

CULTURE, POWER, AND ROYAL NOBILITY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF IGWE ACHEBE'S OPEN LETTER TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CHIEFTAINCY AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS IN ANAMBRA STATE

Chiagozie Eburuaja, PhD
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
cu.eburuaja@unizik.edu.ng

&

Chinwe Udoh, PhD
Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
vc.udoh@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Political discourse does not suffer a paucity of research. The political discourse of Presidents, Governors, and Political candidates has been studied over the years for the use and abuse of power and ideology. However, little research (Ononiwu & Onuigbo 2021, Mlambo 2022) has been carried out over the years to analyze the political discourse of traditional rulers, especially those from the southeast region of Nigeria, bordering on use and abuse of power. Therefore, the present study was conducted to fill the obvious knowledge gap. The present study was a qualitative research. The method of data collection employed in the research is the non-participant observation method. Six extracts that formed the data for the study were gathered from the open letter of Igwe Alfred Achebe, Obi of Onitsha, to Governor Soludo's Commissioner, Hon. Tony Nwabunwanne, which went viral on social media. Textual analysis was employed to analyze data using Fairclough's approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. Findings revealed that the traditional ruler, Igwe Achebe, in his open letter, challenged and resisted power abuse by the commissioner for local government, chieftaincy and community affairs in Anambra State, Hon. Tony Nwabunwanne using certain pronouns that depicted alliances and oppositions and in group and out group markers. He exposes dominance, hegemony, and power play between the state government and the traditional rulers' council that resulted in the suspension of a traditional ruler in the state. The open letter also questions the power relations between the macrostructure of the state government and the microstructure of the traditional rulers in the state. The study concludes that the open letter questions power, hegemony and dominance in macro and microstructures of governance between two groups, and how this power play and interplay are reproduced on social and print media.

Keywords: political discourse, power, traditional rulers, dominance, hegemony

Introduction

Power dynamics is a central idea in the discourse of royal nobility (traditional rulers) considering the extent of power they command in the political and social spheres. In Nigeria, traditional rulers of different ethnic groups and traditional kingdoms are considered Royal nobility. These traditional rulers and monarch of high repute hold significant political, cultural, and social power in different states and the country at large. Notwithstanding their extent of influence and governance, they answer to their different state governors and commissioners of local government and chieftaincy affairs. This can lead to interplay of power relations or power tussle. So, influence and dominance, impacts of systemic inequality and power relations are gleaned from their discourse. Prior to the colonial period, these traditional rulers held power that transcended the political realm. Aptly put, these monarchs command significant influence, power and authority in governance. Some notable traditional rulers of several kingdoms in Nigeria include: Obi of Onitsha, (Onitsha Kingdom), Sultan of Sokoto (Caliph of the Fulani Empire), Emir of Kano (Kano Emirate), Emir of Zazzau (Zaria Emirate), Obi of Onitsha (Onitsha Kingdom), Oba of Benin (Benin Kingdom), Alaafin of Oyo (Oyo Kingdom), Ooni of Ife (Ife Kingdom), Attah of Igala (Igala Kingdom). In contemporary times, these traditional rulers report to their state governments.

These traditional rulers/monarchs, in certain given situations, could be the dominated group while the state government is the dominant group. Power resistance is also inevitable where systemic and dominant structures are questioned and challenged. Traditional rulers may leverage their socio-political, cultural and symbolic authority to mobilize resistance of state power against unacceptable government actions. Nigerian traditional rulers face unprecedented challenges to their authority and influence from state governments. Despite their symbolic power, traditional rulers are subjected to dethronement and marginalization, by state governments, which perpetuate power abuse, dominant structures and inequality.

In January, 2024, a certain suspension letter of the traditional ruler of Neni, Igwe Damian Ezeani, went viral on social media platforms, especially Facebook. The traditional ruler was suspended by the Commissioner for Local Government, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs, Tony Nwabunwanne, for conferring a chieftaincy title on Senator Ifeanyi Ubah. Consequent upon that, Igwe Alfred Achebe, the Chairman of Anambra State Council of Traditional Rulers Council responds to the viral letter using his office as the leader of the traditional rulers in Anambra State. The present study is borne out of the need to study Igwe Achebe's letter for representation of power, its abuse and resistance by a leader and drive scholarly attention to it.

This study aims to investigate the power dynamics between Nigerian traditional rulers and state governments, examining how traditional rulers resist dominant structures, challenge inequality, and reclaim their authority and influence. By exploring these power struggles, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between traditional and contemporary institutions in Nigeria. There is little research on discourse of royal nobility bordering on power abuse and resistance of power abuse. The present study is poised to demystify representation and resistance of power abuse in the discourse of royal nobility, thereby filling the gap in knowledge. The bad leadership situation in Nigeria has also necessitated the present study.

Literature Review

Power and Resistance of Power in the Discourse of Royal Nobility

Power is a central condition in social life (Wodak, 2001). As earlier stated, traditional rulers in Nigeria command symbolic power in their different spheres and domains of influence at the grassroot level. The extent of their power is largely dependent on regional context, because in certain regions of the country they are perceived as custodians of history, religion and culture. Power, here, can be defined as the capacity to influence and dominate people's actions, behaviours, beliefs, and ideologies. Van Dijk (1995) sees power as a property of relationships that exist between social groups, an exercise of control by one group or organisation over another and distribution of power by a particular group in certain domains.

Power is also an exercise of control over a less powerfully dominated social group. This exercise of power has nothing to do with physical force or violence, but largely discursive. Needless to say that discourse is an integral aspect of power and control (Bloor and Bloor 2007) "Discourse plays a pivotal role in the exercise of power. It is like any other social action that may control (members of) dominated groups, for instance by laws, commands and prohibitions, as well as their discourses" (Van-Dijk, 2016, p.71). Wodak (2001) concurs: language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: language indexes power, expresses power, is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and long term. Language provides a finely articulated means for differences in power in social hierarchical structures (p.8). Suffice it to say that struggles for power, control and the resistance of power are encapsulated and realized in discourse.

Power can be exercised through its use and abuse. Exercise of power could lead to dominance. Dominance is an after effect of power in situations where power is abused to control, influence and exploit people in such ways that infringe on their rights or undermine them. Power abuse is the after effect of domination and manipulation. Power abuse is linked to social and linguistic discrimination and inequality (US vs. THEM) and is embedded in text and discourse via existing knowledge and

ideologies (Qaiwer 2020). Discourse plays a leading role in the production, maintenance, legitimization and reproduction of power abuse (Van Dijk, 2016). Power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimised by the text and talk of dominant groups or institutions. For CDA, language is not powerful on its own – it gains power by the use powerful people make of it. This explains why CL often chooses the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyses the language use of those in power, who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and opportunity to improve conditions (Wodak, 2002, p.8).

In situations where power is exercised with the aim of controlling or oppressing a less powerful social group, dominance is inevitable. Dominance is discursively constructed in texts. When two discourse participants engage in casual conversation, one's concern is how to make one's opinion dominate that of others. Texts are 'sites of struggle' where different ideologies contend for dominance (Ezeifeka, 2018). Dominance is a form of social power abuse that results in social inequality (Van Dijk, 1995).

When oppression or dominance is perceived, power resistance may be lurking around, because power can be challenged. Less powerful social groups may decide to unanimously resist or challenge power that tries to disenfranchise, control or exploit them. When power is held by two institutions or organizations, any challenge to power is a challenge to the institution that holds the power (Bloor and Bloor 2007). Traditional rulers in contemporary Nigeria command a lot of influence and socio-political power. Notwithstanding, their office is domiciled in the ministry of local government and chieftaincy matters. Consequent upon that, they answer to the commissioner in charge of the ministry and the state governor. Power relations, here, is naturally asymmetrical. The whole arrangement could lead to power tussle and resistance of power. When power abuse is perceived, it could lead to resistance or challenge of power.

Theoretical Framework

The three dimensional approach to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough is best suited for the present study. The three dimensions are description, interpretation and explanation. These three dimensions of Fairclough's approach to CDA represent language as text, language as discursive practice and language as social practice. The three dimensions recognize the social role of language (Statham, 2022).

Description considers discourse as text. It largely focuses on the structure of the text and analyzes its vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Description analyzes the formal properties of the text under scrutiny. Formal features of a text like its lexical choices: (pronouns and metaphors) and grammatical choices are identified (Statham 2022). This first level of Fairclough's three tier model of CDA focuses on the lexical properties of the text being studied.

Interpretation considers the discursive practices inherent in the text. It analyzes the processes of production, distribution and consumption of text and interprets the relationship between text and interaction. Interpretation explores the idea of text as the end product of the processes of text production and consumption. Mindful attention is given to the standards of textuality (intertextuality and interdiscursivity) through which interaction is achieved in-text (Statham, 2022).

Explanation is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context. It also embarks on an explanation of this relationship. Text interaction with ideologies and power relations in society takes centre stage at this level of the three tier model. Text analysis is carried out by employing the social context of the discourse. Notably, Fairclough's three tier model of CDA considers the social role of language. Text is analysed using the tenets of CDA in line with the text production and its interpretation in societal contexts.

Methodology

The research is a qualitative descriptive research. Six excerpts, not limited by size, were purposively got from the letter. The transcript of the letter of the traditional ruler was got from the print media. The

chosen method of data analysis is textual analysis. Data were analysed using Fairclough's three tier model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Excerpt 1

I was embarrassingly inundated with phone calls and messages from traditional rulers and other persons seeking clarification from me as chairman of ASTRC regarding a situation to which I was not privy. Your letter to Igwe Damian Ezeani was copied to the Commissioner of Police and Director of DSS, Anambra State, but not to the chairman of the ASTRC. This act, amongst many others, was seen by the traditional rulers of Anambra State as a measure of the worth of the traditional institution to the present administration.

Text

Traditional rulers in Nigeria command a lot of political power in their domain of influence. The Obi of Onitsha, in his letter to the commissioner, employs the personal pronoun I to strategically convey his power and authority as not just a traditional ruler but also the chairman of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council, to the commissioner, because the body of the text is a complaint of dereliction of duty. The commissioner had failed to copy the traditional ruler in a letter that ought to be routed through him, thereby neglecting his office as chairman of the Anambra state traditional rulers council. Notably, this first person pronoun I is repeated in the text to denote lexical cohesion. There is also a reiteration of words, *I, I, me*, which is also a marker of lexical cohesion. The second person pronoun *your* is also used in the letter to mark opposition. Preceded by the repetition of the first person pronoun I, this denotes political opposition. *This act ... was seen ... as a measure of the worth of the traditional institution to the present administration* is ironical. The traditional ruler is inadvertently saying that the present administration has relegated the entire council.

Discursive practice

The discursive practice of intertextuality runs in the text above. The traditional ruler references another text, the commissioner's letter to Igwe Damian Ezeani, the traditional ruler of Neni, which is an already existing text. The already existing text was consulted in the production of the present text and the present text is built on it.

Social practice

The text above denotes the social practice of power abuse, relegation and discrimination. Hegemony is equally discursively constructed in the text. A dominant group (state government) is perceived to impose its ideology on a subordinate group (traditional rulers' council). The ideological position of the text is quite clear: the state government has relegated the council of traditional rulers and abuses the power it has over them.

Excerpt 2

B. There is an uncanny sequence of events whereby the two documents, presumably issued on 05 October 2023, the day following my late-night discussions with you and Mr. Governor on 04 October 2023, were not delivered until the ASTRC meeting of 09 January 2024, thus contradicting your apology to me on 07 January for lack of action since 04 October 2023. Is it, therefore, possible that both documents were after-thoughts which were created after the suspension of Igwe Neni on 08 January, 2024 and back-dated as a cover up and rationale for the suspension?

Text

Excerpt 2 is strikingly replete with dates. (Lexical) cohesion is attained by the employment of these dates in the text. The dates are also leveraged on for legitimisation of text. The pronouns *you, your, me* suggest polarization (me versus them), and oppositions. The phrase, Mr. Governor, marks a social distancing from the person of the governor of the state; a non solidarity marker. The text ends with a rhetorical question strategically employed to challenge dominant narratives and assumptions and convey the absurdity of the entire situation.

Discursive Practice

The text achieves intertextuality by referencing two documents and an apology. The text is produced against the backdrop of the aforementioned documents. Information is gathered from these documents for legitimization of the present document.

Social Practice

The letter is ideologically constructed as an after-thought and a cover up. Deceit and abuse of power are also contextualized in the text above.

Excerpt 3

10. Back to your reference **letter** of 08 January, 2024 to me, **you** stated on the first paragraph that "**a minority of traditional rulers have demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money thereby bringing the traditional institution to ridicule and disrepute**". Further, in the second paragraph, you stated that "**A vast majority of traditional rulers conduct their exalted office with dignity and integrity and stick to the Code of Conduct. . . However, a tiny few still act reckless**". These statements were repeated in your **letter** of suspension to IgweNeni as published on the social media. The effects of both **letters** are: A. You publicly visited the sins of an unrecognized self-acclaimed traditional ruler on the entire State traditional institution, to which he does not belong. B. Without providing evidence for your **sweeping statement** about trading chieftaincy titles for money you also, wittingly or not, thereby indicted the entire traditional institution of the State. Your press release to a global audience put the institution into disrepute when a direct circular letter to all traditional rulers as the parties of interest would have sufficed. C. The tone and language of your letter were, by any measure, a **public riot act** and pontification to the same majority of traditional rulers that you extolled as acting with dignity and integrity. The letter lacked respect and sensitivity in addressing the traditional rulers of Anambra State who, by any standard, are held in very high esteem in the comity of the traditional institutions of Nigeria and beyond.

Text

The pronouns *me, you, your, you, your, letter* are repeated in the text to realize cohesion. The consistent use of the possessive pronoun *your, your reference letter, your letter, your press release, your sweeping statement, your letter*, is suggestive of alliances and oppositions. The letter is also ideologically constructed as a public riot act.

Discursive Practice

Intertextuality is majorly derived from quotations, and the text leverages on two quotations to attain intertextuality in the present text. The presence of other texts, via quotations, is obvious in the text being studied. Suffice it to say that the present text is shaped by the presence of other texts; quotations. The present text responds to and reacts against a previous text, the commissioner's letter of suspension to Igwe of Neni and the commissioner's reference letter to the Obi of Onitsha.

Social Practice

The social context of the discourse above is the commercialization of chieftaincy titles and vilification of the traditional rulers in Anambra State who "are held in very high esteem in the comity of the traditional institutions of Nigeria and beyond". The text reinforces the hegemonic structure existent in the political structure of the state government and the traditional rulers of the state. The inherent power tussle and power relations are also explicated in the text. There is also a depiction of the resistance of state power through a subtle US vs THEM depiction.

Excerpt 4

D. **Your** letter also stated that "**Igwe Damian Ezeani, as traditional ruler of Neni, conferred such a phantom chieftaincy title on one Senator Ifeanyi Ubah in violation of the Code of Conduct and without clearance from the Ministry.**" **The ASTRC cannot yet take a view on the violation of the Code of Conduct until it receives a report from the ad-hoc committee it set up to meet with IgweNeni. Nevertheless, it is very manifestly presented above that no written directives from your Ministry on conferment of chieftaincy titles existed before 08 January 2024 when IgweNeni was suspended.** E. **Your reference to**

a second-term Right Honorable Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as "one Senator Ifeanyi Ubah" is most disrespectful, offensive, and unbecoming of one holding a political office as Commissioner. It is noteworthy that a person can only qualify to contest elections after scaling through the highest level of security checks at the federal level. Furthermore, Distinguished Senator Ubah holds a chieftaincy title of his hometown, Nnewi, conferred on him by his monarch and Grand Patron of the Anambra State Traditional Institution, His Majesty, Igwe Kenneth O. Orizu. He is also a well-known business investor in Anambra State and a generous philanthropist.

Text

The personal pronoun *your*, a cohesive device, is repeatedly used in the text to depict cohesion. The persistent reference to *your letter, your ministry, your reference* suggests a distancing from the activities of the state government or governor through its commissioner.

Discursive practice

The text leverages on the quoted text to build intertextuality in the present text.

Social practice

The social context of the text is the resistance of a perceived abuse of power by the state government. The traditional ruler insists that the commissioner's "**reference** to a second-term Right Honorable Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as "one Senator Ifeanyi Ubah" **is most disrespectful, offensive, and unbecoming of one holding a political office as Commissioner**". Dominant narratives are also challenged.

Excerpt 5

*11. In conclusion, I would like to state very clearly that **your** handling of this matter of conferment of honorary chieftaincy titles is the apogee of the progressive dehumanization and dismantling of the traditional institution of Anambra State by the present administration. The institution comprises of some of the **finest sons of Anambra State** who achieved sterling academic heights and professional/vocational attainments. At the behest of their communities, they took up the role of traditional rulers as shining examples for selflessly giving back to their communities in particular, and society at large. **They are the custodians of the culture and traditions of their people** and lead on peace building, security, development issues, etc. **Their** livelihood does not depend on selling chieftaincy titles or the N175,000 monthly stipend from the State Government, but on their own hard-earned modest personal resources. By **their** office, age, attainment and standing in society, **they** deserve far better respect and dignity, than being publicly bullied and unfairly shamed at every opportunity by people in the State Government. The Federal and other State Governments hold the traditional institutions in high esteem. **What then has gone wrong in Anambra State?***

Text

The first person pronoun *I*, second person pronoun *your*, and third person pronoun *they* and *their*, are used to promote alliances and oppositions. The traditional ruler persistently uses *they* and *their* to make reference to the members of his council in order to make his speech free of bias and sentiments. A strategic repetition of the pronoun *their* aids the text in achieving cohesion. The text ends with a rhetorical question.

Discursive practice

Interdiscursivity is employed in the production and consumption of the text above. The current text builds on cultural discourse, albeit being originally contextualised in political discourse. The discourses are interconnected and interrelated for easy interaction.

Social practice

Igwe Achebe accuses the state government of dehumanization and dismantling of the traditional institution in Nigeria. The entire text is suggestive of bullying, power abuse, oppression and discrimination evidenced by the suspension of Igwe Neni and also the circulation of the suspension letter on social media for public consumption. This oppression of the traditional rulers by the powers

that be in the state government is resisted by Igwe Achebe. He also establishes the powers (political, economic and cultural) that these traditional rulers wield in their respective domains. As a good leader with excellent leadership skills, Igwe Achebe defends the integrity of the members of his council.

Excerpt 6

A. There were no formal or written directives from **your Ministry** on chieftaincy titles prior to the suspension of IgweNeni by **your letter** of 08 January, 2024. B. The Government's suspension of IgweNeni was selective and consciously ignored other recent cases of violation of the Code of Conduct which have been brought to your attention. C. **Your** claim that traditional rulers have '*demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money*' was not supported by any evidence. D. Distinguished Senator IfeanyiUbah is not an unknown entity in Anambra State or Nigeria, including to the present administration. Thus, the suspension of IgweNeni and threat to withdraw his Certificate of Recognition for apparently violating the Code of Conduct by giving him a chieftaincy title was extreme in comparison with other recent cases. E. **The traditional institution of Anambra State feels strongly that the present administration is progressively dehumanizing and deprecating the institution against the trend in the rest of the country where the Federal and State Governments accord dignity and respect to the institution.** F. The traditional institution is mindful of the awesomeness of executive power and authority in **our** democratic dispensation but prays fervently that such power and authority, which derive from God through the governed, should be exercised with due sensitivity and humaneness over the governed.

Text

The pronouns *your* and *our* -*your ministry, your letter, our democratic disposition* – are used in the text above to form alliances and oppositions and polarization. It also marks an in group and out group disposition as the Obi of Onitsha makes his stance clear on how the government abuses the leadership powers it holds over traditional rulers in the state. The pronoun *you*, an out group marker, is repeated in the text to make it cohesive. Adjectives are used to ideologically construct the identity of the Anambra state government as dehumanizing and deprecating. Date is also employed to add legitimization to the text.

Discursive practice

Intertextuality is attained in the text through reference to a letter that was already in existence and a code of conduct. The present text builds on these already existing texts.

Social Practice

The social context of the text is power abuse enacted by the state government, its resistance by Igwe Achebe, the chairman of Anambra State traditional rulers' council and accusations of favouritism. In the last part of the letter, Igwe Achebe takes time to set certain records straight given certain ideologies and actions of the government. He clearly resists the power abuse and relegation of the dominated group, the council of traditional rulers, by the state government. He legitimizes the power of the state government and subtly warns the present administration against abusing such powers, rather they should tread with 'sensitivity and humaneness'.

Findings

Findings of the present study reveal the use of the personal pronoun *I* for legitimization of power in the occasion of perceived abuse and relegation of power. It also reveals the repetition of pronouns (*me, your, you, I*) and dates for legitimization and the achievement of cohesion in text. Reiteration is sparingly used for cohesion in the letter. Notably, the text encoder, Igwe Achebe, employs the pronouns *your* and *our* to depict alliances and oppositions in the text. These pronouns are also used as markers of in-group and out-group dispositions. There is also a subtle in-group glorification and out-group derogation, because on one hand, the Obi of Onitsha, accuses the state government of power abuse, bullying and oppression of the council of traditional rulers and ideologically constructs their identity as bullies, dehumanizing and deprecating, on the other hand, he glorifies traditional rulers as leaders at the forefront of "peace building, security, development issues, etc". There is also a ME-VERSUS-THEM polarization using the pronouns *you, your* and *me*. Discursively, the text largely employs intertextuality

in text production and consumption. Considering that the Igwe's letter is a reply to another letter occasioned by the suspension letter of Igwe Damian Ezeani, intertextuality is largely expected to be the norm. There is only one instance of interdiscursivity for text production. The social context of the letter is power abuse and its resistance. Generally, Igwe Achebe exposes dominance, hegemony, and power relations between the state government and the traditional rulers' council that resulted in the suspension of a traditional ruler in the state. The open letter also questions the power relations between the macrostructure of the state government and the microstructure of the traditional rulers in the state.

Conclusions

The present study concludes that the interrelatedness of grammar and pragmatics gives certain affordances for the encoding of ideologies in text. The study concludes that the open letter questions dominant narratives of power, hegemony and dominance in macro and microstructures of governance between two groups: the state government and the traditional rulers' council, and how this power play and interplay are reproduced on social and print media. These are achieved by employing certain grammatical and pragmatic components.

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Appendix

FULL TRANSCRIPT OF IGWE ALFRED ACHEBE'S OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR SOLUDO'S COMMISSIONER

ANAMBRA STATE Traditional Rulers Council

Office of the Chairman

Government House Awka.

Hon. Tony Collins Nwabunwanne,

Commissioner for Local Government, Chieftaincy and Community Affairs, Government of Anambra State, Awka.

NOTIFICATION FOR THE SUSPENSION OF HRH IGWE DAMIAN O. EZEANI, THE TRADITIONAL RULER OF NENI

I am writing in response to your letter, Ref: MLGCCA/HC/2022/T/025/001/103, of the above caption to me dated 8th January, 2024. This response also provides a fuller context of other events relating to the suspension of H.R.H Igwe Damian O Ezeani, the traditional ruler of Neni. Your letter was hand-delivered to me at Onitsha at 6:55pm on Tuesday, 09 January, 2024. I was curious about the timing of the delivery considering that I had presided at the meeting of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council (ASTRC) at Awka earlier in the day, where such a letter would normally be presented to me by the ASTRC secretariat. The letter was a justification for the Government's suspension of Igwe Damian Ezeani as traditional ruler of his domain.

2. My suspicion that your letter was an after-thought was buttressed by the fact that your letter of suspension to Igwe Damian Ezeani of the same date, 8th January 2024, was already trending virally on social media for well over twenty four hours prior to my receipt of your letter. I was embarrassingly inundated with phone calls and messages from traditional rulers and other persons seeking clarification from me as chairman of ASTRC regarding a situation to which I was not privy. Your letter to Igwe Damian Ezeani was copied to the Commissioner of Police and Director of DSS, Anambra State, but not to the chairman of the ASTRC.

This act, amongst many others, was seen by the traditional rulers of Anambra State as a measure of the worth of the traditional institution to the present administration.

3. You were right in your letter that the Code of Conduct for traditional rulers in Anambra State is the creation of the traditional institution. It became effective as a self-regulating code following the 2013 Annual Seminar of Anambra State Traditional Rulers where it was presented and adopted. It was subsequently published in the book, "The Traditional Institution in a Modern Society" being the proceedings of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Seminars held in 2011, 2013, and 2014. The Code of Conduct was also re-issued in March 2020 under my signature as Chairman of the ASTRC. The ASTRC worked harmoniously on most occasions with previous administrations in the application of the Code, such that the ASTRC monitored compliance and recommended sanctions for non-compliance to the Government for necessary action. Now, it would appear that the present administration has completely appropriated the entire application of the Code of Conduct without the involvement of or reference to the ASTRC.

4. You may recall, Hon. Commissioner, that on 04 October 2023, Mr. Governor had called to tell me in a late-night telephone conversation that the Government was considering establishing rules to govern the actions of traditional rulers. The conversation was sequel to a chieftaincy conferment ceremony by a traditional ruler that was deemed inappropriate by the Government. I promptly drew the attention of Mr. Governor to the subsisting Code of Conduct which had served previous administrations and the traditional institution well and suggested that the present administration may need to review the Code for its current efficacy. I thereafter called the same night to brief you on my conversation with Mr. Governor. I also directed that copies of the above-mentioned book be made available to you and Mr. Governor the following morning before a meeting where the matter will be discussed. Having since not received any feedback from you or Mr. Governor, I assumed that the same order with previous administrations would continue to prevail.

5. In my said conversation with Mr. Governor on 04 October, 2023, I had also reminded him of the WhatsApp message he forwarded to me on 09 November, 2022 in which graphic allegations were made against a traditional ruler of Anambra State. I further reminded Mr. Governor that he never responded to my prompt advise by WhatsApp on the options for dealing with the allegations expeditiously. I also re-sent our WhatsApp exchange on the matter to Mr. Governor, but still did not get any reaction.

6. On the events over the last eight days or so, you will also recall that you called me severally on Saturday, 06 January, 2024 between 15:34 and 22:31 hours without reaching me. At 08:06 hours on Sunday morning, I called you and explained the circumstances that made me unreachable on the previous day. In our long conversation, you said that you were seeking to bring to my attention a press release that you were under pressure to issue. This was in connection with traditional rulers conferring honorary chieftaincy titles in violation of the Code of Conduct for Traditional Rulers and the Government directives. You specifically mentioned two cases only, namely, IgweOjoto, who conferred an honorary chieftaincy title on Senator IfeanyiUbah on 30 December, 2023, and the self-acclaimed traditional ruler of Nawfia, who conferred honorary chieftaincy titles on forty (40) persons on 04 January, 2024. You further confirmed that the press release had been issued, which I later found to be on 04 January, 2024, that is, the day prior to your unsuccessful attempt to reach me. In the conversation, you categorically did not mention, in any regard whatsoever, IgweNeni who celebrated his Ofala on 29 December, 2023

7. In our above conversation, I made the following points:

A. Your desire to reach me on Saturday night seemed merely to justify a fait accompli, considering that you had already issued the press release two days earlier "under pressure", as you said.

B. I noted that the self-acclaimed IgweNawfia, whose recognition was withheld by the Government due to pending matters in court, was consequently not considered a member of the State traditional institution. His activities should therefore not be associated with the State traditional institution in any manner. C. I distinctly pointed out that picking on the above two cases (Ojoto and Nawfia) by your office was selective and appeared to be a deliberate favoritism towards other cases which you were well aware of.

D. I reminded you that there had not been any reaction from you or Mr. Governor to our conversations of 04 October 2023 on the Code of Conduct for Traditional Rulers. You apologized for the failure to revert.

8. Fast forward to the meeting of the ASTRC on 09 January, 2024. The normal practice of the ASTRC secretariat is to immediately send electronic copies of important correspondence to me as they are received in the course of the month. On the day of the monthly meeting, a folder is presented to me with all correspondence for my attention, including the last-minute arrivals that were not forwarded electronically.

9. The folder presented to me on 09 January, 2024 included a press release and a letter to the Chairman of the Anambra State Traditional Rulers Council. Both documents were under your signature and were the same in caption, "Directives on Conferment of Chieftaincy Titles by Traditional Rulers", date of 5th October, 2023, content and reference number. The twin documents raised further curiosity in me as follows.

A. A document from your office dated 05 October, 2023 for the attention of ASTRC should normally have been presented at its October monthly meeting on 10 October, 2023. Why, therefore, did three monthly meetings elapse before the above documents were presented at the 09 January 2024 monthly meeting? Categorically, this was the first time that either document had come to the attention of myself or the ASTRC.

B. There is an uncanny sequence of events whereby the two documents, presumably issued on 05 October 2023, the day following my late-night discussions with you and Mr. Governor on 04 October 2023, were not delivered until the ASTRC meeting of 09 January 2024, thus contradicting your apology to me on 07 January for lack of action since 04 October 2023. Is it, therefore, possible that both documents were after-thoughts which were created after the suspension of IgweNeni on 08 January, 2024 and back-dated as a coverup and rationale for the suspension?

10. Back to your reference letter of 08 January, 2024 to me, you stated on the first paragraph that "a minority of traditional rulers have demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money thereby bringing the traditional institution to ridicule and disrepute". Further, in the second paragraph, you stated that "A vast majority of traditional rulers conduct their exalted office with dignity and integrity and stick to the Code of Conduct. . . However, a tiny few still act reckless". These statements were repeated in your letter of suspension to IgweNeni as published on the social media. The effects of both letters are:

A. You publicly visited the sins of an unrecognized self-acclaimed traditional ruler on the entire State traditional institution, to which he does not belong.

B. Without providing evidence for your sweeping statement about trading chieftaincy titles for money you also, wittingly or not, thereby indicted the entire traditional institution of the State. Your press release to a global audience put the institution into disrepute when a direct circular letter to all traditional rulers as the parties of interest would have sufficed.

C. The tone and language of your letter were, by any measure, a public riot act and pontification to the same majority of traditional rulers that you extolled as acting with dignity and integrity. The letter lacked respect and sensitivity in addressing the traditional rulers of Anambra State who, by any standard, are held in very high esteem in the comity of the traditional institutions of Nigeria and beyond.

D. Your letter also stated that "Igwe Damian Ezeani, as traditional ruler of Neni, conferred such a phantom chieftaincy title on one Senator IfeanyiUbah in violation of the Code of Conduct and without clearance from the Ministry." The ASTRC cannot yet take a view on the violation of the Code of Conduct until it receives a report from the ad-hoc committee it set up to meet with IgweNeni. Nevertheless, it is very manifestly presented above that no written directives from your Ministry on conferment of chieftaincy titles existed before 08 January 2024 when IgweNeni was suspended.

E. Your reference to a second-term Right Honorable Distinguished Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as "one Senator IfeanyiUbah" is most disrespectful, offensive, and unbecoming of one holding a political office as Commissioner. It is noteworthy that a person can only qualify to contest elections after scaling through the highest level of security checks at the federal level. Furthermore, Distinguished Senator Ubah holds a chieftaincy title of his hometown, Nnewi, conferred on him by his monarch and Grand Patron of the Anambra State Traditional Institution, His Majesty, Igwe Kenneth O. Orizu. He is also a well-known business investor in Anambra State and a generous philanthropist.

F. Thus, assuming that IgweNeni did not strictly comply with Code of Conduct, would the foregoing factors not be sufficiently extenuating to warrant a far less sanction on him as was meted to some other "tiny fen/" that also failed to comply? The severity of suspension and threat of withdrawal of Certificate of Recognition suggests that there may be other issues with either IgweNeni or Distinguished Senator Ubah which are being stealthily ventilated in this circumstance.

11. In conclusion, I would like to state very clearly that your handling of this matter of conferment of honorary chieftaincy titles is the apogee of the progressive dehumanization and dismantling of the traditional institution of Anambra State by the present administration. The institution comprises of some of the finest sons of Anambra State who achieved sterling academic heights and professional/vocational attainments. At the behest of their communities, they took up the role of traditional rulers as shining examples for selflessly giving back to their communities in particular, and society at large. They are the custodians of the culture and traditions of their people and lead on peace building, security, development issues, etc. Their livelihood does not depend on selling chieftaincy titles or the N175,000 monthly stipend from the State Government, but on their own hard-earned modest personal resources. By their office, age, attainment and standing in society, they deserve far better respect and dignity, than being publicly bullied and unfairly shamed at every opportunity by people in the State Government. The Federal and other State Governments hold the traditional institutions in high esteem. What then has gone wrong in Anambra State?

12. The current impression to the general public is that the issue of honorary chieftaincy title is on the foremost front burner for the Ndi Anambra. On the contrary, the traditional rulers would state for the umpteenth time that their key community challenges include lack of basic amenities (electricity, potable water, healthcare, good access roads, etc), youth unemployment leading to other delinquencies, security and the inability of the communities to fund their contingents of the Anambra State Vigilante Group (AVG), massive urban renewal for our sprawling cities, respectable stipends from the 5% of the statutory allocation to the Local Government Councils as is applicable in other States of the Federation, membership and structure of the ASTRC, etc. To sum up:

A. There were no formal or written directives from your Ministry on chieftaincy titles prior to the suspension of IgweNeni by your letter of 08 January, 2024.

B. The Government's suspension of IgweNeni was selective and consciously ignored other recent cases of violation of the Code of Conduct which have been brought to your attention.

C. Your claim that traditional rulers have '{demonstrated a penchant for trading chieftaincy titles for money/' was not supported by any evidence.

D. Distinguished Senator IfeanyiUbah is not an unknown entity in Anambra State or Nigeria, including to the present administration. Thus, the suspension of IgweNeni and threat to withdraw his Certificate

of Recognition for apparently violating the Code of Conduct by giving him a chieftaincy title was extreme in comparison with other recent cases.

E. The traditional institution of Anambra State feels strongly that the present administration is progressively dehumanizing and deprecating the institution against the trend in the rest of the country where the Federal and State Governments accord dignity and respect to the institution.

F. The traditional institution is mindful of the awesomeness of executive power and authority in our democratic dispensation but prays fervently that such power and authority, which derive from God through the governed, should be exercised with due sensitivity and humaneness over the governed.

13. Dear Hon Commissioner, I thank you for your attention and express my whole-hearted willingness to engage further with you on all the points in this letter in the hope of restoring the dignity of the traditional institution of Anambra State. Please, also, bear in mind that Mr. Governor has made two promises that remain outstanding, namely, to meet with a small number of traditional rulers on issues of concern to the traditional institution, and to address all traditional rulers once more. Kindly make these two commitments happen soon, as well as at regular intervals.

14. Finally, since your communication to the traditional rulers of the State on this matter has mainly been through press releases and interviews, it would be fair and proper that this response is also made available to the media for the purpose of balance.

For and on behalf of the Anambra State traditional rulers,

Yours sincerely,

Nnaemeka A. Achebe, CFR, mni

Obi of Onitsha

Chairman, ASTRC