

## **Social Racism and Discrimination: The Osu Cultural Practice in Igboland**

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### **Abstract**

In some parts of Igboland, people are segregated by the many social discriminatory practices prevalent therein. The Osu cultural practice is one of such social discriminatory practices under discourse. It is an ancient practice that discourages social interaction, marriage, and title-taking by a group of people referred to as Osu. The system has been extant among the Igbos since the pre-colonial era when these people were offered to deities to cleanse the land from abomination, while others dedicated themselves to the deity for protection. These Osu people were thus seen as inferior to the “free- born”, in fact, it was a taboo to interact with or visit them. However, with the changing trends in the society, such as the spread of Christianity, western education, urbanization, and the rise of city-centers in Igboland, the level of observance of the practice seems to be abating, as people interact without questioning the identity of each other. As much as marriage and title-taking, amongst other socio-political functions are concerned, the Osu practice holds sway as the maltreatment meted on the Osu has forced many of them to migrate to other countries, abandon marriages, and commit crimes against humanity in Igboland. The paper, therefore, seeks to assess the changes and continuities that have been obtainable in the Osu system over time. It adopts the qualitative methodology and chronological presentation which include the descriptive and analytic methods of writing history. Primary, secondary, and tertiary sources of data were also used.

**Keywords:** Changes and Continuities, Diala, Discrimination, Igboland, Osu, and Social Racism

### **Introduction**

The story of the human race is to enjoy absolute fundamental human rights such as freedom from inhuman treatment, slavery, discrimination, freedom of thought, assembly, association, and other rights that are reasonably justifiable in a democratic society (Nmah, 2008). However, in the case of Igbo society in the Southeastern part of Nigeria, which is known for its belief in love, unity, and communality, and whose fundamental constitution is the spirit of liberty (Igwe, 1991), this may no longer be obtainable, with the existence of the Osu cultural practice, a burning issue that has torn the Igbo people into shreds. The practice is perhaps among the world’s longest-surviving social discriminatory practices, which is believed to be as old as man itself in Igboland (Onwubuariri, 2016:54-93). It is the division between the ‘Diala’ (free-born) and the ‘Osu’ (outcast) in Igboland which goes back to time immemorial, where both Diala and the Osu are the by-product of the system under which the Igbo people live and are culturally responsible. This practice lies in the attitudes and behaviors that are widely shared among some of the people in Igboland and beyond. The division between the groups presents itself with various political, cultural, social, and economic limitations for the Osu in those communities where it is being practiced.

The Osu practice received literary attention when Achebe (1977) asked the question, ‘what is this thing called Osu?’. According to him, “Our fathers in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu, a thing given to the idols, and thereafter he became an outcast, and his children

and his children's children forever". This was following the frustration of Obi Okonkwo, one of the characters in the novel, who despite his education overseas, and having Christian parents, could not marry Clara, the girl he loved on his return to Nigeria based on the fact that Clara was an Osu, thus, underscoring the seriousness the Igbos attach to the issue.

Considering the level of Osu status in Igboland, it is observed that the practice is a societal institution borne out of a primitive traditional belief system coloured by superstition, and propagated by ignorance. Onwubiko (1993:19-98) noted that an Osu is not chosen by the deity, but rather conditioned to stay with or choose the deity as a last resort. The Osu does not fall into any of the hierarchies of those who own the deity and has no sacred function to perform except the service he does. This means that the exclusion of Osu is therefore clear and unquestioned in Igbo traditional society.

The practice is often seen as a 'disguised social racism', and likened to the practice of slavery in the days of colonial rule, due to its discriminatory nature and violation of the fundamental human rights of the people involved. These human rights are legal entitlements that every citizen must enjoy without fear of the government or fellow citizens (Amalu, 2019:132-142). They are those inalienable rights that are enforceable, fundamental, and enshrined in the supreme law of the land (CFRN, 1999:33-44). In most Igbo communities, these rights are breached, due to the discriminatory nature of the Osu practice, which involves inequality in freedom of movement and choice of residence, inequality in the right of peaceful association, inequality in the enjoyment of the right to marry and establish a family, and inequality in access to public office (Allport, 1979). From the foregoing, it is trite law that people are discriminated against, rejected, and stigmatized because they are Osu. In the face of this discrimination; what is the legality of the *Osu* practice in Igboland and Nigeria? Are there efforts being made by the government and the church alike in eliminating the practice in Igboland? How successful are these efforts if any? Is there still a stigma against the Osu despite these efforts? How is the Osu viewed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

This paper, therefore, reconstructs the existing status quo of the Osu cultural practice for a better understanding of its changes and continuities in contemporary society. It should be noted that the caste system of different sorts like the Osu is not alien to almost all parts of the world. Man's inhumanity to man is a common theme in human society. Thus, while this paper uses Igboland as a case study, it is by no means suggesting that it only exists in Igboland. Rather, the Osu bears a generic meaning associated with any form of stigmatization, victimization, and segregation in any part of the world, without prejudice to any special difference.

The paper is arranged into five parts. Part one is the introduction; part two is the conceptual clarification of some of the key terms used therein; part three examines the origin, nature and effects of the Osu cultural practice in Igboland; part four discusses the changes and the continuities in the practice of Osu in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Igboland; while the fifth part forms the conclusion and recommendations of the paper.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

It is imperative, for better understanding of this paper, to clarify the meaning of some terms used therein.

**Diala:** The Diala, also known as 'Amadi' or 'free-born', are people regarded as the sons and daughters of the soil. They are regarded as superior human beings while the Osu are less human. For Ugwulebo (2011), the Diala are freeborn and suffers no discrimination as a result of their birth. Their ancestors were perceived to be unpolluted and free as they were not sacrificed to any deity.

**Igboland:** Igboland is that part of Nigeria inhabited by Igbo-speaking people. They are among the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and the most densely populated area of West Africa and occupy the South East and some parts of the South-South fringe of modern Nigeria. They inhabit the forest belt area and lie between the Cross River East of the Niger and Benin West of the Niger, and between the Igala to the North and the Niger Delta states to the South. The majority of the inhabitants are in Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and the Imo states of Nigeria. There are also sizeable portions in Delta, Cross River, Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, and Kogi State (Falola et al., 2007:128). Igboland is located roughly between latitude 5 and 7 degrees north of the Equator, and longitude 6 and 8 degrees east of Greenwich, and bound by a host of other cultural groups with significant cultural and linguistic interfaces (Nwaezeigwe, 2007).

**Osu:** Some Igbo society referred to the Osu by various names; for instance, Nzam in Onitsha, calls it 'Adu-ebo', Augwu calls it 'Nwani or Ohu- alusi', in the Nsukka area, it is called 'oruma', while some refer to it as Ume, Ohu, Oru, Ohu Ume, Omoni (Okpu-Aja), etc. Historically, it is a name given to a person, clan, or species in Igboland, who are owned by deities and are therefore considered to be a living sacrifice, unclean, untouchable, less human, and slaves to the gods. Being an Osu can be voluntary, which reflects the victim's choice to become an Osu (Onwubuariri, 2016:59). According to Orji (1999:112), it can occur when a free-born person, enters and take refuge in the shrine out of the frustration or marginalization witnessed as a Diala, or eat any food sacrificed to the gods, thereby declaring himself or herself an Osu. Ilogu (1974: 123-262) described an Osu as a slave of the deity dedicated to performing some menial functions which may include sacrificial functions. In the views of Arinze (1978), and Dike (2002), an Osu is a male or female consecrated and dedicated to gods to appease the gods to carry away sins, calamities, and evil things that may affect the dedicator. He, therefore becomes the sacrificial lamb, a slave or property of the deity to which he is dedicated. However, in contemporary times, Osu are people who are stripped of their life and reality as human beings. They are regarded as descendants of individuals who volunteered and were offered as a sacrifice to certain gods or shrines. They enjoyed protection and privileges but were excluded from the ordinary folks and routine engagements with the rest of the community. In fact, it was a great offence punishable by the god's visitation, to beat or injure any member of the Osu family (Orji, 1999:112), as they are deemed to be property of the gods.

**Osu Cultural Practice:** Culture is as old as humankind. It is a complete phenomenon including everything that is connected with the people's way of life. It is an umbrella term that embodies the social behaviour and norms found in human societies, as well as the beliefs, customs, knowledge, habits, and laws of the individuals in these groups (Tylor, 1871). Osu, as a cultural practice, is a belief system, a traditional and religious belief, transmitted from generation to generation that certain people should be discriminated against by others. It discourages social interaction and marriage with group of persons referred to as Osu. According to Mbalisi (Interview, 2021), it is often seen as a class system, while some view it as social racism within the society where different persons, especially the rich tend to ostracize the poor, because of the nature of the society. As a result, it is perceived as not merely traditional but also possess some religious connotation.

**Social Racism and Discrimination:** Race is a socially constructed difference among people based on characteristics such as accent, manner of speech, beliefs, practices, preferences, and place of origin, etc. Racism, therefore, is an ideology that either directly or indirectly asserts that one group is inherently superior to others. According to Wilson (1999:4), it is an ideology of racial domination in which the presumed biological and cultural superiority of one or more racial groups is used to justify or prescribe the inferior treatment or social positions of other racial groups. It can be deeply rooted in attitudes, values, and stereotypical beliefs, and operates at all levels, be it individual, systemic, or societal. In the same vein, Discrimination includes any distinction,

exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, national or ethnic origin which has the effect of impairing the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, social, cultural, economic or any other field of public life (UN Charter, 1965: art. 1, para. 1). On the other hand, Social Racism, according to Henry and Tator (2006:352) is inequality rooted in the system wide-operation of a society that excludes substantial numbers of members of particular groups from significant participation in major social institutions.

As a form of social racism and discrimination, the Osu cultural practice in the Igbo society involves the practices and policies entrenched in established institutions, resulting in the exclusion of designated groups. The discriminatory Osu practices involves inequality in freedom of movement, choice of residence, right in peaceful association, enjoyment of right to marriage and establish family, and access to public office (Allport, 1979: 52), as they are being construed as inferior, unequal, and different in ways that matter to economic, political, and social life. In its racist and discriminatory nature, it allows the perpetrators to deny that the act was racist and undermine any claim of harm. In his own view, Mbalisi (Interview, 2021) posits that the practice of Osu culture is some form of 'disguised social racism', among some groups within the Igbo enclave, as it is only witnessed when there are serious social functions, that have some spiritual connotations like in title taking, marriages, breaking of kola nuts, attending meetings with the Diala. On the other hand, it does not apply to certain normal social interactions in the natural open space, like going to market, school, and church, among other concerns, where it becomes less important, as nobody recognizes who is an Osu or not. He went further to assert that the Osu practice when viewed from the perspective of social interaction, creates class distinction to differentiate persons either because of their social, political, and wealth backgrounds.

### **Origin of the Osu Cultural Practice in Igboland**

Different historical accounts have been put forward about the origin of the practice of Osu. According to Amadife (1988), the origin can be traced to the era when the gods were believed to demand human sacrifices during festivals, to cleanse the land of abominations. These victims and their descendants became known as '*Osu arusi*'. Some believed that they were descendants of travelers who were merely allowed to stay in the community. Another historical account had it that the Osu system started out of the indigenous religious practices of the Igbo, interwoven with their cultural practices. The indigenous Igbo regards themselves as a meeting point of Mother Earth or "Ala", and functions as intermediaries to the infinitely Supreme Spirit or creator through the deities that are ultimately linked to one's 'chi' or spiritual force. The growth in the number of powerful deities created the need for many assistants for the high priests of major shrines. Miniature monasteries were established in the vicinity of major shrines to train and maintain a constant supply of high-priest assistants, and attend to the deities continuously with intricate religious rituals in their shrines. Upon mastering their spiritual functions, they were unjustly and erroneously assigned the Igbo pejorative name of Osu, Ume, or Ohu arusi (the slave of the deities/gods or shrines) (Isiechi, 1976).

In the view of Ezekwugo (1987), the origin is traced to the Nri Kingdom (the acclaimed ancestral home of the Igbo man). It is believed that the Nri possessed a hereditary power and goes about cleansing the various kingdoms of abomination. Any community that refuses to be cleansed is tagged 'Osu' or 'untouchables'. Another view on the history of Osu puts them as defiant people who simply refuses to heed the orders of the King or decision of the community. Most times, the king banishes the defaulter from the land and the people naturally begin to withdraw from the defaulter. Upon the passage of time, from one generation to another, the victim or their descendants are then referred to as Osu (Ugobude, 2018).

### **Nature of Osu Cultural Practice in Igboland**

The practice of Osu in Igbo culture is a societal institution that finds justification in religious, social, economic, political as well as a primitive traditional belief system. Notwithstanding the community involved in the practice, its basic characteristics remain the same. They are:

**Land Ownership:** Among the Igbo people, land is an asset and most important means of production, and its ownership is communal and not individualistic. However, in those communities where Osu practice is in existence, the Osu does not have fully guaranteed access to community land or other economic resources such as palm trees, etc. According to Apeh and Opata (2009:939-958), the freeborn trace their lineage to the founding ancestors of the village and have an organic relationship with the land as well as an inviolate right to its use; whereas the Osu don't enjoy such right, nor can they own any personal property, as such property is regarded as belonging to the gods.

**Exclusionary Politics:** The first element of exclusionary politics that affect the Osu is the political-legal discrimination through the restriction of the political rights of the non-Dialas in electoral system. According to Omenma (2010:122), constituencies and wards are dominated by Dialas with the non-Dialas as minority. A further element of exclusionary politics by the Osu is the limited right or near non-existence of right to occupy traditional political institutions such as Igwe, Nze, Ozo title, Ezeji, Eze, and any other related chieftaincy titles. He further stated that the non-Dialas are not given autonomous communities, as they are usually subsumed under Diala-dominated community, and even where they have their own autonomous community, political intrigues at the state level dominated by Dialas are employed to deny them or delay the opportunity to produce, appoint, or recognize their traditional ruler within the community. The last element of Diala predominance is the recruitment practice in the public service where the non-Dialas are under-represented and practically excluded from the higher ranks.

**Marriage:** Concerning marriage, the principle of endogamy, which means that marriage will take place within the same group, is rigidly applied. The purpose of the initial inquiry conducted by families at the earliest point of the marriage negotiation is to inquire about the social status of the family and ensure that this principle is not broken. This means that an Osu cannot mingle, marry or inter marry with the free born, but only within the Osu group, as it is considered a taboo. For instance, in Awo- omamma, there is marital discrimination against the Osu (Ubaka and Ugwuja, 2014: 290-314).

According to Orji (1999: 113),

*No free-born ever intermarried with the Osu. If he did, he automatically became an Osu. Whenever, an Osu man wished to marry, he could marry an Osu girl in the town. But if their relationships in the town were so close that they could not intermarry, then the search for a bride for the Osu man was extended to the other surrounding towns where the Osu system existed, and he then married from there. It could happen that instead of marrying a fellow Osu girl, he was able to marry a free born, that was all right for him but when the free born girl was brought home to the place where her husband was known as Osu, she herself automatically became an osu.*

**Communal properties:** The Osus' are not allowed to use or share communal properties such as water taps, markets, community halls, buildings, etc. The reason for this is not farfetched, because since they are perceived to be contaminated and unclean, using the communal properties with the Diala means that the properties will be contaminated too. For instance, in 1983, when the then governor, Dr. Sam Mbakwe embarked on a project to erect pipe borne water in the Eziana

community in Mbaitoli LGA of Imo state, it was rejected because of the claim by the Diala that the project was to be erected on an Osu land, therefore the water would be contaminated and unfit for drinking by the Diala (Amalu et al., 2021:81).

**Social functions:** The non-Dialas are not allowed to engage in any social function in the community. They cannot be ordained as a priest, nor offer anything to the deity, nor come near when the free-borns are offering their sacrifices, as they are perceived to be victims of offering and religiously unclean. They are not allowed to join the Dialas during festivals. They cannot attend the gathering of free men and even on such occasions when they could be present, they do not exert any direct influence on decisions nor make public speeches, break kola nut, or pray to God on behalf of the freeborn at any gathering (Olisa, 2002).

From the above, there is no doubt that the Osu practice is colored by superstition, propagated by ignorance, and subjects the victim to numerous taboos which are very strictly observed.

### **Effects of the Osu Practice in Igboland**

The negative effects of the Osu practice include but not limited to the following:

**Absence of community or self-help development project:** Amongst the Osu are famous and high-ranking persons from all spheres of life, with the capacity for communal development. The isolation of the Osu from the free-born hampers the socio-economic well-being and development of the community, as the Osu may refuse or hardly contribute to the development of the community.

**Absence of unity:** The tendency to discriminate against some individuals is largely responsible for the lack of unity among the Igbo people. Since there is lack of communication and interaction between the Diala and the Osu, achieving any form of unity appears to be difficult.

**Conflict:** It has often caused conflict and inter-communal altercations between the Osu and the Diala, resulting in massive loss of lives, destruction of properties, insecurity, and the inability to cultivate goodwill of social bonding. The basis of the conflict lies in the constitutional human rights violation of the Osu, which are fundamental by being human, as enshrined in the constitution etc. According to Dike (2007:150), such conflict between the Osu and Diala includes; the Oruku Community conflict in Nkanu East Local Government Areas (LGA) of Enugu State, the Eziamma Community in Mbaitoli LGA of Imo state, the Umuaka Community conflict, Awo-omamma in Imo State, Umuawuka and Emii in Owerri LGA, Imo state.

**Interaction and Integration in the Society:** The Osu often find it difficult to interact and integrate properly with the Diala in society. They cannot attend the same church as the Diala, and even if they could, they won't be seen seating on the same chair with them. In the market place, they are often faced with the challenges of not being patronized by the Diala. All these, no doubt, induces spillover effects on quality of life and result in frustration, stress, loss of sense of worth, and family disruption, which generates an increasing rate of violence, homicide, greed, crime, hatred, idolatry, and envy in Igbo society.

### **The Changes and Continuities of Osu Cultural Practice in the 21st Century Igboland**

The fight for the abolition of the Osu practice in Igboland goes back in time, before independence, to the days of Nnamdi Azikiwe who in his historic address to the Defunct Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly in 1956 described the practice as 'devilish and uncharitable to brand any human being with a label of inferiority due to the accidents of history' (Ugobude, 2018). The veracity of the issue is that these people did not choose to be born as Osu. After independence, several Eastern

administrations such as Late Dr. Sam Mbakwe's civilian regime under Nigeria Peoples Party (NPP) in Imo State in 1979, etc., have attempted to abolish the practice (Amalu et al, 2021:78).

Consequently, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Igboland, due to some factors, vis-à-vis; constitutional provisions, urbanization, modern-day education, community efforts, and the spread of Christianity, the world sees Osu practice as a form of discrimination, thereby resulting in clamors and criticisms against the practice. The government, through its constitutional provisions, has made concerted efforts to eliminate the inequality stance and all forms of discrimination which is seen to defy the basic human rights. Though the provisions did not expressly mention the Osu Practice, however, it impliedly eliminates all forms of discriminatory practices, of which victims of the Osu system belong to this category of people that the constitution does not allow to be treated that way. For instance, the right to freedom from discrimination as provided by Section 42 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended), frowns at any discrimination of a person on grounds of the person's community, ethnicity, place of birth or origin, circumstance of birth, sex, religion, political opinion, or disability. However, it is observed that the constitutional provisions are not absolute, as the practice of Osu is more of ethical and moral considerations.

In addition, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, guarantees the right to life, right to equality, right to recognition as a person before the law, freedom from torture and degrading treatment and lots of other human rights. Article I specifically provides that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (UN Charter, 1948: Art.1-7). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, also prohibit discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all aspects of economic, civil, political, social, and cultural life (UN Charter, 1965: Art.1-7). The aforementioned declaration and convention shows the condemnation of colonialism and all practices of segregation and discrimination associated therewith, in whatever guise by the United Nations.

In the religious aspect, Christians have come to participate in the revolutionary process of resolving the societal issues around the Osu practice in Igbo culture. The church in its spread of the gospel is often confronted with a real process of evangelical movement towards the condemnation of the Osu practice (Nmah, 2014). However, the Christian Bible does not seem to recognize any discriminatory practices. For instance, the book of Genesis 1:27 is to the effect that God created all humanity (both male and female) in His own image and likeness. This means that the creation of humanity in God's image is the basis of human dignity as well as the sanctity of life. In addition, Galatians 3:28 is to the effect that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. These passages make it clear and show that neither socio-economic status nor biological status can be used as boundary markers. The point is not that one loses their racial or ethnic identity, nor ceases to be man or woman, or rich or poor, but that one cannot use these things to suggest that anyone is more favored or less favored, or superior or inferior. The Bible further stresses that Christ had to die to redeem not only the innocent but to give chance to the banished to be purified. However, the church effort in the fight against Osu is not absolute as many who embraced the gospel still hold on to the practice as a custom that must live with them, thereby creating a division between the Christian faith and African culture.

In the aspect of urbanization, the Osu Practice is changing, because more people are coming up with new ideas, which gives people the choice to adopt or reject. When people stay in urban areas for a long time, they are absorbed by urbanization and other cultures and as such they try to

influence their communities in more modern ways. People who have been exposed to urban areas who abandon their culture are in the minority, and religion is often the reason why people abandon their traditional cultures. Hence, one finds that in church mostly the ones located in the urban areas, there is scarcely any disparity between the outcast and freeborn, as both sit in the same seat and receives Holy Communion together (Ntshangase, 2015). In the aspect of education, it has contributed to the removal of ignorance from some citizens. Education in this sense involves a transformation of the citizenry and making them aware of their duties and rewards in their respective societies. As a result, the Osu are more enlightened to know their rights and can seek redress in a law court of competent jurisdiction whenever they feel their rights have been violated.

In relation to the traditional rulers of various communities, efforts have been made to abolish the Osu Cultural Practice in their various communities. For instance, in July 2018, the Osu practice was abolished in Irete in Owerri West Local Council of Imo State, as the traditional institution and indigenes of the community gathered to put a stop to the obnoxious system, which they said had caused disaffection and ill-feelings amongst them. In October 2018, the Obi of Onitsha, Igwe Nnaemeka Achebe, took a stance to abolish the culture in Igboland. Even before that, the traditional leaders in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo state had endorsed the abolishment of the age-long practice to free the affected people from stigmatization in the community. In the same month and year, 24 traditional rulers in Oguta Local Council of Imo State endorsed the abolition of the Osu system to free affected people from stigmatization. Again in December 2019, history was made when the Eze Nri, Obidiegwu Onyensoh, alongside other monarchs from Abia, Anambra, Imo states, etc., set out to phase out the Osu practice in all communities in Igboland. After the abolishment, they went further to ask God for forgiveness from those who may have suffered from the practices (Ugobude, 2018).

However, despite the aforementioned progress geared towards the total abolition of the Osu practice in Igboland, it persists as a social sore. Today, the Osu has not generated for themselves the capacity to communicate with the Diala, as the practice still holds sway, mostly in the areas of leadership positions, title-taking, and marriages. While some communities like Nnewi, Okigwe, Nri, Nnobi, etc., have made attempts towards abolishing the Osu practice in Igboland, however, none of these attempts have proven to be successful, except for Nnobi in Idemili Local Government Area of Anambra State, that have been able to fully integrate their Osu population into the mainstream of the community (Dike, 2002). This is because, while its abolition may only be in principle in some communities in Igboland, it is still prominent in some parts such as Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State (Umuode, Ugwuaji, Akwuke, Nike, Umueze, Obeagu, Ugbawka, Mgurumbu, Ameachi, etc.), Umuaka Community in Imo State, Imufu Community in Igbo Eze North LGA, Enugu State and parts of Nsukka, particularly Enugu Ezike community, etc., where it has been institutionalized as a norm (Ugobude, 2018).

In light of the above, this paper, therefore, maintains that the futility and unsuccessfulness of the attempts at the abolition of the Osu practice in Igboland is a sociological problem, which may be traced to the attitudes of the Igbo toward their norms, traditions, and traditional belief. It has to do with culture and beliefs that represent their strength and weakness. It is their strength because it is an indispensable nexus with their past, and it is their weakness because some of these customs and traditions are dehumanizing.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

From the foregoing, it may seem as though the Osu practice has been abolished by the efforts of the church, community efforts, and government through constitutional provisions and other sensitization programs, however, this might be in principle and not in practice. The stigma of being an Osu still exists as a result of the Diala's traditional belief and its attendant consequences which



is mostly predominant among the local people. This stigmatization, no doubt creates a rigid distinction of social status and undermines cohesiveness in Igboland. The social exclusion and discrimination of this kind are unconstitutional and repugnant to natural justice, equity, and good conscience. Hence, abolishing this culture completely, will restore the dignity of affected persons as human beings, promote peaceful relationships, and reduce conflicts in society.

Consequently, in an attempt to eliminate the ugly practice in its entirety and ensure its acceptability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this paper, therefore, recommends for total integration, which lies more on ethical and moral persuasion. There should be inter-marriage between the Diala and the Osu. There should also be inclusion of the Osu people in high positions and community activities like kingship. This can be achieved through the establishment of strong educational, political, and cultural institutions. Mass education and seminars in conjunction with the village chiefs and local government should be conducted in local dialects, to sensitize the people against the effects of the Osu practice. When people are educated, it will create awareness, reduce the high rate of illiteracy among the people, and in turn increase social interaction. There should be a review of the Nigerian constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, to establish a statutory ground for the total elimination and abolishment of any forms of discriminatory practices, by providing severe penalty/punishment to that effect.

There should also be psychological abolition of the culture as well as counseling. This is because the Osu practice has a psychological dimension, whereby the Diala think that associating with an Osu will bring negative consequences upon their lives. In addition, religious organizations can impact positively in their campaign against the practice by preaching equity and equality in their sermons. There should be active participation of the mass media and social media, which could be employed to fight for equality and create further awareness against the Osu practice in Igbo culture.

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