



ERRATUM

CASTE CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: THE OSU/DIALA EXPERIENCE IN IGBOLAND, 1900-2017

NNEKA SOPHIE AMALU, YUSUF ABDULLAHI AND EKONG DEMSON

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The Oruku Community Conflict:

Oruku Community in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State is made up of three villages, Umuode, Umuchiani and Onuogowo. Since time immemorial, there had been a balance of power among the three. They lived in peace, as brothers from same parents. The custom and tradition governed and guided the people and decision making was done by the three clans. According to Adeniyi, Nnamchi and Onyia (2019, P.332) in 1976, Oruku community drew up a constitution of chieftaincy by which the stool was to rotate amongst the three clans. The rotatory system was already established even before the constitution was drawn. However, it was under this constitution that Chief Nwatu Okenwa became the first traditional ruler of Oruku in 1976. After his death, a supposed review of that rotational constitution was drafted devoid of the knowledge of the community. Engr. Raymond Okenwa, brother to the deceased, became the sole administrator of Nkanu LGA and communicated with the then Chairman of the Oruku Development Council, Mr. Felix Nwatu from Umuchiani to install him as the traditional ruler. This did not go down well with the people. The Umuchiani as a way of reconciling with the Onuogowo than fighting to have their son ascend the throne of the 1976 rotation agreement, openly campaigned the idea that the Umuode people are slaves who have no claim whatsoever to the throne. They then imposed His Royal Highness Igwe Cornelus Nomeh on the people based on the 1987 "merit" but his also satisfied the 1976 rotational provisions (Adeniyi et al. 2019, p.332). By this agreement, Umuode was excluded from ascending the throne (CWIS, 2021; Dike, 2002; Amadi & Obomanu, 2016).

With their new ascribed status as Osu, the Umuode had little or no social interaction with the other two clans. Amadi and Obamanu (2016, p.7) stated that "the other communities had a separate market and placed a fine of N1000 (One thousand Naira-about \$10 dollars) on any community member that buys or sells to the Umuode community."

On the 9th of October, 1995, at the reception of Professor. Barth Nnaji, (Umuode's leader in Oruku and world acclaimed professor of Robotic Engineering from Umuode) who received an international award and came down to Nigeria to become a federal minister of Science and Technology under Chief Ernest Shonekan's Interim National Government which held in Professor's compound, armed Oruku youths invaded the reception and drove the guests, while the awardee narrowly escaped them with the help of police officers (Adeniyi et al. 2019). Nine Umuode people were captured and later murdered, while their women and girls were raped. Their houses were looted and vandalized as well as their farms and crops. This incident combined to fuel the emergence of caste-induced conflicts on an unprecedented scale and manner including several decades of cultural exclusion, marriage relationships and traditional positions which fueled strong feelings of discrimination and stigmatization among the Osu (Amadi and Obomanu, 2016, p.7). Dike claims that the people of Umuode have waged wars against this system with about five major conflict since 1995, and many lives have been lost and properties destroyed (2007, p.18)

Due to the recurrence of this conflicts, several investigations were carried out and panels setup, the Umuode community was granted an autonomous status on June 24th, 1998 and

published in the Enugu State Autonomous Communities Edict, 1999 (Edict No.1 of 1999). Consequently, the Umuode people were moved to a new community carved out of land legitimately owned by a neighboring community but still claimed by the Oruku community. The government formally acquired the land to implement the autonomous community of Umuode in the interest of peace (Adenyi et al. 2019).

Adenyi et al., (2019) stated that on 23rd February 1999, Umuode people were moving to their new land to establish their homes, but this angered the Oruku people as their intention was just to eliminate the Umuode people. After several attempts of suppressing them failed, they resorted to force. The Oruku people armed themselves and attacked the Umuode people, killed and burnt their properties in both the Oruku and their new community (Adenyi et al., 2019). Umuode people who survived had to flee from both Oruku community and their new settlement and had been living in most poor conditions. As a result of this, many Umuode people were murdered; others escaped with gunshot wounds into neighboring communities. It is said that over hundred and fifty persons-including women and children were taken hostage for five days without food and water in a detention camp in Oruku. However, the police raided the place and the people were released. Though some arrests were made by the police, they were said to be released and the case closed. It is clear that people who were once indigenes and land owners now became outcasts, refugees and strangers in their own land (Dike, 2007, p.49). In April, 1999 the then Governor of the state was said to have annulled the autonomous status given to the Umuode people on the grounds that it was not acceptable to their neighbors. Also, giving them a separate community would give room for other Osu groups to petition for autonomy in the state (Amadi and Obomanu, 2016). The Commissioner for Special Duties in the State, Mr. Maurice Ede (from Umuode), was allegedly dismissed because he even protested the way the Enugu State handled the crisis (Dike, 2007).

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Interviews

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- Mr. Micheal Amadi, Umuode Community, Enugu State, Telephone Interview, June 9, 2019.
- Mr. Emmanuel Emmanuel, Mbaitoli LGA, Imo State Face Interview, June 4, 2019.