

THE RESILIENCE OF IGBO CULTURE AMIDST CHRISTIANITY AND WESTERNIZATION IN ORLU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IMO STATE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Prior to the advent of Christianity, Igbo culture was well established among the people of Orlu in Imo state, Nigeria. With the introduction of Christianity, the exposure to new forms of life brought changes to people's world views. More than a century after that exposure, if it is necessary to ask: Has the Igbo identity been eroded? The purpose of this study is to account for the resilience of Igbo culture in spite of western cultural influences. Second is to show how Christianity could be an asset in Igbo culture to resist western negative influences. Descriptive and analytic methods were combined for optimal results. Is it right to conclude that with the huge influences from Western (Christian) cultures, the Igbo identity is no more visible? Based on the findings, among the Igbos of southeastern Nigeria, Igbo culture remains the bedrock upon which interpersonal relationships are formed despite incursions of western ideologies. This paper concludes that the Igbos have shown resilience in their identity in a multicultural global world. The paper recommends that values inherent in the various religions to be models for interpersonal relationships rather than projecting ideologies that only arouse tension.

Keywords: Culture, Religion, Resilience.

Introduction

With the introduction of Christianity, western culture advanced unabated. Westernization resulted in the destruction of Igbo culture and imposition of alien "ways of life". Westernization equally furthered the incipient destruction of Igbo values. According to Ilogu, (1974) "western names such as Joseph, Mark, Henry, were given to people through baptism to transform them from

“heathen” to “Christians”. In marriage, monogamy was introduced in place of the predominant polygamy. Ekechi, (1857) states that “with the introduction of modern Western cultural modes of dressing, traditional decorations, drawings and paintings as well as women beautifications with camwood (uri), and red dyes (uhie), were considered unfit for Christians”. This exposure to new forms of life and the possibilities it offered brought drastic changes to people’s world views.

The advent of Christianity in Igbo land meant the introduction of a Christian world view. The religious beliefs, practices, and the provision of social services of these immigrant religion have impact on the religious and cultural life of the traditional communities. Christianity at times has undermined some of the traditional religious and cultural values which have fostered peaceful co-existence over the years. The Igbo have embraced Christianity and western culture which have displaced the traditional religion in its organized form yet the traditional religious beliefs and practices still rule the minds of many Igbo Christians. One of such beliefs and practices that have survived the onslaught of the forces of change in Igboland is the belief in deities. Mbiti (1969) states that “deities though in retreat are very much alive. The average Igbo Christian would not normally participate in the public worship of deities but would resort to deities for help when difficult life situations such as illness, misfortunes, deaths, barrenness, present themselves for solutions”. In this situation, culture clash is inevitable as the dominant culture strives to “over throw” the recessive culture. As conflict emerges, new modes of behavior and lifestyle emerge which result in new identity. One of the major effects of this in this recent time is the resilience of Igbo culture. Alongside Christianity is the Igbo traditional religion (ITR) with a belief system that governs ethics and moralities among much of the population. Christianity was inherited as a form of achievement that abolished “twin-killing and human sacrifices. According to Onwu (2005), “it also introduced education, built hospitals and charity homes”. Christianity decreased superstition, increased and re-shaped the Igbo world view. Ekpunobi and Ezeaku (2011:99-144) noted that:

Some aspects of the traditional values and morality have been influenced by the processes of modernity that are passing through the African societies. Some values and morality are wearing new frames in order to grapple with the increasing socio-religious problems of the contemporary society.

Christianity, with its message of hope and humanitarian concern attracted many Igbo people. The social security and human development that emerged at the time through education were all well attractive. The new possibilities ushered in by Christianity made people to embrace the missionary Christianity

without thinking of the implication it might have on them. The extent to which such western ideologies and their inherent traits of superiority have spawn conflicts with the outcome including destabilization of the economic, political and religious lives of the people. Therefore, it becomes necessary to ask if the Igbo culture did not have the flexibility to go through the huge cultural changes and influence and still retain some of its core features. In what way can Christianity, being a major religion in Nigeria be an asset in Igbo culture to resist Western negative influences? Can Christianity really enhance the Igbos in their search for resilience? Religious conflict in Igbo land had been variously addressed by scholars and social analysts without solving the problem of Igbo resilience for her identity. This is the gap that this paper is poised to fill. This research adopts a descriptive cum analytical method to explore areas of conflict between western cultural ideologies and Igbo cultural ideologies. This methodology becomes very necessary because the situation leading to resilience could be assessed in the research work of previous scholars. The objective of this paper is to show that Christianity could be an asset in Igbo culture to resist negative western cultural influences. It is the intent of this paper to demonstrate how these western culture ideologies induced processes have led to Igbo resilience.

Cultural Background of the Igbos

The Igbo is one of Nigeria's three major ethnic groups. Though majority of the Igbos are Christians, is indigenous traditional religion whose major tenets are shared by the Igbo- speaking people of Nigeria (Uchendu, 1965). The traditional religion was passed on to succeeding generations, but the advent of Christianity in Igboland about '1885' had some influence on the traditional beliefs (Talbot, 1969). The Igbo traditional beliefs have some positive influence on the culture and social lives of the people. For instance, the forefathers of the Igbos were known for their righteousness, honesty and hard work. However, Igbo culture is expressed or manifested through visual art, music, dance, Igbo dialects, proverbs and wise sayings etc. To recapture the state of Igbo culture and evidence of culture decline and conflict areas, the history of the study area provides evidence of rich Igbo cultural heritage and evidence of distorted specific cultures.

Regarding religion, the cultural life of the Igbos shows several religious beliefs. Mbiti (1969) writes that 'Africans are notoriously religious'. This could be seen from the fact that they believe in the existence of the supreme God – 'Chukwu or Chineke' (Great God) and other minor gods whom they take to be the messengers of the supreme God, or who acts as intermediaries between man and the supreme God. They held 'Chukwu' so high and cannot approach him directly and as such go through the deities. Deities are regarded as God's representatives on earth. Some of these deities according to Otteberg (1958) are regarded "as the personification of

phenomena such as rivers, hills, lightening and farms'. Different names are given by the people of Igbo land for the deities in the pantheon. Ilogu (1974), recognizes four major deities in the pantheon of Igbo god. They are; 'Anyanwu' (the sun god), 'Igwe' (the sky god), 'Amadioha' (god of thunder and lightning), and 'Ala or Ani' (the earth goddess). Individuals worship the Supreme Being through their small deities and ancestors. Thus, the existence of many local deities in Igbo religion does not define their religion as polytheism. These deities have shrines, priests, and religious festivals as part of their worship. Igbo traditional religion "involves several sacrifices, rituals, and initiations such as initiation into the masquerade court, the Ozo institution, Nze title, Ichie/oha/elders council" (Tolbot 1967, Isichie, 2004). There are relationships between the gods, oracles, and divination (Ogbaa, 1992, Iroegbu, 2009), such as Amadioha (god of thunder), Ogwugwu, Ahiajoku/Ifejioku (yam goddess), Chiokike (god the creator), etc. The advent of christianity has brought most of these gods and their worship to an end (Ilogu, 1996). Dibia (diviners) play important roles in Igbo religion and spirituality. Orji (2007) "explores the Dibia in historical contexts as priests, healers and diviners. They together with the chief priest (onye isi ala/ Eze mmuo) are intermediaries between the gods (spirits) and the people (humans)".

A distinct feature of the Igbo civilization is the absence of any formal, centralized political authority. According to Ilogu, (1974) "they have egalitarian and republican structure with sub-groups and recognize the council of elders as the highest decision-making body who are the custodians of Ofor (symbol of authority)". Land is the source of economic existence of the Igbo and is shared among patrilineal lines. There are communal and individual ownership of land. Women do not own lands according to custom. Igbo people also engage in commerce, craftsmanship and trade. The social life of the Igbos is built on core values and ethics such as taboos, sacrileges, equality, and honesty. Certain rituals are performed in course of reconciliation, where if the offence is outrageous, the defaulter is utterly banished such as killing of human beings. They place high premium on male children as custodians of culture and inhabitants of the 'obi' (homestead). Igbo culture venerates nature which is believed to be inter-connected with 'Chiokike' (god the creator). As Katherine Slattery (2001) notes "there is a strong Igbo belief that the spirits of one's ancestors keep a constant watch over them, the living show appreciation for the dead and run to them for future wellbeing". The Igbo people worship 'Chukwu' and deserves to have their religious life correctly identified and labelled on their own cultural terms and relatives. It is therefore imperative to reflect on how Christianity helped Igbo religious ideologies to embrace change and continuity.

Difference between Christianity and Westernization

Christianity is a religion that is based on the teachings of Christ. “It is the world’s largest religion with over 2.4 billion followers” (Zoll Rachel 2011). The tenets of Christianity are recorded in the book of Christians called the ‘Holy Bible’. Christianity came to Nigeria in the 15th century through Augustine and Capuchine monks from Portugal (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/church-of-Nigeria>) and was first preached in Benin and Warri (Omotoye 2012). This first attempt failed partly because of the introduction of Atlantic slave trade. The second attempt was successful and was carried out by ex-slaves from Britain, America, Brazil who were already Christians and later found their ways to Badagry and other towns in hinterland (Omotoye 2010). Through its history, “Christianity has weathered schisms and disputes that resulted in many district churches and denominations” (The Global Religious Landscape 2012). Christianity has also played a prominent role in the shaping of Western civilization. However, Christianity must seek to purify and free Igbo culture from its humiliating internal schism and elevate it to acceptable standard and dignity. It should as well encourage Igbo people to appreciate the institutions and values of their own culture. Christianity should assist the government to establish commissions and centers for cultural studies in which relevant experts participate and also promote the cultural and religious alienation of Africans. In this way, traditional values would be preserved and enhanced.

While Westernization refers to the conversion to or adoption of Western traditions and customs. Thong (2012) define Westernization as a process “whereby societies come under or adopt Western culture in areas such as industry, technology, law, politics, economics, lifestyle, diet, clothing, language, alphabet, religion, philosophy and values”. Westernization can also be related to acculturation and enculturation. Acculturation according to Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology is “the process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between cultural groups and their members”. However, the phenomena of Westernization does not follow any one specific pattern across at varying magnitudes within different communities (McLain, 2003). Specifically, the extent to which domination, destruction, resistance, survival, adaptation or modification affect a native culture may differ following inter-ethnic contact” (Kottak, 2005). Westernization which dislodges and destroys traditional culture and impose western ideologies on the people is not the best. No culture should claim superiority over the other, rather the integration of both should be the best approach. The Igbos for instance had lived with their culture long before the advent of Christianity and Westernization. This imposition of Western culture has actually led to clash of cultures and the implication is the resilience of Igbo culture.

Cultural Impact of Christianity on Igbo People of Nigeria.

The encounter between Igbo indigenous religion and Western culture was put clearly by Achebe (1958) when he said that the white man “has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart”. Achebe’s (1958) use of the words “knife” and “things” that held us together be viewed not in the literal sense, but as deeply symbolic. Achebe asserts here that” the Igbo culture and sense of solidarity and communalism (things) were punctured by a new cultural force that were not prepared to take seriously or engage with”. Iroegbu Pantaleon (2000) is of the view that “Igbo philosophy and metaphysics are all about belongingness, being qua being, existentialism, adaptation and survival”. The problem with cultural encounters is that they force one another into a new set of relationships for adjustments called change, a change that will become inevitable due to need by the followers. It is true that from the moment of experiencing the new culture, things will never be the same for the Igbo. Does foreign religion divide or unite? And how exactly did they manage to win some Igbo over to Christianity? Achebe (1958), points out that the outcasts (osu) in Mbanta flocked the church” in pursuit of freedom from evil spirit and operation, twins were thrown away in the forest to die, and Ikemefuna was killed for sacrifice by his father, Okonkwo”. Onwu (2009), also reminds us that when the Igbo’s “gave over the evil forests and shrines of their various gods to Christian missionaries, nothing happened contrary to common expectations, the perception was that those gods were dead (but were they?), the people became convinced that the white man’s gods were very powerful”.

Widows were among the first set of people who were converted by the missionaries. The early conversion was mainly on the ground of socio-cultural humiliating conditions which made them see the hope of liberation in the new religion. In the traditional society, widows were subjected to all kinds of dehumanizing and agonizing conditions. Some were forced to drink the water used to bath their dead husband as a way of exonerating themselves that they had no hands in the man’s death. Some suffered isolation and so on. Christianity has done a marvelous work not only being the voice of the voiceless by fighting against dehumanization of widows but also advocated the rights of women in the society. Achebe (1958) is of the opinion that “religion migrates and liberates, thus producing both change and continuity”. Christianity made Igbos to drop their gods emphasizing that they are “pieces of woods and stone and are not alive” Are they? There is a misinterpretation here. Igbo religion combines local forces, ecological and ancestral resources to seek solutions and find protection in the face of need. This is considered cultural and a responsibility (Achebe, 1958). The aggressive and revolutionary missionary evangelization was aimed at condemning the traditional religion. The inability of the missionaries to see the religious and social values in Igbo

religious traditions made them to categorize many things as superstition, paganism and fetishism. The ideological posture they took did not help the Igbo converts to see anything good in Igbo culture. Igbo Christians became ideologically, the missionary product-one who is a Christian in the church but an African (Igbo) in the village. The “effect of the ideological chanson and assessment of African culture and religion had a corrosive impact on the psychological development of the Igbo Christian here and now (Egbo, 1973). These conflicts began to emerge in the missionary era. The Igbo practised their traditional religion “in secret choosing to hold onto their religious beliefs in private, and at the same time hold to the new religion in view of acquiring the economic empowerment of the white men” (Iwu 1983). Thus, the emergence of minimal Christians who were no longer strong in the traditional patterns as well as in Christianity. The implication is that the resilient impact of Igbo traditional religion (ITR) is practically and ideologically alive and active in the lives of the people. For example, at important occasions like Ozo title taking, or burial ceremony, when it starts raining, people will ask questions like why didn't they negotiate with the rain makers? Again, when people are sick and have visited the hospital for treatment but could not get well, they resort to the Dibia (native doctor) for solution to their problems. Thus, people are able to utilize their skills and strengths to cope and recover from problems and changes.

Western cultural ideologies brought disorganizations of social pattern of life among the Igbos. The missionary education affected character formation, social personality formation and emancipation from social cultural practices and beliefs. This exposure to new side of life and the possibilities it offers, brought drastic change in peoples world view. Traditional decorations, drawings and paintings with wood, and red sand were classified as those things that belong to pagan religion. Women beautifications with cam wood (Uri), red dynes (Uhie) were considered unfit for Christians. As the social life pattern were disorganized, new world views crept in that were not there before. Thus social environment were affected by the new ideologists and trend

The proclamation against polygamy received serious resistance in Igbo land. The acceptance of Christian marriage by new converts did not last long as many backslide into former polygamy life. In a society where many wives and many children demonstrated mark of recognition, and sign of wealth, the teaching of one man, one wife was almost unaccepted. It became extremely difficult to abide by the law of monogamy when the couple could not get offspring in the marriage. Credit however, should be given to Christianity as polygamous marriages are in reduced number today. From the above discussion, one can rightly say that there were internal crisis between western Christian ideologies and Igbo cultural ideologies but Christianity

continued in its message of hope and being an asset in Igbo culture to resist western negative influences.

Over Enduring Institutions

Resilience of Traditions and Traditional Rulers: Igbo culture (Omenala ndi Igbo) are customs, practices and traditions of the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria. It comprises obsolete practices as well new concepts added into the Igbo culture either by cultural evolution or by outside influence. The institution of traditional rulers (Ozo, Ndi Nze) is one of the most enduring traditional institutions of Igbo society. In spite of the many mutations it displayed remarkable resilience from colonial through post –colonial times. The Igbo were organized in “a non-centralized system whereby the traditional rulers of the different clans formed the highest political authorities in Igbo villages” (Afigbo, 1980). These were seen as the symbols of the peoples past, custodians of their history and upholder and preserver of their culture and customs, epitome of cultural norms and values of the society such as truth, discipline, courage and responsibility and so on” (Emordi and Osiki 2008). In theory, traditional rulers in pre-colonial Igbo societies had permanent tenures of office and the positions were hereditary. In practice, they had a number of advisers, assistants and other courtiers and their final decisions were based on harmony of opinions of all the participants. It has frequently been falsely said that traditional institutions (Ozo, Ndi Nze) and traditional rulers are facing a crisis, or are undergoing struggles for relevance and survival in contemporary Igbo politics. According to (Adesoji, 2010), the reflections of the stress of the traditional rulers in Nigeria “are personal humiliation, salary cut, restriction, suspension, banishment, dethronement and murder”. All these indices are not unique to traditional institutions alone but are general phenomena affecting all classes of Nigerians in contemporary time. The position here is that traditional rulership is not facing any crisis of relevance or survival in Igbo society. This is because it has always been relevant and has survived a lot of organized efforts to scrap it completely. Traditional institutions are very relevant in Igbo society but what it is clamoring for is constitutional role and recognition.

Despite this, traditional institutions and traditional rulers have continued to exercise considerable influence and play active role in the political administration at all levels of government in Nigeria. For instance, during the electioneering processes, political aspirants troop to palaces of traditional rulers in their communities to receive royal blessings and endorsements. The study argues that the continued relevance of the traditional institutions are very resilient because their authority and legitimacy are derived from the people’s traditions and customs (Ashiru, 2010). Traditional rulers occupied important positions among the peoples of Igbo land. Their

positions were sanctioned by the traditions, history and culture of their respective peoples who held them in high esteem and reverence (Amusa, 2010).

Resilience of Traditional Medicine and Traditional Healers among the of South-Eastern Nigeria

Like other social groups in the world, the Igbo has forms of traditional or indigenous medicine. Traditional medicine refers to medical knowledge systems which developed several centuries ago in any social group before the advent of modern modern medicine. It could also be viewed as those treatments not commonly believed within the framework of modern medical practice (Huff, 2008). For the World Health Organization (WHO,2003), traditional medicine involves “health practices approaches, knowledge of beliefs, incorporation of plant, animal and mineral based medicine, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illness or maintain wellbeing.

Among the Igbo of southeast Nigeria, indigenous medicine has had a long history. It constitutes part of their effort over the years, to cope with their environment and to lessen pain, treat injuries and illnesses of physical and mental nature. Their traditional medicine clearly prescribe the care for the sick, who to provide the care and how he should proceed. Such facts is provided by adults, traditional healers, bone setters, herbalists, and traditional birth attendants and so on.

A current study into indigenous medicine among the Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria reveal that the practice has passed through what Bever (1993) quoted in Nwankwo (2005)called “excessively unhygienic, and crude stage, and also the ‘age of uncertainty when practitioners were called heathens, pagans and witches”. In the present age of modernity, traditional medicine not only co-exist with orthodox medicine in the Igbo society, but in addition preference for traditional medicine particularly among the lower class is on the increase. Many members of the Igbo society despite western ideologies and Christian ideologies, use traditional medicine in tackling illnesses in their area. Traditional healers are the live wire of traditional medicine in Igbo communities. Their methods are based on the social, cultural and religious backgrounds as well as knowledge, attitude and beliefs that are prevalent in the community regarding physical, mental and social wellbeing and the causation of disease and disability (WHO,1978). Traditional healers are responsible for carrying out healing ceremonies, religious rituals and other rites intended to ensure the safety health of Igbo communities. However, they have withstood and remained very relevant in the health system despite increasing incursions of orthodox medicine into the cultural systems that were previously their exclusive terrain” (Iwu, 1981, Nwaogu, 1997).

Admirable successes of traditional healers in both the Igbo nation and in other countries are well documented by scholars (Kafuru, 1998, WHO, 1998, Nwankwo, 2005). However, it has been argued that a strong belief in indigenous treatment can yield a positive outcome even where scientific treatment is known not to work (Kafuru, 1998.) The WHO, (2003) emphasized that up to 80% of the population of Africa use traditional medicine for primary health care. It stressed the need to harness the resources of traditional healers towards attainment of 'health for all' and the millennium development goals by the year 2015. The WHO also notes that the use of traditional medicine is spreading in popularity in industrialized countries like America where about 158 million adults use complementary medicine (a field that incorporates traditional or folk medicine but is broader in scope).

Factors Necessitating Resilience of Traditional Medicine:

The following factors promote the continued backing of traditional medicine in Igbo society.

(a).Ease to Access- Traditional medicine practioners are easy to access at night and during the day. They live among the people.

(b). Accessible services- Their services are relatively cheaper. They may also accept deterred payments or payments in kind. This close relationship often extends and outlives the treatment period.

©.Shared system of beliefs exists between traditional practioners and their patients. This facilitates understanding and co-operation during the treatment process.

(d).The traditional healer operates usually in his home which is familiar to his client. In juxtaposing, hospital environment are artificial set-ups that might negatively rouse the anxiety of patients.

(e).Failure of Western remedies to address some health problems makes room to traditional medicine inevitable.

(f). The perception that certain disease are effect to anger of the gods or are due to demonic attacks by enemies and evil forces alike, provide further attractions to traditional medicine even in this age. Traditional healers are seen as capable to communicate with the spirits world, offer acceptable sacrifice to appease offended spirits and cast out demons.

Victorious treatment Outcomes: One of their greatest assets is successful outcomes. Some of their medicines are pharmacologically active and have offered relief to their clients. Thus, this has accounted for the importance and resilience of traditional medicine in Igbo society. Traditional medicine exists side by side with modern medicine. There is need for co-operation and exchange of ideas between the two. Seminars, joint conferences on topical health issues should be organized where both practitioners meet and share experiences and enrich each other:

Obnoxious Resilience:

Women Subjugation: Women in Igbo society, in consequence of the sociological background have been victims of all manner of domestic violence. According to Egbue (2005:214)

Violence against women constitutes a highly damaging dimension of the dehumanization of women on basis of culture. This still remains common practice in the localities studied, either as a means of maintaining masculinity and male superiority, or of keeping female spouse in check.

Women in Igbo land are often regarded and treated as the property of their husbands and can physically be beaten up by them as a form of correction. It is also been observed that his cultural approval for the wife battery has also been legalized in Nigerian statute books. Section 55(1) (b) of the Nigerian penal code (Nigeria Penal Code, 2004), for instance, permits wife chastisement as long as it does not cause grievous bodily harm". Again, Nigeria Court of Appeal in the retrogressive judgment of Akinbuwa V Akinbuwa (1998), gave judicial approval to wife chastisement by airming the provisions of 55 of the penal code. This traumatic domestic violence, regrettably have persisted over the years unabated and under reported by women for fear of repercussion, shame, and fear of ejection from the home (Egbue, 2005). Some of these women have grown up with this violence and therefore they perceive it as normal and cultural.

Detrimental Widowhood Practices: Under the Igbo culture, widows are subjected to all manner of degrading treatment. They are often the chief suspects on the death of their husbands and therefore are expected to go through some disheartening treatments in order to prove their innocence from their husband's death. For instance, in Orlu area of Imo state, some dehumanizing widowhood practices often meted out against widows include: compulsory shaving of hair, sitting on the bare floor throughout the mourning period, the widow's movement is usually restricted within the house, she is banned from trading within this lengthy mourning period as a mark of respect for her deceased partner. This compulsory restrictive movement is highly discriminatory because men are not subjected to this type of restriction by the culture on the death of their wives. According to section 34 of the Nigerian constitution (1999), this harmful widowhood practice is an infraction of the widow's right to dignity of human persons. However, the restriction of the widow's right to movement is a breach of her right to movement and amounts to false imprisonment. These obnoxious traditional mourning rites target only women. Men under the Igbo custom are not subjected to any of these degrading treatments.

Wife Inheritance: Under Igbo traditional law, the wife could be inherited by the brother of her deceased husband. This is definitely discriminatory. It is submitted that every woman in the death of her husband should not be compelled or forced against her will to marry within the late husband's family. She reserves every right to get remarried to a man of her choice.

Male Preference: Male sons are preferred under Igbo culture because they perpetuate the family lineage. Therefore, the birth of a son into any Igbo family calls for a big celebration. Despite Christianity and Westernization influences, these cultural practices still show resilience in Igbo society.

Osu Caste System: Osu are a group of people whose ancestors were dedicated to serving in shrines and temples for the deities of the Igbo, and therefore, the deemed property of the gods. (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2016). Relationships and sometimes interactions with Osu were [and to this day, still are] in many cases forbidden. To this day being called an Osu remains a stigma that prevents people's progress and lifestyles (the story of Nigeria's untouchables 2007). According to Achebe (1958) states that "our father in their darkness and ignorance called an innocent man Osu, a thing given to the idols, he and his children and children's children forever". They were regarded as slaves, strangers, outcastes and untouchables. It was generally believed among the Igbo that a Diala (free born) who socialized with an Osu would be contaminated or polluted. The Osu were therefore left on their own, to socialize only among themselves. They are made to live separately from the free-born. An Osu is forbidden from associating openly or having sexual relationships with the son or daughters of a Diala. The Osu are not allowed to break kola at gatherings. They are not allowed to pour libation. They are forbidden from saying prayers on behalf of the freeborn at community meetings. It was believed that if they did, such prayers would only bring misfortune to the village or town the level of discrimination was so serious.

Actually, the seriousness of the Osu tradition began to give way with the introduction of Christianity and western ideologies, and when Nigerian cities began to attract more people from the villages. People now interact without asking such questions as whether one was an Osu or a Diala before they relate to each other. The only time they were confronted with such traditions was if they wanted to get married. If anyone of them is, their relations would aggressively object to such a union, telling their own "You can't marry an Osu. It is forbidden for you to marry an Osu" (Achebe 1958). The church continues to fight for their liberation. The tradition continues to linger. The Igbo people are not sure how devastating the "old power" can still grip them if they violated the tradition of their ancestors. The movement to

liberate the Osu is heating up within churches in Igboland. But can the church win this battle? Only time will tell.

Conclusion

This paper examined the resilience of Igbo culture against Western ideologies and Christian ideologies. A major thrust of this study is that this traditional culture is existing in a society that is fast undergoing rapid socio-economic and political changes. But its greatest challenge is some principles of western ideologies and Christianity that condemned its practices in toto. The early missionaries saw themselves as social and religious reformers whose aim was to condemn Igbo religion, social beliefs and practices, and to replace them with their own. "Many of the hasty conversions lacked some degree of religious conviction as it was a means of shielding against traditional worse situations" (Ekechi, F. K. 1857:148). In this interaction, dominant culture strives to dislodge the recessive culture. According to Achebe, (1958), "Christianity decreased superstition, increased and re-shaped the Igbos faith and world view".

There is no gainsaying that one important feature of culture is that it is dynamic. Culture and traditions change as the socio-economic and other needs of a society change. A tradition suited for that society would need to be evolved. No culture is a finished product. It therefore follows that both the Igbo culture and Western culture must learn from each other. Ekechi, (1857:148) observed that

Some Christians were backsliding to 'paganism' as the social status they expected to gain from the new religion became unachievable. Some recreated new shrines and objects of worships as they had thrown away the ones they had before baptism. Some who dismissed their wives recalled them and also renewed the Ozo title that they renounced. Not only that they returned to traditional religion, but also they remained there as "baptized pagans" answering Christian names".

Instead of denigrating the traditional culture, it would have helped the traditional systems to throw away the bath water while retaining the baby. It is no doubt in reaction to some of these customs that the Igbo have resilience. What experts need to do is to reposition the concept of change and diversity as a means by which the Igbo's embraced the expansion and change that resulted in cultural clash as the dominant culture strives to dislodge the recessive culture. Instead of condemning the practices without due regard to the values intrinsic in them, the government should establish commissions and centers for cultural studies in which relevant experts participate. In this way traditional values including would be preserved and enhanced. Although it

seems that westernization and Christianity have “overthrow” all traditional Igbo cultures, evidence indicate that some core features of these cultures have remained resilient.

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