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FACULTY OF SOCIAL STUDIES

Unveiling the Shadows: A Critical Analysis of the Osu Caste System in Eastern Nigeria

Master's Thesis

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Abstract:

Various societies have various structural norms that govern them which in turn helps to dictate their interactions with each other. The Osu Caste System, which is prevalent in Eastern Nigeria, influences how people are regarded according to where they were born. This system has been in place for a while dating back to the existence of the eastern people and continues to have an effect on people. This thesis explores the Osu Caste system in Eastern Nigeria, including its history, present state, and possible futures. I investigated the Osu caste system using theories such as Erving Goffman (1963)'s stigma theory, and Gordon Allport's stages of prejudice (Gordon, 1979). Allport's theory clarified the prejudice experienced by Osu people, while Goffman (1963)'s research illuminated the stigma they bear.

Through interviews and data analysis, I was able to learn more about the many viewpoints that the Igbo community has on the Osu caste system. While some consider Osu to be inferior, others perceive them as "gods' servants". These opposing points of view emphasize how complex the problem is. Nevertheless, despite efforts to alter it, the Osu caste system continues to have an impact on opportunities, education, and jobs. Initiatives aimed at promoting awareness and education may be crucial in breaking down this system, particularly in bridging the generational divide. In the end, the research highlights how important it is to oppose discrimination, increase awareness, and work towards societal change. Through comprehending the specifics of the Osu caste system and its consequences, I can endeavor to establish a more equitable and comprehensive community that embraces all individuals, not only in Eastern Nigeria, but also globally.

Declaration

I declare that I worked on the topic of Unveiling the Shadows: A Critical Dissection of Osu Caste System in Eastern Nigeria by myself. All sources and sources of information used in writing this paper have been cited in the text and are listed in the references and literature list.

Brno May 2024 ……

Peter Chukwuka Nnadi

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1. Introduction

People live together according to their own set of norms in various regions. Imagine being raised in a society where the rules dictate how you are being treated by others. That is the effect of the Osu caste system which is practiced in Eastern Nigeria. People are still impacted by this ancient custom nowadays. Looking at it, societies have different sociological stratifications either as a consequence of economic status, religious or cultural status. The Eastern part of Nigeria (the Igbos) is well known for their communal living. The Igbos are found mostly in the Southeastern and South-Central Nigeria called Igbo land or Igbo society (AlaIgbo or AnaIgbo). The majority of the Igbos are Christians, while some still practice their indigenous traditional religion (African Traditional Religion), in which its major tenets are shared by all the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria (Uchendu, 1965). Igbo is predominantly made up of a group of people with the same language, culture, traditional beliefs and practices despite the seeming nuances as a result of geographical dichotomies.

As a people, the Igbos are highly religious, and are traditionalists, in the sense that, they respect and preserve cultural heritage and religious beliefs. The traditional religion is passed on to succeeding generations, but the advent of Christianity in Igbo land around 1885 had some influence on the traditional beliefs (Talbot, 1969). The indigenous traditionalists believe in the earth goddess, deities and ancestral spirit and in a Creator- God, Chukwu, Obasi, Chi, or Chineke, the “Supreme God” (Chinua Achebe, I959). However, a relic of the indigenous religious practice of the Igbos is the dehumanizing Osu Caste System, which has alienated the Igbos.

According to George Basden, a former Anglican Missionary who represented the Igbo people on the Nigerian Legislative Council between 1931 and 1937, Osu is an Igbo term to mean a ‘slave’,

but one distinct from an ordinary slave (Ohu/Oru) who in fact is the property of a god, and when once devoted to a god, has no prospects of regaining freedom and must restrict his movements to the precincts of the shrine to which he is attached (Basden, 1966). For Charles Meek, a British anthropologist, Osu is a religious slave cult under the practice of the Igbo traditional religion and system of worship. He maintains that, 'An Osu is a person who has been bought and dedicated to the service of the owner's cult (Charles Meek, 1937)". From the foregoing definitions, it is palpable and convincing to say that 'Osus' are slaves, and as such, possess low or no human dignity and value.

In fact, at a meeting of the Nigerian Members of Parliament to abolish the system in 1956, ministers argued that, the Osu caste system is a horrible system by which a fellow human being is degraded and dehumanized, with his rights and liberties brutalized by abject non-recognitionsystem, and, as unethical as it was, unchristian (Nigerian Members of Parliament Meeting, 1965). In the same vein, Arazu, as quoted by Okeke, maintains that Osu is 'a living sacrifice, something totally dedicated to a divinity'. To classify a human being as 'a living sacrifice' is to equate him as mere object (Okeke,1986). However, Nwabara et al's opinion is more direct and explicit: an Osu is regarded as a degraded human being not fit for the companionship and association of decent and respectable men and women in the society, an outcast fit only to be sacrificed to the idols for the propitiation of the gods (Nwabara et. al 1975). This practice within the Igbo nation brings about discrimination. Hence, there is a need to survey the origin of this societal onslaught.

The origin of the Osu practice nevertheless, is vague and unclear, and there is equally no consensus reached on this basis. For Amadife, the origin is traceable to the era when the gods were believed to demand for human sacrifice during festivals for cleansing as a result of any abomination that

defiles the land. In response to the demands of the gods, the people will contribute to the general or common purse for the purchase of a slave or for kidnapping one (Amadife,1998).

C.O. Dureke avers that, the Osu caste system was introduced in Igboland in the 14thcentury when the god, kamalu or Amadioha informed a juju priest that the land had been defiled and needed purification. However, Dureke did not make mention of the nature of the defilement, he claims that 'kamalu's instruction was that an able-bodied man was to be brought and in the market square on an Afo Ukwu day, he will be publicly dedicated to the gods and the ancestors to atone for the sins of the living. Since the name of the man was Osu, his descendants, according to the custom in Igboland, have had to bear his name (C. O Dureke,1985).

The Osu caste system in Igboland promotes the ideology of supremacy of the Diala (sons of the soil). The Osu people are outcasts sets apart, a "taboo" forever. They live apart in areas specially meant for them in the village more especially, around shrines. The Diala or free born are traditionally abhorred or forbidden from engaging them in marriage. The community tends to ostracize any person who goes contrary to this practice. Osu is like leprosy in the minds of the people. The avid supporters will go to the extent of refraining from eating with the Osu or drinking from the same water-pot with them, buying from the same market with an Osu is equally a taboo (Chinua Achebe, 1960). Even for some, socializing with the Osu, would contaminate, pollute and transform the Diala into an Osu. Also, it is a common belief too that to associate with an Osu attracts the spirit of the deities (which the Osu people serve) to haunt those who socialize with them.

However, it appears or seems that today, things are no longer taken the same way as it was originally in Igbo traditional setting, but segregations are still conspicuously manifesting in the political sphere of the Igbo community. Caste system even influences people's voting behavior.

Conservatives might vote against any politician who condemns or suggests jettisoning the system (Dike, 2002). While some communities may out-rightly refuse to support any politician from the discriminated group. Today in Igboland, this seems to go unnoticed but its impacts keep re-vibrating and causing discomfort and a state of uneasiness on the part of the discriminated group. This system is an impediment to human relationships and social progress (Nwosu,1999).

Osu Caste System, has many social implications. It infringes and impedes the human right - civil right. It also has political implications. Those who adore the system often express some traditional sentiments in support of the preservation of this primitive heritage and custom whenever it is mentioned. With the foregoing, the central focus of the research is to expound the sociological implications of Osu caste system in Igboland. Considerations of the discourse either among the Igbos or outsiders contribute to the formation or raising of my key research question: Why is this practice common among the Eastern part of Nigeria (that is, the Igbos)?

The sub-questions of this research are as follows:

- To what extent are the Dialasinteracting and engaging with the Osus in their own lives?
- How do the Osus' perceive future possibilities for any type of change or improvement in their current socio-economic status?

These questions raised, will be further discussed in the methodology and theoretical chapters, as there remains much to explore and explain about the Osu caste system. This research is necessary and contributes to sociological and cultural well-being of the Igbo people. In order to arrive at an in-depth research of the concept under investigation, one-on-one interviews and other collated data implicate the sociological and cultural discrepancies between the Osus' and Dialas' in Igbo sociological and cultural settings.

Introduction

The following chapter takes into consideration the methodology I employed for this research work. I begin by elaborating on the methodological approach to qualitative data I selected in-depth, one-on-one, semi structured interviews. I personally made the choice of the few elderly persons from both sections (that is, both from the Dialas and the Osus) and few young persons from both sects equally. For proper assimilation of the concept, there is also explication of the major operational terms like “Osu”, “Diala” and “Eastern part of Nigeria ". Most of the information or data got about the operational terms are products of the interviews and field work met. All the approaches employed as methods, form the critical sociological analysis of the topic under inquiry. I conclude the methodology chapter with the details of my data analysis process, stating the overall justification and stands for the methods employed.

In chapter three, I made a critical dissection of the concept of Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria and here lies the bone of contention. This is achieved by connecting the basis of data collection and participants' sample from my methodology to the theories I dimmed fitting to the aim and objective of this study, to explore the concept of Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria. This theoretical chapter per se, considers theories like the theories of discrimination (majorly, that of Gordon Allport) and Goffman (1963)'s work on stigma as critical tools for dissecting and analyzing the issue at hand. These theories are part and parcel of the major themes of data analysis and both the provocation to the research questions.

The chapter four, exposes the sociological analysis of the Osu caste system based on the data and interviews collated in the previous chapter. The research findings reveal the pervasive impact of the Osu caste system on social dynamics within Igbo society, underscoring its deep-rooted historical origins and contemporary ramifications. Through the application of theoretical frameworks such as Erving Goffman's stigma theory and Gordon Allport's phases of prejudice, the

study provides valuable insights into the complex layers of discrimination and social stratification inherent in the Osu caste system. The study highlights the enduring challenges faced by Osu individuals, including discrimination, limited access to resources, and restricted social mobility, which perpetuate inequalities and reinforce societal divisions. By examining generational perspectives and intergroup dynamics, the research emphasizes the importance of education, awareness-raising initiatives, and intergenerational dialogue in fostering a more inclusive and equitable society for all members, regardless of caste identity. Whereas, the fifth chapter makes an evaluation of the entire work with a conclusion.

2 Methodology

2.1 Introduction to Methodology

This research aims at giving explanation of Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria which as a necessity will touch the concept of Diala because the two concepts are intertwined. Osu is a common phenomenon within the Eastern part of Nigeria that evokes the feeling of discrimination. As said in the earlier chapter, the issue at hand is quite dehumanizing, however, the ugliest part of it is that it makes its victims alienated even in their very soil of origin. Based on the complex nature of the topic under investigation, different conflicting and contradicting explanations of both the origin, why it is common among the Igbos and social status of the "Osus" in relation to the "Dialas", the qualitative method becomes a necessary tool in this research work. The in-depth interview method is also used in this research, in a bid to get at quality data.

2.2 Qualitative Data

I opted for the qualitative data collection method because, the work is based on research and studies. This research method is mostly used in discussing and investigating such issues like race, migration, culture, and other complex issues that concerns human identity (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2018). This research method is a veritable tool for the researcher, more especially when it comes to gathering data that concerns understanding how a person construct meaning, which on a long run affects their external lives and behaviors. Qualitative method gives us the opportunity to pause and to understand more intimate the inner worlds of the "Osus" and "Dialas" which is the core aspect of this investigation. As I set out to understand more about the relationship between the Osus and Dialas in Igbo setting, I made appropriate use of the qualitative methods.

2.3 In-depth Interviewing

Due to the complexity of the topic under inquiry, I conducted in-depth interviews, a method of qualitative data collection that allows for a more relaxed and conversational discussion built on the knowledge of an informed and prepared researcher. The participants (both from the Osu sect and Diala sect) were earlier disposed to reflect and think on these questions about their personal experiences and societal status. The interview format was found to be engaging and personal, bringing about a positive rapport with participants. To facilitate the process, I created a semi-structured interview guide with questions to guide the study on the necessary themes and elements. The semi-structured interview technique, as stated by Fedyuk and Zentai (2018), enables the researcher to retain participants' attention on the primary subject during the conversation process without neglecting or limiting their right to free thought. They claim that this strategy aids in keeping the interview "exploratory in nature and participatory in terms of knowledge production" (2018: 173). This method encourages sincerity on the side of those interviewed and helps the interviewer to be focused without derailing from the major themes and elements of discussion.

Conducting the Interviews

In accordance with the participants' preferences, availability, and location, interviews were performed via online or in-person. The participants were given enough time to prepare and well-disposed for best output. In order to create an atmosphere of freedom and freewill on the side of those interviewed, forms of confidentiality and their takes on the issue at hand were prepared and given to them prior to the interviews to go through, fill and sign. This approach of disposition, that is, the forms presented to those to be interviewed earlier, made it possible for them to raise their concerns and questions as regards the topic under investigation ahead of time, and gave them the

ground to prepare themselves towards answering the interview questions. The timing of the interviews was communicated to the participants and to this effect, each interview was scheduled to last at least between 30 minutes to 1 hour. The online interviews were conducted with video and audio records, with the promise of confidentiality. Conducting interviews via Zoom, was not really an easy experience because of network disruptions but we pulled through in some occasions. However, the interviews conducted in person warranted my travelling to Nigeria to ensure proper collation of data and also to feel psychological and physical reactions of the participants. These interviews that took place in person were conducted in private locations of the participants within the country (Nigeria). Participants were given pseudonyms to preserve their intention of anonymity. The pseudonyms are as follows,

Okereafor – Participant I

Nwafor – Participant II

Nwosu – Participant III

Mgbodi – Participant IV

Chituru – Participant V

Akudo– Participant VI

Olileanya– Participant VII

Dike – Participant VIII

Sampling

I used the snowball sampling method (that is, a non-probability method of sample selection that is mostly used to locate hidden population. However, in this research it involves locating interview participants by asking a participant to recommend another person to be sampled or interviewed as the case maybe (Heckathorn 1997, 44:174-199), to select the participants. This method is

frequently used within the social sciences. Coleman (1958) and Goodman (1961) are credited with coming up with the idea first, particularly in terms of gathering qualitative data. This strategy beats out and is more trustworthy than the non-probability method used to select participants with certain identifying qualities and characteristics that are appropriate to the sample requirements (Gill 2020). In order to provide a more formidable ground for the interview, an online space in form of form was created to aid the participants. This encouraged the participants and helped them to know and gather momentum within the area of study. I also sought for qualitative data which made me to leverage upon the snowball sampling method. The online space created made me get a good number of persons which made them to understand my main intention of research and also prepared for the questions ahead. Participants were selected accordingly with their pace of response. Being an issue that is very complex (Osu Caste System) within the Igbo people because different communities and localities with the Igbo nation have similar or varied ways of understanding and dealing with the concept under study, I have to increase the sample size so as to get to a more generalized explanation but with qualitative data still in mind. Therefore, I am very mindful and also placed priority on the quality of the interview despite the number involved.

Questions

The interviews were semi-structured, with a set of questions prepared beforehand. In framing the questions for the participants, rigidity was never intended and this was applicable to them while answering their questions. Very importantly, the freedom of opinion among others was observed, no unnecessary restrictions on how the participants are to answer their questions. Hence, confidentiality becomes the benchmark of the entire interview process. As a result of the complex nature of the subject, I created an atmosphere of free expression, beginning with a more informal introduction to ease off tension and to make the participants feel very much at home and relaxed.

Some of the informal questions that served as preparatory grounds for the main questions include: questions about who the participants are, where they are from, and their current life status among others. As a follow-up question, inquiries on employment, travel, and other topics were considered. Each participant answered the same initial questions that formed the basis of the interview, which varied according to the type of individuals. The key sub-questions as the following:

- Why is this system common among the Eastern part of Nigeria (that is, the Igbos)?
- How do the Osus perceive future possibilities for any type of change or improvement in their current social status?

2.4 Participant Criteria

To participate, Interviewees were required to meet the following criteria:

1. Born before and within the year 1990.
2. Be of Igbo origin.
3. Proficient in both English and Igbo languages.

Age Selection

The age selection is based on the idea that those born earlier before (that is, even from 1912 to 1989) and within the year 1990 in Igboland must have gathered knowledge and experienced the concept under study.

Igbo Origin

One of the criteria to be a participant in the interviews is that one must be of Igbo origin. This is because the concept under discussion is strictly of Igbo origin and common phenomenon only

among the Igbos and within the Igbo land. Therefore, there is no need to associate people who are not from or within the Igbo region because they cannot give a good and reliable explanations of the concept. Hence, the discussion is limited and tied to Igbo culture only.

Language of the Interview

All participants are native of Igboland and fortunately I am of Igbo origin (interpretation and translation would not be a problem), therefore Igbo language was an accepted language for the interview. More so, English language, being the official language of Nigeria, was also used, for an educated Nigerian is capable of both oral and written modes of the language. Hence, the interviews were conducted in both Igbo and English languages. However, Igbo language is encouraged in this work because there are concepts that make up the study which can only be fully expressed and understood in Igbo language alone.

2.5 Data Analysis

This is an overview of the analysis done on the research. It showcases the ways in which the data gathered are used in explaining the objectives of the study.

2.5.1. Coding

To analyze the interviews met, inductive coding (that is, a data analysis process that involves reading and interpreting raw contextual data in order to develop themes, concepts or a process model that facilitates interpretation) becomes a necessary tool. Be that as it may, codes are referred to as a possible means of programming the text in order to arrive at a format of more familiar thoughts about it (Gibbs, 2007: 2). Considering the concepts surrounding the Osu caste system, this approach seemed timely and fascinating to me. Not minding the theoretical justifications for my primary research, there were no rigid codes prior to the interviews.

I used contemporaneous data analysis which was helpful in combining essentially, similar data during the interviews. I had the chance to observe participants' replies after interviewing them and assembling the transcripts, and I was able to be aware of related information obtained throughout the interview process by means of concurrent data analysis. The themes I came up with mainly as regards this, is the explanation of the major terms of this research work.

I came up with the themes by analyzing the topic of study and breaking it into bits based on the major concepts that gives one a good knowledge of what the entire research work is all about. These was achieved by coding the main interest of those interviewed and summarizing their stands on the meaning of the major or key terms that are presented at the earliest section of data analysis.

The concepts of discrimination and the fate of the future generation who may be born into the system were put into consideration during the construction of my interview. The rampant practice of the Osu caste system within the Igboland and the discrimination thereof, brings about the intention to explore why the practice is common in Igboland and the sociological implication of the issue at hand. These two major areas of concentration serve as guidance in further exploring the aim of this research and one of the major areas is my main research question.

Theme Saturation

Within the interview process, there were similar and converging explanations and answers collated up to the point of saturation. However, saturation is a concept which states that as the process of data collection continues to progress and grow, and there are no novelties of thoughts or new different and important information coming up, the sample size maintains a maximum stand (Glaser and Strauss (1967). At this point in my research, qualitative method comes to play also

because despite the many respondents, emphasis is placed on the quality of responses given. Information was collated from both sects under investigation, that is, Osu sect and Diala sect.

2.6 Go-along

Also, in order to make those interviewed comfortable enough for the interview, I employed the go-along method alongside the interviews. This method led to raising of topics and created stimuli for narratives and description. This method is a form of in-depth qualitative interview method that involves the researcher engaging on outings with informants or those interviewed. The go-along can be conducted as a "walk-along", a "ride-along" etc. (Carpiano, 2009). However, in this research I employed the walk-along method to ease off tension and anxieties on the side of those interviewed, in some occasions.

Furthermore, while conducting go-along, fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their 'natural' outings and by the very means of asking questions, listening, and observations, they gather required information concerning the subject under investigation which flow freely from the informants as they move through and interact with, their physical and social environment. The Go-along is not only a modest practice, but also a more systematic and out-come oriented version of 'hanging out' with key informants. This method is an ethnographic practice that is highly recommended in most fieldwork manuals and textbooks (Kusenbach, 2003: 463).

Meticulous attention was paid to creating a welcoming and pleasant atmosphere during the interview process so that participants could freely express their opinions. By using the go-along approach, participants were urged to embark on spontaneous excursions, creating a laid-back environment that allowed for insightful conversation. Through the use of a qualitative technique, participants' complex experiences and observations while navigating their social and physical settings, might be explored. During these exchanges, insightful questions and attentive listening

produced important discoveries that deepened our understanding of the intricacies of the Osu caste system.

In addition, great care was taken during the interview process to protect participant privacy and establish rapport and confidence. Forms, explaining confidentiality policies and the parameters of the conversation, were given to participants prior to each interview, giving them the freedom to speak freely. Every interview, whether done in-person or virtually, was handled with consideration for the particular circumstances and viewpoints of the participants. The interview technique promoted a rich interchange of ideas and experiences by placing a high value on open communication and respect for one another. This helped to provide a thorough examination of the sociocultural dynamics underlying the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction to Theoretical Framework

In this research work, I made use of different theoretical frameworks to guide and direct my data collection and analysis. These theories gear to affirm and expose the discriminatory nature of Osu Caste system in Eastern Nigeria, thereby bringing to the fore the place of the "Osus" in Igboland (Eastern Nigeria). First among the theories I employed is the Gordon Allport's theory (Gordon, 1979) on the stages of prejudice but with particular stress on the stage which he referred to as discrimination. This theory is necessary in this research because it aided me in the construction of the interview questions because the relationship between the Osus and "Dialas" in Igboland (Eastern Nigeria) exposes a rift that is explainable by the use of the concept, discrimination. However, the theories employed are not limited to that of Allport. As necessary and timely as regards this research work, Goffman (1963)'s work on stigma was incorporated to express the theoretical framework of the entire research process. Hence, I will begin by explaining the stages of prejudice of Allport and scholars' reactions for and against his stands and demonstrate the credibility of the theory as it pertains this research work.

3.2 The Stage of Prejudice (Gordon Allport's Theory of Discrimination)

Allport's conception of discrimination is contained in one of his famous works, *The Nature of Prejudice*. In this work, he defined prejudice as "an aversive or hostile attitude toward a person who belongs to a group, simply because he belongs to that group, and it is presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group" (1954:7). Furthermore, for him, prejudice is an internal feeling and the acting out of prejudice occurs when the inner feelings become actions. He

maintained emphatically that the acting out of prejudice is majorly based on race. For him, the scale of acting out prejudice includes the five types of racism (1954:10). These five types consist the following; antilocution or verbal rejection, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack and extermination. I will briefly discuss these five types of racism by Allport but the major concern here is on discrimination because the concept of Osu caste system unravels the bane of discrimination between the so called "Osus" and the "Dialas".

Antilocution

For Allport, antilocution comes to play when one talks about or verbally expresses the prejudice he has. In this case, "with like-minded friends, occasionally with strangers, they may express their antagonism freely" (1954:14). In this type of racism, negative image or words are passed on to friends or to strangers either intentionally or unintentionally. This stage of racism only takes place verbally and it is the lowest scale of Allport's Prejudice Scale.

Avoidance

This is the second level in Allport's Scale of Prejudice. For him, avoidance happens when "prejudice is more intense and this results to an individual avoiding members of the disliked group, even perhaps at the cost of considerable inconvenience" (1954:14). Purportedly, in this level of prejudice, there is only small chance of physical harm towards the member of the disliked group. To highlight more on this level, he explains in his book that "the bearer of prejudice does not directly inflict harm upon the group he dislikes. He takes the burden of accommodation and withdrawal entirely upon himself" (1954:14). For instance, avoidance occurs when a person or a group choose not crossing the crossroad because they are avoiding a member of the other group.

Discrimination

After avoidance comes discrimination according to Allport's Scale of Prejudice. For him, discrimination happens when "the prejudiced person makes detrimental distinction of an active sort. He undertakes to exclude all members of the group in question of certain types of employment, from residential housing, political rights, educational or recreational opportunities, churches, hospitals, or from some other social privileges" (1954:15).

Furthermore, the segregation involves Institutionalized discrimination. This type of discrimination according to Feagin and Eckberg (1954), involves an organizationally arranged action that intentionally makes a different and damaging effect on a particular group (1954:1). However, for Allport, discrimination happens when the rights of people are denied by other group. For instance, discrimination occurs when the political rights of individuals are deprived and denied by others. Everyone who met the requirements to vote should be allowed to vote.

Physical Attack

The next in Allport's Scale of Prejudice after discrimination is physical attack. Allport maintains that "under condition of heightened emotion prejudice may lead to acts of violence or semi-violence" (1954:58). Be that as it may, before the physical attack occurs, there must be present, several steps that will pave way for the outbreak of violence. Some of the steps include long period of pre-judgment and growing discrimination (1954:58).

Extermination

Extermination simply connotes the act of mass killing towards a particular group of people.This therefore, is the final stage of prejudice according to Allport. He states that "lynching, pogroms, massacre and the Hitlerian program of genocide mark the ultimate degree of violent expression

ofzprejudice" (1954:15). For Allport also, there are several steps before the inception of extermination. For instance, there is an important condition that supports the extermination that is a low level of law enforcement in the society. This low level of law enforcement in the society gives room to the prejudiced people to act this way. It gives the prejudice feelings the gap to slip through into an expression of violent act (1954:15).

Following Duckitt's (1992) historical exposition of the trends and discussions on prejudice, there is decade-by-decade shifts in how sociologists or psychologists approach or view the study of prejudice in the twentieth century (this idea is also seen in Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986). Within the early 1900s in the United States, psychologists contributed to a social and intellectual climate that stressed on the importance of (assumed to be genetic) group differences and a "natural" hierarchy of racial and ethnic groups. For instance, backed with IQ test results, psychologists concluded that 87% of the Russian, 83% of the Jewish, 79% of the Hungarian, and 79% of the Italian immigrants to the United States passing through Ellis Island were "feeble-minded" (Goddard, 1913, 1917). In like-manner, the "Osus" in Igboland face racial prejudice that make the "Dialas" (Sons of the soil) regard and treat them as less humans and tag them with derogatory terms and equally segregate them from normal day to day life activities thereby impeding their social integration into the Igbo society at large.

Around the 1920s and into the 1930s, racial prejudice and bias became recognized more generally in Unites States society as unfair. Hence, prejudice and stereotyping were seen as irrational processes, with the measurement of these phenomena becoming the new focus for psychologists (D. Katz & Braly, 1933). Aroused politically by the Nazis' rise to power in Germany and the holocaust, and intellectually by the classic work on the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), prejudice and other forms of bias were viewed in the 1930s

through the 1950s not as simply disruptions in rational processes but as dangerous aberrations from normal thinking. Racism was conceived not only as non-normative but also as evil which is against the good and progress of the human society. According to McConahay (1986), "Hitler gave racism a bad name" (p. 121). This radical dimension and conception of racial prejudice or prejudice also influenced some intellectuals in Igbo setting, the discussion on the Osu caste system became a topic of discussion, issues and concerns were raised which influenced and ameliorated to a great deal the distress of the Osu people but it never eradicated the concept and mentality from the Igbos. Up till today, the Osu caste system remains a form of internal apartheid (Dike, 2002:2).

However, being guided by the psychodynamic viewpoint and influenced by movements in other aspects of psychology, (e.g., aggression research; Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), there was a shift on emphasis of prejudice as a manifestation of unconscious psychological defense mechanisms and the expression of pathological needs. From this bent, Duckitt (1992) identified a critical shift in paradigm in the 1960s, a decade characterized by great civil unrest in the United States and by the successful passage of Civil Rights legislation. Within this period, psychologists recognized socio-cultural influences in prejudice, stereotyping, and bias and began focusing on the role of social learning and norms in the development and maintenance of racial biases (e.g., Pettigrew, 1958). In the 1970s, opus magna of Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) on social identity theory, and theorizing by European social psychology,,a more general insights from Allport 1961, influenced psychologists' approach to prejudice by stressing on intergroup dynamics and motivation. Research on prejudice in the 1980s and 1990s concentrated more on social cognition and stereotyping. Racial biases were conceived as by-products of the processes by which people process, store, and retrieve information as "cognitive misers" (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The thoughts of Allport (1954/1958) expressed in his classic book,

The Nature of Prejudice, prefigured many of the necessary theoretical developments that are associated with later researches on the concept of prejudice. Allport, identified the central role of categorization, particularly in terms of the distinction between ingroups and outgroups, which became the bedrock and foundation of cognitive (Hamilton, 1979) and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) approaches to prejudice. Allport (1954/1958) argues that: "the human mind must think with the aid of categories" (p. 19), he further adds that "in-groups are psychologically primary…., Hostility toward out-groups helps strengthen our sense of belonging but it is not required" (p. 41). Allport recognized the importance of social structure and cultural values on the expression of prejudice (p. 202), and he equally suggested how different cultural, social, and psychological forces could produce "inner conflict in the person harboring prejudice" (p. 316). Many current perspectives concerning the social-cognitive foundation or basis of bias and the potential conflicts between self-image and intergroup feelings and beliefs have developed, directly or indirectly, from Allport's (1954/1958) insights.

Furthermore, current work in the areas of implicit and explicit social cognition (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), and of motivation and ambivalence (Katz, 1981), suggest the possibility of people being unaware of the contemporary forms of racial bias (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998) such as aversive racism (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986), symbolic racism (Sears, 1988), and modern racism (McConahay, 1986). As highlighted by Allport, these contemporary prejudices may be characterized by a discrepancy, or "inner conflict," between one's perceived or desired self-image and underlying (and perhaps unconscious) intergroup feelings and beliefs (which may be rooted, in part, in normal social-cognitive processes).

Not minding the contributions of Allport as it concerns the discussion on prejudice, some researchers and scholars still maintain that Allport did not fully appreciate and unravel the

nonconscious processes involved in prejudice. Some of those scholars include Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998, including recent scholarly contestation on its meaning and yardstick of measurement. Example of such scholars include; Blanton &Jaccard, 2006; Greenwald, Nosek, & Sriram, 2006, who exposed the effect of nonconscious factors as it pertains prejudice and discrimination. As these debates suggest, however, many unresolved questions about non-conscious processes remain to be clarified in the coming decades. Allport's focal point was on the individual contemplating members of other groups. As a result, he did not paint a complete picture of the various levels at which prejudice-related processes may take place. However, from the advancements made in this field, there is a futuristic possibility of a more formidable research in the social neuroscience of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination (Amodio et al., 2004; Phelps et al., 2000). In addition, I also think it's important to move up a level to consider group-level interactions in the context of the ongoing globalization and internationalization of our social world. Also, for some scholars 'research on prejudice even from the perspective of Allport has focused largely on the processes of prejudice, therefore, there is need to understand and talk more about the contents of prejudice and discrimination (Schaller & Conway, 2005). That is, the substance of prejudice may not be random and arbitrary, and a better understanding of this content should yield valuable insights into intervention programs that might best reduce prejudice (Neuberg & Cottrell, 2006; Schaller & Neuberg, 2006).

The case of Osu in Igboland brings about prejudice and the interplay of the different stages mentioned by Allport directly and indirectly. The intention of this work is to criticize or to appraise the work of Allport as well as highlight the impacts of prejudice and discrimination as mediums to expose the place of the Osus in Igboland. Hence, from the majority of the interviews gathered, participants from Osu group buttress and decry how the practice has discriminated them even when

they make efforts to integrate, they are maltreated and are entangled in the trap of prejudices that have long lasted from generation to generation. They are excluded and deprived of their fundamental human rights and this falls within the stage of prejudice by Allport referred to as discrimination. There are also displays of avoidance, physical attacks and at some points, threats of extermination.

This system has caused inter-communal discords and wars between the Osu and the Diala in Igboland and has led to loss of many lives and properties. The discriminatory Osu practices 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, inequality in access to public office... slavery (Allport 1979:52).

Hence, the interview questions constructed from the explanations and discussions on the stages of prejudice by Allport aided the research to expose the place of the Osus in Igbo land, thereby consolidating the necessity of this theory in this research work. The in-group and out-group analogy of Allport goes a long way to expose that the practice of Osu caste system is an inimical practice that aims at enriching and protecting the social interests of the Dialas against the Osus. From some of the interviews met, some interviewee frowned their faces on the system, maintaining that it is an irrational antics through which the Dialas are taking charge and dominating the Igbo race at the expense of a group that are treated as outcasts, less-humans, less-irrational, properties of the gods and even a modern-day form of slavery. The ideas of Allport were employed to investigate the subjects of the research.

Exploring the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria through my research is equivalent to delving deeply into our cultural past. I have been researching the history of this system and how individuals are still impacted by it. A significant portion of my research involves examining Allport and his

theories regarding discrimination. He discusses how bias originates in our inner selves and can manifest as acts of aggression towards others. It's similar to when someone disparages a group of individuals simply because they are a member of that group. This is known as "antilocution," and it represents the initial phase of Allport's theory of prejudice. Next is "avoidance," which is the result of people beginning to shun those in that group,although they may not even be aware they are doing it.It can nevertheless cause hurt and a sense of exclusion in others. Next on the list is "discrimination." People begin to treat others unfairly because of their group at this point. It can entail denying them access to specific areas or perhaps providing them with less opportunity than others. Following that is a "physical attack," in which bias manifests itself in acts of violence or threats of violence. For those that are targeted, this is the most serious stage and can be extremely frightening. Lastly, there is "extermination," which is the result of prejudice turning into genocide or mass murder. Although this is fortunately rare, it is nonetheless vital to discuss in order to prevent it from ever occurring again.

My study demonstrates how the Osu caste system embodies these stages of discrimination. Osu members experience assault and prejudice simply for being themselves. It's unacceptable, and we must take action. With a deeper understanding of how bias functions and impacts individuals, we may begin to improve the situation. My goal is to shed light on the Osu caste system and contribute to the creation of a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

3.3 Erving Goffman on Stigma

Erving Goffman defines stigma as an “attribute that is deeply discrediting” (1963:3). To this effect, a discredited attribute could be easily noticed, such as, skin color, body size etc. On the other hand, it can also be hidden but nonetheless, not negligible, if surfaced or revealed.Such cases include;

criminal record or struggles with mental ill-health or even a deviation. According to Goffman (1963), stigma affects the general dimension of social life, complicates and makes every day micro-level interaction difficult. In like manner, an Osu person is often exposed to public ridicule and even if they are not insulted and ridiculed in public, the Osus always have on them the dehumanizing Osu caste stigma (Dike, 2002:14).

It makes the stigmatized uncomfortable and deter them from engaging with those who do not share their stigma, and those without a stigma are likely to take undue advantage of the situation even to the extent of making the stigmatized feel dejected and not to consider themselves as part of the society in which they belong. Furthermore, Goffman (1963) argues that most people experience the role of being stigmatized "at least in some connections and in some phases of life" (1963, 138). His conception of stigma involves many contemporary discredited attributes, including "tribal stigmas" (e.g., race, ethnicity, and religion), "physical deformities" (e.g., deafness, blindness, and leprosy), and "blemishes of character" (e.g., homosexuality, addiction, and mental illness). Also, as it was in the apartheid system, an Osu is segregated from the rest of the community; and is, if not exaggerated, like socially imprisoned person in the Igbo community (Dike, 2002:11). The system is a cultural albatross for the Igbo society, as it is an impediment to human relationships and social progress (Nwosu, 1999).

As regards stigma, psychologists after Goffman (1963) have made elaborate researches on the cognitive dimensions of stigma and the processes through which it shapes micro-level social interaction and relations. A handful of this research on stigmas associate stigmas to character, for instance, mental illness or addiction, or stigmas stereotyped as deviant, such as homosexuality among others. Differently, the painful part of the Osu caste system is that, it is a stigma that is inherited not as a result of deviation, addiction and the rest of them, it is a generational stigma

(Achebe, 1959). According to Ezeala, the Osus were socially avoided, discounted, isolated, denigrated, victimized, abused, dehumanized and denied fundamental human rights, in some schools, the children of the Osus are cajoled, mocked, spat upon, ridiculed by pupils and their leaders, while in the villages, they suffer all manner of opprobrium and odium (African Concord 7th January, 1988:6).

The concept of stigma has been extensively discussed, critiqued and developed since Goffman (1963). Some sociologists and psychologists contend with Goffman (1963)'s idea that stigmatization is the destruction of social identity, a specific differentiation between virtual and actual social identity. For instance, Spicker (1984) insists that Goffman's stand is an unsatisfactory proposition because, social identity is defined by society, and it is unclear how someone can be "proved" to be different from that definition [and] there is no reason a person who is discredited because of an attribute or characteristic he actually possesses should not be said to be stigmatized (p.156). Hence there are myriad of definitions of stigma. Consequent upon discussion of the diversity of the experience of stigma, Spicker (1984) goes on to argue that it could therefore be viewed as a not very coherent concept and which cannot be easily described, albeit upon its complexities. However, he goes on to argues that "the underlying coherence of a concept rests, not in an attempt to confine its use to a specific or unambiguous use, but in a pattern of 'family resemblances' which defines similarities between related clusters or factors. The idea of conceptualizing stigma to 'family resemblance' recognizes that two members of the same family may be quite unlike, but they are linked to the family by their similarity to other members" (p.162). Still on defining the concept, Stafford and Scott (1986) see it as 'a characteristic of persons that is contrary to a norm of a social unit' (p.80), in which a norm is a 'shared belief that a person ought

to behave in a certain way at a certain time' (p.81). Not being too much acquainted with the definition of the term, the highlight remains that a stigma tarnishes one's social image and that actually, is the case of Osu caste system that is under discussion in this research work.

Noteworthy, Becker (1963) avers that as it pertains stigma, dominant social groups create deviance 'by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance' (p.9). This idea ofBecker goes a long way to corroborate with Allport's discussion concerning the characteristics and tactics of the in-group against the out-group. Sometimes the in-group (that is, the dominant group) lord it over the out-group (that is, the dominated group), set principles, restrictions, among others which might not be comfortable with the normal day to day living of the segregated group (Allport,1954: 41). This idea actually circumvents and exposes the primitive politics of the earliest generations of the Igbos, who invented the Osu caste system as a means to oppress and dominate a group (Achebe, 1959). Although this stand, is seriously under contestation, it also forms one of the core questions of the interview process.

However, Link and Phelan (2001)'s review of stigma in the Annual Review of Sociology initiated a distinctively sociological approach to the study of stigma that has been refined and elaborated. Drawing on Goffman (1963) but incorporating a broader concern for the operation of power in society, Link and Phelan define stigma as the co-occurrence of four processes:

- labeling human differences;
- stereotyping such differences;
- separating those labeled from "us"; and
- status loss and discrimination against those labeled.

By implicating the role of power and discrimination in their definition of stigma, Link and Phelan have gathered an approach to stigma that would enable sociologists to consider how stigma is

related to some fundamental sociological questions, like; those relating to the social creation, reproduction, and consequences of social inequalities.

Rogers and Pilgrim (2014) suggest the need to consider 'labelling theory, social network theory, the social psychology of prejudice and discrimination, and theories of the welfare state' (p.197). However, in the second publication of their work, in 1999, there is no section on stigma, indicating that sociological and psychological interest in it had risen in the intervening years. Whilst not without merit, what is missing from their suggestions is the role of politics, materialism and historical change in how we conceptualize and attempt to combat stigma in the contemporary period. Furthermore, Thornicroft et al. (2007: 16) maintains that stigma refers to problems of knowledge (ignorance), attitudes (prejudice) and behavior (discrimination), while Scambler (2009) insists for a discrepancy between stigma (an 'ontological deficit' associated with shame) and deviance (a 'moral deficit' associated with blame).

The discriminatory behavior and stigmatization are added burdens on the Osus who are already bound with unemployment, poverty, and other injustices. And through socialization and bias inherited from their parents, some Igbo youth have internalized the discriminatory behavior towards the Osu caste system (Dike, 2002:9).

On the other hand, the Goffman (1963)'s theory on Stigma is employed in this research as a necessary tool of investigating the subject of the research because, the issue is purely related to the concept of stigma. And just as Link and Phelan (2001) added to the concept of stigma such sociological questions relating to social creation, reproduction and social inequalities, the interview questions touched these aspects in other to gain a broader insight on the place of the Osus in Igboland. Equally, Becker's idea that as it pertains stigma, dominant social groups create deviance 'by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance' (1963:9), constitutes part of

the interview questions because it has been a contestation whether the Osu caste system is a social construct made by the earliest Igbo generations to suppress and oppress a particular group and this also brings to fore the discussions and ideas of Allport on in-groups and out-groups' analogy. The stigma theory of Goffman is relevant to this research work in a great measure because it raises the concern of social identity and the concept of social identity when tackled properly as relating to Osu caste system, exposes the place of the Osu people in Igbo setting which the main purpose of the entire research process. In the social identity of the Osu people lies how they are being seen and treated in Igbo society and as clearly met by the outcomes of the interview process, there is high rate of stigma attached to the state of life of the Osus not minding that the rate at which it was in the primitive stage is no longer the case in the contemporary stage.

Ihave looked at the concept of stigma in my research on the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria. Stigma is simply the idea that someone is treated unfairly or denigrated because of anything about them that other people find objectionable. This could be anything, including their history or way of looking. This stigma plays a significant role in Osu people's daily life. It's as though they live with a label that prevents them from blending in and receiving acceptance from others. Imagine living your life and constantly feeling that you're the target of criticism or disdain due to an unchangeable circumstance. For those who are from Osu, it is the situation. Their family history is the only reason they are subjected to prejudice and mistreatment, which has an impact on practically every part of their existence. I looked at a theory by Erving Goffman to better grasp this; he defined stigma as a deep type of rejection. According to him, it can even have an impact on a person's sense of self-worth and make daily interactions challenging. This is a very serious stigma for Osu people. It's about being treated less favorably than others, not merely about feeling different. However, stigma isn't only about how individuals view themselves; it's also about how

others perceive them in the society. Osu people frequently encounter obstacles in their pursuit of friendships and employment since other people perceive them as inferior. This starts a vicious cycle of discrimination that is difficult to escape. Through my research on this idea of stigma, I hope to shed light on the challenges Osu people in Nigerian society confront. My study demonstrates the impact stigma has on their lives and the significance of addressing these problems. We can work toward a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their background, by increasing knowledge and fostering understanding.

3.4 Literature Review

Traditionally and religiously in Igbo setting, an Osu accordingly is conceived as one or group of persons who are dedicated to a god or gods as its property. Consequent upon their dedications, "Osus" does not have freedom like every other member of the society, that is the "Dialas". To further explain this, Dike maintains that the Osu caste system brings about discrimination among the Igbo people, not minding the nuances in the descriptions of the concept based on the different localities of the Igbo nation, for instance, it is referred to as *Adu-Ebo* in *Nzam* in Onitsha, *Oruma* in Nsukka, Nwani or *Ohualusi* in Agwu among others. These names Osu, *Ume*, *Ohu*, *Oru*, *Ohu Ume*, *Omoni*, have the same connotation in Igboland. Those referred by these names are regarded as sub-human being, the unclean class, or slaves (2002:2). Furthermore, Dike referred to this system under study as an internal apartheid, illustrating it with the people of Umuode in Nkanu East local government of Enugu State. Here, the Umuode people are said to be descendants of the Osu, and are thereby treated as second class citizens. In their Oruku community made up of Umuode, Umuchiani and Onuogwu, the people of Umuode have limited social interaction with

the rest of the community because of their ascribed Osu status. Strangely, the other two villages cannot intermarry with the people of Umuode. Regardless of their social status in the community, local churches sparingly appoint the people of Umuode to positions of responsibility. Hence, they are made outcasts and this class ostracism works in such a manner that anyone from the other side of the village who engages in a talk or greets any person from Umuode pays a fine whoseworthis a monetary value. Generally, in Igboland the Diala interact less with or avoids the Osu people completely (2002:7-8). This type of behavior is equally likened to the issues during the civil right struggles in the United States when the whites and blacks were prevented from drinking from the same public fountain (Smelser, 1981:175).

Basden (1921), in one of his works with the title *Among the Igbos of Southern Nigeria* affirms that, "an Osu is a slave, but one distinct from an ordinary slave (ohu/oru) who in fact is the property of the god and when devoted to a god, he has no prospect of regaining freedom and he restricts his movements to the precuts of the shrine to which he was attached" (1921: 109). Hence, from his point of view, Osu is nothing but a property of a particular god or gods. In tandem with the thoughts of Basden, Ilogu in his book *Christianity and Igbo Culture* referred to Osu as a "slave of the deity dedicated to perform some menial functions which may include sacrificial functions" (1974, 123). Furthermore, Meek maintains that "Osu is a person who has been bought and dedicated to the service of the owner's cult." In his view, Osu is a religious cast slave based on the practice of Igbo traditional religion and system of worship" (1937:25).

Furthermore, Igwebuike refers to the Osu as "a living sacrifice, something or someone totally dedicated to divinity, only natural death can terminate its existence on this side of reality" (1986,11). In his view, there is no means of changing an Osu to a freeborn. According to the Osu bill written by T. O. Elias, S.N. Nwabara, and C.O. Akpangbo which came under the title *Laws*

ofEastern Nigeria, "an Osu is more or less like the untouchables of India and probably in worse position, Osu was regarded as a degraded human being not fit for the companionship and association of decent and reputable men and women in the society; an outcast fit only to be sacrificed to the idol for the propitiation of the gods. An Osu initially was as it were a non-person scarified to a local deity or idol" (1963:1-2). Edet also maintains that, "among the Igbos of Nigeria, some communities distinguish between the 'sons of the soil or freeborn' and the 'Osu'.The Osu does not enjoy the same rights and privileges which the other members of the community who are recognized as freeborn or true sons and daughters of the land do enjoy. The Osu is an outcaste and just like the outcastes of the Hindu society, they are discriminated against. Marriage to an Osu is a 'taboo' and like the Hindu system, one cannot change his Osu status". (2007: 28). The assertions of Edet exposed to a great deal the social implication inherent in the Osu caste system which is equal to that of the Hindu or Indian caste system.

More still, Igwebuike avers that "the Osus were the altar boys/the mass servers of the juju, cult and /or the deity priest, the significant roles they played in the traditional mode of worship just as the mass services do today in Christian Churches during offerings..., put succinctly, the services of the Osu were then inevitable and therefore a sine-qua-non in the scheme of worship of the Igbo man's religion" (1986:10). Contrary to the stand of Igwebuike, it is noteworthy that the roles played by the Osus in Igbo land cannot be compared to that of the mass servers or the altar boys. For Mgbobukwa, "in Igbo traditional religion, Osu is seen as an accused human being sacrificed to a deity. In the prayer of consecration, he is made to be the absorber of the iniquities, weakness, and problems of the people. He is also made to take on himself the death of the freeborn. Hence the Osu could well be said to be the redeemer of the freeborn ("Dialas")" (1996:39).

The large body of literature, that has been examined, makes it clear that the Osu caste system is still a major problem in Igbo society. For people who are classified as Osu, this system creates several obstacles on all fronts—social, religious, and economic—and maintains the dehumanization of them. I want to learn more about this intricate phenomenon and illuminate its many facets through my research. I aim to add a thorough examination of the Osu caste system to the body of literature by looking at a variety of academic works and historical narratives. My research attempts to offer a thorough understanding of the social, cultural, and psychological components of stigma connected with the Osu status, even if other studies have looked at different parts of this subject. In addition, my research integrates ideas from theories like Erving Goffman's stigma theory, which offers a framework for comprehending how people are marginalized and subjected to discrimination because of their perceived characteristics. I hope to provide new insights on the Osu caste system and its effects on equality and social cohesiveness in Igbo society by utilizing theoretical frameworks and making links between historical narratives and modern reality. I want to give voice to those who have been neglected and overlooked by highlighting the lived experiences of Osu people and their communities through qualitative analysis of interviews and archival research. My research aims to dispel preconceived notions and preconceptions about the Osu caste system and promote social justice and inclusivity by elevating their experiences and points of view. To sum up, my contribution to the literature on the Osu caste system is a thorough analysis that combines firsthand testimonies, empirical data, and theoretical insights. Through illuminating this intricate and frequently disregarded matter, my aim is to augment the continuous endeavors to foster comprehension, compassion, and societal transformation in Igbo civilization.

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction to the Data Analysis

The Prevailing bias and understanding of the generally accepted definition of the termcalled "Osu" is a group of individuals who are more or less slaves, second-class citizens, or even in some archaic form, the ones neglected by the Gods. And this is also consistently perpetuated by the perceived understanding of the gods of antiquity, who deem them as mere property.

Participants defined Osu as people dedicated to serving deities or those from communities defeated in war and sacrificed to gods. They are seen as subhuman, unclean, and slaves with restricted rights. More importantly, participants are also individuals who have above par understanding of the Osu, a name which translates to "*Property of the gods.*"

The Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria is a deeply rooted social structure that has had significant effects on the lives of individuals belonging to the Osu group. This thesis aims to critically dissect the concept of the Osu caste system exploring its historical origins, current implications and potential remedies. By examining the past present and hypothetical future of the Osu caste system as well as analyzing reflexivity among the target group and differences in generational attitudes a comprehensive understanding of this social issue can be achieved.

Hence, in this chapter, I will be navigating the qualitative information gathered via the semi-structured interviews I had performed, while using inductive coding to explain the casteism in the Igbo culture, paying specific attention to the intergenerational effects and biases in clans/families that have been relegated to a specific area. Positionality is a fundamental idea that influences how people approach a particular circumstance. When conducting interviews and gathering opinions in

this context, it entails taking a particular stance, such as an ethnocentric one. This method is especially crucial for dealing with deeply embedded beliefs, such as the widespread belief that those from the Diala caste are superior to those from the Osu caste. Researchers can better negotiate the complexities of the subject matter and guarantee a more comprehensive view of the issues at hand by noticing and analyzing these interactions(Anyacho & Anyacho, 2016).

Deep insights into the complex mechanisms of Igbo society are provided by the findings, especially with regard to the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria. This study reveals the deep effects of the caste system on Osu people by looking at its historical foundations, contemporary expressions, and possible solutions. Utilizing conceptual models like Gordon Allport's stages of prejudice and Erving Goffman's stigma theory, the research offers a sophisticated examination of the intricacies of the Osu caste structure. The research sheds light on the difficulties encountered by Osu community members and the dynamics of their relationships with the Diala community by incorporating personal experiences within the framework of bias. A wide range of viewpoints on the Osu caste system are also revealed via insights from semi-structured interviews with eight individuals, ranging from traditional beliefs to demands for social fairness and inclusion. The study emphasizes how deeply ingrained the caste system has been in many facets of life, such as social ties, education, and opportunities.

The Osu caste system endures despite attempts to modify the deeply ingrained caste structure because of cultural values and opposition to change. Divergent perspectives across generations underscore the continuous challenge of harmonizing customs with demands for fairness and inclusivity. The study emphasizes how important it is to have continuing conversations, educate the public, and launch awareness-raising campaigns in order to combat discriminatory practices and advance societal change. In the end, this research adds to broaderscale, sociological

conversations about social stratification, discrimination and inequality by highlighting the critical requirement of group action in order to overthrow repressive structures and further social justice agendas. The research promotes inclusive societies where everyone is given respect, equality, and the chance to flourish by fusing empirical evidence with theoretical insights.

4.2. Osu

The major concept under study in this research work is Osu.I wish to give a more detailed explanation of the concept based on the fruits the interviews yielded. The interview question was "Who does the Igbos consider as Osu?" and Participant VII (Olileanya) has the following to say:

> Down the history lane, Osu in Igboland dates back to antiquity. Its thrust and practice is a product of tradition. It originated as a result of some powerful deities creating the need for assistance for the high priests of major shrines. Therefore, within the areas of the major shrines, a niche or a space were carved out in order to train and maintain the constant supply of assistants. Hence, those selected and prepared for assisting the high priests in service and rendering spiritual functions to the gods were branded with the name Osu.

Through her words, Olileanya transports us to bygone eras in Igboland culture. They describe the deep historical foundations of the Osu caste system, linking its origins to the requirement for aid in important shrines. It is similar to unearthing an ancient scroll that contains the secrets of a bygone era. The reference to strong deities requesting assistance for high priests' sheds light on the role of the Osu in terms of spiritual significance. It seems as though we are seeing the rites and ceremonies that shaped the community's beliefs while standing next to these esteemed priests. Olileanya's depiction of the shrines' layout creates visions of artists painstakingly creating these

hallowed locations. Itis like looking back in time to observe how a society sets itself up to carry out its spiritual obligations. Olileanya's story provides an insight into the intricate history of Igboland, illuminating the ways in which spirituality and tradition converged to form the Osu caste structure. It serves as a reminder of how much the traditions and behaviors of our ancestors still affect us now

For Participant VIII (Dike):

> People became addressed as Osuafter a community, town or village loses war with their neighboring communities, towns or villages. The loser town, community or village, in response to their defeat, will offer some of their people to the gods for atonement. By this very action, they become perpetual properties of the gods. Hence, the shrines of deities become their homes forever. Not only that, by their perpetual condemnation to remain in servitude to the gods, they are branded as Osu people.

Dike's response paints a vivid picture of the origins of the Osu caste system. It is similar to listening to a tale that has been passed down through the ages, exposing the origins of a deeply rooted custom. Imagine a distant past where groups engaged in conflicts over dominance. Following a loss, some would make a penance offering their own people to the gods. Despite being a desperate move, this action resulted in a lifetime of service to the almighty. Dike's remarks illuminated the somber reality that Osu-branded people had to live with. The result of battles fought generations ago sealed their fate.It serves as a reminder of how the wounds from the past still influence the present. A degree of realism is introduced to Dike's story by the notion that the shrines will serve as their eternal homes. It seems as though the country itself attests to the sacrifices made for world peace. There is a tremendous weight in the air from tradition. All things considered, Dike's story

provides insightful information on the history of the Osu caste system. It acts as a reminder of the intricacies of the past and the lasting effects of decisions made in the past on the present.

Participants III (Nwosu) and VI (Akudo):

> Osu caste system originated from the practice of the Igbo people to offer human sacrifices to appease the gods for a misdeed, or to bring to an end a calamity that befell the people. The human sacrifices must not be in the form of murder because some of those offered to the gods are kept in perpetual servitude to the gods. Therefore, Osu means, property of the gods. And this made them to maintain an aloof relationship with other members of the civil society. As a result of fear or reverence, a set of rules and regulations were made by the people to moderate their interactions with other people.

Nwosu and Akudo provided insight into the history of the Osu caste system by connecting it to prehistoric Igbo customs. Imagine a time when humans worshipped the gods and offered sacrifices in the hopes of gaining their favor or averting disasters. It's similar to seeing into a far-off past where customs ruled day-to-day existence. They characterize Osu people as basically deriving from the gods, distinguished by a status that makes them unique. Imagine being constrained by custom and powerless to alter a destiny predetermined by uncontrollable circumstances. It's an eerie idea that highlights the influence of the past on the present. They claim that Osu people and the rest of society have a sense of separation that stems from a combination of fear and reverence. They seem to be divided by an imperceptible wall that influences how they communicate and relate to other people. There are laws and norms governing how people are to behave with Osu people, as Nwosu and Akudo pointed out. These rules are a reflection of a deeply embedded social system in which traditional values continue to influence contemporary behavior. All things considered, their observations provide an insight into a culture in which custom and belief converge to

influence the lives of Osu people and those around them. It serves as a reminder of how the past still affects the present and emphasizes the importance of empathy and understanding when navigating the complexities of social norms and caste systems.

Theyfurther stress that: “Unfortunately, at some point in time, the dignity at which the Osu people were treated depreciated and even deteriorated up to the point of regarding their state of life as social ostracism. As they continue to grow numerically, their social status became to be identified with and equivalent to that of an outcast, and this got at its peak within the nineteenth century”.

Their message bears great weight, highlighting the erosion of Osu people's respect and dignity over time. Imagine watching as society gradually diminishes your value and you become more and more of an outsider. It's a sobering fact that exposes the persistent prejudices that Osu people have faced for many years. When we think back on the nineteenth century, we might see a period marked by significant upheaval and uncertainty. Imagine a society where the Osu people are caught in the midst of changing attitudes and power relations. It's a turbulent time when preconceptions grow stronger and new ones appear. Their statements underscore the hardships of a disadvantaged and ignored group and resound with a sense of injustice. It serves as a reminder that prejudice permeates all facets of life, influencing people's opinions and removing opportunities. Through expressing their perspective, they illuminated a troubling period in history and challenged us to face the harsh facts of social marginalization and its enduring consequences on Osu people. It's a call to action that highlights how important it is to acknowledge the worth that each and every person has, regardless of their background or social standing.

From the foregoing, Osu in the perspective of Igbo traditional religion, is a person or a group of persons who are dedicated to a god as its property. Hence, an Osu does not have freedom of association like every other member of the society (Diala – freeborn).

4.3 Analysis of the Societal Stratification of the Igbo Culture

It's critical to investigate a variety of contemporary social discourses in order to completely comprehend the realities of people (such as the Diala) whose social standing is linked to being perceived as less than others. This entails taking into account concerns regarding their connections, identities, and aspirations in light of current social discussions. We can learn more about these people's lives and the things that shape their sense of identity and social status by examining these concerns in the context of larger societal conversations.

Especially because as Morse (2015) explained when saturation in qualitative research is achieved by analyzing significant characteristics within categories, it leads to a stronger, more cohesive understanding of the phenomenon studied. As I stated in the previous chapters, by the usage of in-depth semi-structured interviews, go-along interviews coupled with snowball sampling, thus, helped reduce the chances of individual and societal biases clouding the responses of participants.

In the understanding of this phenomenon, I chose to divide the main question of this research "Why is this practice common among the Eastern part of Nigeria (that is, the Igbos)?" into varying degrees of probes which Powell et al. (2012) explained as crucial to avoid the detrimental impact of confirmation bias on question type, especially because Interviewers' skill in adhering to open questions reduces the detrimental impact of confirmation bias on question type, with good interviewers asking the same proportion of open questions in both conditions.

Hence, the eight participants were asked introductory basic questions which opened up a larger discussion regarding the reason for the ostracization of the Osu people, perhaps it is a case of misinformation spread from generation in the bid to maintain some hold on the local culture in the advent of missionaries promoting Christianity, and the question "Who is considered as Osu" served

as my starting point. This question divided my list of participants into varying categories which served as an accurate measure of the saturation of responses, a similar trend even while the answers they all gave were slightly different. As the most prominent and pronounced form of casteism that prevails in Nigerian society, discrimination against Osus, a caste determined by heredity irrespective of the individual's religious faith and practices, and although this is a society where individual merit and achievement entitles one to the highest indigenous title and social prestige, Osus cannot aspire to one for their stigmatized caste status (Banerjee & Ghosh, 2019).

The Osu caste system finds its roots in historical practices of social stratification in Eastern Nigeria. The system designates certain individuals as "Osu " who are considered to be inferior and untouchable by the rest of society. This segregation has created a social divide leading to discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion of the Osu group. In the present day, although Nigeria has transitioned into a democratic society, the Osu caste system persists albeit in more subtle forms. Hypothetically if the system were to be dismantled it would require a re-evaluation of societal norms, attitudes and beliefs (Abia, Amalu, and Ariche 2021).

Initial Knowledge; What Osu stands for

Throughout the interview with the participants, it became crucial to understand their positions and the reasons their biases had such a strong hold on them. For some, Osu in Igboland dates back to antiquity. Its thrust and practice are a product of tradition. It originated as a result of some powerful deities creating the need for assistance for the high priests of major shrines. Therefore, within the areas of the major shrines, a niche or a space was carved out to train and maintain the constant supply of assistants. Hence, those selected and prepared to assist the high priests in service and

rendering spiritual functions to the gods were branded with the name Osu, like Okereafor (a septuagenarian) explained what being an Osu entails:

> Osu: they are the chosen ones! Dedicated to the service of the deities, the unseen hands that guide our lives. They tend to the shrines, make offerings, and bridge the gap between the earthly and the divine. Without them, who would appease the Alusi? They may not walk freely amongst us, but their work is sacred, a duty to the greater good.

His firm belief in the perspective that the Osu, a severely discriminated against caste of individuals, is foundationally supported by DeSteno & Dasgupta (2004). They explain the process by which prejudice clouds the judgment of individuals, especially in the in-group and out-group decision-making processes, within the context of social and psychological themes. Such is the case of Okereafor in his definition of what Igbos call Osu, especially because socially advantaged individuals exhibit a more implicit preference for their in-groups and bias against outgroups. This bias is influenced by self-esteem and mainstream culture and can lead to subtle discriminatory actions. This concept is very important to realize because prejudice is linked to ideologies of assimilation and segregation among majority-group members. Additionally, it is functional for minorities to acculturate, influencing migration coping strategies (Zick et al., 2001).

But in the real sense, He (Okereafor) showed some wariness due to the changing times and the erosion of traditional values, seeing the Osu as living embodiments of ancient wisdom that need to be preserved, he shared a proverb with me at that moment: "*Igba eze na-agba, onye na-emeofo ka esi na-emeya,"* which translated to When the king makes a sacrifice, it's the priest who performs it. It essentially means that even while the Osu are being discriminated against, he still believed

that the specialized role of certain individuals in carrying out crucial tasks for the community's well-being, draws a significant parallel between the priest in the proverb and the Osu.

Then as if to justify his perspective of the Osu as a second-class people who only function as assistants to high priests in the village shrines, Okereafor quoted another proverb, *Nkita na-ama ebe o sirinriya, ọ naghịaṅụmmirin'anyaya*, meaning that “The dog knows where it gets its food, it doesn't drink water with tears”, showing that he still maintained some gratitude that even while the Osu are apart from other people, it is very crucial for maintaining the community's continued blessings.

Views of such can only be a product of ingrained knowledge and inter-generational biases which have been passed from the generations before him till they reach him, and similar to this, Nwafor's response to the question "Who do the Igbos consider as Osu?" falls into a category that blends elements of both atonement for war and the human sacrifice origin, while also venturing into a perspective.

While he doesn't explicitly use the term "war," Nwafor acknowledges the history of the Osu being offered as appeasement to cleanse sins, which often stemmed from wartime situations. He emphasizes the "burden" they carry due to this origin.

> "Calling the Osu 'assistants' simplifies their plight. History remembers them as offerings, burdens borne by a community to cleanse their sins. War, famine, and epidemics, all call for appeasement. The Osu people carry that weight, marked by their difference. In essence, to say they just help at shrines ignores the deeper story of atonement and societal sacrifice"

Nwafor alludes to the human sacrifice tradition by pointing out the "ancient practice" and the Osu being marked as "different" due to their origins. However, she doesn't delve into the specifics of human sacrifice but significantly deviates from both categories by strongly criticizing the continued labelling and discrimination against the Osu. She challenges traditional narratives and advocates for recognizing their rights and identities, and this response is a nuanced combination of historical understanding, critical analysis, and a modern social justice perspective. It acknowledges the complex origin and societal burdens faced by the Osu while pushing for their inclusion and equality.

While Nwafor's response is a testament to the diversity of thought and the ongoing discussion surrounding the Osu caste system in contemporary Igbo society, it remains very important to understand that historically, the Osu were subjected to various forms of social exclusion and restrictions. They were forbidden from engaging in certain social activities such as intermarriage with the freeborn, attending communal gatherings or even participating in religious ceremonies (Okanezi and Ekechukwu, 2021). These discriminatory practices were justified by the belief in the spiritual impurity of the Osu. As a result, the Osu faced severe social and economic disadvantages limiting their opportunities for upward mobility.

Sociologically speaking, the divergent perspectives of Okereafor and Nwafor offer some insight concerning the delicate nature of the Osu concept in the Igbo community. Okereafor adheres to a traditional belief system that regards Osu as divinely appointed attendants, highlighting their sacred function in preserving cosmic equilibrium through ceremonial practices. Even in a more welcoming environment, this traditional viewpoint, by merely associating Osu identity with historical responsibilities, might sustain Osu’s exclusion.

In stark contrast, the perspective of the latter challenges the categorization of the Osu as mere atonement to the gods from a tribe or community that lost a war, which effectively marked them as properties of gods, it also challenges the narrative that the Osu originated from the human sacrifice tradition of the Igbos(eastern part of Nigeria) to appease the gods by highlighting the social construct of the Osu and the varying discriminatory aspects of the culture, He emphasizes the individual identities and rights of the Osu, advocating their full integration into the regular community as equals.

On one hand, the differences in the responses of these two participants can be accredited to education, institutional changes and also cultural changes, all of which are very important according to Koenig et al. (1953), who explain the methods through which prejudice and discrimination can be reduced most especially against racial and cultural minorities. Regardless of this, the contrasting viewpoints showcase the ongoing internal debate within the Igbo community regarding the Osu concept, as Okereafor's perspective reflects the power dynamics embedded in traditional structures, while Nwafor challenges those structures and advocates for social change. Hence, in the understanding of this, it becomes very crucial to understand how the Diala interact and engage with Osu's in their own lives.

Individual Relationships

As established in the prior sub-chapters, it is crucial to first understand who, and most importantly, what category of people would be considered as Osu in Eastern Nigeria I.e. amongst the Igbos, and since that has been established, the hypothetical that also ranks high on the scale of importance is the question "How do the Dialas (freeborn) interactand engage with Osu in their own lives?"

However, this is very important for various reasons, chief of which is the promotion of behavioral alienation which is bound to occur if there is a perception of discrimination (Schildkraut, 2005).

As aforementioned, an Igbo person has a clear picture of what he or she thinks the Osu represent, and more importantly, there are three (3) varying opinions on this matter, and one could posit that they are similar in some form. There is a relatively positive outlook on who the Osu are and what they contribute to society, and a participant in this study, Chituru, a budding artist, describes his friendship with a friend in the Osu caste.

"My name is Chituru, and unlike many in my hometown of Enugu, I don't see Chike through the warped lens of stigma. I see him for the artist he is, the soul resonating in his music, the wisdom etched in his smile. Our friendship blossomed over shared cups of palm wine and late-night jam sessions, fueled by a mutual hunger for expression and an unspoken defiance against the shackles of tradition.

> I remember the first time I heard him play. It was at a dusty roadside bar, smoky and alive with the murmur of gossip. Chike, cloaked in the shadows, poured his heart into the nne, his voice raw and aching yet defiant. His song wove tales of forgotten rituals, whispered secrets of the earth, and the burden of a history etched in his very being.
>
> That night, something shifted within me. I saw beyond the label, beyond the whispers and fear-mongering. I saw a human being, a storyteller, an artist whose song stirred my soul. With each note, a bridge stretched across the chasm of prejudice, built on the common ground of creativity and a shared human experience.

> Our friendship took root in that smoky bar, nurtured by stolen moments after market days, hushed conversations under the moonlit sky, and impromptu jam sessions that echoed through the quiet of my studio. In Chike's eyes, I see no judgment, only acceptance and the spark of shared passion. We speak the language of art, where labels fade and souls connect.
>
> He shares stories of his family, passed down through generations like precious embers, tales of resilience and defiance in the face of ostracization. He teaches me ancient rhythms, and secrets of the drum that speak a language older than words. With every shared melody, I learn, I grow, I shed the skin of ignorance and embrace the richness of his heritage, our heritage.

Our friendship is not without its challenges. There are stares and hushed whispers, disapproving frowns and raised eyebrows. But we face them together, our bond strengthened by the fire of shared purpose. Through my art, I strive to amplify his voice, to paint the stories etched in his eyes, to challenge the preconceptions that hold his people back.

Yes, the path we walk is not easy. But in Chike's presence, I find not just friendship, but a window into a world hidden from most. His story is the story of the Osus, a story of struggle and resilience, a testament to the human spirit that shines even in the darkest corners. And in sharing that story, we paint a future where labels crumble, replaced by the vibrant tapestry of our shared humanity.

So, while others see only the stigma, I see the song, the stories, and the soul that pulses beneath the label. And in that song, I hear a call to action, a challenge to rewrite the narrative, to paint a world where the music of freedom resonates for all. For in the harmony of acceptance, we truly become human.

Chituru talked about his encounters with the Osu caste system, in which some people happen to be subjected to prejudice only by their birth. Small things caught his attention, such as elderly people attempting to separate him from his Osu pal. Because of the social norms inherent in Igbo culture, this system severely restricts the Osu people and renders their lives difficult. Chike, Chituru's pal, hails from a family that has endured ongoing discrimination and misfortune as a result of their membership in the Osu caste. By discussing long-forgotten customs and untold tales that go against the strong social forces that want to silence particular voices, Chike uses his music to communicate these battles. Chituru also understands the fact that a lot of Osu people might not return to the village for festivities like other people do because of this experience of discrimination. Compared to people who grow up without Osu labels, like Chituru himself, they may feel less appreciated or even be treated disrespectfully. Not only does this unfair treatment come from older generations, but it also occurs in settings like marketplaces and schools.

Chituru doesn't just learn from other people's tales; he also reflects on and learns from his own experiences. He observes a glaring disparity in the treatment of Osu and Non-Osu persons, demonstrating that this prejudice transcends age and familial ties. In Igbo society, it's a more general problem that requires awareness and adjustment to treat everyone equally. The impact of the Osu caste system extends beyond the realm of social relations and permeates various aspects of Igbo life. For instance, the Osu are often excluded from community leadership positions denying them the ability to participate in decision-making processes. This exclusion further reinforces their marginalization and perpetuates the cycle of discrimination. Additionally, the stigma associated with the Osu caste system affects their access to educational and economic opportunities hindering their socioeconomic development.

Past attempts to address the Osu caste system have been met with various levels of success. Missionaries played a crucial role in challenging the system by promoting Christianity which opposed the discrimination of Osu individuals. Additionally, the influence of Western education and urbanization gradually eroded some aspects of the caste system (Nixon, 2021). However, the practice persists due to deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and the resistance of certain segments of society to change, and Obinna (2012) explained past contact scenarios which provide us with valuable insights into the social implications of the Osu caste system. The discriminatory practices associated with the system have resulted in the marginalization and stigmatization of Osu individuals and their families. They face restricted access to social and economic opportunities, limited intermarriage prospects and exclusion from certain social and cultural events. This has perpetuated a cycle of inequality, prejudice and social division within Eastern Nigeria.

4.4 Analysis of Positionality among the Target Group

Positionality refers to an individual's social and cultural background which influences their perspectives, experiences and understanding of the world (Holmes, 2020). In the context of the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria, positionality plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics and power relations within this social hierarchy. The positionality of Osu individuals is deeply intertwined with their identity formation. Being born into the Osu caste system automatically assigns them a subordinate position within society. This predetermined status shapes their sense of self-worth and the opportunities available to them. Osu individuals often face discrimination restrictions on social interactions and limited access to resources, educational opportunities and employment prospects. Positionality within the Osu caste system is also influenced by power dynamics.

The social hierarchy of Eastern Nigeria is characterized by a non-Osu group known as the "freeborn" Dialas, who hold the highest position. They are well positioned, have a lot of advantages, and have a big societal impact. On the other hand, the Osu community is pushed to the periphery of society and experiences oppression and marginalization. This difference goes beyond social interactions and penetrates the political and economic sectors, solidifying the Osu population's cycle of disadvantage.

And of course, participants in this study, most of whom are Dialas or individuals who have rejected the notion of being classed into a specific or a singularly rigid caste in the Igbo society, were asked the hypothetical question "How has your perspective on the Osu system changed over your lifetime?" Because it is caste, relations have evolved from a traditional system of social stratification to an instrument for economic and political gain, shifting from ritual hierarchy to social discrimination (Anyacho & Anyacho, 2016). It becomes expedient that the participants of this research have a firm standing of their positions regarding the Osu caste system, to avoid being used for political gain alone.

It became clear during the interviews that the participants' assessments shared an interesting degree of similarity. One noteworthy finding was the enormous shift of viewpoint that many people, including Nwosu, experienced. At first, Nwosu's main goal was to unite people; but, as the discussion went on, they acknowledged that the Osu community was facing difficult economic conditions as a result of persistent prejudice and stigma. This shift emphasizes how crucial it is to have honest conversations and engage in introspection in order to develop empathy and understanding. It emphasizes how meaningful talks can help people extend their horizons and gain a greater understanding of societal challenges.

The participants, who are mostly Dialas, were observed to be receptive to differing opinions and to critical awareness, which indicates a considerable level of cognitive flexibility within their cultural surroundings. There have been noteworthy attempts to confront and demolish the caste system, in spite of the many difficulties Osu people endure. A number of grassroots initiatives, like the "Osu Liberation Movement," have been formed with the goal of promoting the social inclusion and rights of Osu community members. These programs include encouraging social justice and equality, educating the public about the detrimental effects of the caste system, and increasing public awareness. These organizations work to subvert ingrained societal conventions and promote a more just and inclusive society for all through lobbying and cooperative efforts.

Social Class and Economic Status

Within both Osu and Non-Osu communities, individuals from different economic backgrounds have contrasting perspectives on the caste system. Therefore, even while there was a very large difference in perspectives and how these individuals understood the plight of people who fell into the Osu caste system, it is likewise very important to pay attention to how economic disparities and access to resources might influence attitudes and experiences. Each participant had a certain understanding of what the Osu people went through and how it effectively affected them in the new age, such as Okereafor whose responses reflect both functionalist and conflict perspectives on social change. Similarly, Mgbodi, one of the participants in the interview, highlighted the functionalist view, believing that eliminating discrimination will benefit the entire community by promoting harmony and social cohesion. However, the former's perspective embraces principles explained by Sharma (2022), who states that caste politics in India negatively impact social cohesion, and promoting equal social rights and justice can help overcome these barriers for a more integrated and cohesive society, and one could also say that the influx of missionaries into

Nigeria especially their concentration in the Eastern part of Nigeria helped alleviate the economic situation of the Osu because most of them became the bulk of the first school and church members, this is very important to consider because Sahay (2022), explains that religious conversion is a tool for addressing the rigidity of caste system and promoting social justice and human rights. As Akudo believes, dismantling caste discrimination is key to unlocking the full economic potential of the entire community and achieving inclusivity, and she said;

> "…the fight against caste discrimination is not just about equality, it's about unlocking the full economic potential of our entire community. Osu individuals are doctors, engineers, and entrepreneurs waiting to blossom. By dismantling these social barriers, we unleash their talents and create a more just and productive society for everyone."

This is a viewpoint that is rooted in the critical sociology perspective, challenging the status quo and advocating for social justice, which would function even more when there is proper consideration of power structures and collective action to achieve social and economic progress.

But as Okereafor said,

> "While I wouldn't speak ill of another man's livelihood, I have seen Osu struggle to sell their crops at fair prices. Some buyers whisper and point, treating them with less respect than others".

The above statement however, shows just the sliver of the lives these individuals lived, and similarly, Chituru explained hearing stories of being denied loans for their businesses, of whispers following them down market streets, of dreams deferred due to societal biases

4.5 Differences in Generational Attitudes

According to Abia, Amalu, and Ariche (2021), Generational attitudes play a significant role in shaping responses to the Osu caste system. Older generations may adhere more strongly to traditional beliefs and norms perpetuating the discrimination against the Osu group. However, younger generations influenced by modern education and exposure to diverse perspectives may be more receptive to challenging and dismantling the caste system. Understanding these generational differences is essential in formulating effective strategies for addressing the Osu caste system.

With regard to generational attitudes about the Osu caste system, Participant IV (Mgbodi) provided the following insight:

> "In my family, I've seen how older relatives hold tightly to traditional beliefs about the Osu. They consider it to be a holy custom that needs to be upheld. However, there is a rising feeling among my peers, especially those who have had access to education and exposure to diverse cultures, that it is urgent to confront these antiquated standards. We support justice and equality for all people, regardless of caste."

Mgbodi's perspective clarifies the ways in which families of varying ages struggle with the Osu caste system. Imagine a family reunion where the younger members, like Mgbodi, share their thoughts on modern viewpoints while the seniors reminisce about bygone traditions. Mgbodi's perspective depicts a conflict between tradition and modernity. The Osu caste is revered by the elderly as a priceless relic of their ancestry that has been passed down through the years. For them, it's not just a belief; it's a way of life that's fundamental to who they are. But Mgbodi embodies a more modern way of thinking. Their eyes have been opened to questioning long-standing traditions by their exposure to education and a variety of cultures. They support justice and equality because

they believe that all people, regardless of caste, should be treated with respect. This gap highlights the continuous conflict between accepting progress and upholding tradition. Every generation struggles with its own ideals, attempting to strike a balance between preserving the history and paving the way for a more diverse future. Mgbodi's viewpoint inspires us to question outmoded customs and work for a society in which everyone is accorded respect and equity.

Twenge, Campbell and Freeman (2012) demonstrated in their research whichanalyzed the generational differences in life goals, concern for others and civic orientation. GenX and Millennials prioritize extrinsic values more than intrinsic ones, show less concern for others, and show a decline in civic orientation compared to Baby Boomers, this analysis supports the views in this thesis on how the perception of the Osu system may differ across generations. Younger generations may hold more progressive attitudes, while older generations may be more attached to traditional perspectives. Consider the historical context and social changes experienced by each generation to understand their views.

> "I've noticed among my peers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, there's a greater emphasis on social justice and equality,"

said participant VI (Akudo), who discussed her perspective on generational disparities surrounding the Osu caste system.

> “We are more inclined to question outmoded customs like the Osu caste system and place a higher priority on moral principles like justice and compassion. Older generations, such as the Baby Boomers, may, nevertheless, have become more ingrained in conventional viewpoints as a result of their upbringing and exposure to historical background."

Akudo's observation clarifies the opinions of various age groups regarding the Osu caste system. Imagine yourself having a conversation about society's intricacies over a meal with Akudo and her pals. Akudo stands for the younger generation, which values kindness and justice, such as Millennials and Gen Z. They seek a more just and compassionate world and challenge antiquated customs like the Osu caste system. However, Akudo concedes that elderly people, even Baby Boomers, may cling to conventional values. Their upbringing has been shaped by history and by the way things used to be. This demonstrates how different generations view social concerns such as caste prejudice. However, Akudo's remarks serve as a reminder that communication is essential to progress. We can close these inequalities and work toward a more equitable society for everybody by having honest conversations.

The views surrounding the Osu caste system have been deeply ingrained within communities and passed down from one generation to another. The notion of purity and pollution which forms the basis of this system has been internalized and normalized over time (Amalu, Abdullahi, and Demson 2021). It is often believed that intermarriage or any form of social interaction with Osu individuals will bring about spiritual contamination. These intergenerational views perpetuate the caste system making it difficult to break free from its grip on society.

Nwafor said,

> "Our customs are firmly ingrained with ideas about pollution and purity in my community. We learn early on that socializing with Osu people results in spiritual pollution. Since these ideas have been passed down through the centuries, it is difficult to oppose the caste system and advance social change."

Nwafor's viewpoint illuminates the deeply held views about the Osu caste structure in his tribe. Imagine yourself sharing your thoughts with Nwafor while you sit next to a crackling fire. Concepts of defilement and cleanliness are ingrained in Nwafor's community's customs. Children are indoctrinated from an early age to avoid contact with Osu people out of concern for spiritual contamination. Since these ideas have been passed down through the centuries, it is difficult to oppose the caste system and push for reform. Nwafor's remarks emphasize how tradition has a big influence on how people think and behave. Even with a strong desire to advance, defying established conventions is a difficult undertaking. This highlights how crucial it is to recognize cultural nuances in the pursuit of social justice and equality.

To address the Osu caste system it is crucial to challenge and change the intergenerational views that sustain it. Education plays a vital role in this process as it helps create awareness promote empathy and challenge deep-rooted beliefs (Weinberger 2017). Schools and educational institutions should incorporate lessons on equality diversity and human rights ensuring that the younger generation grows up with a more inclusive mindset.

"Education is key to challenging the intergenerational views that uphold the caste system,"

said Akudo, emphasizing the significance of education in resolving the Osu caste system.

> “The younger generation can be encouraged to think more inclusively and with empathy if human rights, diversity, and equality are taught in schools. This is essential for destroying the deeply ingrained ideas that support discrimination based on caste."

The message of Akudo strikes a deep chord regarding the significance of education in dismantling the Osu caste system. Imagine sitting next to Akudo, her sincere countenance demonstrating her faith in the transformative potential of education. She stresses that education has the power to

change people's attitudes, especially for the younger generation. Human rights, diversity, and equality are ideals that are taught in schools, and they help to break down caste-based discriminatory ideas. The words of Akudo serve as a reminder that education is about more than just spreading knowledge; it is also about developing empathy and modifying attitudes. We can create a more inclusive society where discrimination based on caste is eliminated with the help of education.

Additionally, community engagement and dialogue are essential in dismantling the Osu caste system. Open discussion forums and awareness campaigns can provide platforms for individuals to share their experiences, challenge discriminatory practices and foster a sense of unity and understanding. Religious and traditional leaders also play a pivotal role in combating the caste system by advocating for inclusivity and denouncing discriminatory practices.

As stated by Participant III (Nwosu),

> "Campaigns for awareness and open dialogue offer essential venues for people to speak out against discriminatory practices, exchange personal stories, and promote harmony and understanding among neighbors. This highlights the importance of community engagement and dialogue in addressing the Osu caste system. Religious and traditional leaders, who promote tolerance and denounce discriminatory practices, are also vital in the fight against the caste system. By working together, we may attempt to remove the obstacles that the caste system imposes and advance a more just society."

Nwosu's viewpoint emphasizes how important it is to have community conversations and engagement in order to address the Osu caste system. Imagine Nwosu speaking with conviction and honesty in his speech. He places a strong emphasis on the importance of creating forums where

people can freely express their experiences and oppose discriminatory policies. Furthermore, Nwosu acknowledges the critical role that traditional and religious leaders play in fostering inclusivity and denouncing discrimination. His words act as a call to action for communities to unite in dismantling the obstacles erected by the caste system. Nwosu's remarks highlight the group effort required to create a society that is more equitable and inclusive for all.

In conclusion, the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria continues to have profound effects on the lives of individuals belonging to the Osu group. Analyzing the various perspectives of individuals across different age groups, mainly between Gen-Xers and boomers, and the understanding of the strong predisposition to either avidly support the role of the Osu in society, and justifying it by explaining it to be crucial to the community's growth to some other participants who see the possibilities of progress and growth that is embedded in breaking free from generational trauma and barriers to growth, which would result in changes in status quo. Legal frameworks should be strengthened to protect the rights of Osu individuals and ensure their equal treatment under the law. Anti-discrimination laws should explicitly address caste-based discrimination, providing legal recourse for victims and holding perpetrators accountable. Nevertheless, by also critically dissecting the concept of the caste system analyzing past current and hypothetical contact exploring reflexivity among the target group and considering generational attitudes, this thesis provides a comprehensive examination of the issue. It is imperative to recognize the detrimental effects of the Osu caste system and work towards its eradication through education awareness and societal transformation.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Summary of the Findings

The conversation about discrimination and stigma inside the Osu caste system directly relates to our study questions about Osus's socio-economic status and the interactions between Dialas and Osus. Our analysis indicates that because the Osu people have two distinct identities—caste and gender, discrimination against them, especially against women, is a serious problem. Their ability to obtain work, education, and other opportunities necessary for socio-economic growth is severely hampered by this discrimination. We have learnt so much about the ways in which bias and discrimination function in an Osu's life by applying ideas like Goffman's stigma theory and Gordon Allport's phases of prejudice.

This research also clarifies the range of viewpoints that the Igbo community has on Osus. Some acknowledge the important responsibilities that Osus play, while others think less of them. This range of opinions highlights the complexity of the Osu caste system and emphasizes the need for thoughtful discussion and understanding. Furthermore, our analysis includes friendships that defy social norms, demonstrating the possibility of constructive transformation. We can break down the obstacles created by the caste system and build a more inclusive and equitable society by supporting education and awareness campaigns. In conclusion, our conversation emphasizes how critical it is to combat discrimination and promote equality for Osus. It emphasizes how cooperative efforts to change society can open the door to a more equitable and prosperous community for all of its members.

5.2. Discussion on the Theories of Discrimination and Stigma

Stigma and discrimination have long been issues in many societies. They can appear in a variety of ways, including caste structures. For instance, women in the Osu caste may face more severe forms of discrimination and stigma due to the combination of their caste and gender identity. They may encounter gender-based discrimination in their community and more challenges in getting an education, finding employment, and accessing other opportunities as a result of the combined effects of casteism and patriarchal structures.

A crucial perspective for comprehending the complex and diverse aspects of the discrimination and stigma encountered by Osu caste system members is provided by the theories of discrimination, particularly those posited by Gordon Allport (Gordon, 1979) and Goffman (1963)'s stigma research. These ideas provide insight into the ways that bias and discrimination appear in society and affect the lives of people who are disadvantaged by caste systems, such as the Osu. They explore the psychological foundations of stigma and prejudice, showing how they support the marginalization and dehumanization of particular groups in society. Allport's thesis has made it easier for us to understand how discriminating behaviors stem from biased views further reinforce the division that exists in society between Osus and Dialas. However, Goffman's theory has clarified how stigma feeds into this marginalization and division.

According to Gordon Allport's theory of discrimination (Gordon, 1979), there are several stages that prejudice can go through, with discrimination being a crucial one. This theory offers a framework for comprehending how prejudiced actions and viewpoints emerge in communities and eventually result in the oppression and marginalization of particular people, like the Osu caste. Through an analysis of the discriminating behaviors and mindsets that characterize the Osu caste

system, we can acquire a deeper understanding of the fundamental elements that sustain this type of social inequality.

In a similar vein, Goffman (1963) explores the social and psychological mechanisms that lead to people being classified as abnormal or substandard by society in his work on stigma. Stigma is essential to maintaining the social hierarchy and the discrimination against Osu caste members within the framework of the Osu caste system. We may better comprehend how harmful preconceptions and labels are created and applied to excluded groups, resulting in their social exclusion and marginalization, thanks to Goffman (1963)'s insights into the dynamics of stigma.

We were able to have a thorough grasp of interaction of social, psychological, and structural elements influencing the continuation of the Osu caste system and the discrimination its members experience by utilizing these theories of discrimination and structural conflict. These theories offered helpful framework for examining the underlying causes of discrimination based on caste and guiding initiatives to confront and eliminate such repressive social structures.

5.4. Sociological Implications.

During the course this study, I have been able to realize that this caste system if not fully eradicated and dismantled will lead to profound sociological implications on not just the individuals but also to the society at large. Above all, it leads to social stratification and class differences, wherein the Diala or freeborn (in group as Allport would say) will always dominate and discriminate over the Osus. This in turn does not go down well with the later as they would always be marginalized, and the dialas would continue that dominance making it a never ending practice. Such discrimination is like a cancer worm that is gradually eating up the progress of the society. It can reawaken prejudice, and if care is not taken, serves as a birthing ground for societal cohesion. In

the political parlance of the society, it poses a great challenge to justice and equality and above all infringes on human rights.

5.2. Real World Implications

The Osu caste system in Nigeria is a threat to the real world. For it affects various aspects of the human world. In the religious setting wherein the watch word is love, peace and unity, this practice is out rightly against its tenets, little wonder the Christian missionaries made earnest efforts towards curbing and abolishing such practice although their effort failed to meet a great success as the practice still lingers. Being a little for of racism, the practice is a threat to world peace and justice. As the saying of Martin Luther King Jr goes, Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, Osu caste system is one of the injustice practices in the world for it perpetuates inequality and hinders mobility, education, employment, friendship, marriage and livelihood in general. It denies the world of potential world geniuses and savior. Its psychological implication is tantamount to depression.

5.2. Conclusion

These findings provide important insights into the tangled-up lifestyle at work inside Igbo society, especially when one considers the study's broader implications on the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria. Exploring deeper into the more general implications of the research, it is apparent that the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria is not only a regional problem; rather, it speaks to broader sociological debates about social stratification, discrimination, and inequality. Osu people are subjected to pervasive discrimination and marginalization, which is a reflection of larger patterns of structural injustice and emphasizes the urgent necessity for group action to topple oppressive structures. Through the investigation of the connections among caste, stigma, and structural

injustice, this research adds to the current endeavors to advance social justice causes and build more welcoming communities.

The study also clarifies the long-lasting influence of cultural norms and historical legacies on modern social systems. The Osu caste system persists because of strongly rooted cultural values and unwillingness to change, despite efforts to confront it through urbanization and missionary work. This emphasizes how tradition and advancement interact in a complicated way, making real societal change extremely difficult to achieve. More so, the research explores the historical roots, current forms, as well as potential solutions of the Osu caste system, exposing its significant effects on those who identify as Osu.

Using theoretical frameworks such as the Erving Goffman (1963)'s stigma theory, and Gordon Allport's phases of prejudice (Gordon, 1979), this study provides a thorough analysis of the Osu caste system in Eastern Nigeria. The application of these theories into this case study has yielded important insights on the Osu caste system's historical roots, contemporary ramifications, and possible solutions.

First, Allport's phases of prejudice theory played a crucial role in helping to formulate the interview questions, placing an important focus on the stage of discrimination. This thesis highlighted the separation caused by discriminatory behaviors rooted in the caste system and allowed for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of relationships between the Osus and "Dialas" in Igboland. Through the integration of individual experiences within the context of prejudice, I was able to shed light on the fundamental challenges and difficulties that members of the Osu community endure.

Furthermore, by illuminating the social dynamics and naming processes inherent in the Osu caste system, Goffman (1963)'s work on stigma has successfully enhanced our understanding. The

perpetuation of inequality and marginalization that the people of Osu Caste system endure is largely due to stigmatization, which also affects their connections in the social field, prospects for socio-economic growth, and access to resources. Gaining an understanding of stigma as a core caste system function helps us better understand the system's long-lasting effects on both individual lives and larger society structures.

The effects of the Osu caste system extend well beyond social interactions; Osu people's capacity to assume leadership roles, pursue higher education, and seize economic possibilities are all profoundly impacted (Abia, Amalu, and Ariche 2021). Mixed outcomes have come from attempts to address this strongly ingrained caste structure, including missionary efforts (Haferkamp and Smelser 2020) and the effects of urbanization (Babak and John 2021). The Osu caste system endures despite these efforts because of deeply ingrained cultural values and a strong aversion to change. There has been a rather significant effect by the long-standing structure on Osu people's life paths and has therefore, reinforced social divides in the areas of leadership, education, and economics. Essentially, the Osu caste system perpetuates disparities that affect the opportunities and well-being of individuals under its influence, casting a long shadow over numerous aspects of life.

The comprehensive data gathered from eight participants in semi-structured interviews gave room to gaining a deeper understanding of the prejudices and points of view which are embedded in the Osu caste system. It was to some considerable extent evident from participant discussions that opinions on Osu varied widely. Some see them as people who are dedicated to serving gods or as people from downtrodden areas. Regretfully, there's also a general belief that Osu people belong to a group that is inferior to humans, dirty, and has their rights restricted as pointed out by Abia, Amalu, and Ariche (2021).Considering the fact that the Osus are viewed as lesser humans in the

Diala culture, it is difficult for them to be treated fairly in the legal system. The research conducted revealed an extensive variety of generational views in addition to individual viewpoints. It brought to light the existing disparities in how the communities of Diala and Osu view and interact with one another. The goal of this study was to expose the various perspectives that people use to understand and negotiate the complex layers of the Osu caste system.

The diverse perspectives held by members of the Igbo community about the Osu idea are a particularly intriguing finding. People like Okereafor, for example, shed more light on the traditional perception of Osu as loyal attendants on high priests, viewing their responsibilities as holy and essential to the community's well-being. Others, like Nwafor, on the other hand, present an alternative viewpoint and cast doubt on the traditional plot. They aggressively advocate for the Osu members' rights and identities to be acknowledged, and they push for their full integration into society on an equal basis. This obvious difference in opinions illustrates how complicated the Osu issue is, inside the Igbo people's society, where traditional practices and demands for social justice coexist (Okeke, Ibenwa, and Okeke 2017), resulting in a dynamic environment that actively requires serious thought and comprehension.

I also studied friendships that defy expectations and biases in society. The friendship between Chituru and Chike is one example of how people can come together from different backgrounds. But friendships aren't the only thing impacted by the Osu caste system. It has an impact on opportunity, education, and careers. It persists despite efforts to alter it due to ingrained beliefs and aversion to change. Furthermore, our research emphasizes how opinions across generations influence how people view the Osu caste system, indicating that education and awareness raising initiatives could be crucial in breaking down this deeply ingrained social structure. It demonstrates

how perceptions vary between younger and older generations. While elderly people adhere to tradition, younger people are more adaptable. Fostering intergenerational communication and understanding can help to create a more equal and inclusive society for all.

Whether someone is categorized as Osu or Diala significantly influences their outlook and encounters within this social structure. For those identified as Osu, life involves dealing with discrimination, limitations on social connections, and restricted access to essential resources, all determined by their pre-assigned status. This pre-assigned status leads to a set of unfreedoms, impacting Osu individuals' ability to live fully and equally in society (Phelan and Link 2015). This unequal power dynamic is further intensified by the prevailing societal norm that places the non-Osu community in a more dominant position. As a result, this power imbalance becomes a driving force in the marginalization of Osu individuals, shaping their day-to-day experiences and interactions within the broader community.

Significantly, the findings have consequences that go beyond the boundaries of Eastern Nigeria and resonate with larger sociological discussions on inequality, discrimination, and social stratification. Our findings highlight how urgently we must work together to oppose discriminatory behaviors, raise awareness, and push for social change. We support ongoing attempts to topple oppressive regimes and further social justice agendas by examining the linkages of caste, stigma, and structural injustice.

This study essentially attests to the sociological theory's ongoing applicability in comprehending and addressing intricate social problems. I explain the complexities of the Osu caste system and propose significant change based on sociological principles by combining actual data with theoretical ideas. In order to create inclusive communities where everyone is granted equality,

dignity, and the chance to thrive, it is crucial that we keep working with theory, research, and action going forward. Nonetheless, in a more simplified manner, this study presents a better understanding of the Osu caste system and its derogatory effects. It shows the unending need to work together to challenge discrimination and make society fairer, and a better place, for everyone.

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Interview Questions

1. I would like to start with you telling me a little about yourself.

2. What is your own definition of the concept Osu Caste System?

3. Why is this practice common among the Eastern part of Nigeria (that is, the Igbos)?

4. To what extent are the Dialas interacting and engaging with the Osus in their own lives?

5. How do the Osus perceive future possibilities for any type of change or improvement in their current socio-economic status?

6. What is your overall relationship towards the Osu people?

7. 'Osu' being a practice embedded in the religion and culture of the Igbos, do you see the System being eradicated in the nearby future? If yes, to what extent?

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