



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Nigeria

Nigeria – NGA37560 – Igbos – Osu –
Outcasts – Segregation – Internal relocation
– Employment – Education – Marriage

22 October 2010

1. Are there traditional Igbo beliefs which cause people to be treated as outcasts and driven from their communities?

The Central Intelligence Agency ‘World Factbook’ states that the Igbo (or Ibo) ethnic group is one of “the most populous and politically influential” groups in Nigeria, constituting 18 percent of the population.¹ The Igbo people originate from south-eastern Nigeria, and live in small independent villages. Igbo society is sharply divided in terms of “wealth, achievement, and social rank”.²

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) explains that while most Igbos are Christians, some continue to “practice the indigenous traditional religion, whose major tenets are shared by all Igbo-speaking people of Nigeria”. These traditional beliefs, which are passed down to each generation, include the existence of an earth goddess, deities, ancestral spirits, and a ‘Supreme God’. One traditional Igbo practice is the caste system which dehumanises and treats as outcasts those designated to be ‘Osu’. Also referred to as Ume, Ohu, Oru, Ohu Ume, and Omoni (Okpu-Aja), people of the Osu caste “are regarded as sub-human...unclean...or slaves”. Traditionally, the Osu in the Igbo community were sacrificed in order to appease the deities.³ Human Rights Watch states that an Osu person was traditionally deemed to be ‘owned’ by the deities.⁴

A recent article in the Nigerian newspaper *Vanguard* similarly states that traditional Igbo beliefs define two classes of Igbo people, the Nwadiala, or ‘sons of the soil’, and the Osu, people dedicated to the gods. The Nwadiala are regarded as ‘masters’ while the Osu are considered to be “slaves, strangers, outcasts and untouchables”. The Osu caste system is derived from traditional Igbo “religion, supernaturalism and theism”, under which the Osu’s dedication to the gods makes their status “a condition of permanent and irreversible

¹ Central Intelligence Agency 2010, *The World Factbook: Nigeria*, CIA website, 29 September <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 1

² ‘Nigeria: Culture’ (undated), Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Moscow website <http://www.nigerianembassy.ru/Nigeria/culture.htm> – Accessed 22 April 2009 – Attachment 2

³ Dike, V. E. 2002, ‘The Osu Caste System in Igboland Discrimination Based on Descent’, A Paper Presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Sixty-first session, 8-9 August, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, pp.2-3 http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/nigeria.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 3

⁴ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.11 – Attachment 4

disability and stigma”.⁵ *BBC News* also recently reported that the Osu are outcasts among the Igbo people, “the equivalent of being an ‘untouchable’”.⁶

In 2003, a professor of anthropology and expert on Igbo socio-cultural issues advised that Osu is more of a status than a caste, although it shares certain caste characteristics, including the belief that it is contagious.⁷ Osu status is hereditary, although it can also be acquired through marriage.⁸ Osu status “cannot generally be overcome”.⁹ A University of Lagos scholar similarly advises that Osu status is designated “by virtue of birth”. As such, “it is not a person’s actions but their heritage that marks them as Osu”.¹⁰ According to expert advice provided in 1999, the Osu are “hereditary cult slaves”. Although outwardly indistinguishable from the wider Igbo community, Osu live in separate villages and are unable to marry Igbo ‘freemen/women’. If an Igbo child is given to an Osu as a slave, or a sacrifice, that child and their descendants are outcast from the general Igbo community.¹¹ A late Nigerian professor who was also an Igbo advised that Osu is “still a status people know but don’t talk about”.¹²

In 1999, the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) cited a professor at the Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University, who advised that the Osu are a slave caste “in terms of their loss of freedoms”. Osu are regarded as “socially inferior to other Igbo” and are “despised”. Osu members could be sacrificed on order of the High Priest of the Court, although since “the designation of persons as Osu was abolished through legislation over thirty years ago”, it is unlikely that Osu members would be sacrificially killed today.¹³

A Nigerian professor also stated that “the use of Osu persons in sacrifices to the gods happened only as recently as the 19th century and does not occur today”. A University of Lagos scholar similarly “stated that ‘the issue is almost history now’ and that in 1963 an

⁵ Uchenna, T. 2010, ‘Osu caste in Igboland’, *Vanguard*, 9 October <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/10/osu-caste-in-igboland/> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 5

⁶ Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

⁷ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, *NGA41455.E – Nigeria: The Kisa Osu caste system in Anambra State and the treatment of untouchables*, 23 April – Attachment 7

⁸ Dike, V. E. 2002, ‘The Osu Caste System in Igboland Discrimination Based on Descent’, A Paper Presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Sixty-first session, 8-9 August, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, pp.2-3

http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/nigeria.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 3

⁹ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.11 – Attachment 4

¹⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *NGA30813.E – Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

¹¹ Dorward, D. 1999, ‘Email From Dr David Dorward Of The Institute Of Africa Studies, La Trobe University, On The Subject Of Religious And Inheritance Customs Of The Igbo People Of Nigeria’, 4 January – Attachment 9

¹² Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *NGA30813.E – Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

¹³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *NGA31551.E – Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”*, 6 April – Attachment 10

Eastern Nigerian law was passed specifically abolishing the Osu cast[e]. He also said that the constitution guarantees non-discrimination and thus if a person feels they are experiencing different treatment as a result of a perception that they are Osu, they can take legal action”.¹⁴ According to Human Rights Watch, “[l]egislation abolishing the Osu system has been in force since the 1950s, and constitutional provisions prohibit discriminatory practices and promote equal implementation of legal protections...However, these laws remain largely unenforced”.¹⁵

2. If so, how do communities treat outcasts?

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) states that even though the Osu system has been outlawed and traditional roles have been abandoned, Osu people continue to face discrimination in society.¹⁶ Human Rights Watch similarly indicates that despite sharing the same legal status as all Nigerians, discrimination against Osu “remains largely unchecked” as “members of the Osu community are still shunned as pariahs and denied social equality”.¹⁷ Osu members continue to be outcast from the Igbo community and treated as second-class citizens, although it is argued that “they can and do mix with non-Osu persons”.¹⁸

The IDSN reports that the Osu system “enforces segregation of one section of a community on the basis of an inferior social position”. Osu and their children face ostracism and mistreatment, including being described as ‘impure’ and ‘contaminating’, based on the “widely held belief that touching an Osu automatically turns you into an Osu”. Marginalisation of Osu severely impacts on their ability to attain equal rights within the community. Furthermore, in extreme cases, Osu have been the subject of violence in attempts to reinforce the Osu caste system. For example, in 1999, a group of Osu was attacked when attempting to resettle to escape discrimination, resulting in the death of at least one person, the rape of Osu women, and the destruction of their homes.¹⁹

Traditionally, Osu were “forced to live on the outskirts of villages to be the target of any bad luck that might occur”.²⁰ A number of sources indicate that this segregation still

¹⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA30813.E – *Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.21 – Attachment 4

¹⁶ International Dalit Solidarity Network (undated), ‘Discrimination based on descent in Africa’, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, p.8

http://www.idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/Africafull.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 11

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.11 – Attachment 4

¹⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA30813.E – *Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

¹⁹ International Dalit Solidarity Network (undated), ‘Discrimination based on descent in Africa’, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, p.8

http://www.idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/Africafull.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 11

²⁰ International Dalit Solidarity Network (undated), ‘Discrimination based on descent in Africa’, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, p.8

http://www.idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/Africafull.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 11

occurs, although for less spiritual reasons. An October 2010 *Vanguard* article states that “[t]he Osu are made to live separately from the freeborn”.²¹ A September 2010 article in Nigerian newspaper *Daily Sun* reports that in some communities, Osu are not permitted to build houses that face the street; rather, they must face the bush, as the Osu “are regarded as slaves”.²² Furthermore, in 2000, the IRB referred to a news article which reported that in Akwa-Etiti, Anambra state, the Osu live in different parts of the town to the wider Igbo community.²³

A 2009 *BBC News* report describes the experiences of Pastor Cosmos Aneke Chiedozie, a Nigerian born-again Christian whose grandfather was an Osu. The report states that although in the past Chiedozie and his family would have been ostracised, “banished from communal land [and] banned from village life”, these traditions have weakened over the past five decades. It is stated that presently, “the only trouble the Osu encounter is when they try to get married”. Nevertheless, “the fear of social stigma is still strong – to the point that most would never admit to being an Osu”, particularly as some Igbo people continue to hold traditional beliefs. The *BBC* highlights the difficulties faced in finding an Osu willing to discuss their status. Chiedozie, a born-again Christian, states that “he has had a hard fight to escape the stigma of the Osu”, after his father “denounced the traditional beliefs that made him an outcast from society”.²⁴

Professor Ben Obumelu, former vice-president of an influential Igbo organisation, advises that in the past, Osu “were banned from all forms of civil society; they had no land, lived in the shrine of the gods, and if they could, would farm the land next to the road”. In recent times, these village traditions have been weakened by increasing urbanisation; however, they continue to “have a lingering hold on people because they are not sure how much power the ‘old ways’ still have”. Obumelu states that Osu traditionally were not victims of violence, although more recently “community conflicts have erupted between people each accusing the other of being Osu”. Nevertheless, “Pentecostal churches...are having an effect and a growing population may also drown out the stigma of being Osu”.²⁵

A professor at the Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University advised in 1999 that although “the social treatment of Osu has improved over time and with the influence of Christianity...they are still considered as ‘outcasts’ by many members of the Igbo community. This means they are unable to join the clubs, associations or meetings of other Igbo; they cannot eat with other Igbo”.²⁶ *Vanguard* reports that Osu “are treated as

²¹ Uchenna, T. 2010, ‘Osu caste in Igboland’, *Vanguard*, 9 October <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/10/osu-caste-in-igboland/> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 5

²² Nwachukwu, S. J. 2010, ‘Osu/Diala caste: Open sore in Igbo land’, *Daily Sun*, 21 September <http://www.sunnewsonline.com/webpages/features/freekick/2010/sept/21/freekick-21-09-2010-001.htm> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 12

²³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, NGA34152.E – *Nigeria: Clashes between osu caste members and a group called Sons of the Soil in Owerri and/or Jos which resulted in the deaths of osu caste members and detention of osu caste members*, 31 March – Attachment 13

²⁴ Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

²⁵ Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

²⁶ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA31551.E – *Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”*, 6 April – Attachment 10

inferior human beings and kept in a state of permanent and irreversible disability; they are subjected to various forms of abuse and discrimination... The Osu are not allowed to dance, drink, hold hands, associate or have sexual relationship with the Nwadiala... According to human rights groups, some of the atrocities meted out against the Osu in Igboland include: parents administering poison to their children, disinheritance, ostracism, organized attacks... denial of membership in social clubs, violent disruption of marriage ceremonies, denial of chieftaincy titles, deprivation of property and expulsion of wives”.²⁷

Human Rights Watch reports that the majority of Osu are landless, they are only permitted to marry other Osu, and are even “buried in separate cemeteries”.²⁸ The IDSND states that in many Igbo communities, “an Osu is regarded as a worthless human being”, while intermarriage with an Osu is ‘an abomination’ and ‘a social taboo’. In the past, extreme discrimination against Osu people included excluding them from dining with the wider community, refraining from touching them for fear that the status was contagious, and refusing to buy goods from Osu market sellers. In addition, “there was an apparent superstition that the ghost of the ancestors would haunt any person who was friendly with the Osu”.²⁹ The IRB advised in 2000 that in various parts of Nigeria, descendants of Osu are still prevented from mixing with other people, intermarrying with ‘freeborn’ Igbo, and trading in markets with other Igbo.³⁰

Furthermore, a Professor of History at the University of California advised in 1999 that Osu status continues to be “a great social disability”, adding that those recognised as Osu should relocate to where they cannot be recognised. Nevertheless, he also stated that if an Osu individual is not personally known to other people, then their Osu status would also be unknown.³¹

3. Do people who are regarded as outcasts suffer discrimination in areas such as employment?

BBC News reported in 2009 that although Osu are discriminated against in Igbo village life, some “Osu have been able to use the ostracism to their advantage”, by embracing Western education and becoming “Nigeria’s first doctors and lawyers”. As a result, many prominent families in Igbo communities are Osu.³² Nevertheless, an October 2010 article in *Vanguard* states that discrimination against Osu includes “inequality in access to public

²⁷ Uchenna, T. 2010, ‘Osu caste in Igboland’, *Vanguard*, 9 October <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/10/osu-caste-in-igboland/> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 5

²⁸ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.11 – Attachment 4

²⁹ Dike, V. E. 2002, ‘The Osu Caste System in Igboland Discrimination Based on Descent’, A Paper Presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Sixty-first session, 8-9 August, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, pp.7-9

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³⁰ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2000, *NGA34152.E – Nigeria: Clashes between osu caste members and a group called Sons of the Soil in Owerri and/or Jos which resulted in the deaths of osu caste members and detention of osu caste members*, 31 March – Attachment 13

³¹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, *NGA30813.E – Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

³² Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

office”.³³ The IDSN similarly reports that “stigma prevents Osu holding positions of responsibility”.³⁴ Furthermore, a late Nigerian professor who was also an Igbo advised prior to 1999 that the status of Osu members as second-class citizens resulted in “poorer job and educational opportunities”.³⁵

The US Department of State reported in March 2010 that despite the prohibition of ethnic discrimination in Nigeria, “claims of marginalization continued, particularly by members of southern groups and Igbos”. The report does not specifically mention discrimination against Osu.³⁶

4. Might a person who is treated as an outcast have trouble going to school and obtaining an education?

As mentioned in response to question three, a Nigerian professor advised prior to 1999 that due to their status as second-class citizens, Osu members have “poorer job and educational opportunities”.³⁷ The IRB stated in 1999 that previously, Osu were excluded from attending the same schools as other Igbo children; however, an African studies professor advised that the influence of Christianity in recent times has encouraged “mixing in this environment”.³⁸ Furthermore, *BBC News* reported in 2009 that some “Osu have been able to use the ostracism to their advantage”, by embracing Western education and becoming “Nigeria’s first doctors and lawyers”.³⁹

5. Would they face restrictions in terms of potential marriage partners?

It is widely reported that Osu are only permitted to marry other Osu. In many Igbo communities, intermarriage with an Osu is considered to be ‘an abomination’ and ‘a social taboo’.⁴⁰ A professor at the Africana Studies and Research Centre at Cornell University

³³ Uchenna, T. 2010, ‘Osu caste in Igboland’, *Vanguard*, 9 October <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/10/osu-caste-in-igboland/> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 5

³⁴ International Dalit Solidarity Network (undated), ‘Discrimination based on descent in Africa’, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, p.8 http://www.idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/Africafull.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 11

³⁵ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA30813.E – *Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

³⁶ US Department of State 2010, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2009 – Nigeria*, March, Section 5 – Attachment 14

³⁷ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA30813.E – *Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods*, 7 January – Attachment 8

³⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA31551.E – *Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”*, 6 April – Attachment 10

³⁹ Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

⁴⁰ Dike, V. E. 2002, ‘The Osu Caste System in Igboland Discrimination Based on Descent’, A Paper Presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Sixty-first session, 8-9 August, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, pp.7-9

http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/nigeria.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 – Attachment 3

advised in 1999 that Osu “cannot marry other Igbo”.⁴¹ Human Rights Watch reported in 2001 that “marriage to an Osu by a non-Osu is highly discouraged and even condemned by society”.⁴²

An October 2010 article in *Vanguard* states that “[t]he Osu caste discrimination is very pronounced in the area of marriage. An Osu cannot marry a freeborn. The belief is that any freeborn that marries an Osu defiles the family”. Consequently, prospective marriages in Igbo communities lead to investigations into the lineage and social status of the intended spouse. If the prospective spouse is found to be an Osu, the marriage plans would be aborted. In some cases, married couples are forced to divorce due to “the Osu factor”.⁴³

In 2003, the IRB cited an anthropology professor who similarly advised that concerns over the potential Osu status of a family member’s prospective spouse are evident “in just about every marriage”. Although Osu status may be overlooked if the Osu family is particularly wealthy, “it will never be completely forgotten or forgiven”. Furthermore, “[t]he children of such a union will be looked at askance by some sticklers and may have a difficult time finding marriage partners”.⁴⁴ Human Rights Watch also states that children born of a union between an Osu and a non-Osu “are likely to be ostracized and mistreated”.⁴⁵

6. On what basis might a person be treated as an outcast under traditional Igbo beliefs?

According to traditional Igbo beliefs, there are various ways in which a person can be designated as Osu and, therefore, treated as an outcast. In particular, a person’s heritage determines their Osu status, although it can also be acquired through marriage to, or sexual relations with, an Osu person.⁴⁶ Osu status “cannot generally be overcome”.⁴⁷

A university professor in African studies advises that in the past, a person was given Osu status after being bought as a slave from outside the community and “placed in the service of the gods through the direction of the priests”. Another way that a ‘free person’ obtains

⁴¹ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA31551.E – Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”, 6 April – Attachment 10

⁴² Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.12 – Attachment 4

⁴³ Uchenna, T. 2010, ‘Osu caste in Igboland’, *Vanguard*, 9 October <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2010/10/osu-caste-in-igboland/> – Accessed 13 October 2010 – Attachment 5

⁴⁴ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2003, NGA41455.E – Nigeria: The Kisa Osu caste system in Anambra State and the treatment of untouchables, 23 April – Attachment 7

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⁴⁶ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA30813.E – Nigeria: Osu cast system in the Igbo community and whether: an Osu is someone chosen by community to serve God and the people; as an Osu one will not eat, play or associate with non-Osu people; when a Chief Highness dies three Osu members are chosen to be sacrificed and buried with him; and, Osu are sacrificed to appease the gods, 7 January – Attachment 8; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA31551.E – Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”, 6 April – Attachment 10; Dike, V. E. 2002, ‘The Osu Caste System in Igboland Discrimination Based on Descent’, A Paper Presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) Sixty-first session, 8-9 August, International Dalit Solidarity Network website, p.3 http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/africa/pdf/nigeria.pdf – Accessed 15 October 2010 –

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⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch 2001, *Caste Discrimination: A Global Concern*, 29 August, p.11 – Attachment 4

Osu status is by seeking priest protection when fleeing particular circumstances. Traditional beliefs dictate that in seeking such protection, the person accepts the status of Osu. The hereditary nature of the Osu status means that they “would also be condemning their children to the status of Osu”.⁴⁸

Furthermore, as mentioned in the response to question one, expert advice provided to the RRT in 1999 states that if an Igbo child is given to an Osu as a slave, or a sacrifice, that child and their descendants are outcast from the general Igbo community.⁴⁹

7. Would this status be passed on to a person’s children or grandchildren?

Osu status is hereditary, and is inherited by an Osu person’s children and grandchildren. A University of Lagos scholar advises that Osu status is designated “by virtue of birth”. As such, “it is not a person’s actions but their heritage that marks them as Osu”. A history professor at the University of California also states that a person’s heritage defines their status as an Osu.⁵⁰

8. Would a person need to provide information about their family background in order to obtain a job in Nigeria?

No information was found regarding the requirement to provide family background information in order to obtain employment in Nigeria.

9. Would this be the case if they were to relocate to a large city like Lagos?

No information was found regarding the requirement to provide family background information in order to obtain employment in Nigeria. However, some sources indicate that people of Osu status could relocate to cities such as Lagos where their status can be concealed. In 1999, an African studies professor advised “that an Osu person in fear of sacrifice could safely move elsewhere in Nigeria and...that many Osu do in fact go to urban centres where their social status as Osu can be hidden”.⁵¹ *BBC News* reported in 2009 that “[i]f someone lives in Lagos these days, the only time a person may come into contact with [discrimination for being Osu] is when they are planning to get married”.⁵²

⁴⁸ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 1999, NGA31551.E – *Nigeria: Follow-up to NGA16476.E of 12 April 1994 and NGA30813 of 7 January 1999 on whether ritual murders or human sacrifices still occur in Nigeria; whether Osu caste members of the Igbo tribe could be sacrificed at the burial of a High Chief; whether Osu members still suffer “discrimination”*, 6 April – Attachment 10

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⁵² Walker, A. 2009, ‘The story of Nigeria’s ‘untouchables’’, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, 7 April – Attachment 6

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