



Nigeria – Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 14 October 2014

Any information on "Queenships" of shrines in Nigeria. In particular, any material as to whether the refusal of a Queenship in Ondo State could result in serious harm to the person refusing the Queenship.

A 2004 article from the Lagos-based newspaper The News relates the experiences of a Christian woman who refused to accept the position of priestess at a traditional religious shrine as follows:

“Indeed, Shrines, seem to have been elevated to such a position of authority in some Igbo communities that the deities are, sometimes, believed to chose their servants. When that happens, they do so without regard for the victim's faith. A case in point, is one Mrs. Esther Ekedigwe. Esther is a Christian, but when 'Odo' a deity whose shrine is in Amaozalla in Ozodo Local Government Area wanted her as his priestess, she was not consulted. Esther considered the offer incompatible with her convictions as a Christian and turned it down. To the adherents, of 'Odo' that is the peak of sacrilege. Consequently, Esther was condemned to death by the idolators. The death sentence, it was learnt, was meant to appease the deity. Other Christians in the community, The NEWS learnt, are so scared to defend Esther because of ‘the dangerous nature and potency of the 'Odo' deity.’ At present, Esther has fled the community, and her whereabouts, according to Michael Ekedigwe, a relation, is unknown. Ekedigwe, further disclosed that a lot of helpless female Christians in the community had become ‘perpetual servants of the deity through this kind of intimidation by the worshippers.’ He stated that it has been a yearly event, from time immemorial, that before the celebration of 'Odo' festival, some women are chosen through ballot to become new servants of the deity. ‘Once the ballot falls on any woman,’ he explained, ‘it is either she serves Odo or she will be condemned to death and be stoned subsequently.’ So, in February this year, when Esther, amongst other women, was selected by the traditional ballot and she declined, custodians of Odo did not hesitate to declare a Fatwa on her and her entire family. Since then, Esther, her husband and three children have been on the run.” (The News (22 August 2004) *Nigeria: Gory Rituals*)

An Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada response to a request for information on the consequences of refusing to accept the position of priestess refers to information provided by a professor of anthropology at Warren Wilson College, Asheville, North Carolina (WWC) and a professor of anthropology at Southern Illinois University (SIU) as follows:

“According to the WWC Professor, the consequences of refusing to be a water priestess once chosen ‘are spiritual, not social (6 May 2008). If one denies their calling, it is believed that the water spirits will be unhappy and will continue to harass the individual which will manifest through sickness and the other symptoms mentioned previously. Similarly, the SIU Professor stated

that a woman may become afflicted with a condition that may be construed as a sign that she has ignored her commitment to become a priestess.” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (8 May 2008) *NGA102846.E – Nigeria: The name of the river goddess of the village Enugu-Ngwo; whether she chooses a woman to become her priestess; the manner in which she chooses her priestess; the priestess's duties, including ceremonies related to infertility, widows and the circumcision of married women; the consequences of refusing to accept the position of priestess once chosen*)

This response also states:

“Similarly, the SIU Professor stated that there can be supernatural consequences for refusing to become a priestess, such as death, and explained that community members might say that if a woman was struck dead by lightning, it was because she refused her role as a priestess. The SIU Professor added, however, that it would not be implausible that if a woman refused the position of priestess, she could be poisoned by a native doctor. The SIU Professor noted that native doctors possess a high degree of sophistication with respect to poisoning methods. The SIU Professor stated that he was not aware of a specific case of a woman being poisoned for refusing to become a priestess.” (ibid)

A country advice document published by the Refugee Review Tribunal of Australia states:

“One outside expert source reported that serious harm could come to a person who is expected to take on the role of a village chief priest in Igbo society. In 2001, Dr. David Dorward, Director of African Research Institute at LaTrobe University, Victoria, was contacted in regards to a similar Nigerian case, although he was addressing the situation of Igbos in Anambra state. He reported that it is unlikely that someone who is to assume the role of village chief priest as a result of hereditary practices would be harmed ‘...as there are likely other appropriate candidates since primogeniture isn't a pervasive rule.’ However, in other cases, free will may be subordinated to the needs of the community. If someone is the ‘chosen repository of the relevant spirit’ to become chief priest, one may have an obligation to the community to placate the spirits. Depending on the community, refusal in this circumstance could produce violence against the individual.” (Australian Government: Refugee Review Tribunal (28 February 2011) *Nigeria – NGA38220 – Imo State – Igbo – Priest – Succession – Refusal – Christians*)

This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research and Information Unit within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

References:

Australian Government: Refugee Review Tribunal (28 February 2011) *Nigeria – NGA38220 – Imo State – Igbo – Priest – Succession – Refusal – Christians*
<http://www.ein.org.uk/print/members/country-report/rrt-nigeria-nga38220-imo-state-igbo-priest-succession-refusal-christians>

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European Country of Origin Information Network

Google

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Lexis Nexis

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database

UNHCR Refworld