
SOCIAL CONTROL IN PRECOLONIAL IGBOLAND OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study is a descriptive investigation of the traditional system of social control and order maintenance in the Igbo nation of Nigeria in Africa. It discusses how the Igbo employed customary standards of conduct and negative sanctions for breach of norms to control its people prior to the advent of the Europeans, colonization, and prisons. Employing ethnographic methodology, the paper describes what constitutes serious deviance and the stringent penalties imposed for their contravention in pre-colonial Igboland. Specifically, the Igbo employed the services of council of elders, age-grade associations, title-making associations, oracles, "Dibia" fraternities (medicine men), secret societies, the myth of reincarnation and non-transmigration, and the invocation of spirits of the ancestors ("mmanwu" and ancestral worship) to preserve collective conscience. Finally, the paper suggests a re-evaluation by current government in Igbo nation to determine a possibility of co-opting certain elements of pre-colonial systems into the 21st century social control in Igbo states.

Keywords:

African Studies; Anthropology; Criminal Justice; Criminology; History; Political Science; Sociology; Council of elders; Age-grade associations; Title-making associations; Ancestral worship; *Dibia* fraternities (medicine men); Oracles; Secret societies; Reincarnation; and Non-transmigration.

INTRODUCTION

Many anthropologists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, etc., have written on different aspects of the African peoples. Unmistakably, the traditional systems of social control and policing of the various ethnic groups in Africa drew little attention to international and national scholars. In effect, the unique and sometimes traumatizing methods of offender apprehension and disposal, in

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many parts of Africa, remain hidden to scholars in various regions of Africa, as well as scholars from outside of Africa.

Deviance is an ubiquitous phenomenon. It is found in every healthy society, “even in Durkheim’s *Society of Angels* (1964).” The Igbo (Ibos), like all societies worldwide, have customary standards of conduct and negative sanctions for any breach. In the study of African criminology, we had to start with investigating how each African ethnic group controlled its people prior to the advent of the Europeans. In this vein, African nationals who grew up in rural African societies can lead the way. It is our attempt to fill the void by studying the Igbo system of social control as natives of the Igbo nation.

Some early European writers (Basden, 1966) on Africa have described people of Africa south of the Sahara as savages. Through this study of social control in Igboland, scholars may see that there was a stringent system of order maintenance in Igboland as was the case in all of the African Kingdoms south of the Sahara. Leading authors on ancient Africa like Diop (1987) have argued that “there is agreement on the fact that the African variety of organization is indigenous: it could not have come from Aryan or Semitic Mediterranean” (p. 100).

Whereas deviance is a cultural universal phenomenon, what constitutes deviance is not. Therefore, it is expedient that other Africans and non-Africans know the various behaviors that were regarded as offenses, the seriousness of such offenses and the disposal mechanisms for their violations. In fact, some Igbos who are forty years old or younger today have little or no knowledge of what constituted serious deviances and penalties for their contravention in pre-colonial Igboland. This study is a descriptive account of how the Igbo social system was controlled in pre-colonial times. Furthermore, it provides data for comparative analysis of other societies’ traditional systems of social control.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE IGBO

The Igbo occupy southeastern part of Nigeria with a population of over forty million people today (Ekwe-Ekwe, 2006a; 2006b). At the time of their contact with Europeans around 1830s, they had an estimated population of five million people. They lived in villages and some large towns, but they were totally a *gemeinschaft* structure and a stateless patriarchal society (Horton, 1972) in modern sense of the word.

The Igbo have been described as *The King In Every Man* (Henderson, 1972). This means the Igbo have no kingship system. They do not believe in owing allegiance to any single authority. Only the Earth-God has that authority. Every married male is the head of his family and has authority only within his family. In the absence of a king or chief, how then did the Igbo maintain order and stability in their nation? This is one of the questions that this study will answer.

In the pre-colonial times, the Igbo means of subsistence were mainly farming and trading. Some also engage in fishing and hunting. Other subsistence professionals were blacksmiths, weavers, potters and diviners.

The Igbo have age-grade associations, title-making associations, *Dibia* fraternities (medicine men), oracles (Uchendu, 1965), and secret societies (Ottenberg, 1958). These associations and formations or entities were used as social control mechanisms. Capitalism was not imported in Igboland, but extended kinship/family system prescribed communal ownership of land by kindred; and everyone was his brother's keeper. Although the Igbo have a council of elders by kindred, they had no regional or national assembly, thus a stateless society.

Pivotal in Igbo social system is the theory of reincarnation. They believe that their deceased members and the ancestors come back to temporal life. As Uchendu (1995) surmises, "the Igbo construction of the world is that reincarnation after death and the need to join the living lineage, make the world of man and the world of the dead a single universe providing an alternating abode for man". To this effect "belief in reincarnation gives the Igbo hope of realizing their frustrated status goals in the next cycle of life" (Uchendu, 1965). Unmistakably, non-transmigration is inevitably regarded as the most severe punishment for those guilty of abomination. In effect, ancestors occupy a very important place in Igbo religion and philosophy. The spirits of the ancestors are invoked in all requests to the gods and in all judicial matters.

Anyasodo (1975) posits that religion and law are intertwined in Igbo social systems to the point that their social, economic and political life is profoundly influenced by a "pantheon of supernatural powers which operate within the human sphere in various ways. These supernatural forces are classified into two groups: Those that live and control the heavens under the supremacy of the Almighty God, and those that live and control the earth, led by the Earth-goddess. Similar perspective has been expressed by Oli (1990) who pointed out that among the spirits that live and control the earth are several other minor deities representing mountains, water, trees, sand, fortune, wealth, destiny, strength, evil spirits, ancestral spirits in the collective immortality and those in the *Zamani* (Mbiti, 1971).

The Igbo respected and honor achieved status more than ascribed status. Individual achievements determine a person's social position in his community. Consequently, alcoholism and loitering are not characteristics of the Igbo. They are very assertive and proud of their achievements, and they raise their children not to fail in life. In effect, the Igbo material culture is engulfed in ingenuity and creativity. All of these characteristics of the Igbo will impact the nature of their laws, judiciary, crime prevention methods, and offender disposal mechanisms. Above all, gerontocracy determines who leads each kindred.

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PREVIOUS STUDIES

Some studies have been made on social control in Nigeria. None of them concentrated specifically on the social control among the Igbo in pre-colonial times. Probably the best scholarly account of the Igbo social system was produced by Uchendu. In his accounts of the Igbo, Uchendu concentrated more on “status and hierarchy among the Igbo” (1963), “the status implications of Igbo religious beliefs” (1965), and “Kola hospitality and Igbo lineage structure” (1964). Uchendu’s writings about the Igbo were influenced by the English colonial culture. He did not touch pre-colonial system of social control, but he mentioned the inhuman treatments meted out to those who committed abominations.

Basden (1921), a European anthropologist, studied Igbo customs and tradition but did not look into the Igbo judicial system. Green (1964) studied life in rural Igbo communities, but paid little attention to the Igbo legal system. Mbiti (1971), in his *African Religion and Philosophy*, did not include the Igbo in his studies, but he provided religious facts and beliefs that are prevalent in all African societies south of the Sahara which are ancestral connections with the living, reincarnation, and the zones of existence of departed relatives: collective immortality (The dead who are still remembered) and the *Zamani* (Dead relatives whom no living person knew them).

Meek (1970) studied law and authority in a Nigerian tribe. He gave an account of traditional Igbo laws and customs as he saw them during the colonial regime. He did not provide any information on pre-colonial Igbo laws and policing methods. Elechi, (2006) researched on “Doing Justice Without the State” among the Afikpo (Ehugbo), but the research was neither specific on pre-colonial social control, nor designed to cover the whole of Igboland.

Ebbe (2000) in his “Crime and Crime Control in Nigeria: Posttraditional Nation-State”, provided only an outline of law enforcement in traditional Nigeria and how the British colonization of Nigeria and the concomitant introduction of English legal system changed the prior customary order. Also in his “Crime Prevention in Nigeria: Pre-colonial and Post-colonial Dimensions,” Ebbe (2003a), again, concentrated only on crime prevention methods in traditional Nigeria. Many other scholars on social control or policing in Nigeria concentrated on colonial and postcolonial Nigeria system of social control and policing as in Okonkwo (1966); Tamuno (1970); Onwudiwe (1997); Ebbe (1981, 1982, 1994, and 2004); and Onyeozili (1998, and 2005).

METHOD OF STUDY

This study is exclusively about the Igbo system of social control in pre-colonial Nigeria. Social control as implied by the authors here refers to cultural norm enforcement and order maintenance. This is not a sample-based study. The authors looked at a whole population of the Igbo nation. The Igbo social system is built on oral history kept alive through immemorial customs and traditions, transmitted from generation to generation. They kept no written records. The data for this study were collected through two avenues: ethnographic observations by the two writers who are natives of the Igbo nation and who also are privileged to have lived with grand-parents and parents who have lived on earth for over ninety-five years. One of the writers lost his mother in 1999 at the age of 99 healthy years, and the other lost his 100-year old father in 2001, and 95-year old mother in 2010. Through oral history, from their grandparents and parents, they learned the Igbo traditional system of justice and social control.

Furthermore, data were collected through review of relevant literature on Igbo of southeast Nigeria. These literature accounts provide anthropological, sociological, economic, political, and historical accounts of the Igbo people. Additionally, some pre-colonial system of justice and social control survived the colonial hegemony.

Data were collected on what pre-colonial Igbo society defined as offenses (crimes), types of offenses, methods of preventing crimes, the judicial system, types of punishment meted out to offenders, and the goal of punishment.

FINDINGS

Pre-colonial Igbo lived in autonomous communities. There was a total absence of chiefs in the nation. Each autonomous community was made up of kindreds, and each kindred was led by the oldest male. This kindred leadership was not inherited. If the leader of the kindred dies, the next oldest male took over. In those days, each kindred had not more than twenty-four persons made up of adult males and females, and their children. Each household was headed by an adult male. He had authority over everybody in his household. He and his family members owed no allegiance to the oldest man in the kindred, but they respect his opinion in every matter.

Type of Offenses and Disposal Mechanisms.

In principle, most pre-colonial Igboland had three classes of people – the Freeborns (*Nwa-afọ or Diala*), the Slaves (*Ohu*), and the Outcastes or ritual Slaves (*Osu*). The concept of crime was not applied. Instead, there were two types of offenses: abominations (public offenses), otherwise called *aru*, or something the Earth abhors, and delicts called *mmehie* (private offenses). Among some Igbo, people who committed an abomination such as the murder of one's parents,

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brother, sister or kinsman; incest, a son having sexual coitus with one's sister or one of his father's wives when his father is still alive; killing or eating a domestic animal dedicated to the gods; or any other offense against the gods, may be dedicated to the shrine of a god, and they became *osu* (outcasts or untouchables). With some other Igbo groups, people fleeing persecution may take asylum by pledging their servitude to oracles, thereby, voluntarily inheriting the ritual slave status (*osu*) in exchange for "safety." *Mmehie* offenses such as burglary, robbery, stealing, etc., were disposed of, not by imprisonment, but by shaming, restitution, a fine, compensation, a communion feast, or sale into slavery (for a persistent recalcitrant).

There was no system of imprisonment. When an abomination was committed, the sending of the offender to a perpetual exile may be accompanied with dedicating him or her to a god. Where an offense such as murder was inadvertently committed, an offender is sent to exile for a given length of time (Achebe, 1959). The length of time varies among different Igbo groups. The whole community shared a sense of guilt for his crime, which must be sanctified. The entire community had to offer a communal sacrifice to propitiate the gods, so that the anger of the gods would not fall upon the entire community.

As Igbo religion and law are intertwined, there were pieces of lands, rivers, trees, forests, and some week days that were defined as sacred. For the sacred pieces of land, there are days of the week that nobody should farm or work on them. It was a taboo for anyone to catch and eat fish from a sacred river. It was forbidden for anybody to cut down a sacred tree such as *uboldia* (***umune or ogirishi***) among some Igbo. Sacred forests and caves were the location of the Holy Shrine of the People, the home of their god. Only the priest or priestess consecrated to the Holy Shrine was allowed to enter the forest or caves, which was where he/she lives. Any special prayer or sacrifice to the gods through the Holy Shrine must be made through the priest or priestess who was dedicated to the god of the Holy Shrine.

Most communities had certain days, in the four-day Igbo week, when nobody was allowed to work on a particular piece of land. If anybody violated any of the above sacred rules, he or she must provide a fowl, sheep, goat, ram, or cow, kola-nut, and other items to the community to offer a sacrifice to the desecrated or violated entity to appease the gods. The sacrifice could be accompanied by reprimand and other sanctions. Any refusal by the offender to provide the sacrificial items could lead to his total excommunication from the community, which was the severest punishment. A person excommunicated in pre-colonial Igboland was lost in a crowd, because if his/her fire went out in his/her kitchen, he/she wouldn't go to his/her neighbors to get another. It is also believed that in death, he would neither be able to transmigrate nor reincarnate. In fact, it is the fear of communal sanction, the thought of non-reincarnation, and non-transmigration after death which keeps members behavior in check.

Crime Prevention.

Right from birth, the Igbos begin to teach their children the dos and don'ts in Igboland; the taboos, abominations, sacred and profane, sacrilege, and the importance of honor and dignity, respect for elders, women and older siblings. Throughout the Igbo communities, social control was informal but efficient. There was no formalized police system in modern sense of the words.

In pre-colonial Igboland, every head of a household provided physical security for all members of the household through environmental designs in form of architectural design of residences, wooden fence barriers and masonry barriers (walls of mud, bricks or stones). The fences or masonry walls could be circular or rectangular surrounding all residential and non-residential buildings in the compound (Ebbe, 2003b). There was usually only one major door or gate for exit and entrance to the compound. When adults left for farm work in the morning, this security wall exit door would be locked. Babysitters who were usually inside the complex were warned not to unlock the gate or door for any stranger. This front door or gate of the compound security wall was locked every evening at sunset and remained so all night long. People were not expected to visit at night, except when there was an emergency in the neighborhood. The compound security wall could have a short rear door, but this rear door was always locked both day and night. The rear door which served as an emergency exit from the compound was also designed for going to the gardens at the back of the compound. It was short and small to make it difficult for a burglar to escape easily with or without large items belonging to the victim. In most cases, compound walls made of wooden or bamboo fence barriers had no rear entrance/exit gate (ibid).

Access control was the common form of environmental design in pre-colonial Igboland. If there was any footpath created by members of a household, outsiders were not allowed to use them to come to the compound. Most of the time, a cross-bar was placed across the footpath to warn outsiders not to use the footpath to enter the compound. Some heads of households might hold a dog in a leash tied to a small tree adjacent to the footpath to scare outsiders from using the footpath. The employment of individuals as security guards or modern policemen was not yet conceived, because the Igbo nation was then a simple stateless society (Ebbe 2003b).

The head of a household could use his presence to warn potential night burglars not to target his household by making a series of high-pitched, head-voice, exclamatory sounds while either standing on the ground or climbing a palm tree at night. The exclamatory sounds could be sounds of joy, great excitement, or a war song. Additionally, as most burglaries in Nigeria are carried out at night, he could shoot his blacksmith gun in the air at night as an anticipatory burglary preventive mechanism. Also, when the head of a household suspected chances of

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night burglary in the village, he could beat his ancestral drum pretending to appease the spirits of his ancestors. By doing so, he gave notice to the burglars in the vicinity that he is around. It is a cultural truism in Igboland that as long as potential burglars in the town or village knew that the head of a household is at home, they avoided his compound.

Furthermore, Ebbe (2003b) further posits that some efforts to prevent criminal victimization in Igboland appeal to transcendental reality. In this vein, some property could be saved in a Shrine Grove of the community's god. The people believe that if anybody steals something saved in a Shrine Grove, that person will die a sudden death or face a mysterious sickness, which would lead to the person's death and be buried in a tabooed forest (an evil forest). The Shrine Grove is also the Holy Shrine, the home of the community's god – the god of their ancestors who had existed and was worshipped from generation to generation starting beyond the reach of living memory. There was no exception to the type of property that could be saved in a Shrine Grove (the Alter of the town or village).

Real estate, cash crops, fruit trees, and movable possessions outside the home were secured from vandalism and criminal intervention by using leaves of sacred trees such as *uboldia* (***umune or ogirishi***) or the youngest leaves of a palm-frond (***omu nkwu***). Every native of the locality knew the evil consequences of tampering with any property that has any of those sacred leaves placed on it. The negative consequences were the same as those of stealing properties saved in a Shrine Grove. In fact, anything displayed for sale, in the absence of the owner, could be secured from theft with any of the sacred leaves. Additionally, some people used ash from their kitchen to secure a property left on a roadside or displayed for sale by an absent seller. It was believed that stealing anything that had kitchen ash on it would render the thief to ashes as soon as the thief ate anything cooked in a kitchen in his/her home or elsewhere. That means the person would die suddenly and go back to ashes from which he was incarnated.

Judicial System in Pre-colonial Igboland.

The judicial system of handling cases in pre-colonial Igboland was informal. The "court of original jurisdiction" was the "court of the father (husband) of a household". Justice was primarily a family affair (Ebbe, 2003b). The deviant acts of his wife or wives and children were dealt with exclusively by him. If the rule violation was a victimization of any member of his family, he would convene a "court" hearing composed of his wives, older sons and daughters who would be there only to listen and witness his judgment aimed at specific and general deterrence. The facts of the matter would be laid down. The accused may call a witness or witnesses from within or outside the immediate family. If he was found guilty of the offense, he was punished, most of the time, by corporal punishment or denial of a meal, a knock on the head or a slap on one cheek, depending on seriousness of the offense. In cases of repeat persistence in serious

offending, an overbearing father may rub some hot pepper by the eyes of the offender. The authority of the father was not questioned by anybody in his family, as patriarchy and patrilineal formed the order of authority and inheritance.

The second level of “court” was the council of elders in the village. Each village was made up of people who were united by ties of consanguinity. The cases that reach the village or community council were inter-family civil or criminal victimizations. Civil matters were settled amicably, but criminal victimization had double-barreled penalty. The convicted offender had to pay back whatever he took away from the victim by restitution or compensation. For very serious offenses like burglary or robbery, the guilty offender had to be shamed before the community in the village market square by stripping him or her stark-naked and beating him/her as they parade him/her around the market square, and then leave him to go home. The trials are held in the village square, and are open to all members of the community who wishes to attend – including children.

In cases of abominable hateful offenses like murder, an offender and his family may be permanently expelled from the community. If the offense is manslaughter; an unintentional murder, the resultant penalty would differ. The guilty person and all his family are required to go on exile for a given number of years after which they would be reconciled with the community. The evidence on Igbo method of pre-colonial dispute resolution is supported by Jell-Bahlsen (1988). In either case, the offender’s home and all property are razed to the ground by the younger age grades in an effort to assuage the anger of the earth god against shedding the innocent blood of a kinsman (Achebe, 1959; Jell-Bahlsen, 1988).

The first “court of appeal” in pre-colonial Igbo judicial system was the diviner. He was consulted when there were doubts about the identity of the offender. The council of elders could submit suspects to the diviner. The diviner, after some incantations, would tell his consultants the person who committed the offense. The elders would take the offender home and apply an appropriate punishment. Some diviners could use trial by ordeal to reach their conclusions.

The highest “court of appeal” in Igbo judicial system, in pre-colonial times, was the “oracle” (Uchendu, 1965). The most famous oracles in traditional Igboland were the *Agbala* of Awka, the *Igwe-ka-Ala* of Umunoha, the *Kamalu* of Ozuzu, the *Ibini ukpabe* of Aro-Chukwu (the “Long Juju”), the *Mkpokiti abirikete* of Umunze, and the *Haba* of Agulu. The common characteristics of the oracles and their operations were shrouded in a strict code of secrecy and an institutionalized intelligence service. They were consulted from far and wide throughout Igboland. The oracle was believed to be a lesser god with supernatural powers and was capable of connecting with the transcendental realm to get answers to questions of its consultants. Its verdict, in all cases, was not questioned. The oracle’s consultants could be two individuals in a conflict. They could decide to ignore the decision of a council of elders and consult the oracle. Sometimes a

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council of elders could recommend that an oracle be consulted and decide which oracle should be consulted. From the Igbo pre-colonial times to 1902 when it was destroyed by the British forces in the now infamous Aro Expedition of 1901-1902 (Ikime, 1977), the *Ibini ukpabe* of Aro Chukwu – the “Long Juju”, was the most famous of all Igbo oracles. Similarly, all of the oracles were driven into obsolescence either by colonial conquest or Christianity and colonial laws of the early 1900s.

Kingship in Igboland

It should be noted that the idea of kingship was not universal in pre-colonial Igbo nation. Igbos never had a centralized government in the form of a king with a consolidated power, but they were law-abiding people long before the advent and spread of European influence. They had well-established norms of conduct and maintained numerous institutions for the express purpose of ensuring that laws were observed and that order and harmony were maintained. Infringement of laws was dealt with by the *Oha*, under the direction of the elders, and this was the key to the success of the Igbos’ unique system of government, Ohacracy (Njaka, 1974).

The Igbo communities which had kings, e.g Onitsha and Oguta (Nzimiro, 1972), were actually groups who migrated from other places and settled among the Igbo. The Onitsha Igbo for example still trace their origin from the ancient kingdom of Benin. These resettled Igbo had their cultures which in no way serve as a source for tracing Igbo history. Even among the Onitsha or Oguta Igbo, the father in a household up to the present still holds authority of first disciplinary instance, and the kings never settled private matters. Similarly, the Nri (Hahn-Waanders , 1990) migrated from Aguleri/Umuleri communities. Although its agents exercised religious functions of earth cleansing and sacrificial offering in cases of abominations among some Igbo, this role was exercised for a fee, and as migrants, they never wielded political authority over any Igbo group.

Offender Disposal.

The types of punishment meted to offenders have been stated above. What was unique in punishment of offenders in pre-colonial Igbo justice system was certainty and swiftness in the application of punishment. The goal of punishment was reintegration of the offender into the consanguineous collectivity for as long as the offense was not an abomination. Thus, the pre-colonial Igbo system of offender disposal is aimed at tertiary prevention which involved incapacitation of the offender by excommunication, expulsion from the community, and public ridicule or shaming of the offender – which is effective in both specific and general deterrence. The reconciliatory justice and offender disposal system also aims at assuaging pent-up animosity, separating combatants, and allowing enough time to calm agitated tempers (Jell-Bahlsen, 1988; Ebbe, 2003b).

Discussion and Conclusion.

Although pre-colonial Igbo nation was referred to as a stateless society (Horton, 1972), its social control mechanisms prepared them very well to cope with the complexities of modern economic and political developments. While the advent of the Europeans and the subsequent colonization of Nigeria by the British helped to get rid of some inhuman methods of offender disposal such as the dedication of a person who committed an abomination to the gods to become an outcast, it (colonialism) however destroyed an effective normative system that preserved positive moral values of the Igbo for generations. From Human Right perspective, it is heartrending for a descendant of an “outcast” to suffer the consequences of an ascribed status he/she did not bargain. The “osu” caste system contributed to the societal fragmentation and distrust, and in effect contributed to destroying the cohesiveness of the Igbo nation in contemporary Nigeria. Thanks again to colonial-based laws; the osu caste system was legally abolished by the Eastern Nigerian Government in 1956 (Uchendu, 1995).

The destruction of the oracles was a good riddance, because so many Igbo men and women were sold into slavery, because they were falsely found guilty of an offense by an oracle. Records by Anene (1966) and Ikime (1977) exist on how the Aro people used the “Long Juju” – the *Ibini ukpabe* of Aro-Chukwu, to enrich themselves by falsely telling their consultants, that the accused was found guilty of the offense alleged, and that the “Long Juju” has slaughtered him. They (the Aros) would pour blood-like substance through a pipe to indicate the death of the offender. The consultants, after seeing the blood-like substance flowing out, as being the blood of the accused, would go home with no sympathy for the alleged offender. When the consultants left, it is alleged that the “Long Juju” operators would take the accused and sell him/her into slavery. So the colonial laws and Christianity played a significant part in the good riddance of the oracle system of justice.

It is noteworthy that the pre-colonial Igbo system of justice had no death penalty, because shedding a kinsman’s blood would be an abomination. The system also had no prisons, because the incarceration of a family member would bring humiliation and shame to the family name. Some pre-colonial Igbo system of treating the offender in the community survived the colonial regime. Up till today, very few criminal cases reach the post-colonial court system. Many criminal and juvenile delinquency cases are disposed informally in the towns and villages. The Council of elders serves as the trial courts and, the age grades serve as the main enforcement arm of the village justice. It is only when litigants chose to ignore, or contest the council decision that they resort to formal court system which often takes time to resolve and costs much money to prosecute.

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Furthermore, the pre-colonial Igbo social control system of having three to five vigilante men to monitor movements of known criminals in village markets survived the colonial administration. Post-colonial Igbo local governments employed “vigilante boys” and street urchins (*ndi oti mkpu*) to watch out for criminal offenders. The younger age grades are also still employed as local security in Igbo villages and towns. In some places like Bende, young Okonko society members fulfill this vital social responsibility of enforcing community discipline (Onyejekwe, 2003).

This study is probably weakened by reliance on the authors’ personal experiences in Igboland and having inherited more than octogenarian parents and grandparents as a source of data collection, and review of literature. Be that as it may, Igbo culture is a monolithic one. Its social system in pre-colonial Nigeria was simple but orderly. The culture then was not yet influenced by outside contact. Therefore, the information the authors gathered from older parents and grandparents should be reliable. Future researchers on this topic should make a survey with a large sample of octogenarian Igbo people to see if they could find some other social control systems in pre-colonial Igboland not covered in this study.

Finally, other high crimes like kidnapping of persons for extortion of money have become prevalent in present day Igbo nation. This study falls short of arguing that the pre-colonial system should be adopted as a panacea to this menacing dilemma. It however calls for governmental evaluation of the pre-colonial system with a view of integrating relevant and workable aspects into a new approach to reducing crime and delinquency in Igbo nation.

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