

Slavery Accusation Litigation and Male Gender Discrimination in Abbi: The Case of Egwenu

Dr. C. O. Okwelum , Dr. J. A. Onoyemeakpo and Mr. B. U. Oju

Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro, Delta State.

Corresponding author: okwelumchukwudi@gmail.com

Abstract

This study interrogates the phenomenon of slavery accusation in Abbi despite the fact that the institution has been abolished many years ago and there are no obvious evidences of its existence except as may be captured in modern slavery. The accusation is also regardless of the fact that there are extant laws of the constitution providing that citizens shall not be discriminated against as a result of the circumstances of birth, ethnic origin or religion. This study chooses, as a specimen from Abbi community, Suit No. NWACC/37/2021 Chief (Hon.) Solomon Egwenu v. Adolphus Okolafor Enueweosu which is founded on defamation of character of the plaintiff for being called a slave filed before the Ndokwa West Area Customary Court, Kwale. The study adopts content analysis within the broad spectrum of doctrinal method. It seeks to interrogate the factual circumstances that led to the litigations and critically raise the nature of the slavery accusation. Attempt was made to capture the evidence of witnesses in whose presence the allegation of slavery was made against the victim. The study finds that the allegations were not well founded in facts but were raised in relationship to communal traditional politics and power struggle and that the conveyors of the accusations were actuated by malice, jealousy and base motives to de-shine the rising political profile and traditional power aspiration of the victim in the locality and the victim's capacity to bring more enlightened views and practice to native customs on local adjudication and dual-traditional-nativity identities. And to a large extent, purveyors are unwilling to appear in court to defend or ventilate their accusations as found in the specimen. The study also finds that who may be regarded as a slave may not actually have been subjected to the conditions of 'slavery' and that the purveyors are not largely ignorant of what the institution of slavery entails but attempts were made to pigeon hole the accusations within modern slavery. It is recommended that Abbi traditional council should put in place, mechanisms to punish exercises in denigrating its chiefs before it Palaces than allowing such infractions to get to the conventional courts of law.

Keywords: Slavery, Abbi, Gender Discrimination, Litigation, Defamation of Character, Court.

Introduction

The accusation and branding of slavery in Nigeria appear to be taking an upsurge in the socio-political and economic relationships between citizens. Although the stigmatization is not freely branded, and often, it is captured in innuendos, in micro-communities like Abbi in Ndokwa West Local Government Area, Delta State the accusations are running riot and are largely resorted to in durations of open traditional political conflict and altercations and are thusly made verbally and or tersely in writing. This study shall endeavour to demonstrate that while witchcraft accusations are leveled largely against the female

gender in Abbi, slavery or servitude is leveled against the male gender. This is a position chosen for the purposes of this conversation otherwise actual existence in abundance of female gendered slavery or servitude exists in this part of the world. For instance, in *Hadijatou Mani v. Niger*, the Republic of Niger was fined \$19,030 by the West African Regional Court of Justice for failing to protect a 12 year old girl from being sold into slavery in 1996 for \$500. Hadijatou Mani had worked for Naroua who bought her for over ten years without pay and had also given birth to three children in her servitude for Naroua during which period she was also engaged in agricultural labour and sex-slavery (wahiya). Besides being sexually abused, Haroua, her owner, opposed her marriage to another man and Naroua was jailed for bigamy. Anti-Slavery Campaigners in Hadijatou Mani's case believe that slavery is rampant in Africa despite legislative prohibitions submitting that there are over 43,000 persons enslaved in Niger Republic alone despite slavery's abolition in 2003 (Massalatchi, 2008).

The position of this study that the male gender is more commonly and regularly confronted in slavery accusation and servitude is further undercut by the United States Supreme Court decision in the Nestle's case involving child slave labour in Mali. In other words, slavery and servitude affect all kinds of sub-groups such as girls, boys, children, men and women to mention a few. In the Nestle's lawsuit, the United States Supreme Court declined to dismiss a claim seeking to make Nestle (a multinational company in beverages) accountable for using child slaves to harvest cocoa for cheap labour in Mali in West Africa. The suit was initiated by ex-children slavery victims in 2005 (Reuters, 2016). To demonstrate and confute further, the position of this study, the case of *Florolu v. Romania* (decided on 12/3/2013) establishes that such sub-groups as prisoners can be subject to slavery and servitude. In the case under reference, the applicant, Florolu, while in prison custody was servicing the motor vehicle fleet of the Prison Facility as a result of which 37 days was deducted from the length of his sentence. He however sued and claimed that he was entitled to be paid for the services rendered to the Facility. The European Court of Justice held that his claim that he be paid for the servicing of the vehicles of the Facility was unenforceable as it was labour done while 'under the ordinary course of detention' (European Court of Human Rights, 2002). However, in *Alade v. Federal Republic of Nigeria*, where Sikuru Alade was held in pretrial custody for more than nine years (awaiting trial), the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) found that the terms of his detention violated the prohibition of arbitrary detention under the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2012).

In this study, Chief Solomon Egwenu was a paid State government civil or public servant all his life until he retired to his micro community of Abbi. Throughout his service years, he was vibrant and known to be politically assertive and not a push over in the scheme of things. The facts he publishes of himself are self-evident and shall be used to interrogate the three prolonged accusations leveled against him in the course of the conversation. Although the discourse shall be opened to several perspectives it should be stated perfunctorily from the onset that *the culture of slavery in traditional context* as expounded by Duke and Osim (2020)

shall be emphasized and adopted in this study. They posit that slave culture is used to refer to all forms of behaviours, attitudes and living strategies that promote domination, oppression, inequality and dehumanization of persons. They further posit rightly that a traditional society (like Abbi) is one firmly guided by customs and habits that are handed over from the past generation for the organization of the present and future society.

Duke and Osim also posit that slaving culture is part and parcel of earthly society and its dynamics adapt to changing economic and socio-political needs of the individual and trends in society and that every historical epoch has its desire for a definition of slavery accusations which are ultimately determined by social interactions in the life of the people. While in full time service, the accusations of slavery leveled against Chief Solomon Egwenu were absent because he was not at home to closely participate in the decision making structures of Abbi community; he was an illustrious son then, but as soon as he retired home from government service to join his kinsmen in the day to day pull and push of decision making, the divergence of views or the superiority of arguments or the balance of the imaginary scale of justice in decision making have sold him out to the slur, stigmatization and scape-goating of his kinsmen. The volume of knowledge and the divergence of opinion between a highly educated and enlightened Abbi indigene cannot also be congruent with those that are not well travelled and who have been in the backwaters of Abbi community since childhood. In an attempt to agree and disagree in heated communal debates in decision making affecting land in tribal palaces, anger gets fired up and name calling and labeling result. Chiefs are known to attack one another when the chips are down in palaces and banal abuses may be deployed plus vulgar language exchanges but thereafter the impact of such verbal attacks may injure permanently, the feelings and personalities of victims and recourse to litigation for redress may in many circumstances be futile as they are largely retracted and discounted. Apologies sometime come later but before they do, the damage had already been done and the label sticks and becomes difficult to erase.

Statement of the Problem

Generally, the male gender is more susceptible to accusations of slavery than the female gender in Abbi, but what drives the accusations? Are the accusations real, well founded or they are mere caricatures of hatred and jealousy arising from local traditional political power disagreements? The accounts of authorities like Christelow (1985) on our knowledge of African slavery as being in serious constrains since the institution is now moribund require review. The fact that our knowledge of the history of slavery depends on oral accounts of natives and written accounts of early Europeans have been updated by recourse to judicial records which is a source often neglected by historians and writers on the subject. As this assignment presages, our review shall be assisted by recent accounts of judicial decisions across the world against the upsurge of modern slavery. The issue in this study therefore is whether the attempt sought to be made to reconcile the general body of the literature on the subject matter of slavery with the case that has been chosen for study: Suit No

NWACC/37/2021 Chief (Hon.) Solomon Egwenu v. Adolphus Okolafor Enueweosu: is useful or worthwhile.

This study is thus aware of the dignitary harms that attend to the subject matter of slavery conversation and commentary; the excruciating details of a brutal illegal system which ignores the humanity and sensibilities of victims to the extent that one of the greatest shortcoming of the status is not being considered a child of God (Sypher, 1939). As Simard (2020) admonishes, writers on slavery in our time should de-emphasize the old law and its illegitimacy. Emphasis should to be placed on the current law against slavery within the socio-political context that does not lionize slavery-like practices and what they stand for in relationship to conflicts and struggles in oil exploitation, land tenure holding, traditional title holding and its power benefits. The problem of a research of this nature therefore is that once the accusation is raised, it spreads like wildfire particularly amongst the ignorant that tend to believe without confronting the facts and having to read in between the lines but preferring to gesture that there is no smoke without a fire.

Objective of the Study

Eteng *et al* (2021) have seen slavery from the perspective of a common practice in most ancient cultures and civilizations which have been reinvigorated and are being replaced by more agonizing patterns of the modern scourge with many people coming under the capture of its umbrella which appear to give impetus for this enquiry to see whether the scope of the pernicious allegations against Chief Solomon Egwenu of Abbi can be plugged into the pigeonhole of modern slavery: whether from the economic perspective of his glorious public service being impugned or from his assertive comingling with his native Chiefs of Abbi in their boisterous disagreements on day to day land dispute decisions in the ever changing palaces of Abbi that run gerontocracy and patriarchy. How these decisions and accusations ensue from the victim's position and traditional power title as Okpulute-uku in the decision making process in the land related disputes shall be seated within the general spectrum of slavery in Abbi cultural milieu is the challenge if not the hallmark of this conversation.

Conceptual Clarification

Conceiving slavery

As Arocha (2010) makes clear, the starting hurdle in any study on slavery is the question of how it ought to be defined. He argues that theoretical analysis on the subject tends to pander towards generalizations underestimating the diversity of the practices and the experiences that can be related to slavery. Arocha raises the following questions, 'does slavery mean the same thing in all societies? Are there characteristics attributable to all forms of slavery? Or can modern slavery be distinguishable from the older genre?

A functional understanding of the concept of slavery from the Bellagio-Harvard Guideline on the legal framework of slavery is the power of control of one over another as one would possess a thing. Such control attaches with it the right of ownership including selling,

buying, using, managing, profiting, transferring or even killing the slave or the person held in slavery and servitude. The definition popularly offered by Slavery Convention 1926 (as cited in Allain; and Kiconco, 2021) that slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership is exercised was affirmed in the Australian case of *The Queen v. Tang* (2008) HCA 39. The 1926 Slavery Convention arose from Articles 22 and 23 of the 1919 Convention of the League of Nations which considered critically the status of the Mandate Territories of Central Africa that were transferred from defeated countries of Germany and Italy to the victorious ones of England and France at the end of the First World War. Perfunctorily, Articles 22 and 23 provide for the prohibition of slave trade and human rights associated with fair human conditions of labour for men, women and children. The articles were proposed with respect to Ethiopia which remained unconquered in Africa and was suspected of slave dealing (Allain).

The 1926 Convention conceived slave trade as all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts involved in the acquisition of a slave with a view to selling or exchanging him; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves. Viscount Cecil of Chelwood (as cited in Allain) defines it as the maintenance by a private individual of rights over another person of the same nature as the rights which an individual can have over things (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Allain however make useful clarifications as to the situations in which there are legitimate control in employer and employee relationships where lawful exercise of control and management occur in a workplace. What is focal point is the degree of control. For instance, in Arlington, Texas, USA a District Court Judge, John H. McBryde jailed Mr. and Mrs. Ngozi Ihechere Nnaji twenty and nine years respectively for enslaving a Nigerian widowed mother of six children for eight years for forced labour and seizure of documents in return for financial gains. The widow was lured into the US to work for the care of her six children but she got only \$300 for eight years under servitude whilst her passport and other vital documents were seized by the Nnajis who were further fined \$305,957.60. Essentially, the widow lost all elements of freedom and was not allowed to make calls to her children in Nigeria or converse with neighbours in the US except under the strictest observation, monitor and control (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010).

In *Nevsun Resources Ltd v Araya* there was an appeal from the British Columbia wherein three Eritrean workers claimed that they were indefinitely conscripted through the Eritrea's military service into a forced labour regime where they were required to work at a mine in violent, cruel and inhuman conditions with degrading treatment. It was the argument and submission of the owners of the mine, Nevsun Resources Ltd, that the claim be declined and struck out by the Court but it was refused because it was held sustainable. Yet, in *Slavery case against Niger before ECOWAS Court* 260 families of Danki village took Niger Republic before the ECOWAS Court of Justice over a ruling of a Nigerien court which found that ex-slaves were not entitled to own land after they had been set free by the 2003 law

prohibiting slavery in Niger. Their appeal to the ECOWAS Court in claims amounting to 2 billion CFA Francs has been adjourned for judgment (Djeugoue, 2019).

Modern slavery

In recent times the concepts of slavery, slave and servitude have acquired widespread categories beyond the narrow indentured or bounded labour prism they used to be confined. In fact, according to Simard (2020) the coast that the concepts are currently occupying has continued to expand making it largely meaningless that over 600,000 soldiers had to die in a single war for their existence or non-existence yet the institutions and legal jurisprudence around them have continued to mushroom. LeighDay (2023) has carefully demonstrated the magnitude of the new scourge and the evidence used to express it falls within violence and threat of violence; restrictions of movement; denial of wages or threat to expose victims to authorities for non-possession of valid documents or possession of invalid and faked or inadequate ones. Furthermore, LeighDay categorizes modern slavery as human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, child slavery, prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Modern Slavery Act, 2015 consolidates these acts and offences as the exploitation of people for personal, financial or commercial gains. It occurs when people are controlled by others, often forced into labour through threats. The current market of slavery according to LeighDay is estimated at 115 million pounds sterling worldwide and more than 40 million people are affected. Almost 25 million are trapped in the forced labour field alone. Instances of modern slavery are more intriguing than the old genres the most popular of which were the trans-Sahara and trans-Atlantic slave trades. Currently, it trends beyond ill-human treatments and crude exploitation of labour to transnational economic exploitation by multinationals of all hues especially oil companies. In Ghana, a group of 60 children aged five to seventeen years old called out Olam to court for negligence and unlawful exploitation of labour and inhuman conditions of work while Olam unjustifiably continued to enrich itself (LeighDay, 2023). In *Kiobel v. Royal Dutch Petroleum Co.* No. 10 – 1491 (U.S. 2012) while Shell argued that allowing corporations to be sued for torts like slavery and genocide would be sorely inconvenient, the U.S. brief argued that action can be sustained against Shell in the US if the corporation has a strong connection with USA as there is no international law norm distinguishing corporations from natural persons in slavery and the amicus brief argued that claimants originally from Ogoni in Nigeria should be entitled to approach the court against Shell.

In 2020 alone, over 52 cases of forced labour were reported in Nigeria by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) and another 27 were reported in the first quarter of 2021. From 2004 till date about 15,863 victims of human trafficking have been rescued at the ratio of 11,430 females to 4,430 males (The Nature and Extent of Criminal Groups...). The numbers are sobering. About 1,611,000 people are living in modern slavery in Nigeria alone out of a population of 206,140,000 with a current GDP per capita of \$5,186 (Walk Free Global Slavery Index, 2023). On the other hand, during the trans-Atlantic

slave trade, about 13 million Africans were illegally transported from West Africa (on the whole) to the western hemisphere and of this 11,328,000 went to the new world (Laremont, 2023). In the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Britain, France and Portugal etc were clearly involved but in modern slavery everyone (nations and non-nations) is involved. Forced labour for instance varies according to gender and age but is more in the informal sector. Men and boys are into street vending and domestic servitude while women and girls are more in domestic servitude, forced marriage and commercial sex work (Walk Free Global Slavery Index, 2023). For Kalu (2004) there is nothing absolutely old or new in slavery. It is notorious that new or modern slavery of trafficking in human beings is just an old wine in a new bottle as it is as wide spread as to defile location. Its constituency is the entire globe: east, west, north and south and perhaps, it is more virulent than the old and the push and pull factors canvassed by Okogbule (2013) are high levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and marginalization.

Theoretical Framework

Several theories fit into the study of slavery. Arun and Olsen (2023) have discussed quite a number of them such as supply-chain, diffusion of innovation, intersectional gender and development theories. However, these theoretical approaches suit mainstream and modern slavery (Aworawo, 2001). Majeed and Malik (2017) have also considered the cost benefit (rational choice) theory in slavery studies but the frameworks seemingly applicable by the nature of the facts yielded in this study are conflict, structural-functionalism and labeling theories (The Cause and Consequence...) which are considered below.

Labeling theory

This theory postulates that individuals know themselves by how others label them. This theory is directly related to symbolic interaction. As individuals interact in the society they come in contact with one another and they form impressions and opinions about one another and also conflict with one another over power, roles, values, resources and space. The roles individuals play affect them and those around them; it could yield auspicious or inauspicious consequences. Communication is thus important in the interaction between members of the society: groups, sub-groups and their use of language, symbols and signs. It is the negative reaction of others to a particular behaviour of an individual that causes others to label him negatively or positively (Skaggs, 2023). The labeling of Chief Solomon Egwenu by Chief Enebeli as a non-native of Abbi and a leader of the violent gang of Umu-Ugbo criminals in Umia Quarters, Abbi; the labeling of Chief Solomon Egwenu as a foolish man who was dismissed from service without pension and gratuity; and those of Chief Enueweosu that Chief Egwenu is not a native of Abbi and does not know what he is submitting and deciding as the Okpulute-uku in the Onotu-Uku-in Council of Umia Quarters may all have largely arisen from the role Chief Solomon Egwenu plays in the palace and how the role has negatively impacted on the sensibilities of the accusers who are also fellow chiefs in the community.

The process of labeling also gets Chief Solomon Egwenu stigmatized as a *slave*. Indeed, he was avowedly stating with his witnesses before the trial court that his accusers meant, by calling him a non-native, that he is a slave. This was despite the fact that none of the accusers could be pinned down to the use of the word 'slave' as can be deduced from the facts of the accusations. He wanted the court to infer from the statements of his accusers that he was being stigmatized and labeled as a slave in Abbi community and approached the court to put a stop to it through all the well known remedies of payment of monetary damages for defamation of character, publication of rebuttals in local and national newspapers and even the use of town criers to revoke the accusations during four consecutive market days so that market women could be aware of the revocation.

Conflict theory

It is one of the basic principles of conflict theory that individuals in society interact on the basis of conflict than agreement. It argues that social structures are created through conflict between individuals and groups over differing interests, values and resources (Social Conflict, Wikipedia). In Abbi, the institution of Inotu title grade has a council of chiefs bestowed with the powers to wage native war on behalf of the community. The territorial integrity of the community and the administration of traditional justice are within the purview of the council. Only natives of the community are presumably admitted into the title cadre of the inotus. The subject matters that come before them mainly are land disputes and consideration of issues related to the celebration of festivals. The decision at the Palace of the Onotu-Uku-in-Council is however subject to appeal before the Okpala Uku-in-Council. The Okpala Uku-in-Council is perhaps the highest decision making body in Abbi gerontocracy. The decisions of the two Councils yield awards that are as good as a judgment of a conventional trial court.

It is in the process of conflict resolution before the Onotu-uku's palace that all the slavery-like accusations against Chief Solomon Egwenu emerged. When Chief G. N. A. Enebeli was pontificating, that Chief Solomon Egwenu was not a native of Abbi but Onicha-Ukwuani, he was doing so within the wells of the Palaces of the Onotu-uku and Okpala-uku of Abbi. When he sent a text message to Chief Neku Oputa he was complaining about the leadership and the mode of celebration of the Ukwata festival and the desire to do so jointly. Also, when Chief Sunday Ovil Obafe accused the victim of being a foolish man and a retiree without pension, it was arising from Chief Obafe's dissatisfaction over a decision in a land dispute before the Palace of the Onotu-uku. The conflicts between these two chiefs with Chief Solomon Egwenu synchronize with that between the latter and Chief Enueweosu at the same Palace of Chief Matthew Udi, the Onotu-uku of Umia Quarters, Abbi.

Structural functional theory

As Garner (2019) states, structural functional theory focuses on structure (as such as the structure of the institution of the Onotu-uku-in-Council, the composition of Abbi into quarters, streets and the organization of the community in order to achieve cohesion and

organic control. Such festivals as Ukwata are celebrated to bring all natives home annually during which matters affecting the members of the families and the community as a whole are tabled. Patterns of roles and distribution of resources, duties, powers, age grade graduation and nativity initiations and values are worked out for the overall existence and continuity of the community. The conflicts and disagreements which occur and give rise to the institution of the various actions in defamation of character are considered part of the integral whole. The institution of the court is also considered as a structural part of the community for it also makes decisions that are binding on the erring chiefs if they are found liable in the courts of law for the slavery accusations. The choice of the victim to also access and ventilate his grievance before the court is an integral part of exploiting the functional role of the court in the organic and or mechanical solidarities and controls of the community (Nickerson, 2023).

Literature Review

Chief Enebeli's accusation

Trouble began to brew between Chief Solomon Egwenu and his kinsmen in Abbi when Chief Enebeli G. N. A. blew the first salvo that Chief Solomon Egwenu 'is not a native of Abbi community but of Onicha-Ukwuani; a comment and statement repeatedly made in English and Ukwuani languages on 4th and 12th March, 2020 at the Palace of the Okpala Uku of Abbi community'. Chief Enebeli G. N. A. proceed to forward a text message thereafter into the phone book (inbox) of Chief Neku Opute of Abbi concerning Chief Solomon Egwenu as follows, 'Chf N Opute, ebi, it's surprising that an Abbi person or persons could write a petition to the DSS (Department of State Services) Kwale against me on the issue of joint celebration of Abbi Ukwata Festival. I have never in my life written any petition against any individual not to talk of writing against an Abbi person...The threat is to burn my house, my car, kidnap and kill me and my wife. And you know that Umugbo and Umia people have a penchant for all these crimes. I give you this information so that you please advise their leaders, Chf Ikenwugu S, Chf Solomon Egwenu and Deputy Onotuku of Umia to restrain their followers. I know they listen to you... For if anything untoward happens to me in any respect, these leaders will be held accountable. I am not the Okpala Uku or the Onotu Uku. My sin is I refused to join the Deputy Onotu Uku of Umia Chf Solomon Ojinika in his opposition to Okpala Uku. Right now, I am in Abbi. I hope you will come for the feast. Good evening. Chf Enebeli, G. N. A.'

Chief Enebeli is a lawyer and a retired Executive Manager of the Central Bank of Nigeria. He is of the Ogwezzi-Amacha family, one of the families which readily come to the fore in the assertion of the aboriginal status as the founders of Abbi community where the Ukwata Festival is globally acclaimed as their cultural festival and gift to the world during which annual celebration, all indigenes of Abbi community are enjoined to travel from far and wide to attend and celebrate. Chief Neku Opute on the other hand is also an astute lawyer and a retired Deputy Superintendent of Police and former Director of Security Services Chevron, Nigeria. When thereafter he transmitted the text message to Chief Solomon

Egwenu, the latter felt aggrieved and briefed a Solicitor on 22nd March, 2020 to approach the High Court of Justice, Kwale for a suit in defamation of character. He claimed in the Statement of Claim in the suit which was later abandoned that by the publication which was without any provocation or excuse Chief Enebeli meant that 'the claimant is a leader of kidnappers and arsonists; that the claimant petitioned Chief Enebeli to the Department of State Services; that the claimant threatened to burn the defendant's house, kill him and his wife; that as a leader of Umia and Umugbo people the claimant has the penchant to lead his people to commit these crimes; that the claimant is amenable to the advice of Chief Neku Opute; and that the claimant shall be held responsible if anything untoward should happen to the defendant, his wife, car and house.' Three witnesses to Chief Solomon Egwenu who filed their witnesses' statement and deposition on oath in the ill-fated suit were Chief Neku Opute, Chief Orsino Chimsunum and Chief Wilson Mba.

In the suit which claimed N50,000,000.00 Chief Solomon Egwenu desired 'an order of the court restraining the defendant from making such further defamatory statements particularly that he was not from Abbi but from Onicha-Ukwuani, a distant community within Ndokwa West Local Government Area of Delta State'. The claimant further desired 'an order compelling the defendant to tender a public apology through "a town crier for four Eke Market days in Abbi" and in a publication in the Pointer, Vanguard, Sun, Punch and the Nation newspapers. In order to join issues with Chief Enebeli, Chief Egwenu proceeded to plead as follows, 'I am a native of Abbi from Eba-Okpala in Umugbo Street in Umia Quarters of Abbi town. I am a direct descendant of Egwenu, the son of Enwefa, the son of Odufu, the son of Onyenibe, the son Onwuka, the son of Ugbo, the son of Aninta, the son of Udu, the son of Amacha who is the founder of Abbi. I am also maternally from Abbi because of my father whose mother is the daughter of Osuya Ikote of Umu-Onyugba and was one time Ada (most senior female) of Abbi community. By virtue of my originality from Abbi, I inherited from my ancestral fathers of Onwuka and Ugbo, so many farmlands and ponds which make up a large chunk of Onwuka family land. My late father, Egwenu Enwefa, lived and became the head of Onwuka family until his demise on 6th February, 1969. He stood and swore over the Umu-Onwuka family lands and served the ancestral gods and jujus till death'.

Perhaps, it is relevant to locate the crux of the dispute between the Chiefs in the context that the accusation of non-nativity arose against Chief Solomon Egwenu. As Chief G. N. A. Enebeli encapsulated it in the text message to Chief Neku Opute, it had to do with the disagreement 'on the issue of joint celebration of Abbi Ukwata Festival'. If an insight is to be given over the disagreement at this stage, Abbi community has had the steely disaggregation between Okwelle and Echalla quarters (the two communities that make up Abbi) from time outside human memory. The desire of a pan-Abbi man like Chief G. N. A. Enebeli is to use the joint celebration of the Ukwata Festival to bring Okwelle and Echalla communities together to foster unprecedented unity between the two brother communities. But those who are versatile in the cords that hold Abbi community together believe that such a move would turn Abbi asunder because the separate celebration of the

Ukwata Festival makes Abbi thick, colourful and divergent thusly promoting healthy competitions amongst the people.

Advocates of joint celebration are further viewed with askance because behind their advocacy and propulsion masquerades the anachronistic attitude of the Amacha stock in Abbi to weave the sentimental claim of aboriginality and founding fatherhood of Abbi not only against Ndueze and Owolokpo families of Echalla quarter but the spread of the notion to Okwelle quarters thereby igniting widespread unrest and crisis due to the unpopularity of the claim and desire. Therefore, in order to allow peace to reign and allow the tapestry of the founding fathers remain separate celebration is urged by modern elites in the likes of Chief Solomon Egwenu. And as excepted Chief Solomon Egwenu and his younger elites had the day but at the predation of the Chief Enebeli group. Though it did not take the guise of the joint Ukwata Festival celebration, it took that of land dispute. It did not also concern Chief G. N. A. Enebeli, it concerned Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe. It did not also come in the nature of an attack against the political and traditional background of Chief Solomon Egwenu, it came in the form of his socio-economic, educational and official work background and history.

Chief Obafe's accusation

In a Solicitor's letter to Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe of Umu-Onyugba Street, Abbi, Counsel to Chief Solomon Egwenu had stated, 'We are Solicitors to Chief Solomon Egwenu whose character was defamed by you on Nkwo-day in the evening between 7.30 to 8.25 pm on 11th April, 2021 at Chief Matthew Udi's Palace over a piece of land dispute between Chief Emu and Mister Tem whereof you published of and concerning Chief Solomon Egwenu words to the effect that, 'He is a foolish useless man who was dismissed from his official employment with Delta State Government and has no pensions and gratuities'. Learned Counsel continued, 'We beg to state that this is a criminal slander and defamation of character that is not only false but malicious. Chief Solomon Egwenu was a Chief Nursing Officer Grade 1 on grade level 16 as well as Principal, State School of Nursing, Agbor Delta State from 2007 to 2012 and retired with full benefits, gratuity and pension. He receives his monthly pension till date from Trust Fund Pensions. Your allegations have done so much damage to our client's reputation and integrity as they were made in the presence of Chief Matthew Udi (Onotu Uku of Umia Quarters, Abbi), Chief Godday Esenwugu, Chief Solomon Ojinika (Deputy Onotu Uku of Umia), Chief Augustine Osagu (Secretary to Inotus-in-Council of Umia), Chief Emeka Chukwuka and Chief Tom Enuewenba'.

Framing a civil summons in the sum of N10,000,000 attached to the notice of demand headed for the Chief Magistrate's Court Abbi, Chief Solomon Egwenu gave Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe 14 days within which to pay the claim otherwise the claim was to be fixed for hearing. As stated in the claim, the context and occasion of the defamation arose from communal issues associated with decision making in the resolution of land disputes between other parties. In patriarchal Abbi, land ownership is a serious issue of contention. Traditional decision making in Abbi traditional councils (whether at the Okpala Uku or the

lower Onotu Uku Palaces) is influenced by the depth of the disputants' pockets. A lot of lobbying and behind the scene settlement of the arbiters take place. It is notorious that the Chiefs openly take sides besides being openly attached as members of the disputing families and ownership of land in Abbi is largely on the basis of the family. To have resorted to publicly announcing that Chief Solomon Egwenu is 'a foolish useless man' may not be unconnected with bias and such undue influence in traditional decision making. However, it needs to be stated that Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe is a henchman of Ogwezzi-Amacha family and his Umu-Onyugba Street is a core place of Ogwezzi-Amacha family root. In the case to be cited anon, Suit No: NWACC/37/2021 Chief Solomon Ewenu v. Chief Enueweosu Adolphus Okoloafor, which was filed on 11th November, 2021 in which the saga of slavery accusation fully came to the fore and received a full blown trial, Chief Egwenu articulated the unique position of the Ogwezzi-Amacha family of Umu-Onyugba Street where his paternal mother hails from as follows, 'My father's mother is from Umu-Onyugba Street. Osuya was her name. She was the daughter of Ikote and reigned as the Ada of Abbi; the oldest woman of Abbi. Umu-Onyugba today possesses the authority of the ancestral shrine of Abbi Echalla and they are the *only people competent* to move the ancestral shrine from one eldest man (the Okpala Uku) to another'.

Chief Enueweosu's accusation

Chief Solomon Egwenu's claim against Chief Enueweosu Adolphus Okoloafor, defendant in NWACC/37/2021, was couched as follows, 'The parties are both natives of Abbi within the jurisdiction of the honourable court. The plaintiff is a retired public servant and currently the Head of Department of Nursing, Novena University, Amai Campus. The defendant has defamed the character of the plaintiff in the gathering of Chiefs and well meaning persons in the Palace of the Onotu-Uku of Abbi by calling the plaintiff a stranger element in Abbi; referring to the plaintiff as being a non-indigene thereby exposing the plaintiff to hatred, ridicule, discredit and injury of his reputation built over several years. By so doing and calling the plaintiff a stranger, the defendant has distorted and is attempting to distort the traditional and historical origin of the plaintiff, his forbears and his off-springs'. Chief Solomon Egwenu thusly claimed the sum of N500,000.00 being damages for defamation of character and perpetual injunction restraining the defendant from further publication of the defamatory words.

Before laying out the evidence of the plaintiff at the trial Area Customary Court, Kwale, it is necessary to present the evidence of Chief Solomon Ojinika (the Deputy Onotu Uku) who volunteered to be a witness and who had been present in all the three incidences in which the awful accusation of slavery had been leveled against Chief Solomon Egwenu. On 18th September, 2023 Chief Solomon Ojinika, a retired Corporal of the Nigerian Army stated as follows, 'I live at 21 Ejakita Street, Abbi and I know the parties. We are all chiefs in Umia Quarters of Abbi. It happened that when all Chiefs gathered there was an argumentative allegation to the effect that the defendant said the plaintiff was not from Abbi through his father (that is paternally). Everyone in the gathering got surprised that he said so. The

members were highly embarrassed and he was asked where the father of the plaintiff came from but he could not give an answer to the question. Rather, he claimed before the gathered Chiefs that anyone who wanted to know where the father of the plaintiff came from should come to his residence for explanation and lecture.'

Chief Solomon Ojinika continued before the trial Area Customary Court, Kwale as follows, 'However, nobody agreed to go to the defendant's residence but on a second date when the meeting of the Chiefs reconvened, we asked him again whether he knew that the import of what he said was an abusive word? He was asked to apologize to Chief Solomon Egwenu but he said he would not apologize and charged the victim to go to hell to ventilate his grievance leading the plaintiff to file this suit.' Prodded by Counsel to Chief Solomon Egwenu to state to the trial court how he, Chief Solomon Ojinika felt about the entire incident, he averred further as follows, 'I felt very sad because I know that Solomon Egwenu's father is from Abbi. I was the Deputy Onotu Uku of Umia Quarters, Abbi and I regarded what the defendant said to be unlawful. The impression the defendant created was that Solomon Egwenu was *a slave in Abbi and the implication of that is that Solomon Egwenu cannot aspire to any traditional office, role, rank or kingship of Abbi.*

Victim confronts accusers

Having stated the gravamen of the case of slavery accusation against Chief Solomon Egwenu it would be necessary however regurgitating it may be to reproduce the evidence of the plaintiff before the trial court as stated by him under oath, 'I am Chief Honourable Solomon E. O. Egwenu, I hold three Master degrees. I reside in Eba Okpala in Umia Quarters Abbi in Ndokwa West Local Government Area. I am a pensioner. I retired as Principal Chief Executive, State School of Nursing, Agbor, Delta State and currently the Head of Department of Nursing, Novena University, Amai. I retired on 31st December 2012. I was a Supervisory Councilor for Health in the old Ndokwa Local Government Council 1991 to 1992 before the Council was split into three: being Ukwuani, Ndokwa West and Ndokwa East Local Government Councils. I am maternally from Ogume in Ndokwa West Local Government Area in that my mother is from Igbe Ogume and I took my first traditional Inotu title from Igbe Ogume about 30 years ago. My biological mother, Madam Catherina Orjie Egwenu (nee Anie) is from Igbe Ogume. Anie is the son of Omolu son of Odigwe son of Odia son of Uti son of Ifiloji son of Igbe founder of Igbe Ogume and Igbe is the second son of Ezedogume the founder of Ogume clan. In 2008, I became an Inotu title holder in Umia Quarters, Abbi and currently I am a High Chief with the traditional title of Okpulute-Uku in Umia in Echalla in Abbi. Okpulute is a very senior chieftaincy title above Eze-Ozoginiogwe which I had enjoyed previously'.

'As Okpulute, I am a member of the Okpala Uku-in-Council and also a member of the Inotu-in-Council in charge of traditional and community issues involving policy formulation and implementation. We are involved in adjudication on traditional matters, internal communal crisis, disputes on land matters and ownership within our jurisdiction. I am married to Gladys Egwenu nee Eka-Iloma (the author of Abbi, Her People and History) from Okwelle

Quarters, Abbi. I have eight children: six boys and two girls. My children are scattered all over the world. My first daughter, a journalist, is married and resides in Asaba, Delta State. My second child, a son, is a bio-pharmacist in Lagos. My third child is a quantity surveyor in Lagos. My fourth and fifth children are in Lagos. The sixth is a legal practitioner based in FCT, Abuja. My seventh child is in Malaysia and the eighth child is residing at Agbor. The defendant is one Chief Anthony Okoloafor Adolphus Eneweosu based in Abbi running a trado-medical church. He is a junior Chief. He is an Ozojiniogwe chief who we send on errands to represent the Chiefs during initiation ceremonies for new chiefs. He is amongst those who go to dance in the homes of the newly initiated chiefs and get entertained there. Concentrating on the factual circumstances that led to the accusation, Chief Solomon Egwenu continued after restating his genealogy as canvassed in the High Court suit against Chief G. N. A. Enebeli as follows, 'I happened to be a member of a sub-committee of Chiefs appointed by the community and the Council of Chiefs to adjudicate over a land dispute between Ogbeti Street and Umu-Owolokpo family. We were almost at the verge of settling the matter and then directed the two parties to proceed to serve and revoke the various jujus they invoked against themselves in the course of the dispute and to do a written intention of their desires to withdraw the cases before this very court. Ogbeti family complied and wrote a letter of withdrawal while the Owolokpo family insisted that they must confer with their son who lives in Lagos, Chief Augustine Okwelum, who finances their litigations, before they could decide on what to do. Based on their position, we decided to adjourn the sitting to enable them make their son available. On the date of reconvention, Chief Augustine Okwelum came to the palace appearing with the defendant, Chief Enueweosu who was neither a member of Umu-Owolokpo family nor Ogbeti family nor a member of the sub-committee constituted to look into and settle the matter. In fact, he is an Ogwezzi-Amacha family member and as soon as he arrived the gathering, we suspected that he was out for mischief and had an agenda of his to execute. He was unruly and aggressive to everyone.'

'When the Onotu Uku directed me to brief the house on the developments in the resolution of the dispute so far, he interrupted me immediately and called out on me saying, "Shut up! What do you have to say? Are you a native of Abbi? You are not a native of Abbi! Keep quiet!" The Chiefs in the Council cautioned him to withdraw the malicious and defamatory statements but he insisted and insulted the Inotus in the Council that they are "useless Inotus". When Eze-Ozoinogwe (Leader of junior Chiefs like him) Chief S. N. Ikewugwu cautioned him, the defendant told him to shut up! The defendant went further to ask us (the Council) what gives us the impetus to talk to him. He told the house, "If you want further information on why Solomon Egwenu is not a native of Abbi, you can come and pay me for the lecture and I will educate you on it". The defendant emphasized that he meant what he said that I am not a native of Abbi. One of the three members of the Inotu title age grade in the Council cautioned him further by stating, "When you call somebody a slave, the onus is on you to prove who bought the slave and where he was bought". But the defendant stuck to his ground without mentioning who bought me and where I was bought. It is a cause of

concern to me that someone should allege that I am not an indigene of Abbi thus implying that I am a slave or without parental lineage in Abbi. The allegation therefore is not only annoying, derogatory, defamatory and intended to rubbish the historical foundation of Egwenu family but it is untrue and purveyed in bad faith. It is not only intended to impugn my integrity and cast aspersion on me by bastardizing my history and those of my children but runs contrary to the Nigerian constitution. Based on the foregoing, I chose to seek redress from court instead of self-help. I claim N500,000.00'.

Victim confronts accusations

In what way then can this study draw perceptible evidence of the victim's slavery from the facts laid out in the foregoing factual literature? In the first instance, Chief G. N. A. Enebeli sought to allege that the victim was from Onicha-Ukwuani community not Ogume community and to that extend, not a native of Abbi. The accusation is the least debilitating as it does not fall on any tangible template and the accuser never had the opportunity to demonstrate and prove it. Moreover, Chief Enebeli's allegations in the text message to Chief Neku Opute sought to cloth the victim with an appreciable level and garb of leadership within Umu-Ugbo Street and Umia Quarters, Abbi. The accuser believed that the victim had the capacity to goad his followers to kill the accuser and or his wife and burn down his house and or car. Chief Enebeli's case can be carefully understood to fall within the category of common place conflict as a disagreement or an adversarial relationship between two parties with a range of issues connecting power, values, divergent cultural views and the way forward in the deconstruction of the relationship between members of the quarters and the quarters themselves within Abbi in relationship to the use of the universally acclaimed Ukwata Festival as a cement and building block in Abbi nation building (Adetunberu, 2023). Not much useful purpose can thusly be served by Chief Enebeli's accusation in this study as the nativity allegation raised by him has no legal and factual foundation.

The next accusation by Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe that the victim is a foolish, useless man who was dismissed from his official employment with Delta State Government and has no pensions and gratuities, smacks of an attack against the criminal record of the victim firstly as to whether he committed a criminal offence that led to his dismissal from service leading to his loss of right of pension and gratuity. Secondly, an innuendo to the effect that the victim has no gainful engagement and economic financial base predisposing the victim into intermeddling in communal and traditional adjudication without authority and probably, insufficient knowledge of the traditional history and evidence of the facts of the land dispute in issue. The teeth of this innuendo can be found in the accusation of Chief Enueweosu signified by calling the victim out in the following caustic statements and remarks, 'Shut up! Keep quiet! What do you have to say? Are you a native of Abbi?' What actually would a stranger have to say about the history of his host if the chips are down? Natives have a way of demonstrating that their rights and affairs should not be adjudicated upon by a stranger. It has earlier been submitted and the fact may require re-emphasizes

that many problems in micro communities may be rooted in the use of power in decision making in traditional society making those aggrieved to take it unkindly against traditional judges due to the strong belief in the influence and drive of subterranean forces in decision making such as corruption, bribery and influence peddling.

Although Chief Enueweosu did not mention any clan apart from Abbi that the victim can be traced to, the victim himself affirmatively declared that his biological mother comes from the neighbouring community of Igbe Ogume where he took his first chieftaincy title more than 30 years ago before acquiring the chieftaincy title of Abbi. Could the recurring accusations of the trio of Enebeli, Obafe and Enueweosu be situated within the Ogume nativity of the victim? Could the trio be suggesting and signaling to the fact that the victim's dual celebration of the nativity of Ogume and Abbi in Inotu title holding contemporaneously in a lifetime is contrary to native law and custom? As shall be demonstrated anon by Eka-Iloma (2017) maternal origin in Abbi is well ensconced in the practice of *Idegbe* and *Nwa-uso*. Could they be suggesting that by firstly part-taking in the intricate mandatory traditional nativity initiations in Ogume 30 years ago, the victim had sold out to his maternal lineage? Could they be arguing that it was repugnant to Abbi culture and tradition to part-take in the Inotu title initiation ceremony of Abbi after the victim had, many years ago, given his allegiance to his maternal community of Igbe Ogume? It would appear as if the confidence with which Ozoginowe Chief Enueweosu was confronting the Onotu-in-Council and challenging them to a lecture, teaching and enlightenment on the imbroglio had more meaning than meets the eye and the level and concurrency with which the accusation was being raised may not be unconnected with the 30 years ago initiation and how contradictory or conflicting it may stand with the Abbi nativity initiation. In other words, if the victim is to be subjected to a choice between which to support in a state of war between Abbi and Ogume, which will he choose?

Nativity initiations and celebrations

A close study of the two nativity initiations and distinction has to be drawn between the two chieftaincy title initiations. Recourse shall be had to three contemporary authorities on the histories, customs and traditions relating to Inotu title order of Abbi and Ogume; namely: Eka-Iloma (2017), Oweh (2018) and Ekele (2000). In the neighbouring community of Ogume, Ekele (2000) writes that Inotu title grade does not necessarily make a member a Chief but an Ajieh and although he called for clarifications on this artificial score, the title grade requires a special initiation and celebration ceremonies in that it occurs once every five years coinciding with the graduation of the male gender in the seven cluster villages of Ogume (Ogbe Ogume, Ogbagu Ogume, Igbe Ogume, Ogbole Ogume, Umuchime Ogume, Utue Ogume and Obodougwa Ogume) from one age grade to another. The candidates are thus initiated in accordance with the age grade system and the age grade of those moving to Inotu title order is referred to as Otun-nta age grade. The initiation is not only compulsory but mandatory for every male of the clan. The title is seen as a necessity because if a member of the age-grade fails to join in the initiation, his balloon of self-pride and worth

and those of his family and up-springs are punctured and deflated. And if perhaps the member is the most senior in the age grade, he loses all privileges accorded to seniority and becomes a member of the *Otu-uku* grade regarded as 'a servant group' of his age grade. It is the vicissitudes, the push and pull of this condition of membership of *Otu-uku* (that is the lifetime inability to measure up to one's age mates) that presages accusation of slavery through bonded labour, debt bondage and such strain and strand of modern slavery. Studying closely the supply-chain of modern slavery, Bodendorf et al (2022) believes that economic failure factors in life have a significant impact on contemporary slavery.

The significant point that Ekele (2000, p. 39) makes is that the first condition to qualify for initiation is that the candidate must not be a *slave*. This critical point for the purpose of this study implies that slavery can be conceptualized in Ogume cosmology. Further, a candidate must not have strictures such as having been convicted of stealing, adultery, lying, and playing pranks. And unlike in Okwelle quarters of Abbi where women can be admitted into the order, Ogume community and Echalla quarters of Abbi do not accept women in the Inotu titled grade. Okwelle quarters of Abbi therefore exhibits a more tolerant gender balance in the order but it is notable that only women of astute substance can be admitted. Such women included Chief Mrs. Agnes Okwose, Chief Mrs. Ezinmalu Eni and Chief Mrs. Marian Anna Okolocha (all of blessed memory). The initiation process starts from June of the initiation year contrary to the position in Abbi where initiation may take place anytime any year. In the five years preceding the year of initiation, the Ogume candidate referred to and called or greeted *Uche-Aku* and his wife greeted *Oche-Ego* or *Okechi Ekpa* are to save frugally for the initiation year and the couple begins the process by going to the Onotu-Uku Palace (the leader of the Inotu age grade) and the Ada Palace (the oldest woman in the community) to register their intentions to be admitted into the order in a ceremony called *Ibu-Ego* or *Ikpanku*.

The candidate is later visited by the *Ogbenegbe* group usually accompanied by trumpeters to inspect the prepared and proposed items for the initiation ceremony usually 40 tubers of yams, 40 rounded dry fish, basket of kola nuts and 30 beer bottles of local dry gin. This group is later followed in quick and dramatic succession by the *Osele* who comes into the compound to ask the candidate whether he is prepared for the initiation ceremony upon which the candidate is swiftly invited to the Palace of the Onotu Uku for the *Ido Uzu* (white chalking) ceremony during which the rules and regulations of the order are pronounced to the candidate and his wife or wives. About a month thereafter, the candidate is gorgeously dressed and makes a triumphant outing to the village square in a ceremony called *Ipu Afia* where he is sprayed with money by his well wishers and family members.

In Abbi, as captured by Oweh (2018, p. 58), the Inotu chieftaincy is the most popular and prestigious. It is meant for the rich and wealthy who can afford it as not everyone can foot the bill as it is used to display opulence and affluence. It is thusly discretionary and not mandatory as quite a number of rich folks in Abbi avoid it for personal or religious reasons. Lack of good moral standings may also deny a candidate of the title and while it is a male gendered title in Echalla, the female gender can be initiated into the order in Okwelle, Abbi.

The Inotu Council of Chiefs headed by the Onotu Uku is saddled with the defence of the territory of Abbi and wages war on behalf of the community. Its second significant role which this study imbricates is the judicial function: the settlement of local disputes between individuals and or families in accordance with custom and tradition of Abbi.

According to Eka-Illoma (2017, p. 91) a person is a native of Abbi if he comes from Okwelle or Echalla quarters with his father being a native or his mother (who is not married) being a native of Abbi. The later person is called *Nwa Idegbe* or *Amu Ekulu* or *Nwa Uso*. This does not connote slavery as the person is a son or daughter of an unmarried woman (who is a native of Abbi) and in this regard, he bears his mother's father's name as his father and can inherit the mother's father's property without encumbrances. Accordingly, a candidate for initiation into the Inotu title grade in Abbi must have a sponsor who must be an Inotu title holder to mediate for him before the Onotu Uku who initiates him after he and his mediator have consulted the Deputy Onotu Uku, the Ugo Uku (Speaker) and the Okpulute Uku (the leader of the upper echelon of the Inotus) in a ceremony referred to as *Ikumpi* (lurking of horns). After screening the candidate against financial and moral backgrounds, the Onotu Uku summons a meeting of the Council where the candidate and his mediator presents N50,000 (as at 2017 when Eka Illoma wrote) with a hot drink, a carton of Star beer, a carton of Stout beer, a bottle of local dry gin and a jar of palm wine. The candidate is chalked on the face and both hands. Thereafter, the Ozoginogwe cadre of the Inotus leads the candidate home in a dance procession where celebrations are held. After entertainments at the candidate's home, a young plantain tree is cut and placed across the entrance of the abode of the candidate and it is trampled under feet to mark the end of the ceremony.

Nativity initiations negate slavery

Now, where lies the ownership of a person as property especially in regards to the victim's labour (Wikipedia) in the facts of the initiation ceremonies of nativities in Abbi and Ogume narrated in the preceding section? The facts are not even cast in the emancipatory campaign flavour that Afigbo (2023) confronted in *The Abolition of Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885 – 1950* which shed light on the 'important dark corner of the social history of the region' which Abbi community belongs. A thesis statement for slavery which suggests that it was supported because it made the owner enormous wealth and it took war to abolish it (Thesis Statement...Bartleby) does not tally with the templates of this study. A situation in which work or service is exacted from the victim under the menace of any penalty and for which the victim has not offered himself voluntarily has not been established in this study (Jernow, 2009) or, did Chief Sunday Ovili Obafe anchor this in relationship with the victim's work history with the Delta State Government and School of Nursing Agbor. Yet, two perspectives can be suggested from the accusations of Chiefs Obafe and Enueweosu. For Chief Obafe, can it be said that the victim laboured in bondage for the Delta State Government and the School of Nursing Agbor hence he has no pension and gratuity? The response is null. And for Chief Enueweosu, can it be argued that the victim is laboring for Abbi community as Okpulute-uku for which he arrogates adjudicatory

powers without remuneration from the community for his labour and thusly a slave for the community? Abbi community does not have a template for community slavery. Does the victim not suffer indignity harm from members of the community who suffer from the adjudicatory role of the victim in the Onotu-uku-in-Council as the Okpulute-uku of the council for which there is no wage? Perhaps, he does.

It is necessary to state categorically that the three accusers of the victim did not use or employ or deploy the word *slave* in their conversations with the victim and in all the three situations the victim got aggrieved, the victim and his witnesses were the ones characterizing the conversations and accusations in slavery categories. It is thus necessary to reemphasize that the concept of slavery became widespread with the invention of agriculture during the Neolithic Revolution about 11,000 years ago (Wikipedia). And even as late as 2018 in Brazil, there are over 190,000 slaves and over 40.3 million slaves exist in the world today (Baptista *et al*, 2023 and Walk Free Foundation, 2018). This world figure has been adopted by Imran and Domician (2018) continuing that there is an unhelpful attempt to disconnect old slavery from the modern which is the world's fastest growing crime and has a huge number now as never before. It is opined that population explosion associated with economic vulnerability, violation of social rules, greed, corruption and violence, and agricultural modernization are driving it. It involves compulsory labour with the victim's location of labour and residence dictated by the parties that hold the victim in bondage in this case: Delta State Government; School of Nursing Agbor; Novena University Amai; and or Abbi Community and specifically the Onotu-uku-in-Council, Umia Quarters, Abbi. In a research by Wijaya (2019) the key characteristics of slavery are stated not to be ownership but control. Its core is violence, entailing absence of choice. To obey is safe, to disobey is punishment. No law controls the relationship between the owner(s), outlined above, and the victim. It is an economic relationship for profit (considered normal) for which the victim is not paid a dime but cruelty and hurt are integral part (Bales *et al*, 2009).

The victim's case has not borne out these catalogues of facts characteristic of slavery-like relationship particularly the violent and control grips. That the victim is slaving for the Onotu-uku-in-Council for no remuneration is perceptible but it is not being done involuntarily. It is the same genre of service which every other Abbi male render in community service which is recognize by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999. However, that the victim takes joy in it does not mean that the indignity harm attached to it is condoned by the victim. What also appears certain is that the victim's Okpulute-uku title lasts for five years after which he transcends to another role. But the controversies that surround the victim in the recent history of Abbi may be captured in another form. The victim is so articulate in the gathering of his peers in Abbi that he once proclaimed in local newspapers that the Oyuwa (Oyiwa) of Abbi which ought to have morphed into the title of the King of Abbi was but only a juju priest of Nze deity, a warlord not entitled to ascend to a kingship throne and for associated sundry reasons, Abbi has remained a gerontocracy till date.

Conclusion

Attempt was made in this study to plug three 'slavery like' accusations by three Chiefs in Abbi against Chief Solomon Egwenu, considered as the 'victim', into the general framework of the institution of slavery and determine whether the accusations were made out for the purpose of reaching the conclusion that the victim is a slave as he and his witnesses are believing the victim to be so accused. Try as the study did to review both the general literature on slavery (including modern slavery) and the literature on the facts of the accusations, it failed to reach a positive reconciliation of the two literatures to the effect that the allegation and accusation are made out. The fact that the accusers were never brought to the table to state their cases appears in the circumstances of the study to be irregular but did not detract or diminish the conclusion that the accusation was not proved as the law does not even appear to provide a platform upon which an accuser is allowed to mount the rostrum of the court's witness-box to prove that a victim is actually a slave. Although the existing literature confronted on the history of the maternal origin of the victim suggests that slavery exist in Ogume, the fact that the victim was allowed to participate in the initiation ceremony into the inotu title age grade in Igbe Ogume qualifies the victim categorical as a freeborn of Igbe Ogume where he maternally hails from. It also suggests that a person with only a maternal origin from Ogume can aspire to all levels of title holding including the Okpala uku of Ogume. In other words, maternal and paternal descendants are equal. The existing literature confronted in the course of the study from Abbi does not also appear to discriminate against a person due to maternal origins or none participation in the initiation into the inotu title grade. In other words, although the two communities of Abbi and Ogume are patriarchal, there exists ample and sufficient room for maternal originality.

Recommendations

It is thus recommended as follows:

- Abbi traditional council should be able to punish exercises in denigrating its chiefs before its Palace than allowing such infractions to get to the conventional courts of law.
- Chiefs who are dissatisfied with decisions in Palace settings should have recourse to appellate litigation instead of resorting to slavery like accusations against opponents.
- Consent of disputants should first be sought in writing by the Palace before delving into adjudication in order to stave off recourse to vulgar abuses when a party becomes dissatisfied with a customary arbitration award.

References

Adetunberu, O. (2023, October 2). Deconstructing conflicts in West Africa and implications of ECOWAS military invasion of Niger Republic. Lecture delivered at the Institute of Global Peace and Conflict

- Management, Lagos. <https://www.gatekeeper.ng/deconstructing-conflicts-in-west-africa-and-implications-of-ecowas-military-invasion-of-niger-republic/>
- Afigbo, A. (2023). The Abolition of Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885 – 1950. Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora African Studies. <https://www.boydellandbrewer.com>the-aboliti...>
- Allain, E. (ND). Contemporary slavery and its definition in law. <https://www.glc.yale.edu>sites>files>
- Arocha, L. (2010). Theoretical perspectives in understanding slavery: past and present challenges. In: Wylie, G., McRedmond, P., (eds.) Human Trafficking in Europe. London: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://www.link.springer.com>
- Arun, S. and Olsen, W. (2023, April 25). Modern slavery and exploitation work regimes. An intersectional approach: Modern slavery and exploitative work regimes: Policy implications of multiple and differential intersections. Development in Practice. Vol. 33(2). University of Manchester. <https://www.research.manchester.ac.uk>
- Aworawo, D. (2001). Western theories and the exploitation of West Africa since the slave trade era. Journal of Cultural Studies Vol. 3 No. 1. pp. 90 – 98. <https://www.ajol.info>
- Bales *et al* (2009). Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People. Oxford: Onworld. P.33
- Baptista *et al* (2023). The modern slavery wheel as the new theoretical framework. Cadernos Ebape. Br., V.21, no 3, Riode Janeiro, e 2022 – 0063. <https://www.search.proquest.com>openview> & <https://www.scielo.br>cebape-Lp>
- Bodendorf *et al*. (2022, September 14). Indicators and counter measures of modern slavery in global supply chains: pathway to social supply chain management framework. Business Strategy and the Environment. Vol. 32 Issue 4. Pp. 2049 – 2077. <https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>
- Christelow, A. (1985). Slavery in Kano, 1913 – 1914: Evidence from the judicial records. African Economic History. No 14 pp. 57 – 74 (18 pages). <https://www.jstor.org>
- Djeugoue, B. M. (2019, May 8). Slavery case against Niger before ECOWAS Court. <https://www.ihrda.org>
- Duke, E. O. and Osim, S. E. (2020, June 5). The culture of slavery in traditional context and globalized society. Social Space Journal. <https://www.socialspacejournal.eu> and <https://www.academia.edu>The-culture-o...>
- Eka-Iloma, R. O. (2017). Abbi: Her History, People and Culture. Lagos: Babs Printing Services.
- Ekele, A. A. A. (2000). History and Culture of Ogume Clan (1440 A.D. to the Present Day). Ebije Marketing Company.
- European Court of Human Rights, (2002, August 3). Guide on Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Prohibition of Slavery and Forced Labour. <https://www.echr.coe.int>echr>gu>
- Garner, R. T. (2019, May 23). Structural functional theory. The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology. Wiley Online Library. <https://www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com>
- Imran, S. & Domician, M. (2018 September). Modern slavery policies in a conceptual perspective. International Journal of Engineering and Management Sciences. Vol. 3. (No. 4). <https://www.researchgate.net>
- Jernow, A. (2009). Forced labour and human trafficking. Casebook of Court Decisions. A Training Manual for Judges, Prosecutor and Legal Practitioners. Special Action Programme to Combat Forced Labour. International Labour Agency. <https://www.lawcat.berkeley.edu>record;https://www.ilo.org>wcms-106143> and <https://www.worldcat.org>title>ocic>
- Kalu, V. E. (2004). International juridical response to 21st century slavery: Challenges for Nigeria's comatose legislature. Faculty of Law Lecture Series No. 2 August. Faculty of Law, University of Benin, Benin City. <https://www.nigerianlawguru.com>articles>
- Kiconco, A. (2021, June 2). Wartime forced marriage and sexual slavery in Africa: Cases from Ugnada and Sierra Leone. <https://www.republic.com.ng>
- Kiobel v. Royal Dutch Petroleum Co. No. 10 – 1491 (U.S. 2012)

- Laremont, R. R. (2023). Political versus legal strategies for the African slavery reparation movement. Liberal Arts and Sciences. African Studies Quarterly. University of Florida. <https://www.asp.africa.ufl.edu>laremont-99>
- LeighDay. (2023). Modern slavery and human trafficking. <https://www.leighday.co.uk>
- Majeed and Malik (2017). As cited in, Rational Choice Theory of Human Trafficking – Bartleby Research 2023. <https://www.2.bartleby.com>eassay>
- Massalatchi, A. (2008, October 27). West Africa Court convicts Niger in slavery case. <https://www.reuter.com> & <https://www.interights.org>niger-slavery>
- N. A. The cause and consequence of human trafficking: Human Rights Violations. Press Books. <https://www.ohiostate.pressbooks.pub>
- N. A. Thesis Statement for Slavery – 1077 Words/Bartleby. <https://www.bartleby.com>essay>Thesis>
- N. A. The nature and extent of criminal groups' involvement in modern slavery: Input of the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria to the Special Rapporteur's Report on the role of organized criminal groups with regard to contemporary forms of slavery. <https://www.ohchr.org>NHRIs>N...>
- Nevsun Resources Ltd v. Araya & Ors 37919/2020/SCC 5/1 decided on 28/2/2020 <https://www.decision.SCC.SC.ca>
- Nikerson, C. (2023, May 12). Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity. Culture and Identity. Simple Sociology. <https://www.simplesociology.com>
- Okogbule, N. S. (2013, February 27). Combating the 'new slavery' in Nigeria: An appraisal of legal and policy responses to human trafficking. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org>
- Journal of African Law, Vol. 57 Issue 1 April, 2013, pp. 57 – 80.
- Open Society Justice Initiative, (2012, July 11). Alade v. FRN: Nearly a decade in pretrial detention. <https://www.justiceinitiative.org>
- Oweh, J. E. (2018). Contemporary History and Culture of Abbi. Benin City: Owenplus Publicity.
- Oxford English Dictionary (1989). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. Vol. 16, p. 573.
- Reuters, (2016, January 14). U.S. Supreme Court gives boost to child slave labour case against Nestle. <https://www.businessday.ng>
- Simard, J. (2020). Citing Slavery. Stanford Law Review. Vol. 72 January. <https://www.review.law.stanford.edu>sites>
- Skaggs, S. L. (2023, September 8). Labeling theory. History and Society. Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com>
- Slavery Convention, 25 September 1926, 60 LNTS 253
- Sypher, W. (1939). Hutcheson and the 'Classical' Theory of Slavery. Journal of Negro History 24(3): 263 – 280. <https://www.phipapers.org>rec>SYPHAT>
- U.S. Department of Justice (2010, June 6). Arlington, Texas. Couple sentenced for enslaving Nigerian Woman for more than eight years. <https://www.justice.gov>
- Walk Free, (2018). In, Baptista *et al* (2023). The modern slavery wheel as the new theoretical framework. Cadernos Ebape. Br., V.21, no 3, Riode Janerio, e 2022 – 0063. <https://www.search.proquest.com>openview> & <https://www.scielo.br>cebape-Lp>
- Walk Free, (2023). Global Slavery Index: Modern slavery in Nigeria. <https://www.walkfree.org>
- Wijaya, C. S. (2019). The analysis of slavery in twelve years a slave written by Solomon Northup. A Project of Faculty of Social Science and Humanities. Tangerang: Buddhi Dharma University <https://www.repositori.buddhidharma.ac.id>...>
- Wikipedia. Slavery. <https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org>wiki>slavery>
- Wikipedia. Social Conflicts. <https://www.en.m.wikipedia.org>