



The symbolism of the pre-colonial concept of *Anikanmadu* among the Ibusa people of Aniomaland

Odigwe A. **Nwaokocha**

Department of History and International Studies

University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

odigwe.nwaokocha@uniben.edu

Abstract

This work attempts a deep exploration of the concept of anikanmadu among the Ibusa people of Aniomaland, an Igbo group, who inhabit a section of the western bank of the Niger. While considerable scholarly attention has gone into studying ani, the earth goddess, a powerful deity all over Igboland, the political connotation of ani (land) as the community has not received much consideration. The current paper focuses on understanding ani as a political force akin to the state by employing the pre-colonial Ibusa political order as a case study. The study focuses on locating and discussing political power relations within the community by exploring the deeper political meaning of the importance of the state being greater than the individual. While noting that ani occupies a unique position in Igbo cosmology and greatly influences behaviour, this work explores the more profound significance of ani, representing the community as a kind of leviathan that towers above all in society and commands the respect of all. Focusing on the pre-colonial Ibusa community and using primary sources, this work also explores the anikanmadu group as a vital political organ that operated nocturnally and clandestinely while enforcing the will of the community in a way that demonstrated the supremacy of the community over all individuals. The work concludes that the concept of anikanmadu that underlays the secret executive organ, also known as anikanmadu, was instrumental in maintaining the oneness, well-being, and sovereignty of the community while ensuring that societal rules and laws were applied enforced and sanctions placed on recalcitrant members of the community.

Keywords: Symbolism, Anikanmadu. Ibusa, Aniomaland, Igbo cosmology, ani

Introduction

Many phenomena, beliefs and institutions that held sway in pre-colonial African societies are now highly weakened and, in some cases, virtually extinct. One such concept is *anikanmadu* among the Ibusa people of Aniomaland in modern Nigeria. This work focuses on the *anikanmadu* institution by acknowledging that although some scholarly work has been done on *Ani* (land), the earth goddess and a recognized deity all over Igboland, the political underpinnings of *ani* as analogous to a community and political force worthy of worship have been overlooked. This paper then focuses on locating and discussing some political power relations within the community by exploring the deeper political meaning of the concept that the community or state is greater than the individual, which *Anikanmadu* simply means. From here, it becomes evident that *ani* occupies a unique position in Igbo belief and greatly influences behaviour and social conduct. This discussion takes the discourse on *ani* to a higher realm. It investigates the more profound significance of *ani*, representing the community, as a kind of leviathan that towered above all in society and commanded the respect of all. We will explore the concept of *anikanmadu* in the pre-colonial Ibusa community of Aniomaland in Nigeria.

Employing many primary sources, this work explores *anikanmadu* as a significant political organ that operated secretly and enforced

the will of the community in a way that vehemently asserted the supremacy of community laws over every individual or group. In making its contribution to a deeper understanding of the nature of Igbo political power, this study shows that the concept of *anikanmadu* that underlay the secret executive organ that enforced the community's decisions helped in maintaining the community's oneness, wellbeing, and sovereignty and ensured societal rules and laws by ensuring that sanctions placed on disobedient members of the community were executed.

Locating Ibusa and Aniomaland

Ibusa (Igbuzo in pre-colonial times) is a community in Oshimili North Local Government Area of Delta State in modern Nigeria. It is about seven miles to the southwest of Asaba (Ahaba in pre-colonial times), the capital city of Nigeria's Delta State. Both communities are in the same area as Aniomaland, which lies on the western side of the middle reaches of the lower Niger River. They are an Igbo group that shares boundaries with Edo State on its northern and western axis, Urhoboland and Isokoland in Delta State and Rivers State to the south, and to the East, the River Niger. Modern Aniomaland has nine local government areas: Oshimili South, Oshimili North, Aniocha South, Aniocha North, Ndokwa West, Ndokwa East, Ukwuani, Ika South, and Ika North. The Niger River separates Aniomaland and the Anioma people on the western bank

of the Niger from other Igbo sub-groups, who live on the eastern bank of the Niger. This has made people describe them as the 'West Niger Igbo.'

Ibusa was an autonomous republican entity in the pre-colonial era. It was run along gerontocratic lines, with the oldest male in the minimal and maximal family heading such administrative units. The overall leader of the town was the eldest living male descended from a known ancestor. Stranger elements not connected by ancestry to other community members were not allowed to assume such positions at different levels of the community's administration. This leadership position was open to all indigenous males as there were no ruling houses in Ibusa from which leaders and rulers were selected. The town's ruling did not depend on the whims and caprices of the eldest male, who was known as *Diokpa* (Eldest male). The community's general assembly, *izu ani*, assisted him. This critical organ held legislative, executive, and judicial powers in its arms and exercised them with the guidance of the community's traditions generated over time. Among these traditions that guided the pre-colonial Ibusa community were the special place reserved for *ani*, the earth force, and a powerful Igbo deity that controls societal behaviour and conduct and punishes disobedience to ensure the survival of the society's moral code and socio-political order.

Understanding the concept of *Ani* among the Igbo

Ani literally means "land" in the Igbo language. However, it is essential to note that *ani* symbolizes much more than land in Igbo metaphysics, belief, and politics. *Ani* is thus a significant component in Igbo perception of the universe. In Igbo belief, *ani* stands for three essential but interrelated things. First is "land," its literal meaning; the second is "the earth's force," a deity that has shrines at different levels in every Igbo community; then third, *ani* is the supreme force in the Igbo political order, which is like the law-giver, protector of the community's social order, and punishes dissent in a way that ensures order and cohesion. It is important to note that in the pantheon of Igbo gods and goddesses, *ani*, the earth force, is depicted as a female deity and wife of *Amadioha*, the god of thunder.

The first meaning of *ani* as land is well-known and may need no further explanation as it is axiomatic and universally known. It is the dwelling place of flora and fauna and represents the soil on which most human food crops grow to sustain the human race with food and water. The symbolism of *ani* as the earth's force and a powerful deity needs some elucidation here. Pre-colonial Igbo communities dedicated their communities to *ani* and vouchsafed their commitment to the *ani* deity by erecting *ani* shrines at different community levels. The *ani* also represents a

spatial terrain that could be seen as a place for meetings, a place of worship, or a shrine. To explain further, the primary Igbo political organization is encapsulated under *umunna* (loosely translated as "children of the same father"). This expression covers many kinds of kin relationships among the Anioma Igbo group and goes up to the *body* (town). The first in the *umunna* line is the *ohuno* (equivalent to the nuclear family); next is the *ebo* (the extended family of different *ohuno* descended from one male ancestor). A collection of several *ebo* forms the *ogbe* (village or quarter). In ancient times, each *ogbe* organized its defence and fiercely protected its status as an autonomous socio-political entity. Every *ogbe* was armed with a shrine dedicated to the *ani* deity. A collection of different *ogbe* in the same settlement constituted the *obodo* (town). The *obodo* had its *ani*. *Ani* shrines were usually erected around the first settlement in the community. No individual owned an *ani*. In pre-colonial times, the *ani* was surrounded by the *egbo* tree planted by the community to demarcate the *ani*, a sacred place, from other parts of the settlement and as a mark of reverence for the deity. Sacrifices were often offered to the community's ancestors at the shrine.

At this point, it should be noted that the nonsense *ani* is believed to sit at the head of all other deities in the pantheon beside *Amadioha*, whose consort she is depicted as.

From this golden height among Igbo deities, *ani* is responsible for maintaining moral standards and order and bringing wrongdoers to justice— all perceived as a challenge or a threat to the social order (Agbasiere, 2000). Her mythical partner, the malevolent god of thunder, *Amadioha*, represents anger against all who refuse to uphold standards that ensure the survival of the social order. *Amadioha* employs lightning and thunder against offenders (Onunwa, 2010). The nature of the collaboration between two malevolent deities against mere mortals can only be imagined!

The last symbolism of *ani* is abstract and highly spiritual as it is relatively political and aids social cohesion in Igbo communities. *Ani* serves as the supreme force in the Igbo political order, giving laws, protecting the community's social order, and punishing dissent in a way that ensures order and cohesion. Here, *ani* is regarded as a guardian spirit, a strong force for peace, order, and the general well-being of society. Apart from providing space for physical settlement, *ani* gives the Igbo a platform for farming activities and burial space for the dead on their way to the realm of the spirits. For the Igbo, *ani*, the earth spirit, is the recognized moral agent second only to *Chukwu*, the Igbo equivalent of the Christian God (Arinze, 2008, p. 27). Pre-colonial Igbo communities predominantly engaged in farming, and their physical and spiritual connection with *ani*

(the soil) cannot be overemphasized. The *ani* deity was closely related to farming in the Igbo worldview. Therefore, individuals and the community needed to be in good standing with *Ani* to promote bountiful harvests and avert ill-health and other misfortunes. In this light, sacrifices were offered to *Ani* just before the planting season and at the end of the farming season.

Sacrifices were also made to thank *ani* before the date of *iwa ji*, the Igbo new yam festival (Ikpo, interview), given that yam was a primary staple food in the Igbo land. The invisible forces of *ani* and the reverence with which *ani* was regarded ensured that community members respected societal covenants made at the physical *ani* because of the fatal consequences of violations. The fear of *ani* was a societal weapon of control and continues even today in Igbo communities. This can help us understand that societal laws, rules, and customs are related to *ani*; hence, they were referred to as *odi na ani* (what is obtainable in the land) or *ome na ani* (what is done or acceptable in the land). They are spelt as *odinani* and *omenani*, respectively. These rules are sanctioned and enforced by *ani* in a way that they are laws that different organs of society fanatically defend. The defence of these rules was not to satisfy the whims of any individual *per se*. However, it was paradoxical for self-preservation to stave off the wrath of *Ani*, the malevolent earth deity.

Omenani was the unwritten but known standard that ensured social control since supernatural forces could severely punish those disobeying them. In the words of a researcher, it

functions as reference points and provided [*sic*] ethical foundation, which ensured that these values are respected and that members of the group employ them as the parameters that guide their behaviour to protect both the collective and individual's interest and to ensure that peace and social harmony reigns (Nwoye, 2011, p. 315).

In the Igbo worldview, living a good life and being a good member or citizen of the community was to respect the mores, taboos, and laws of the land, otherwise known as *omenani*. This can be understood and explained by the unhidden fact that *omenani* was the unseen point of reference in any moral or political conversation among the Igbo. Emmanuel Nweke Okafor believes that *omenani* embodied the "spirituality of any existing Igbo community and is meant to provide and protect all values inherited from the ancestors" (Okafor, 2016, p.148). Was *ani* analogous in any way to the state in the Igbo worldview? What then was *ani* in the political sphere of Igboland?

Symbolic place of the Ani Deity in Igbo political order

The relationship between the individual Igbo and Igbo community on the one hand and ani on the other is more complex than merely describing it as an article of faith. That will reduce the relationship to a religious one. However, it was not just about belief. It was more about obedience. Ani demanded compliance with societal laws. The relationship was spiritual and a matter of unquestioned obedience, leaving the individual and the community with no choice. *Ani* must be obeyed, not respected. It was feared for its retributive powers. In the words of an Ibusa elder, "You do not question *Ani*. It is all and all. Its rules must be respected, or it will strike" (Mordi, P.O, Interview, February 5, 2022).

The *ani* is like the headquarters of life in every Igbo community. Among the Anioma, this started from the Anioma *ogbe*, as earlier referred to. The gathering of the *ogbe* for important rituals, including rituals associated with passages and oath-taking, took place there. It is important to explain here that in typical Igbo cosmology, the land (*ani*) was the link with the past and ancestors. Every severe offence against the community/state was against the spirit of the land. This can help elucidate the concepts of *nso ani* (taboo) and *ani ka nmadu*. At the apex of the Anioma socio-political ladder is the town, and the Anioma call it *obodo*. Like the

Anioma *ogbe*, every Anioma *obodo* (town) had its *ani*, which controlled behaviour and punished deviance. Ani and the community ethos it fanatically enforced were akin to the state. Though the typical Igbo community is often called a town, Ikenna Nzimiro says it often consists of a federation of dispersed villages (1972, p. 21). In this system, the component units are not kept together by force of arms. This binding agent or force was a mystical and forceful pull of shared beliefs and customs. The belief system was the fulcrum on which the community turned, was the state.

How the *ani* of different communities is named speaks volumes about *ani* and the state. In Ibusa, the focus of this work, the community's *ani*, is called *ani* Igbuzo (Igbuzo land), as Ibusa is a name bestowed on the town by British colonial administrators. In neighbouring Asaba, the community's *ani* is known as *ani* Ahaba (Ahaba land), Ahaba being the pre-colonial name of the town. The same holds true in all Igbo communities. Ibusaland and Asabaland are like England, Ireland, and Deutschland, all sovereign autonomous political entities. This analogy may seem out of place today because of the seemingly small size of these Igbo communities. However, these Igbo communities were autonomous states in pre-colonial times, each with its own governmental apparatus and hierarchical political structures.

Ani was a pervasive spirit in the pre-colonial political space of Igbo communities. The general constitutional framework and principles guiding each Igbo village's acceptable and unacceptable (in effect, the constitution) are linked to the *ani* deity. The larger family groups that comprise the *obodo* (town), as shown earlier with the Anioma *ogbe*, are also linked to the same source. Every regulation from the simple to the complex combined to form *odinani* is enacted before the *Ani* shrine, with the spirit of *Ani* looming as a sanctioning force. Covenants that must never be broken amongst individuals and families and the administration of oaths are also made in the presence of *ani*. Anything that the traditions forbade or that threatened its wellbeing, such as homicide, incest, willful abortion, adultery, or stealing of any kind, attracted the burning anger of *ani*, who demanded that the *alu* (abomination) be addressed through sacrifices or other more severe measures. The importance of *ani* in Igbo political organization is further foregrounded because it is an aspect of autonomy and independence enjoyed by pre-colonial Igbo communities because of the segmented nature of political power in Igboland. It is important to note that pre-colonial Igboland was not a single political community. As a unit, the entire pre-colonial Igboland did not possess an *ani*. It was not a state as it had no political force uniting it and did not submit to one political authority. Communities

within Igboland were states, each with its *ani* as the centre of the community's political life. This explains why artificial colonial political and administrative creations such as provinces, divisions, and even the modern local government areas did not, do not, and cannot, have *ani* of their own. They merely operated and still operate based on civil rules in the constitution inspired by British colonialism and the legacies it handed down to the modern Nigerian state. This new system has enveloped Igboland and has nearly effaced its old ways.

The autonomy of pre-colonial Igbo communities is explained by the fact that each had its *ani* and sets of laws known to *Ani* and supposedly given by her. Though each community upheld nearly the same traditions, they differed to some degree but not as it related to such things as murder, stealing, incest, suicide, and other high crimes against society. Generally, sins against the community were interpreted as transgressions against the land, just as the modern state charges certain offences against the laws of the land. For instance, a villain who murders another had a case with *Ani* for spilling innocent blood on the community's soil, an act considered abominable and sacrilegious. *Ani* severely punished high crimes to discourage other community members from taking the dangerous path of treating societal norms with levity. This was to ensure social order and avoid anarchy- the primary duty of the

state, government, and the law. Here again, we see the supremacy of the community as promoted by *Ani* surfacing.

Another vital role of *ani* is to ensure social cohesion at different levels. The *ani* shrine was often the scene of oath-taking by people accused of certain misdemeanours.

Individuals proclaiming their innocence were usually asked to pick a lobe of kola nut over which some words had been uttered from a charmed stone called *iyi* (oath). This is called *ikwu iyi* (swearing an oath). Anyone who swore an oath knowing that he/she was guilty as alleged contended with *ani* and faced dire consequences. At another level, *ani* helped communities to lessen the incidence of psychic attacks, witchcraft, poisoning, and other forms of wickedness against members of the community. This was done through what is known as *igba ndu* (covenant) before the entire community gathered at the *ani* shrine. These ensured that evil and wickedness were reduced in pre-colonial Igbo communities as *igba ndu* could not be broken by any parties without dire consequences.

Generally, anyone who goes against *ani* automatically endangers themselves and, depending on the issue, the entire family may be in harm's way. A person who violates the laws of the land as prescribed and enforced by *ani* was referred to as *onye melu nso ani* (someone who violated the customs of the land or one who did what the land forbids). *Nso* is the concept of sacredness. Anyone

who goes against a sacred societal rule is assumed to have committed an *alu* (a taboo, an abomination) and was expected to offer sacrifices as appeasement to the *Ani* deity at the shrine of *Ani*. This was done to cleanse the community and avert the wrath of the gods. This is called *ikpu alu*. In Ibusa, anyone who was found guilty and forced to perform the sacrifice of *ikpu alu* suffered the consequence tantamount to that of an ex-convict and was exempted from the great assemblies of the clan, having gravely greatly offended the community at a point in history (Nwaobi, N. Interview, January 3, 1994).

The importance of *ani* in the Igbo political firmament is supported by the reality that an indiscretion against *ani* – the law-giver and the equivalent of the political state – was a sacrilege against society and an affront against commonsense as established by the community. It represented an infraction that was avoided because of its more significant implications for society and the offending individual. The fear of the retributions from *ani* and the community was critical for social control and order in Igbo communities. Knowing that and keeping to the tenets was wisdom. From here, it is easy to understand why the Ibusa people believe that *ani* is supreme.

The twin concept of *Anikanmadu* in Ibusa socio-political traditions

A translation of *ani ka nmadu* from the Igbo to English shows that the land is greater than

the human person. *Anikanmadu* encompasses two basic things that are interrelated yet not necessarily mutually exclusive elements operating at two distinct levels. On the first level, *anikanmadu* embodies the belief that the land or earth is greater than humans. Land here is understood as the soil that nurtures food for human consumption and serves various ritualistic purposes, such as washing Igbo babies with its sand at birth to prevent later offensive body odour, serving as where post-natal umbilical cords are buried, and being the final resting place for human remains. The more profound significance lies in the understanding that the community, along with its laws, rules, regulations, and traditions, surpasses the importance of any single individual regardless of social status. Ani locates power within the community and controls the relationship between the individual and the community. The community then stands as the political leviathan under whose suzerainty the individual is subordinated to societal regulations, which *ani* (the community) defends fanatically. In this way, the community demands prompt obedience from individuals and punishes dissent. In this enterprise of punishing reprobates, *ani* was sometimes believed to join forces with *Amadioha*, her mythical husband, in employing thunder to strike down offenders and deviants, particularly for certain severe offences.

At the second level, the concept of

anikanmadu in Ibusa refers to an organ of the community's government that physically executes the community's decisions made by known and appropriately constituted authorities. The *Anikanmadu* group was a known organ that operated to execute the will of the pre-colonial Ibusa community, whose active participation in administration started to wane with the introduction of colonial rule by the British around 1900 and eventually became defunct under colonial rule as the colonial authorities outlawed its activities (Nwaobi, N Interview, January 3, 1994). Today, the concept of *anikanmadu* representing the potency of the earth deity and the philosophical position that the community is greater than the individual still exists among the Anioma and Ibusa people. However, the existence of *anikanmadu* as an executive organ primed to execute the will of the Ibusa community is no more. Ethnologist Angulu M. Onwuejeogwu captured the *anikanmadu* group in the following words: "This was a group of secret police that had the traditional prerogative to use naked force on any Ibusa person that was found guilty of any offence by any of the groups that had the constitutional and traditional right to do so" (1972, p. 22).

It is germane to point out that the two levels of *anikanmadu* discussed above are closely related. The first level flows into the second, which merely exists to enforce the concept of community supremacy represented by the first. They both herald the supremacy of *ani*

as the community over the individual, *anikanmadu*.

The activities of the *anikanmadu* group were meant to give meaning. They did give meaning to upholding the traditions of the land, distilling the deeper meaning of social order and community coherence. According to Paul Okocho Mordi, an Ibusa elder,

The *anikanmadu* could do and undo on behalf of society. It could do anything approved by the community to ensure law and order. Without such a strong force as the *anikanmadu*, it is possible that a lot of what we know as Ibusa tradition would have disintegrated long ago and would never have reached us. *Anikanmadu* existed to ensure the survival of the Ibusa community by ensuring that everyone lived by the sacred tenets of the community. The fear inspired by the *anikanmadu* organ kept many in check (Interview, February 5, 2022.).

This accentuates and justifies the position of another Ibusa elder, Joseph Chukwuka Nwaokocha, that "... the executive *anikanmadu* group was the community's messenger that executed the will of the state as a loyal group within the community sworn to the survival of the ethos and mores of the community and, by extension, that of the community itself" (Interview, February 5, 2022).

The *modus operandi* of *Anikanmadu*

The *anikanmadu* group was a potent force in the pre-colonial political order of Ibusa. It was also an organized group integrated into the Ibusa political and judicial system. As noted earlier, *ani* burnt with anger at transgressions against the moral order. Any sentence that was passed on any transgressor beyond the offering of propitiating sacrifices to *ani* was carried out by the *anikanmadu* executive organ. However, it did not act with impunity but according to established guidelines. Before taking action, *anikanmadu* warns the offender at least three times. Such unheeded warnings attract the action of *anikanmadu* operating in the dead of night. The individual's house could be destroyed, or the person killed, depending on the offence (see Onwuejeogwu, 1972, p. 22). Everything the group did was supposed to be kept secret. According to Onwuejeogwu (1972), "After the action, the matter was regarded as closed, for *Anikammadu* – meaning the Earth-Force is greater than man – had done its job, and it was considered TOP SECRET and CLOSED" (p. 22).

Individuals could apply to join the *anikanmadu* group (Nwaobi, N., Interview, January 3, 1994). People who participated in *anikanmadu* deliberations and actions were mainly titled men. Among them were the three principal war leaders of the three quarters into which Ibusa was divided. These are the Iyase of Ibusa, the Odogwu of Ibusa, and the Uwolo of Ibusa (Ikpo, Interview,

January 6, 2008). Others qualified to join were brave men expected to keep secrets (Onwuejeogwu, 1972). Membership also included challenging and energetic young men who could be counted upon when physicality was needed to execute specific community directives. The selection of these young men was usually the job of an inner caucus of the community's *ndichie* (assembly of titled men) or the *izu ani* (the assembly of the community) as the community referred to itself as *ani* (Ajumeze, G., Interview, April 16, 2008).

One of the significant features of life in the pre-colonial was that any person known to have stolen and found guilty of such offences against the traditions of the land was ostracized and, on death, denied a decent burial. *Anikanmadu* ensured that the person's corpse was taken away and thrown into the town's *ajo oshia* (evil forest). The body so evacuated by the *anikanmadu* group was supposed to be dropped on the ground at *ajo oshia* and not buried in the bowels of the earth as the *ani* deity had rejected the person for evil conduct (Okeleke, M., Interview, March 15, 2008). Sometimes, an individual who had been found guilty of severe crimes against the land was plucked from his or her home in the middle of the night and escorted to the boundary between Ibusa and another town and expelled from the town after being given specific instructions never to set foot on the community's soil again (Aniegbu, O., Interview, November 20, 2020). In extreme

cases, such individuals seized from their houses were executed by hanging, carried out by the *anikanmadu* group (Nwaobi, N., Interview, January 3, 1994). In this category of extreme cases also, the *ndichie* could direct the *anikanmadu* to hand the culprit a rope and be directed to hang themselves. Paul Mordi recalls that his father, who died in 1968 at the age of about one hundred and ten years, told him that in some cases, a criminal was brought out in the middle of the night and led to a secluded place, made to dig a grave, forced to lie in it, and buried alive (Interview, February 5, 2022). Sometimes, such persons are forced to drink poisonous substances that would kill them before daybreak (Nwaobi, N., Interview, January 3, 1994).

As gruesome as some of the operations of *anikanmadu* may seem, they were empowered by Ibusa traditions to carry out her will with dispatch to deter people who may wish to test the community's resolve to protect and defend her values against infractions. The decisions and the seeming brutality involved in their execution were ultimately meant to prevent anarchy and chaos from enveloping the community and obliterating the cherished traditions that helped her develop, structure, and establish a civilization.

Finally, in the pre-colonial Ibusa setting, the twin concept of *anikanmadu* manifested itself with severe brutality, aiming to deter

the establishment of precedents where infractions against the law went unpunished. This approach was adopted to avoid the transformation of an *alu* (abomination) into a tradition, preventing it from being perceived as the norm. An Igbo saying captures this sentiment: "alu gba ahor o me omenani," loosely translated as "when an abomination persists for too long, it becomes a tradition."

Anikanmadu in contemporary Ibusa

The land (*ani*) or community is still considered supreme in the Ibusa society. Shrines dedicated to *ani* remain across the Ibusa community. These portions of land are known and respected for what they represent, despite the advent of what is considered 'modern.' Colonialism and the so-called modernity marked by attraction to foreign things have not been able to completely detach the people from their traditional attraction to *ani* and all that it represents. The forces introduced by foreign influence have not stopped the people from traditional adherence to *ani* in all its ramifications and abhorrence for things likely to contravene the laws of the land as handed down from the past.

Ani is still revered as the authentic law-giver among the Ibusa people despite the existence of the Nigerian state and her laws and statutes. It is essential to point out that the traditional Ibusa socio-political and judicial systems are still robust even when we admit they are no longer intact. No matter how

highly placed one is, one can only take it for granted at the person's peril. The rules and conventions that constitute them represent traditional mores and are based on the laws as binding instruments and social glue holding the community together. They are still widely respected because of the general fear of the retribution that may follow doing otherwise. Beyond what is believed to be the spiritual dimension that may follow, individuals and groups who have dared to go against societal rules have been excommunicated and made to face the consequences of becoming social pariahs as punishment for dissent (Aniegbu, O., Interview, November 20, 2020). The weight of such is that the person or group concerned is severed from the great assembly of the community to serve as a deterrent to those who may decide to test the community's resolve to defend its customs and conventions. Such deviants involved in abominable acts are still considered *ndi alu* (Mordi, P.O, Interview, February 5, 2022). Sanctions placed on such persons are also allowed to follow them to the grave as the community will always insist that such unworthy characters are not given the luxury of community burial in the event of death. In Ibusa customs, one of the greatest tragedies that can befall anyone is to be denied a 'decent' burial by the community, that is, to not have the community participate in the funeral ceremonies. The fear of such an unpleasant outcome has continued to guide

action and conduct. The most incredible honour for a departed Ibusa person is to be afforded the respect of being lowered into the grave by his or her kinsmen. Being denied that tribute is considered the ultimate humiliation for the dead and their family. The fear of *ani* (the community) and her prescriptions remains conventional wisdom in Ibusa today, even with modern laws appearing to be the fulcrum on which society revolves. In the words of an Ibusa elder

... It is challenging to determine whether the laws of the modern state or adherence to traditional customs determine behavior in Igbuzo these days. People are trapped within appearance and reality. The confusion reflects how strong the traditional system remains despite attempts by the modern state to replace it with a system that appears alien to the people's worldview (Mordi, P.O, Interview, February 5, 2022).

In a way, the above quotation sums up the struggle between the modern and traditional forms of government. It is a powerful commentary about a system that is mixed and fluid. It talks about a structure where people are torn between old and new and forced to worship at two different alters simultaneously. It represents a substantial challenge.

In this phenomenon of allegiance to the ancient and modern, despite the fear of the

consequences of seemingly abandoning time-tested traditions handed down from the past, the laws and statutes instituted by the modern state are increasingly getting more vigorous. This is principally because while the modern state has the Police and other organs of the state to execute her laws and prosecute offenders, the traditional structure is petering out as the *Anikanmadu* organ has ceased to exist. This means the state is no longer owned and operated by the people, and an all-encompassing system extracts allegiance.

The extinction of the *Anikanmadu* group as an enforcement organ of the Ibusa community due to the overthrow of the traditional order by colonialism represents a substantial disadvantage, as the traditional arrangement has relinquished its privileged position in law enactment in the new state. It will be essential to point out here that the *Anikanmadu* concept of the state and its dedication to the mores of the land by executing the decisions of *izu ani* now belongs to the past. However, respect for the ethos of traditional Ibusa society and the gamut of customs that gave it vitality are still alive, flickering away and thinning out daily because of the new state and new values. This is because the new state appears better equipped to enforce her laws, unlike the old system, whose wings appear broken. Despite the disadvantages stacked against the old order, it retains a sacredness around it that is not easy to uproot and throw to the

wind. It is not likely to completely go away any time soon.

Conclusion

The very concept of *anikanmadu* and the activities of the *anikanmadu* as an organ of the Ibusa community responsible for carrying out her will speaks volumes about the power of the community over the individual in the Igbo political arrangement. We can find an equivalent of such powers and influence in modern civil governance where appropriate state organs, like the judiciary, can pronounce the death penalty on specific categories of offenders while competent organs of the state are directed to carry out the judicial pronouncement. The reverence preserved for the *ani* deity among the Ibusa people inspired the twin concept of *anikanmadu* discussed in this work. The *Anikanmadu* group no longer operates as it did in pre-colonial times. However, there can be no argument about the place of *ani* as a vital force for cohesion in the Ibusa community, even in modern times. Despite the existence and seeming preponderance of Western laws and political forms, the famed *ani* deity and all it represents in the socio-

political order of Ibusa are not taken for granted. Modernity has diminished but not wiped out the pervasive influence of *ani* in the life of the Ibusa community. The *ani* deity is still revered for what it stands for and what it is believed to do to all who commit crimes against society or seek to take societal traditions for granted. The influence of Christianity among the Ibusa people is widespread, and there are Christian worship centres almost everywhere, with adherents of different Christian denominations attending services. Even at that, the people of Ibusa avoid issues that will bring them into conflict with traditional customs. Not a single *ani* shrine or location has been abandoned in Ibusa. Such shrines are once again becoming popular among the people as strong arbiters in the face of increasing challenges and conflicts inspired by rapid urbanization and the failure of the more extensive national state apparatus to deliver the good life and justice. What the future holds for the more profound symbolism of the *ani* deity and its meaning is unknown. A better understanding of its deeper meaning lets one appreciate what informs certain phenomena about Ibusa traditions and those of the larger Igbo group.

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