Umunna and Conflict Resolutions in the Post-Independence Igboland: The Case of Amaruru Autonomous Community in Orsu Lga, Of Imo State.

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Abstract

Conflict is an integral part of human nature. It tends to manifest extensively as a result of human interactions between one another and over scarce resources. Although, there had been a general perception of conflicts as being dysfunctional because of its destructive and damaging nature without taking into recourse the functional perspective of conflict. However, in Amaruru autonomous community, they had developed over the years a mechanism called "Umunna" meaning "Kinsmen" for effective conflict resolution. Umunna is an important aspect of Igbo cosmology or world view which originated from persons or group of persons from the same lineage. The paper applied the descriptive approach to bring to fore the dynamics of Umunna on conflict resolutions. The paper examined also the dexterity, expertise and tactfulness of the Umunna in resolving conflicts with the sole aim of uniting and consolidating the peace and harmony of the society. The findings revealed that the application of this skillful mechanism was made successful and possible based on these methods of conflict resolution, which is democratic in nature and not partial. The methods applied in achieving results were based on cultural norms/values of the community which were internalized in the socialization of the people from childhood to adulthood. The paper suggested that to achieve effective approaches to conflict resolution in the 21st century, these methods should be applied and integrated in our conflict resolution mechanism. The paper concluded that the conflict resolution mechanism of the Umunna is suited to de-escalate the upsurge of conflicts that have been witnessed in recent times.

Keywords: Umunna, Conflict Resolution, Autonomous, Communities, Peace, Mechanism.

Introduction

Conflict cannot be separated from human interactions and associations. Human relations concept postulates that; conflict is natural, "innate and inevitable". To this extent, humans need to accept conflict as part of life. Based on this emerging scenario, every human society, developed their ideal methods of conflict resolutions that are peculiar to them based on their acceptable norms and values which they duly observed for the resolution of their conflicts. The Amaruru community is not in isolation in selecting an indigenous method of conflict resolution mechanism which are favourable to them. These highly revered methods is known as "Umunna". According to (Kelechi 2004)[1], Umunna are regarded as patrilineage descendants of families, clans belonging to one lineage. Umunna could literally mean a group of people who descended from the same father, but not of the same mother. It occupies a section of the village and owns a common land which it allocates to members for farming and housing. It is led by the Okpara, who is usually its senior member.

However, according to Chief Okolo[2]. Umunna assumes specific positions in Igbo society in which Amaruru community is not in isolation. Okolo opined that Umunna is a brotherly institution for peace, progress and unity to administer justice, conflict resolution and managements. They also ensure there is strict adherence to the community cultural values which are regarded as laws and order. In case of dispute or conflict arising as a result of human interactions, the Umunna devises strategies, using best indigenous methods to resolve the conflict to the best interest of the disputants. Conflicts do occur because of our diverse backgrounds and perception to issues. As a result of this divergent views, conflict may arise. This is where the dexterity of Umunna comes to play in the Igbo society of which Amaruru community is not in isolation. The Umunna is a strong institution that has been able to resolve and managed conflict effectively in order to keep the community, at peace and stable. There is no conflict that Umunna cannot resolve and manage between two disputants, that is why the paper is vigorously advocating that the western approaches to conflict resolution should integrate this traditional system of conflict resolution in resolving conflict for speedy outcome.

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[1] Kelechi. A. Umumna and Conflict Resolution (Owerri: Okem Publisher, 2004) P.89

[2] Chief Okolo Onyeka(Oral Interview) Male 70 years, Amaruru, Orsu LGA, Imo State, 20th October, 2023.

There is one characteristic that is peculiar to the Umunna in conflict resolutions which is their unbiased approaches to issues. They treat everybody as equal, both the rich and the poor derives justice. No favouritism in terms of conflict resolution unlike what is obtainable in the conventional justice system were justice were bought and denied by the highest bidders. That is why justice is delayed and denied. These is were the recurring decimal in contemporary justice delivery system where the poor and indigent citizens swallow their bitter pills because they were surcharged and denied justice in our contemporary justice delivery system; for example the law enforcement agency and the judiciary. Moving a step ahead, the court is not left out of the quagmire. The constant delays and adjournments of cases to the detriments of the less privileged. The poor and less privilege loses hope and confidence in the contemporary justice and delivery system because of the lack of trust and confidence in the judiciary system.

However, it is a point to understand that this is a sharp contrast from what were obtainable in the traditional conflict resolution mechanism where the Umunna are at the helms of the affairs and conflicts were resolved to the satisfaction of all disputant without much time wasting and at lesser cost, at a favourable environment.

Tradition of Origin of the Amaruru Community

According to oral source of history as postulated by High Chief Eze-Ifedi[3], the Amaruru people had migrated into their present abode some centuries ago. These views were collaborated by High Chief Francis Ngawuchu[4] from Umuadu village who opined that this movement and migration of various Igbo groups from their ancestral home at Nri, which culminated to the dispersal of various Igbo groups into their different locations within the confirms of the Southern Eastern region of present-day Nigeria of which the Amaruru people were not left out in the web of migrations. These movements and migration was centered on land scarcity for farming and minor quarrels. Ngawuchu went further to narrate that there were several migrations and movements of the several Igbo groups from Awka and Nri axis to Amaigbo and notable Eastern areas like Bende, Afikpo among others.

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[3] High Chief Eze-Ifedi (Oral Interview) Male, 72+ years, Amaruru, Orsu LGA, Imo State 20th October, 2023.

[4] High Chief Francis Nganwuche (Oral Interview) Male 78+ years, Amaruru, Orsu LGA, Imo State, 4th October, 2023.

During this movement from Nri, the Amaruru people moved towards the Urasi River area. According to High Chief Ngawuchu[5], there are evidence of old residential mud site along Urasi River by Ezinife village which testifies to these claims. He went further to narrate that there are still evidence of old mud houses, wells, old palm trees and some Uha trees still standing there till date, showing evidence of habitations for hundreds of years.

According to Ngawuchu[6], who narrated extensively the oral tradition of the Amaruru people, he opined that Amaruru came to its present abode from Nri with his father Ozuru. Ozuru gave birth to Ome, then Ome gave birth to two boys, the first one was Amaruru and Okpududu (i.e.) Ihetinasa. Amaruru had a wife called Nkwo-Ama. They both had nine (9) children which is the nine villages that made up Amaruru as a town. The nine children (villages) are as follows: (1) Odumeje (i.e.) Umuadu (2) Ama Okwe (3) Elugwu (4) Elugwu to kpi (5) Umunume (6) Umuehihi (7) Alumeze (8) Umuawula (9) Orume.

According to oral tradition as source of history regarding their settlements at their various environments, Ozuru and his children had a problem in crossing the Urasi River. Urasi river as it was then according to High Chief Ngawuchu was covered by a very thick forest. There was a big animal hovering around the bank of the Urasi river. People feared to have an encounter with the animal or even come closer to the bank of the river. This was as a result of the awesome nature of the animal. However, Ozuru in collaboration with his children started setting traps for the animal. They dug a pit for this beast. After sometime, the animal fell into the trap and it was killed. The name of the animal was called Odudu. After killing this animal, they crossed the Urasi river and settled at their present abode till date.

The Meaning of Umunna and its Composition

According to Okorie (2014)[7] Umunna is a form of a patrilineage maintained by the Igbo. Law starts and ends with the Umunna, which is a male line of descendants from the founding ancestors (who the line is sometimes named after) with groups of compounds closely related families, headed by the eldest male member. The Umunna are involved in settling disputes among members of the community in other to ensure

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[5] High Chief Francis Nganwuche, Male, 78+.
[6] High Chief Francis Nganwuche, Male 78+.

[7] Okorie, M. Conflict Resolution in Pre-Colonial Igbo Society (Enugu: Survey Pub. 2014) P. 45

social harmony and peaceful co-existence between members of the community. It is systematically done to manage conflicts from getting out of hand. In conflict resolution and management, Umunna exhibit tremendous tactfulness in adjudicating the conflict resolutions. Their decisions were final in matters of conflicts resolutions and their decisions were highly accepted in courts of law as evidence if the conflict eventually progresses to that point.

However, the Umunna is the strongest institution in the Igbo society in which the Amaruru community is not in isolation. It is regarded as being the strongest because every male citizen in Amaruru community belongs to the Umunna and the ladies belong to the Umuada. This institution remains strong because they settled disputes between one another ranging from marriages, land disputes, tribal wars and intertribal issues that may lead to conflicts, among others.

The Umunna institution in Igbo society remains sacrosanct in decision making because their decisions were always collective and democratic. The Amaruru community follows this same pattern in their quest to resolve and manage conflicts. That is

why the Umunna is strong and well respected because neglecting Umunna, is at one's own peril. There is a saying that "Mmadu ada Aka Umunnaya" meaning "No Man can rise above his Umunna or Kinsmen", in any circumstance because you cannot stand or be in isolation in the community where you were born.

According to Okorie (2004)[8], Umunna are always available to find solutions to any problems plaguing their society. For examples, land disputes, marriage, debts among others. The Umunna must first of all look at the conflict to see how to resolve and manage it to avoid it getting out of hand. High Chief Ekene[9], observed that the compositions of the Umunna comprising of a wider blood relationship; extended families that look after one another in various aspects of life. The Umunna acts as a support base in virtually anything a member of the community is doing. For example, burial ceremonies, marriages, receiving chieftaincy title among others. They are there to support you and contributes to the success of the event.

These actions were always common in every Igbo society in which the Amaruru community is not in isolation which

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[8] Ibid

[9] High Chief Ekene. O (Oral Interview) Male 80+ Years

showcases the power of blood relations and support. Every member of the community contributes his or her own quota to the progress and success of one another which is called "Igwebuike" or "aghena nwa nneya" meaning "There is strength in oneness and be your brother's keeper"

Okorie concluded, by observing that the Umunna preserved the sanctity of the community, promulgating laws, enforces it as well as prescribe suitable punishment to offenders in the community. In other to forestall the observance of the law, order and peace to manage and curtail the envisaged conflict that may arise, everyone, no matter his status in the society belongs to the Umunna and must abide by the decisions of Umunna in any matter. This is because they serve as enforcer of the law of the community. They see to the orderliness of the community; you must bow to the Umunna in decision making.

For example, no matter your status or influential personality in the society you must bow to the Umunna in decision making for the good of the community for example having an altercation with your kinsmen. The decision and resolutions of the conflicts by

the Umunna is sacrosanct in that matter. Umunna sit and resolved conflicts in Igbo society which the Amaruru is not in isolation. The verdict delivered are respected in court and the Umunna can be summoned to give evidence in court over a particular matter. The court in their magnanimity cannot jettison their verdict on a particular conflict because they are more conversant with the history and culture of the land than the court.

High Chief Unaegbu[10], opines that if you want to know anything about a person, it is through his Umunna or kinsmen that you will understand who a man is, you do not know a man where he lives, work or do business. You can discover a man through his Umunna, how he was born, grew and became a man before going to the city to settle. Customs demands, that no matter how rich, eminent, educated, your social and religious status, you must subject your loyalty to Umunna. You cannot rise above your kinsmen; customs requires that you humble yourself to the kinsmen. Umunna are always fearless in conflict resolution and management because they are non-partisan. They look into the eyes of the both parties without mincing words and tell them the truth concerning a given conflict in

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[10] High Chief Umaegbu, M. (Oral Interview) Male 85+ years

a bid to resolve it and keep the community at peace. The interest of the community is always important than individual's selfish interest.

However, the composition of the Umunna according to High Chief Unaegbu is made up of the Okpara which is the overall oldest male member of the branch of lineage. He holds the "*ofor*" which signify the spirit of the ancestors. He performs sacrifices to them and carries important observances for the earth goddess. The Okpara is a political leader of the Umunna. He is never autocratic, but his decisions are carried out democratically. Umunna is like a union of brothers that share common bond of lineage in any community. Umunna is doing great works in conflict resolution because a community could be determined to be peaceful, cordial, and issues of co-existence on how the Umunna managed and resolved conflicts in that particular communities.

Nature and the Causes of Conflict in Amaruru Community

The nature of conflicts is something that is difficult to determine because, it manifest in diverse forms and shapes. That is why Olaoba, (2015:7)[11] opines that conflicts are in the magnitude of rage, rifts, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes, wars assaults among others. The author posited that conflicts in indigenous African societies could manifest predominantly in chieftaincy and boundary disputes among others, which the Amaruru community is not in isolation. To bring the picture of the nature of conflict clearer and expository, Francis (2006:75)[12] define conflict as the pursuit of incompatible interest and goals by different group. Conflict could be looked at as a behaviour or an action that introduces strain and stress in the relationship between two or more parties on the attainment of a set of interest or goals. In conflict, parties perceive or treat each other as a stumbling block that will results in frustrating the other in attaining a set goal or even furthering one's interests.

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[11] Olaoba, O. B. Ancestral Focus and the Process of Conflict Resolution in Traditional African Societies. In Albert. A.O (Ed) Perspective on Peace and Conflict in Africa. Essays in Honour of Gen (Dr) Abdul Salami A. Abubakar. (Ibadan: John Achew Pub. 2015) Pg 7

[12] Francis B. Peace and Conflict. An African Overview of Basic Conflicts. In: Best.G.(Ed) Introduction to Peace and Conflict Resolution in West African. (Ibadan: Spectrum Book 2006) p. 75

Omatosho (2004:96)[13] also argued specifically that societies and communities in a bid to attain or achieve certain objectives like expanding their frontiers to acquire fertile lands for farming and grazing, engages in conflicts with neighbouring communities to achieve these goals and desires. In collaboration to this view, Adam (2006:60)[14] opines that conflicts are inevitable in as much as scarce natural resources like rivers, fertile lands, vegetations among others are unequally distributed among various communities which invariably may not have equal political, economic and military capability to defend their territory against lesser communities which may not have acquired that military capability in this process, the stronger dominates the lesser and conflict arose. Ken (2007:2)[15] agrees with the view that one community dominating another by stressing that the nature of conflict could be described as an attitude, behaviour or an action that introduces strains and stress in the relationship between two or more parties in the attainment of set goals or interest. The author concluded that conflicts emanates between two communities as a result of unequal endowment of natural resources.

Based on this scenario, conflict can never be divulged from human nature because conflict is intrinsic and inevitable in the socialization and interactions of individuals in their quest to achieve desired goals and aspirations. The rush to achieve these goals by parties transcends negativity to cheating, marginalization, selfishness among others.

Galtung (1996:40)[16] in collaboration with the view that conflict is intrinsic postulated that conflict might be negative or positive. He concluded that conflict might be negative when it leads to extreme loss of life and property, and positive when it performs a social function. In agreeing to this view, Dahrem Dorf (2000:19)[17] observed that based on human interactions in the affairs of life. He strongly argued that societies have two faces, those of conflicts and those of consensus. The author submits that one of the causes of conflicts in every society resides in contradictions or conflict of interest.

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[13] Omotosho, M. Evaluating Conflict and Conflict Management in Africa, *Journal of Dispute Resolution* 1 (7): 2004. 96-98

[14] Adam, A. M. Intergroup Conflicts and Customary Mediation: Experiences from Sudan in: *African Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1 (2) 2006 p. 10-15

[15] Ken, T. *Principles of Conflict in Traditional African Society* (Ogun: Soyin Publishes 2007) p.2

[16] Galtung, L. Cultural Violence in Africa. *Journal of Peace Research* 1 (27) 1996 p.40

[17] Dahreun Dorf, P. Frustration and Conflict (London: Methuein Publisher 2000) p. 19

In accordance with this view and observations of Dahrem Dorf, which transcends to the causes of conflict in Amaruru community. It is worthy of note that the followings are the causes of conflicts in Amaruru community: Land and boundary conflicts, inheritance conflicts, murder conflicts, marriage and divorce conflicts among others. These conflicts will be explained further in the following sub-topics.

Conflict Resolutions Mechanism in Amaruru Community

According to Olaoba (2015:16)[18], conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity and effect of conflict. In informal proceedings, conflict resolution exercises permit [s] a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding options to crisis and to divergent points of view. In accordance to this view Punnier (1995:11)[19] opines that conflict resolutions in indigenous societies performs a healing function. The author argues that conflict resolution provides an opportunity for the examinations of alternative positive decisions to resolve differences. The author concluded by observing that failure to resolve conflict over access to commonly valued scarce resources and over divergent perceptions of socio-political situations has the high potential of degenerating into an uncontrolled violence. Aja (2007:32)[20] argued from a different perspective that conflict resolution comprises an agenda setting to resist parties in conflict or dispute to establish a common ground, given certain guiding principles of conditionality for peaceful co-existence. He further opined that conflict resolutions establishes a wide range of laid down established rules and regulations of the land.

In contrast, conflict resolution represents a theoretical design, while conflict management represents the operational and implementation mechanism among others. However, in the Amaruru community within this scope of the study. conflict resolution promotes consensus building, social bridge reconstruction and re-enactment of order within the community. Agreeing with this

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[18] Olaoba, O. B. Ancestral Focus and the Process of Conflict Resolution in Traditional African Societies. In Albert. A.O (Ed) Perspective on Peace and Conflict in Africa. Essays in Honour of Gen (Dr) Abdul Salami A. Abubakar. (Ibadan: John Achew Pub. 2015).

[19] Punier, G. The Management of Conflict Interpretations and Comparative Perspectives (New Heaven: Yale Investy 1995) p. 11

[20] Aja. A. Basic Concepts Issues and Strategies of Peace and Conflict Studies (Enugu: Keny Publishers 2007) P. 32

submission Otete (2010:11)[21] observed that conflict escalation in indigenous societies were always on a skeletal framework, this is the result of built in mechanism by the applications, of certain indigenous methods which were centered on the cultural value systems of the community in resolving conflicts. The author concluded that conflict resolution is organized to preserve the social harmony and cultural value system of the indigenous societies. The author went further to observed that cross examination was an important mechanism employed in the process of conflict resolutions in indigenous societies. It is also a means of weighing evidence through cross checking and collaborations of the facts in conflict to determine the real facts and finally exert pressure to resolve the conflict. Consequently, in indigenous African Societies, particularly in Amaruru community in conflict resolutions and undue favours to the disputants were discouraged. It is pertinent to note that extra judicial methods were employed in conflict resolution in Amaruru community.

Conflicts and its Resolution in Amaruru Community

Land and Boundary Conflicts

Land epitomized socio-political and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities. Land is normally a place with historical meaning and provides continuity and identity across generations. Land has much to do in human affairs and what human do in the land affects the land positively or negatively. However, land ownership and territorial boundaries had over the years generated a lot of conflicts in Amaruru community in the period under study. Variables of uncertainties triggered the escalation of this brouhaha. For example, increase in population explosion which had exerted much pressure on the land and coupled with land hunger for expansion purposes. Based on this scenario, it triggered conflicts. Ownership of lands and boundaries conflicts had contributed immensely to the causes of conflict between the Amaruru community and her neighbours in the adjacent villages.

As the case maybe, the intensity of the conflict may be hostile if the land in question

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[21] Otete. M. The Dynamics of Social and Cultural Conflicts in Nigeria (Enugu: Ochaim Pub. 2010) p. 11

was a fertile one for farming with presence of economic trees like raffia palm, palm trees, iroko trees among others. At times a market of high economic importance to the host community could cause conflict. For example, according to High Chief Ngawuchu[22] oral tradition holds, that "Nkwodi" market in Amaruru which was strategically located at the bank of Urasi River between Ezinifite and Amaruru communities was a bane of conflict as regards to who controls and owns the market. As a result of constant conflicts, the market was relocated upland to its present location. In a bid to wave off the Ezinifite community. As a result of scarcity of lands, conflict developed between Amaruru and Ezinifite by the West, Ihitenansa by the North, Ihungwo by the East, as a result of claims of ownership and control.

According to Nwachukwu[23] who observed that land and boundary disputes had contributed to so many conflicts in the community. He cited the conflict that occurred between Ezinifite community and Amaruru community that led to the relocation of the Nkwodi market to its present

location north as a result of an incursion into the land of Amaruru community by Ihungwo community for expansionist purposes. Ihungwo needed these lands because it was fertile for planting and habitation purposes. The Ihungwo felt that they had enormous capabilities to defeat the Amaruru and claim the land using any available means at their disposal to humiliate and disposes the Amaruru community of their land.

This forceful encroachment triggered serious conflict between Ihungwu and Amaruru communities. The name by which this conflict was remembered was called *"Ogu Mpuru Oka"* (the war of the grains of corn). It was named so because, the war brought famine and draught on the land. High Chief Nwachukwu[24] opined that the aftermath of the War left untold hardship, loss of life and property on both sides. The Umunna's of both communities united to make peace by calling for a cease fire. The Conflict resolution was achieved by the consultation of the oracle to determine the true ownership of the land in litigation. At the end, the land was ceded to Amaruru community. After the peace deals were initiated and resolved by the

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[22] High Chief Nwachukwu Onyeka. (Oral Interview), Male 73+years.
[23] High Chief Nwachukwu. Onyeka. (Oral Interview) Male 73+ years.

[24] High Chief Nwachukwu Obim 73+ Male, 18th October, 2023.

Umunna's of both communities, the elders of both communities brought palm wine, kola nut and alligator pepper and poured libations at the boundary of both communities to seal the reconciliations in other to avoid, future reoccurrence of such conflicts. By this action, conflict was resolved and managed effectively, to avoid further escalations. The elders in appreciation for the attainment of peace slaughtered a goat to seal the peace deal.

This scenario typifies a significant milestone of the dexterity of the Umunna in conflict resolution to preserve and stabilize Amaruru community for peace and harmony to reign. Another example of conflict resolution by the Umunna could be seen in the land and boundary disputes between the Amaruru community and Ihite community. According to Nwachukwu[25], the land where the Amaruru community usually farm once in every seven years became contentions to Amaruru and Ihite. This land was regarded as the economic hub by the people of Amaruru because of the abundance of economic trees like Oha, Iroko trees, palm trees, among others. The land was known for bountiful harvest and it was a source of support for the

entire needs of Amaruru community. This land was not owned by a single individual, but rather, it was collectively owned by the entire community. The land was called a community land. As a result of the richness of the land according to oral tradition, it became an envy of neighbouring communities like Ihite. As a result of that, the Ihite went to war with Amaruru and at the end of the war, Ihite community was defeated. The conflict was resolved by the two communities by consulting the oracle to determine who owns the land.

The oracle justified that the Amaruru owned the land. That wise declaration by the oracle, in collaboration with the diplomatic craftiness of the Umunna helped in the conflict resolution between the two warring communities, deviating a little from land/boundaries conflicts between two communities to inheritance conflicts. A typical scenario was narrated by High Chief Samuel Madu[26] opined that Emeka, on the death of his father, was taken to his mother's place because the mother was afraid of the safety of Emeka as the only child. As the event unfold when Emeka returned from his mother's village when he might have become

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[25] High Chief Nwachukwu Obim 73+ Male, 18th October, 2023.

[26] High Chief Samuel Madu. (Oral Interview) Male, 69+ Years

of age. The land, which was his portion of inheritance from his father had been taken over by fellow kinsmen and in the process he was left with no land. As a result of this situation, a good friend, of his late father Chief Adiele came to his assistance using high level of diplomacy with the intervention of the Umunna, Emeka reclaimed some of the lands he had abandoned from childhood. In appreciation to Adiele, Emeka transferred the ownership of land to Adiele, and both men took a blood covenant to cement the deal and friendship.

However, as event unfold, this act of kind gesture would eventually lead to a protracted land dispute between the two families after the death of both men. The attempt by Emeka's family in later years to reclaim the said land was seriously resisted by Adiele's family. This conflict between the two families however ruptured the bond of friendship which had existed between the two families. The Umunna in their dexterity in conflict resolution and management brought their expertise to bear in conflict which is intending to tear both families apart.

The Umunna in their wisdom and tactfulness consulted the oracle to determine the truth and to also seek the divine wisdom of the gods to know how the both families came to

own the land in dispute. The oracle through the chief priest opined that Emeka and Adiele ab-initio had entered into blood covenant when the land was transferred. The oracle therefore upheld the important agreement entered into by both men and failure to abide by the decision of the gods, the consequences will be multiple death within the community. The Umunna in agreement with the verdicts of the gods poured libation with hot drinks, threw some pieces of kolanut on the ground and stoke the "ofor" on the ground which signifies the symbol of purity, truth and justice to seal their decision and declared that violators would incur the wrath of the earth goddess "ala," the ancestors of the community and the generality of all the spirit forces that were guiding the community.

This timely intervention by the Umunna eventually brought to an end the conflict that was about to tear both families apart. It is worthy to note that the Umunna aspect of conflict resolution and management is an important integral part of social history and peaceful co-existence within the community. This could be exemplified in the nature of the outcome of every dispute when consensus was reached by both parties. Instead of usually win-loss scenario, it was always a win-win situations, the disputants always see

themselves as fellow kinsmen and brothers in progress for the good of the society not seeing themselves as enemies. The disputants will always embrace themselves or drink wine or water from the same cup signifying unity or oneness.

Inheritance Conflicts and its Resolution by the Umunna

Inheritance is one of the cheapest sources of conflict in Amaruru community. This type of conflict is a normal occurrence within the community, because of the attachments the people had on inheritance which is their fundamental right of owning properties bequeathed to them by their fore bearers. It involves sharing of the properties of the dead called "ika-ekpe" among the children and family members of the deceased.

In Amaruru community, according to Nnodimele[27], who opined that at the death of a man, his properties were inherited by his sons while that of a woman was inherited by her daughters. The cardinal principle of succession in the Amaruru community is primogeniture that is to say, the first son or the eldest male in the family known as "okpara or diokpa" succeeds his father. The

eldest son inherits his father's "ofor" and other objects of worship; the eldest son also inherits the father's "obi" (the house where he lived and died). Other properties such as farmlands, farming implements, economic trees and livestock among others were shared among his male children by the Umunna in such a way that it will not result to conflict.

On a death of a man without a male child as further stressed by Nnodimele, the late man's elder brother had the right to inherit his properties. But if the deceased was the eldest, his immediate younger brother was required by custom to inherit his properties. In Amaruru community, traditions required that women do not possess the right to inherit land. The daughters of the widow of the deceased have right to be catered for by the person who inherited their father or husband's properties.

In Amaruru community, according to Nnodimele[28], the eldest son who is called the Okpala always held his fathers' properties in trust for the brothers. It is his duty to manage and administer them for their collective benefits. But invariably, it might at times turn out conflictual in the sense that the Okpala, on some few occasions, tend to confiscate

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[27] High Chief Nnodimele, N. (Oral Interview) Male 70+ years

[28] High Chief Nnodimele Nnamdi, Male, 70+, Amaruru, Orsu LGA, Imo State, 20th October, 2023

some of the properties for his personal use by planting economic trees like palm trees on them. The attempt by the other brothers to reclaim such properties from their eldest brother usually led to protracted conflicts. For example, in the family of Aluronye in Umuadu village in Amaruru, according to Nnodimele[29], Nnamdi Ezenwoke married five wives who gave birth to many sons and daughters. On his death, the eldest son, Uzoma according to tradition inherited or kept in custody their father's properties in trust on behalf of his brothers.

After some few years, the brothers conspired among themselves to eliminate Uzoma their elder brother, in a quest to disinherit him from the largess of their father's properties. This unlawful act by the children of Nnamdi was a deviation from the custom of Amaruru community. This resulted to a serious conflict that the Okpala was said to have escaped from being murdered by his brothers. It was the Umunna who intervened and brought peace to that family by sharing the properties of Nnamdi to his sons for peace to reign. In appreciation, the children of the deceased provided refreshments of pounded yam, kolanuts, palm wine, and "ugba" (African

salad) to thank the Umunna, at the end, the eldest of the Umunna stroke the ofor on the ground to seal the resolution and invoke the wrath of the ancestors on any violators.

The Resolution of Murder Conflict in Amaruru Community

In Amaruru, the murder of a kinsman was regarded as a taboo and a serious crime committed against the earth goddess, an abomination, "Nso-ala" or "alu". The person who committed such a crime was sent on exile in other to purify the land. For example, in "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe, when Okonkwo the chief actor in the novel killed his fellow kinsman, he had to flee to Umuofia, his mother's place for seven years before the matter was resolved. (Achebe, 1958:68)[30].

According to High Chief Nnodimele[31], murder conflict usually brought conflict between the murderer and fellow kinsman of the murdered. For example, in the case of Elugwu village and Elugwutokpi was the murder of the son of Onyeka of Elugwu by men of Elugwutokpi that brought conflicts between the two villages. It all began when a man named Akatobi from Elugwutokpi was

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[29] High Chief Nnodimele Nnamdi, Male, 70+.
[30] Chinua Achebe. *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinamma Publishers, 1958) P. 68

[31] Chinua Achebe. Things Fall Apart.

said to have married three wives out of which the first two had children for him, while the youngest was yet to have. Akatobi was not always comfortable with men coming very close to his wives, especially the youngest wife whom people described as a paragon of beauty.

However, Akatobi had on several occasions caught one of Onyeka's son exchanging pleasantries with his younger wife. Akatobi then accused the young man of committing adultery with his wife and eventually conspired and killed him. As tradition demands, it is a taboo to kill a fellow kinsman and tradition demands that Akatobi should go on exile for a period of time so that the land will be purified and the gods appeased before he could return to the village. But these noble traditions were not followed, but rather Elugwutopi hid him in the village. This sparked off conflict with Elugwu village after about one year of fighting between the two villages, the Elugwutopi village sued for peace through their Umunna. The two villages came together through their kinsmen (Umunna) to resolve the conflict. It was agreed that Akatobi should be exiled for six years in other to appease the gods and sanitize the land. The family of Akatobi should oversee to the burial of Onyeka's son and also

compensate the family. Peace was once again restored between the two villages.

Marriage Conflicts

The Umunna resolved or settled marriage conflicts within the community. They advise young couples to stick to the sanctity of the marriage vows, love and respect each other according to tradition permits and avoid anything that will lead to divorce. A typical example of the above happened according to Nnodimele (oral interview) in Amaokwe village in the family of Nnamdi and his wife Ukwuoma. Nnamdi had accused Ukwuoma of infidelity, an allegation which Ukwuoma had repeatedly denied. This resulted in conflict between Nnamdi and his wife to the extent of Nnamdi attempting to divorce his wife. It was at this juncture that the matter was reported to the Umunna who intervened to restore the marriage. After hearing from both sides, the conflict was amicably resolved by asking Ukuwoma to always respect the husband and Nnamdi had his duty to love and provide for the wife and stop beating his wife.

After the resolution, the couples were very happy that their marriage which was about to be torn apart was restored back. In appreciation, Nnamdi embraced the wife in

front of the Kinsmen (Umunna) and presented to the Umunna a keg of palm wine and kolanut for helping him save his marriage. Without the quick intervention of the Umunna in this case, the conflict could have degenerated and lead to divorce which might be counter-productive.

Conclusion

Irrespective of the colonial watershed in adopting western styled institutions in conflict management and resolution, the Umunna traditional institution has not only transited generational appeal throughout the phases of colonial administration, but has adapted to conflict resolution mechanism as an age long traditional institution with the impetus of retaining the strong African heritage of Eastern Nigeria's Igbo people of conflict resolution by kinsmen, before the introduction of western styled conflict resolutions mechanism. The Umunna institution in the Igbo cosmology is strongly recognized as a strong force for rapid conflict resolutions and management. These systems, the study envisaged could be reformed and integrated into the contemporary conflict resolution mechanism for quick resolution of conflict.

Having seen the numerous advantages derived from Umunna in conflict resolution, this paper set to interrogate in concrete terms the authenticity and efficacy of this Igbo system of conflict resolution so as to deepen understanding of the system as well as explore the possibility of infusing it in the modern system of conflict resolution mechanism for better results. The researcher humbly suggests that for quick and amicable resolution of conflicts, the Umunna mechanism should be integrated into our conflict resolution mechanism for faster resolution of conflicts. In concluding, the paper suggested that if these indigenous methods is upheld and applied, the better for our conflict resolution mechanism.