

FRAMEWORK FOR RESOLVING INDIGENE-SETTLER CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: THE CASE OF ORUKU-UMUODE CONFLICT IN ENUGU STATE

Felix C. Asogwa

Department of Political Science,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani-Enugu

Chidi Ugwu

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Malachy C. Ochie

Department of Political Science,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu

Ifeanyi Didiugwu

Department of Mass Communication,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu

Ifeanyi S. Odoziobodo

Department of Political Science,
Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani-Enugu

Abstract

The pervasive nature of Indigene-Settler conflicts in many Nigerian cities and communities has been a source of worry to many Nigerians. The negative implication of this on our socio-economic and political development cannot be over-emphasized. Therefore, we set out to investigate the indigene-settler induced conflict in Enugu State namely the Oruku-Umuode conflict. Documentary and survey methods of data gathering technique were the key instruments used. The social identity theory was used as tool for analysis. The paper found that the deprivation of certain basic entitlements accruable to the people of Umuode community by their Oruku neighbours on the account of their relegation as settlers is the key factor that engendered the conflict. The major findings of this research are that in the Oruku-Umuode case, the Amadi-Obia binary is the long-standing mobilizing identity that makes the disagreements between them more delicately complex. Again it was found out that what accounts for the complex nature of the conflict and the solidarity it generated in the two communities developed along the traditional caste system of freeborn and slaves. We recommend the employment of the traditional conflict resolution mechanism as panacea to such complex conflicts between indigene-settler communities.

Keywords: Indigene, Settler, Conflict, Deprivation

Introduction

One of the defining features of socio-economic and political processes, not just in Nigeria, but also in many other African countries is the destabilizing nature of

communal crisis. In Nigeria, especially since 1999, domestic instability arising from intra- and inter-communal conflicts of varying dimensions has been very well documented by scholars as exemplified in the works of Imobighe (2003), Egwu (2003), Osaghae and Suberu (2005), Salawu (2010), Fawole and Bello (2011), amongst several others. Expectedly, the socio-economic cost and associated humanitarian tragedies that have accompanied these communal crises are huge and mind-boggling. Over the years, many scholars have shown that indigene-settler dichotomies as well as issues relating to citizenship are predicated on a number of factors prominent among which is “the nebulous national constitutional misconstruction and discriminatory tendencies of elitist politics”, that reinforce communal conflicts in Nigeria (Ojukwu and Onifade, 2010).

The major problem here is that such concepts as “citizenship” and “indigeneship” have been misinterpreted and abused in the Nigerian context resulting in a double-standard application of the notion of “indigeneity”. Hence, in many Nigerian societies, people may be excluded or denied legitimate opportunities for no other reason than genealogy or migratory narratives. It is, therefore, common in many Nigerian societies to find people who were born in a particular place and who have lived all their lives in that place being denied access to opportunities primarily because they are regarded as “settlers” or in the Igbo parlance, “*ndi mbia-mbia*”. It is this type of alienation or exclusion, particularly at the communal level that has been the major driver of conflicts between the “indigenes” and “settlers”.

Here, the discrimination or alienation of persons on the basis of indigeneship or migratory narrative is complex essentially because such discrimination is directly linked to individual and group access to resources, -especially land, political offices and traditional leadership opportunities. This usually gives rise to a frightening divide between “we” and “them”, -a mindset that has atrophied across decades and held as sacrosanct by people on either side of the divide. Even among a homogenous ethnic group like the Igbo of south-east Nigeria, the vexed issue of indigene-settler dichotomy has been pervasive, incidentally not due to any religious or language differences, but because of ‘*stereotyping*’ arising from migratory narratives, which has condemned some group of people to second-class citizens.

The lingering communal conflict between Oruku and Umuode communities in Nkanu East LGA of Enugu State is a classical example of indigene-settler driven conflict. Before the outbreak of the conflict, there was only one community known as Oruku with Umuode as one of the three kindreds making up the original Oruku community. In real terms, the issue of indigene and settler in Oruku flows from the discrimination and exclusion suffered by victims on account of their migratory narratives. Those who consider themselves as “natives” or “indigenes” tend to exclude those considered as “strangers” from access to environmental resources and in most cases political patronages. The conflicts spawned by this type of exclusion are disturbing with massive implications for political stability and development of Enugu State and Nigeria in general. All over Nigeria, the crises between ‘Indigenes’ and ‘settlers’ exist in the context of identity consciousness, access to and control of resources and positions. Very often, we employ the term “indigene” or “native”

(among the Igbo: “*amadu*” or “*Amadi*”) to describe the level of acceptability of an individual in a certain geographical area above others on the basis of the fact that he or she owns such a place as an inheritance from the fore-fathers, and can trace his or her ancestral background from that area. Therefore, the focus of this paper is to determine the extent to which the “indigene-settler” binary fuel such conflicts and also to develop a framework for its resolution.

Overview of Social Conflicts as Contests for Space and Resources

There are varieties of perspectives on social conflict. Despite their differences, all conflict perspectives have a view, in one form or another, that there are groups in society that have different interests. They see society as consisting of social arrangements that tend to benefit some groups at the expense of others, and the existence of different interests make conflicts inevitable. Different groups pursuing different interests are likely to clash and produce some degree of instability in society (Giddens, 2009).

Many regard Karl Marx as the first to articulate conflict in social life. Marx (1848), narrated how capitalists and workers were locked in an asymmetrical relationship that benefited the capitalists at the expense of workers. Some writers, such as Haralambos and Holborn (2015), however hold that Marx's writings would not rightly be regarded as part of the conflict perspective because of his concept of conflict as a temporary social feature that appeared at some point in history (after 'primitive' communalism) and would disappear if society matured into post-capitalist communism. Writers generally accepted to be conflict theorists, in this light, are those who regard conflict as a permanent feature in society (Weber, 1905; Ezeh, 2008).

Weber (1905), suggested that people could be divided by their status, situations and political interests and also by their economic positions, arguing that there could even be numerous divisions within the two basic classes that Marx had identified (Haralambos & Holborn, 2015). Other conflict theorists influenced by Weber might be too numerous to review individually, but the more prominent ones are difficult to miss. Dahrendorf (2007) is one of such scholars. He saw conflict as concerned with authority. He wrote that those occupying dominant positions would strive to maintain the social structure that guarantees their advantage while those in subordinate positions have an interest in changing that structure. It is this situation that Dahrendorf (2007) saw as the basis of conflict in society. And he held that conflict was ubiquitous since authority systems permeated and criss-crossed the diverse facets of social life (Ritzer, 2012). In other words, those who have authority in one sphere, fighting to maintain it, might belong to a subordinate group in another sphere, fighting to change it.

Coser (1966), another prominent conflict theorist, presents a more general picture of social conflict as a struggle over status, rank, position, power and scarce resources in which the sole aims of the parties involved are not only to gain the desired value but to also neutralize, injure or eliminate rivals. It is also in this breadth that Means *et al.* (2002), define conflicts as situations involving people or social groups with different interests and mutually antagonist tendencies and opposing

influences competing for the use of limited resources to ensure or enhance their livelihood. They further note that manifestations, dimensions and levels of intensity of conflict vary greatly: these can be implicit or explicit, proximate, local, national or international.

Among anthropologists who have theorised on social conflict is Forde (1954), who noted that even in small scale societies, there was constant conflict because not everybody accepted the dominant ideology and principles of their societies, even if they could not help tolerating it. Other anthropologists such as Radcliffe-Brown (1951), Coser (1957) and Gluckman (1963), who studied different traditional societies also theorised on the rootedness of conflict in social life (Scott and Marshall, 2005). What is common with these conflict scholars is the agreement that dissension does not necessarily have to be confrontational to be regarded as conflict; they take conflict to exist anywhere there is lack of consensus in whatever form, whether violent or not (Ezeh, 2010). Llyod (1968) and Akpabot (1975), respectively explored conflict in this light among the Yoruba and the Ibibio, both in Nigeria, and highlighted the function of conflict in social life as well as the traditional strategies of getting around it in those societies. In this vein, Nadel (1976), investigated witchcraft among the Nupe and Gwari in Nigeria and the Korongo and Mesakin in Sudan, and noted that witchcraft accusation was only a local non-confrontational mechanism for expressing and venting conflict in those societies.

The racist approach to explaining ethnic disadvantage focuses on conflict between ethnic groups (Haralambos and Holborn, 2015). Just as we have social conflict, there is also an ethnic conflict which is very common in most of the developing nations (Chukwu and Onifade, 2010; Nnoli, 2008). And these conflicts occur when ethnic groups or sub-groups of an ethnic group compete for political, economic and natural resources at various levels (Dowden, 2009). Eze (2008) notes that a group would usually not cause trouble if there is no indication that their sectional interests are in danger, that is, if it is not the case that, real or apparent, things are being manipulated to favour the other members at the expense of their own section.

The recurring post-independence disturbances in Nigeria, especially between the Hausa and the Igbo, that culminated in the Nigerian civil war, and still rear their head now and then, are blamed on ethnic-based competition for power at the centre and concerns for control of national resource base of the country (Dowden, 2009). Among other cases in this category across Africa, Meredith (2006), recalls the Gikuyu versus Luo rivalry in Kenya, the Hutu and the Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda, the Muslim Arabs and the non-Muslim Blacks in Mauritania and Sudan, as well as the Ndebele and the Shona in Zimbabwe. There is also the prolonged violent conflicts in the area commonly called the Manor River region (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) between the late 1990s and early 2000s that unfolded along ethnic fault lines as well (de Otaola, 2005).

Nigeria's Niger-Delta region has seen revolts against the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies due to their perceived unjust treatment by the federal government and the petroleum companies that mine the oil in their region without

giving back in terms of amenities and ecological control. The region has as well seen other contests for resources and privileges which are inter-ethnic in nature. The Ijaw-Itsekiri clashes in 1997 over the relocation of Warri-South local government council headquarters from Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw town, to Ogidegben, an Itsekiri town (Oromareghake, Arisi, and Igho, 2013), is an unforgettable case in which many lives were lost. That was, in the last analysis, a struggle against losing a local government council headquarters with the prospects of, perhaps, jobs and such other government-related resources and privileges.

A consideration of the inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria shows that although the contest is usually for control of power, space or resources, ethnic/religious platform sooner becomes the rallying point for opposing groups. The stubborn Jos crisis, recorded to have first come to limelight in 1902, can be recounted in this light. Jos is a city in Nigeria's Middle Belt made up of 'indigenes' that are largely Christian and 'non-indigenes' who are mostly Muslim. Although apparently expressed through struggles for political control, the contests between these groups have been for land and the attendant resources. It has taken up different characters in different periods. In the last decade, Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State has been the epicentre of the crisis.

Bamguje (2009) records that since the current civilian regime in 1999, there has been violent rivalry between the Hausa-Fulani (said to be settlers) and the Berom (said to be indigenes) over which 'divide' would produce the Chairman of Jos North local government council. However, the fact that churches and Mosques often become the primary targets when such hostilities spark off underlines the ethno-religious slant of the whole contest. While Hausa-Fulani continue to claim that they have lived long enough in the state and are large enough to be major stakeholders, the Berom have resisted this, claiming that they are the 'sons of the soil' and should have political control of Jos-North (Ojukwu and Onifade, 2010). In the North-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, the 'indigene-settler' violent contestations do not seem to be peculiar to Jos. The Zangon-Kataf crisis was also a prominent case.

The Zangon-Kataf communal conflict, which became explosive in the 1990s, is reported to have reared its head as early as 1863 (Suberu, 1996). It is reported to have arisen over residential space between the Hausa and Kataf ethnic groups. The Kataf would easily present their oral tradition, which recounts how, in 1767, Mele, an itinerant Hausa trader from Niger, was given a portion of their land to settle on. After some years, according to the narrative, Mele was joined by his kinsmen (hence, the *Zangon-Kataf*, which means transit camp in Kataf). The insistence by the Kataf, on this count, that the Hausa community should leave met with the insistence by the Hausa that the Kataf claim was nonsense, given that they had been there for so long in living memory. The Zangon-Kataf clashes then followed the attempt by the 'indigene' Kataf to eject the 'settler' Hausa from the area (Jija, 2008).

In some cases, however, the contest for land seems to be clear and uncomplicated by other factors. Between Aguleri and Umuleri, neighbouring Igbo communities in Anambra East Local Government Area of Anambra state, the tussle was over Otuocha land. It is recorded that the chiefs and elders of Umuchezi Umuleri

sold a part of Otuocha land to the Royal Niger Company in 1898. In 1900, British colonial administration revoked Royal Niger's title to the land. In 1916, the colonial government transferred the title to that land to itself, but did not do much to effectively occupy it.

This then prompted Aguleri people to grab that opportunity to 'reclaim' the land they held to be theirs *ab initio* before being fraudulently sold by elders of Umuchezi Umuleri. Their attempt to do this met with resistance from Umuleri, in hostilities that became fatal in 1995, lingering (amidst court cases and government interventions) until 2007 when community-based organisations, especially the *Umu-Ada*, eventually helped strike a compromise between those neighbours after a long drawn intervention process (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010).

Like in the Aguleri-Umuleri case, the hostilities between Ife and Modakeke, two Yoruba groups in Oyo State of Nigeria, is also over access to land. But in their case, one of the groups' (i.e. Modakeke) very survival was on the line, in that the Ife were bent on driving them away from an area they had occupied and called home for more than a century. It is recorded that the Modakeke had migrated to the old Oyo Empire because of the Fulani invasion of their own section of Yoruba land (Babajimi, 2003). Some sources hold that the then Ooni of Ife, Abaweila, gave the Modakeke refugees a piece of land to settle on in 1840. However, the resolve by later generations of Ife 'indigenes' to drive the descendants of the original Modakeke 'settlers' back to their origin sparked off fatal confrontations between them in the 1990s (Jija, 2008).

Ezza and Ezillo are two Igbo groups in Ebonyi state, southeast Nigeria, whose own conflicts are more or less similar to the Ife-Modakeke case in substance. Those two related communities in Ishielu Local Government Area of the State have been in fatal contests over three strips of land around their area, Ishimkpume, Amalinze, and Umuezikoha. The Ezillo version of the story is that in early 20th century, they had a communal conflict with Ngbo, their neighbours. Ezillo, instead of taking matters into their own hands, had complained to Ezza, generally regarded as the oldest community in Abakaliki. Ezza, after having intervened, eventually took up residence in-between them to form a buffer and forestall further clashes.

However, the Ezza side of the narrative is that Ezillo had invited them to help fend off Ngbo encroachment on their land; and that after pushing back Ngbo, Ezillo had asked them to settle on the contested areas to prevent further intrusion. These areas, according to them, include the present-day Ishimkpume, Amalinze, Umuezikoha and Eguechara. The Ezillo, however, insist that only 22 Ezza men had been invited to settle on just one section of their land, Eguechara. However, in the course of time the original settler-warriors brought along their relatives. This would increase their population, causing them to spread to other sections of Ezillo land. Ezillo, in any case, did not deny having given out land to Ezza; they rather maintained that Eguechara was the only section they had offered.

In 1955, the matter had got to an Abakaliki colonial customary court which ruled in favour of Ezillo and, thereupon, mandated the Ezza to move from all other sections of Ezillo land to Eguechara. The Ezza had appealed to an Abakaliki colonial

district officer who affirmed the judgement of the customary court. But because the colonial administration did not enforce that judgement, the Ezza remained in the land until 2008 when a fight between two men (of Ezillo and Ezza) over a bit of land eventually re-opened the age-old space contests between the neighbours. Ezillo, therewith, resumed their demand that Ezza move out of all sections of their land except Eguechara which they agreed to have given out to the latter. The bloody hostilities also happened in different periods of 2010 and 2011, requiring violent police action to achieve the fragile peace that lingers yet (Mkpuma, 2012; Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014).

Importantly, it has been observed that sub-ethnic or intra-ethnic conflict (that is, between sections of the same ethnic or cultural group) in Africa and in Nigeria is under-researched, and that much of the research attention to violent conflicts has focused on inter-ethnic hostilities, i.e. between different ethnic or cultural groups (Onwuzuruigbo, 2010; Mbah and Nwangwu, 2014). Mbah and Nwangwu (2014), note that while such conflicts may not attract as much attention as inter-ethnic or macro-ethnic conflicts, they are capable of yielding theoretical insights into identity formation, ethnic transformations and questions of citizenship in a dynamic setting like Nigeria. The bones of intra-ethnic contentions in Africa and in Nigeria have had more to do with tussles over land, natural resources, identity and elite competition for chieftaincy and other political-economic trappings (Ibeanu, 2003; Onwuzuruigbo, 2010). Sometimes, these may be seen to overlap in peculiar ways. For example, although chieftaincy tussle helped trigger the 2007 Bawku crisis in northern Ghana, the conflict was basically a struggle for access to land (West Africa Network for Peace-building (WANEP, 2010). The Oruku-Umuode crisis (about which more will be said below) is another example – in that case residential space is the immediate concrete bone of contention, but the delicate, long-standing '*Amadi*'-'*Obia*' ('*freeborn*'/'*slave*') identity binary has been the deep-rooted rallying point for the opposing groups.

Essentially, Ibeanu and Mbah (2011), argue that while land and other material interests are the immediate concrete bones of communal contentions in Nigeria, they do not entirely explain the identities that form around them and how these identities acquire specificity and become the basis of mobilization and intensification of conflict. They note that the negative mobilization based on ethnicity, religion, language, race and other identities in the pursuit of access to limited resources further fuels such conflicts. In the Oruku-Umuode case, the *Amadi-Obia* binary is the long-standing mobilizing identities that make the disagreements between them more delicately complex (Brown, 2003).

It may be concluded, from the foregoing, that ethnic and sub-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria and Africa have mainly manifested as contests for resources, especially land. And it may well be that patterns of managing those conflicts could have a hand in why many of them seemed intractable (cf. Ezeh, 2008).

Analysis of Oruku-Umuode Conflict

Pressures from a combination of factors, such as rising population density and neo-liberalism, have raised land into an object of intense desire in rural communities of southeast Nigeria (Ibeanu, 2003). Ibeanu and Mbah (2011), however, argue that while land and other material interests are the immediate concrete bones of communal contentions, they do not entirely explain the identities that acquire specificity and become the basis of mobilization and intensification of the conflicts. They note that the mobilization achieved with such identities as ethnicity, religion, language, clan or race in the pursuit of access to the limited resources further fuels such conflicts. In the Oruku-Umuode case, the *Amadi-Obia* binary are the long-standing mobilizing identities that make the disagreements between them more complex and delicate (see Brown, 2003).

Onuogowo, Umuchiani and Umuode are descent groups that existed as Oruku community in the Igbo sub-group of Nkanu in south-east Nigeria from 1948 until the 1990's when they fell into crisis – a crisis that is yet to be resolved, erupting now and then into fatal confrontations between Onuogowo and Umuchiani (who now make up the present Oruku) on the one hand and Umuode on the other. Umuode people are regarded as settlers among the Oruku, traceable to a slave in the service of Nara people (a neighbouring community), whom the king of Nara had set free and had requested Oruku to temporarily accommodate. According to the oral tradition, Umuode were originally known as '*Umuobia*' (or descendants of an *Obia*, a settler). In the course of time, as the story goes, the *Obia* got married and began to bear children who also began to work for Oruku people in a slave-owner ('*Ohu*'-*Amadi*) feudal-type relationship until the British colonialists arrived in late 19th century.

Available records indicate that the seed of the Oruku-Umuode crisis seems to have been sown by the colonial disruption of the economic base of pre-contact Nkanu social structure. The economic system that the British met in many sections of southern Nigeria was that based on a feudal-type slave-owner (or *Ohu-Amadi*) relationship (Afigbo, 1981). In 1916, with an impetuous fiat, the British colonial administration enacted a decree abolishing the status of slavery in south-eastern Nigeria. In the Igbo sub-group of Nkanu, the gusto with which the erstwhile 'slaves' moved to assert their new freedom was met with an equally strong quest with which their former owners/masters moved to resist the fundamental shake-up that the decree implied. The ensuing dissensions culminated in a violent conflict that began in 1921 and lingered until a colonial military patrol was dispatched to quell it in early 1923 (Brown, 2003; Obi-Ani, 1999).

Thenceforth, the 'natives' and the 'settlers' managed to forge a peaceful coexistence, so much that the then warrant chief of Oruku town, Igwe Okenwa Adenyi, was able to bring them together under one community with the name, Oruku in 1948. However, from the late 1980's to early 1990's, chieftaincy tussles and accusations of the community's constitution manipulation led to disagreements that opened up the old *Ohu-Amadi* fault lines. The mutual recriminations building up between the former *Amadi* and *Obia* descent groups tipped in 1995 and began to be vented in numerous clashes that destroyed many lives and properties (Ugwu, 2009;

Ukemenam and Okechukwu, 2008). From 1995, when clashes resumed between the groups, to 2013, Adenyi, himself an Oruku man who has been an active part of the struggle, counted nine occasions of violent confrontation which reportedly destroyed about 30 lives and over 200 houses (Adenyi, 2014). In addition to those invaluable losses, the Oruku-Umuode crisis has had other socio-economic costs as well. Since 1995 when the confrontations began, the education of children of the community has been disrupted, economic life of the community (epitomised by the robust Eke Oruku market) has been in shambles. Other dimensions of social progress and development have also eluded the community.

That the fault lines of this conflict have been along the enduring *Ohu-Amadi* duality makes the point that there is something deeply culturally ingrained about the dissension, only waiting for tipping points (like chieftaincy hassles of the early 1990's and squabbles around a reception party organised for an Umuode son who had returned from the USA in mid-1990s) to vent itself (Obi-Ani, 1999). In addition to the *Amadi-Obia* identity binary, chieftaincy tussles and indiscretion on the parts of the government and the Catholic Church leaders have further complicated their disagreements over a residential space for Umuode (Adenyi, 2014; Brown, 2003; Obi-Ani, 1999; Umuode Town Union, 2009).

Other details of the crisis, which will be too much to be recounted here, can be found in several other publications, many of which have been mentioned above. However, what must be noted is that the conflict between Oruku and Umuode now finds its concrete expression in the contest for a residential space. For reasons that we unravelled in the course of fieldwork, the Umuode group prefer a stretch of land identified as *Aguefi* whereas Oruku (now comprising only Onuogowo and Umuchiani) insist that they (Umuode) relocate to another section called *Abari*, which the former have offered for that purpose (Adenyi, KII, 2016; Nwobodo, Umuode Town Union, KII, 2016). As seen in the several sources narrating the situation, Umuchiani and Onuogowo are driven and mobilized by their identity as the *Amadi* (or indigenes). They insist that Umuode, being descendants of their forebears' 'slaves', are settlers (or *Obia*) and should therefore accept the card they were being dealt, such as the proposal that they relocate to *Abari*.

Umuode, nonetheless, insist that they hold a stake in 'Oruku land' because they have been there for so long in living memory, and should have a choice as to where to reside. Oruku people further support their position with the point that allowing Umuode to settle in *Aguefi* – the way Umuode, Enugu State Government and the Catholic Church have pursued it – will dislocate a lot of Oruku indigenes who have resided in *Aguefi* for ages. As reported in many of the materials on the crisis, there are other subtle details about the claims and counter-claims to *Aguefi*, which we deeply explored in the course of the fieldwork.

For instance, in the course of our field work, we carried out advocacy visits to the two communities. Most of the key actors in the conflict we interacted with lived outside the study area. It was, therefore, necessary that we visit the conflict areas, interact with the natives and also intimate them of our mission. The aim of these visits was to soften the ground for the conduct of our FGDs, IDIs and mediation

sessions. These visits were very crucial in our project given the volatility of the study area. We also carried out advocacy visits to the Deputy Governor of Enugu State, Chief Mrs. Cecilia Ezeilo, under whose portfolio the Oruku-Umuode conflict falls; the Secretary to Enugu State Government (Chief Ajah) and HRH Igwe Emmanuel Ugwu (one of the influential traditional rulers in Enugu East Senatorial Zone, where our research area is located). The security agencies (the State Police Command and Directorate of State Security Services) were also put in the know of our project. Most of the key actors in the conflict area (especially the traditional rulers of Oruku and Umuode communities) played important roles in softening the grounds for us as well as mobilizing their people.

The FGDs provided avenues for ventilation of grievances and platform for interaction of the research team with members of both communities. The FGDs/Mediation sessions afforded us the chance to interact with the youths and women groups, town union leaders, age grade chairmen and some members of the clergy from both communities as well as some of those key actors we identified during our mapping exercise. Both sides used the forum to restate their positions or articulate what led to the conflict. One common sentiment expressed by both communities is their willingness and readiness to put a stop to the conflict because in their own testimonies, the conflict has taken a huge toll on them especially in their economy and political interaction. Both communities also expressed happiness with the research team noting that their confidence in our team stems from the fact that ours is not a government panel but purely academic enterprise which report will be unbiased. Key issues that emerged from the FGDs/Mediation sessions in both communities centered on the following:

Umuode:

- ❖ The non-consensual amendment of the 1976 Chieftaincy Constitution and removal of rotation clause for merit clause in the new constitution
- ❖ The contention over the Agu-efi land. The research team visited the Agu-efi land and discovered that even now Oruku and Umuode people co-inhabit the area in their numbers.
- ❖ The controversy over the Government White Paper and the problems of implementation. In their opinion, the implementation of the White Paper would help in proper boundary delineation especially at the Agu-efi area.
- ❖ Rejection of the Abari alternative
- ❖ Readiness to shift grounds

Oruku:

- ❖ Huge knocks on the Enugu State Government for not getting to the root of the problem before granting autonomous status to Umuode as well as issuing White Paper on the conflict.
- ❖ The government, argued Oruku, reversed itself on the position of granting autonomous status to any community in the case of Umuode.
- ❖ They are still willing to live with Umuode as one community

- ❖ If the option above is no longer feasible, Oruku still offered Abari as an alternative area of resettlement for Umuode. The research team eventually visited the Abari area.
- ❖ Oruku's position is that such resettlement is supported by history in Nkanuland. They point to such resettlements of Isiogbo Community in Nara; Akwuke in Akegbe-Ugwu, Ugwuaji in Awkunanaw, etc. Their contention is that Abari is large enough (about 175hectares) to accommodate Umuode.
- ❖ They also expressed their readiness to shift grounds

In the FGDs/Mediation sessions, we observed the impact of historical narratives on the conflict. It was obvious that most of the young men have been sucked-in by the narratives of both sides and sometimes, because of stories that have been narrated to them by their leaders, the question of concession becomes tricky and difficult. Even though accusations of distortion of narratives were leveled by both sides, they were willing to subject to the *ani* deity to prove the authenticity of their claims. This suggests that both sides still have trust in the potency of *ani* to dispense justice without fear or favour.

At any rate, Nzongola-Ntalaja (2011, cited in Mbah & Nwangwu, 2014) seems to be addressing such cases as the Oruku-Umuode crisis when he noted that identity conflicts due to social exclusion have increased the level of inter-communal violence and ethnic wars, further noting that inter-communal violence, based on identity conflicts, take place between a group that defines itself as the rightful stakeholder and those it perceives as intruders.

Studies focusing on the Oruku-Umuode troubles are numerous, although from perspectives that vary more or less. Scholars like Afigbo (1981), Brown (1996, 2003), Obi-Ani (1999), and Ugwu (2009) focused on the history and evolution of the crisis; some, such as Edike (2013), Enechukwu (2012), Nzomiwu (2012) and Okenwa (1999), recounted the harrowing experiences of members of the Oruku/Umuode community because of the crisis; others, such as Adenyi (2014), Ukemenam and Okechukwu (2008), Umuode Town Union (2009) have also recounted efforts made so far, both internally and by external bodies, to resolve the crisis. Adenyi (2014), for example, lists several court cases, government white papers and church declarations regarding the crisis. A lot of those studies often ended with their own recommendations as to how to get around the stand-off.

Even though both sides are mobilized along the *Amadi-Obia* binary narratives, people from both sides voice their readiness to end the conflict and live their normal lives. However, actors from both sides do not believe that recommendations emanating from the various panels set by the government and the church can resolve the conflict. Their lack of belief in the various court declarations, government and church recommendations stem from their conviction that such recommendations are alien to their culture and do not take into consideration the potency of what they hold sacred such as the *Ani-Oruku* (the earth force or goddess). Covenant entered into by both parties in the name of such force is more dreaded or feared than any court verdict.

Framework for the Resolution of Oruku-Umuode Conflict

Given the foregoing, we propose the following framework for resolving the Oruku-Umuode crisis, and which could be applied in similar circumstances in other parts of Nigeria and Africa. This framework, which we hereby refer to as “*Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanism*” is based on the realities that starred us in the face in the course of this research. One very clear fact from our investigations is that both Oruku and Umuode declare their commitment to have the matter resolved. Both parties have even come to the conclusion that the various court cases, judgments, and even the Enugu State White Paper on the issue are incapable of installing lasting peace in the area. In developing this framework, we followed the following steps:

- ❖ ***Mapping of the Conflict Area:*** In doing this, we mapped the study area with the aim of identifying the various actors in the conflict and noting their points of departure. We appreciate the fact that in every conflict situation, there are usually few individuals on both sides whose disagreement on issues that could have been resolved at the embryonic stage very often are allowed to escalate to disturbing proportions. This type of disagreement, more often than not, develops on account of personal ego and inability to subsume their pride for the good of the collective. These individuals always construct their own narratives to suit their positions; and because their people look up to them as pillars in their various domains, they cling on to their narratives as the absolute truth and conduct themselves to sustain the narratives of their hometown heroes. Unsuspecting members of both parties are consequently recruited to pursue and sustain these conflicting narratives with violence and passionate intensity; even when most of the recruits are oblivious of the real cause of the disagreement between the major actors in the dispute. The major actors use carrot and stick tactics to maintain firm grip on their supporters such that any contrary opinion is regarded as an act of sabotage, which sanction is hugely consequential. So the essence of the mapping is to identify these actors; listen to their points of disagreements and identify the points of departure. It is important to note that in most Nigerian, nay African communities, the most susceptible group for recruitment is the youth. Customary and traditional beliefs are the basis of recruitment. They are literally brainwashed into such narratives as “what our forefathers told us; how we used to function in the good old days; and how the ancestors can wipe them out if they do not strive with all their might to protect their heritage”. With this type of mindset, the youths, motivated by minimal handouts from their sponsors devote themselves to defending this real and imagined heritage. In most cases, the youths become lawless such that even their sponsors can no longer control them. They become lords unto themselves and even threats to their sponsors. Among them, they also create power points that define their own stake in the dispute. In most conflict communities, the youths abandon agriculture for the filthy lucre of conflict which comes through plundering and looting the resources of the opposing parties. In their own communities, the youths also take over the sources of income and define who

among the elite is or not supporting the “struggle”. In the course of this research, we heard stories from both parties on how the youths have taken over economic resources in both communities; how mercenaries are hired and how they raise funds to sustain the fight. But in all this, none of the youths we interviewed could reasonably say what the real problem was; but most of them were quick to say that they were merely acting on what their leaders told them. In conducting this mapping, we invested serious efforts in identifying the cultural traits that had held both communities together before the onset of the crisis. Usually, there are certain cultural bonds that served as rallying points, which even in the conflict they hold dear to their hearts. For instance, among most African communities, spilling the blood of a kinsman is regarded as a taboo. In most African communities, feuding parties are usually neighbours sharing common historical background and bonded by a common culture irrespective of their migratory narratives.

- ❖ ***Isolating the Major Actors in the Conflict:*** After the mapping, the team isolated the major actors in the conflict and had private discussions with them on individual basis. This stage is usually very revealing because each of the major actor in the conflict has a story to tell. In our interaction with the two major actors in the Oruku-Umuode conflict (one is retired federal permanent secretary from Oruku and the other a former minister of the Federal Republic from Umuode), we found out that both had a prior and functional relationship with one another before the conflict. They had stayed together, eaten together and done a lot of things together. It was actually due to personal disagreements between them; or in some cases envy or fear of domination that drove a wedge between them. These propensities are then fed with conflicting stories intended to draw support from their various constituencies. It is actually these propensities that drive the conflict and not necessarily the concocted narratives they tell their supporters. Remove these propensities and the conflict will end. Hence, it was necessary to speak to these key actors; prick their consciences on what level of destruction and hardship the conflict has brought upon their communities; and asked them how they would want history to remember them when they had lived their lives and passed on. This seemed to touch their innermost beings whereupon they individually and separately suggested the invocation of traditional means of covenanting before *ani* deity.
- ❖ ***Conduct of FGDs:*** The third phase of the framework was the conduct of focus group discussions (FGDs) with the others actors in each group (recommended by the two major actors mentioned above) in a pre-arranged venue designated by them. In this FGD, allowed the participants to briefly restate their position. The facilitator or conciliator then took over; appreciated their concerns and fed their expectations of peace. We asked them how long the conflict has lasted and what they had benefitted therefrom. This was a very critical stage in the framework. We refrained from showing any form of bias but were guided by the benefits of peace. We further asked them what, in their own opinion, should be done for the

resolution of the conflict. Then, the significant question followed: would they be willing to shift grounds if the other party shows willingness to shift grounds also. One basic truth is that each party wanted a permanent solution to the conflict. This is a very important factor in conflict resolution- that is, the declaration by both parties for peace. The real problem, therefore, was that none of the parties, on its own was willing to shift ground without a third party providing a platform for such shift- a platform that would guarantee each party a soft landing. We noted that the various court judgments obtained by either party; not even the government white paper by the Enugu State Government provided such soft landing. We discovered that only traditional mechanism, like covenanting (*igba ndu*), which both parties know its potency, can. In these FGDs, the leaders of the youths, women leaders especially the leaders of the Umuada and other major community leaders were involved. Conflicts in Igbo traditional society take on various forms and colours.

- ❖ ***Involvement of the Umuada Group:*** No matter the nature of the conflict in Igboland, once it is brought before the umuada, the group, by tradition and custom, has the latitude to intervene and resolve the matter. Resolution of any conflict in Igbo society is graduated and procedural. The first point of conflict resolution in Igboland is the nuclear family. If the nuclear family fails to resolve the issue the matter is referred to the larger umunna, then to the village assembly or council of elders and finally to the gods or deity. At any of these stages, the umuada could step into the case. Among the Igbo, the umuada group is revered because of its importance in resolving very thorny issues that could have defied other levels of conflict resolution and also because of the spiritual significance attached to that institution. The verdict so pronounced by the umuada is irreversible and would usually be enforced through a variety of means such as mild sanctions, directive to the guilty party to go and appease the other party. Refusal by any of the parties to obey the verdict of the umuada is often met with stiffer sanctions like outright ostracism or excommunication from the community. The opinion or verdict of the umuada on any conflict situation in Igbo traditional society is rarely neglected because of the critical role they play in the community. Apart from conflict resolution, the umuada also perform critical ritual functions. They are regarded as the custodians of cleansing and purification morality for their agnate families, clans or communities. The umuada perform cleansing rituals or what the Igbo call “*ikpu-aru*”; and also perform purification rituals for lineage houses and communities. In our interactions with the women group from both communities, they agreed to use the umuada group as a buffer for resolution of the matter. They complained that they had been unable to intervene due to the fact that nobody had provided a platform for them to intervene. They agreed to prevail on their two notable sons to sheath their swords in the interest of peace and declared their readiness to invoke the full traditional weight of the umuada to compel them to the peace table.

- ❖ **Identify Common and Dissenting Grounds:** The fourth stage in the framework involves identifying areas where both parties seem to agree and where they seem to disagree. This helped the research team in narrowing down the scope of disagreement and itemizing strategies for reaching agreement on those areas. The parties were not given the latitude to draw up the conditions of the agreement otherwise they would still hold on to their positions. Rather, the facilitator did that and carefully and persuasively canvassed this position to the leadership of both parties and making adjustments where necessary. This is a very delicate and painstaking process requiring patience and tact in man-management and native diplomacy. Once all the rough edges were smoothed out, the fifth stage was activated.

- ❖ **Organize a Town Hall Meeting:** This stage is the coming together of both parties in a type of town hall meeting. In this meeting, the terms of agreement were read and adopted by both parties and copies of the agreement given to them. The final stage is the traditional covenanting. This is the most critical stage. Igbos are traditional religionists or animists. They believe in deities and gods whose potency they dread. Both parties are brought before the god of the land where they are led through the ritual of traditional covenanting. The common, most effective traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in these parts include oath taking (*iñu iyi*) and blood covenant (*ikọ mme* or *igba ndu*). Oath taking involves swearing to powerful community deities and pledging a specified course of behaviour. In the conflict area, the *ani-Oruku* (the earth force or deity) is still revered by both sides despite the conflict. The second option was invoked because blood has been shed in the conflict– it is a means of appeasing the earth deity (or *Ana/Ani/Ali-* due to dialectal differences), which abhors the spilling of blood. *Igba ndu* (covenanting) involves sacrifices and reparations in the form of exchange of valuables to replace the dead. These means, despite having been widely abandoned under the heavy influence of Christianity, have proved very valuable in bringing the warring parties of Oruku and Umuode to the peace table. This framework, depending on the peculiarity of a given area, can be modified and used by mediators to resolve indigene-settler conflicts, not just in Igboland but also in other parts of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Conflict, in whatever form it occurs, is an integral part of human existence. Conflict resolution, therefore, focuses on how societal conflicts are handled or resolved. Some scholars have argued that since conflict is part and parcel of human existence, emphasis should be on its peaceful resolution. In other words, if conflicts are resolved to the satisfaction of all the contending parties, it will lead to greater social cohesion and strengthening of social bond. On the other hand, when conflicts are poorly handled, it destroys the fabrics of social cohesion and could even generate greater conflict.

This paper, therefore, focused on developing a framework for conflict

resolution among the indigene-settler communities in traditional Igbo society of South-East, using the Oruku-Umuode conflict as a case study. The paper argues that the Igbo society has traditional structures for conflict resolution other than the western-style conflict resolution mechanisms. The paper contends that such alternative dispute resolution mechanism is fundamentally guided by the Igbo culture and tradition codified as *omenani*. Therein lay the framework outlined above.

References

- Adenyi, T. O. (2014). Conflict and its destructive nature: A case study of Oruku/Umuode conflict in Enugu state 1990/91 till date. BSc Long Essay, National Open University of Nigeria, Enugu Study Center, Nigeria.
- Afigbo, A. (1981). *Ropes of Sand: An Outline of Igbo History*. Owerri: RADA.
- Ake, C. (1985). *Political Economy of Nigeria*. Lagos: Longman
- Akpabot, S. E. (1975). *Ibibio Music in Nigerian Culture*. East Lansing: Michigan University Press.
- Babajimi, P. 2003. Ife-Modakeke Conflict Osun State. In T A Imobighe (ed) *Civil and Ethnic Management in Nigeria*, Ibadan: spectrum books. Pp.146-166.
- Bamaguje, N. (2009). Muslim Hausa Hegemony and the Jos Crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com>.
- Brown, C. (1996). Testing the boundaries of marginality: Twentieth century slavery and emancipation struggles in Nkanu, northern Igboland. *Journal of African History*, 37, 51-80.
- Brown, C. (2003). *We were all slaves: African miners, culture, and resistance at the Enugu government colliery*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Coser, L. (1956). *The Function of Social Conflict*. New York. Free Press.
- Dahrendorf, Ralf. (2007). *The Modern Social Conflict: The Politics of Liberty*. Transaction Publishers
- Dowden, R. (2009). *Africa: Altered States, Ordinary Miracles*. London: Portobello.
- Galtung, J. and Webel, C. (2007) *A Handbook of Peace and Conflict Studies*. Edited by. Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, London and Newyork NY 10016. Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data. pp.35 and 180.
- Enechukwu, I. (2011). Contaminated Blood: The Continued Struggle of Equal Rights of the Slave Born' in Nkanu, Nigeria. Retrieved on 14th May 2014 from www.igbostudiesassociation.org.
- Ezeh, P-J. (2005). Ethno-Linguistic Auto-Disclaimer and Imagorization as Socio-Economic Strategies in Nigeria (165-184), in Okeibunor, J. J. & Anugwom, E. E. (eds.), *The social sciences and socio-economic transformation in Africa*. Nsukka: Great AP.
- Ezeh, P-J. (2008, October). Conflict and Politics in Contemporary Africa: An Anthropological Perspective. A paper delivered at the monthly seminar of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.
- Ezeh, P-J (2010). *A Survey of Socio-anthropological Thoughts for African Students*. Enugu: Lifegate Publications.
- Forde, D. (1954). *Yako studies*. London: Oxford University Press.

- Giddens, A. (2009). *Giddens Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Haralambos, M. & Holborn, M. (2015). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (9th ed.). London: Harper Collins.
- Ibeanu, O. (2003). Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict in Anambra State, Imobighe, T. (ed.), *Civil Society and Ethnic Conflict Management in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Ibeanu, O. and Mbah, P. (2011). Sub-ethnic Identity and Conflict in Nigeria: Revisiting the Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict in Anambra State. Paper presented at the National Workshop on Citizenship and Indigeneity Conflicts in Nigeria, organized by the Centre for Democracy and Development, held at Denis Hotels, Abuja, 08-09 February, 2011.
- Ibeanu, O. and Onu, G. (2001). Ethnic Groups and Conflicts in Nigeria. The Southeast Zone of Nigeria Programme on Ethnic and Federal States.
- Jija, T. (2012). Language as a Tool for Conflict Management in Nigeria. *Journal of Igbo Language and Linguistics*, 5, 112-120.
- Karl Marx *et al.* (1848). The Communist Manifesto. Accessible at www.marxists.org.
- Lewis A. Coser (1957). "Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change", *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 8, No. 3. pp. 197-207.
- Max Gluckman (1963). *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe (Macmillan).
- Mbah, P. & Nwangwu, C. (2014). Sub-Ethnic Identity and Conflict in Nigeria: The Policy Option for the Resolution of the Conflict between Ezza and Ezillo in Ebonyi State. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(2), 681-688.
- Means, K., Josayma, C., Neilsen, E., & Viriyasakultom, V. (2002). *Community-Based Forest Resource Conflict Management: A Training Package* (volumes 1-2). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).
- Meehan, C. (2008). "Destructive Conflict". Retrieved from www.smallbusiness.chron.com/, on 12 Nov., 2015
- Meredith, M. (2005). *The State of Africa*. London: Te Free Press.
- Mkpuma, B. (2012). "Ezza-Ezillo Crisis: Matters Arising". Retrieved from <http://www.newsdiaryonline.com/ezza-ezillo-crisis-mattersarising-by-be-86k> on 11 Nov., 2015
- Nadel, S.F. (1976). Witchcraft in four African societies: An essay in comparison. In R.F. Murphy (Ed.). *Selected Papers from American Anthropologist 1946–1970*. Washington DC: American Anthropological Association.
- Nnoli, O. (2008). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Revised 2nd Edition). Enugu: SNAAP Press
- Nwanunobi, C. (2001). *African social institutions*. Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press.
- Obi-Ani, P. (1999) "Abolition and Slave-Freeborn Relationship in Nkanu". *Nsukka Journal of Humanities*, 10, 186-195.
- Ojukwu, C. C. & Onifade, C. A. (2010). Social Capital, Indigeneity and Identity Politics: The Jos Crisis in Perspective. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 45(5), 173-180.

- Okenwa, N. (1999). The Igbo *Osu* Caste System and the travails of Umuode People. Retrieved from http://group.google.com/forum/#!topic/soc.culturenigeria/ptbn_jbhkri, on 12 Nov., June, 2015
- Onwuruigbo, I. (2010). Researching Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria: The Missing Link. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33(10), 1797-1813. DOI: 10.1080/0419871003763304
- Oromareghake, P., Arisi, R., & Igho, O. (2013). Youth Restiveness and Insecurity in the Niger Delta: A Focus on Delta State. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, 13(3), 46-53.
- de Otaola, I. H. (2005, October). A Conflict Analysis of the Manor River Region: Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. A Report for Action Aid.
- Otite, O. (1990). *Ethnic pluralism and ethnicity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Shaneson.
- Radcliffe-Brown, R (1951). "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology". *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 81(1/2): pp.15–22
- Ritzer, G. (2012). *Sociological theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Scott, J. & G. Marshall. (2005). *A Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Onwuzuruigbo, I. (2009). Suberu, R.I. (1996). "Ethnic Minority Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria". Ibadan: Institute Française de recherché en Afrique
- Umuode Town Union (2009). (A Pamphlet Release) Oruku-Umuode Crisis: Facts about land Ownership.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/United Nations Development Programme Center for Conflict Resolution (2013). A Training Manual on the Understanding of Conflict Negotiation and Mediation. Retrieved from www.google.com/undp, on 15 Nov., 2015
- Wallensteen, P. (n.d.). *Understanding Conflict Resolution*. Los Angelis: SAGE.
- Weber, Max, (1905). *The Protestant Ethic and "The Spirit of Capitalism* (1905). Translated by Stephen Kalberg (2002), Roxbury Publishing Company
- West Africa Network for Peace building [WANEP] (2010). The Search for and Restoration of Lasting Peace in Bawku. A Narrative Report of Second Roundtable Conference on Bawku, held in Miklin Hotel, Kumasi, 08-09 May, 2010.
- WANEP (2011). Redressing Violence in the "Home of Peace and Tourism". A Report of Consultative Meeting with Plateau State House of Assembly, 09-10 June, 2011.