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Communal Conflicts in Southeast Nigeria: Explaining the Elites' Character in the Oruku and Umuode Sub-ethnic conflicts of Enugu state

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Abstract

Sub-ethnic conflict has offered so much to communal conflict literature. Several factors contribute to the literature on sub-ethnic conflicts, such as chieftaincy tussles, indigenous-settlers identity, land contests, and the quest for autonomous communities. While this literature has attracted significant attention to academic study, it has not yet provided reliable insight into elite roles in fomenting sub-ethnic conflicts in southeast Nigeria. The study analyses how the Igbo elite of Oruku-Umuode extraction recreated sub-ethnic conflicts in the two communities. With the help of Elite theory, the study used documentary methods to generate data and inductive analytical techniques and historical methods to analyze the data. Findings reveal that Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts are micro conflicts of the rural community's macro trajectories, primarily exacerbated by the dominant political and economic power of Oruku and Umuode elites. Thus, the study recommends that state governments abrogate autonomous communities' land claims in Igboland.

Keywords: Abrogation, autonomous community, communal animosities, Igbo elites, sub-ethnic conflict

Introduction

Conflict, in whichever form it occurs, is often an uncomfortable and energy-consuming experience. Either intra or inter-ethnic conflict (Mbah & Nwangwu 2014; Alimba 2014) or social (Salehyan et al. 2019), economic and material (Tade & Yikwabs 2020) political (Edigin 2010; Dorff, Gallop, & Minhas 2020) and religious (Ifechuwude & Gibson 2021) forms of conflict, conflict is a feeling of disagreement perceived when the incompatibility of interests or set of behaviour is inconsistent (Mayer 2010). This feeling can be anger or bitterness that takes an emotional reaction to a circumstance or interaction that signals disagreement (Otite & Albert, 1999). This disagreement might arise from the divergence of interests, values, and aspirations in the competition for resources to meet demands on social life in a defined socio-physical environment (Kwaja & Ademola-Adelehin 2017).

Given this situation in urban and rural communities, there are tendencies for potential conflicts to occur due to bitterness, anger, frustration, or hopelessness incubating between communities, social relations and individuals' conflicting interests and goals. Therefore, conflict is conditional on conflicting goals between competing and opposing groups or individuals in a rural or urban community. Thus the narratives of urban and rural conflict literature (Ann et al. 2014; Fienitz & Siebert 2021) draws to mind the open invitation to conflict because groups or individuals attempted to attain conflicting goals. Nevertheless, the recent morphology of conflicts indicates more rural conflict (Radil et al. 2022) than urban conflicts in North and West Africa, with a 2018 study showing a record high of violent communal conflicts re-occurring each year in rural African communities between groups often organized along identity lines (Elfverson 2019). On that note, communal conflicts are between non-state groups organized along a shared community identity (Brosché, 2022), notably at the rural level.

In Nigeria, with over 250 opposing groups divided along ethnic lines, Nigeria is trapped in more complexities of a rural and communal complex conflict. Arguably, one can envision complex conflicts in a society of more groups or identities. To be sure, in a 173 active communal conflicts study, Nigeria was at the top of the six worst-hit countries after Ethiopia and Somalia. In the study, Nigeria experienced 37 unique communal conflicts during 1989-2010 (Brosche & Elfyersson, 2012). In the southeast states of Nigeria comprising Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo states, most violent communal conflicts along identity lines take the forms of intra-ethnic or sub-ethnic conflicts, thus creating sub-ethnic conflicts in most Igboland communities. Reflecting on this, Oji, Eme and Nwoba (2015) identified the participants in these intra-ethnic conflicts as communal groups whose primary identity prevails and whose membership is not attained but ascribed. Thus, conflicts predicted in a communal context with relatively small group sizes assume the character of sub-ethnic conflicts, with 90% of all communal conflict relating to diverse claims to land rights and unclear legal clarity in Nigeria (Agheyisi 2019)

Sub-ethnic conflict is seen as micro-level conflicts within the larger kaleidoscope of inter-ethnic relations and conflicts (Jinadu 2004). The frequency of sub-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria could almost be compared to a biological cell, which sub-divides and subdivides again, creating more and more replicas (Osinubi & Osinubi 2006). Historically, while sub-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria predate colonialism, the southeast, as one of the zones among the six zones in Nigeria, has been engulfed in sub-ethnic conflicts. In their research, far back as 2001, Ibeanu and Onu identified over seventy sub-divisions of sub-ethnic conflicts in the southeast alone as severe conflicts among the Igbo sub-identities (Mbah & Nwangwu 2014). Popular among sub-ethnic conflicts in Igboland is the Aguleri-Umuleri sub-ethnic conflicts in Anambra state (Nwachukwu 2016; Lawrence 2018; Charles 2019; Ikenna 2022) and the Ezza and Ezillo in Ebonyi state (Oji, Okechukwu, Hyacinth 2014; Dennis 2010; Peter 2016; Kelechi 2017). Other unreported are the Ehime and Mbanu in Imo state, the Isu/Utuma communal clash in Abia state, and Oruku/Umuode in Enugu state.

Suffice it to say that the occurrences of these unreported sub-ethnic conflicts over the years across 3 of 5 states in the southeast raise more concerns than ever before. In Enugu state, despite the Enugu state Government White Paper reports of 2009, the Oruku-Umuode have persisted despite regular casualties of the Oruku/Umuode conflicts that

have received comparatively little attention. Where it has (Ayua 2006; Okechukwu 2014), the character of the Elite's involvement in the Oruko/Umuode conflicts and its casual impact have not been interrogated. What available literature on Orukuo/Umuode indicates the causes of these sub-ethnic conflicts within the theoretical paradigms of indigenes and settlers' identities, land disputes, boundary disputes, exclusion of minorities, kinship disagreement, autonomous community contest, population increase and economic expansion narratives?

By sub-ethnic conflicts, I mean conflicts within a homogenous ethnic community primarily caused by a few individual elites' primordial interests and behaviour under the pretence of a communal conflict. Whilst other factors causing intra-ethnic conflicts are prevalent in the southeast, it is not as glaring when the elite character is involved. The presumption is that elite differences between the same ethnic groups could create injustice and grievances that directly or indirectly deny the Elite its privileged access to pooled resources and positions relative to other communities, which affects the Elite's constituency. Thus, the common ground of unity or compromise among the elites, in most cases, when there is perceived suspicion or mistrust, is the likelihood of elite disagreements brewing conflicts. The failure to reach an elite compromise from the disagreement is a product of elite greed that begin with an intra and inter-ethnic bias narrative. In his celebrated study on ethnic politics in Nigeria, Nnoli (1978) averred that the foundation of ethnic prejudice visible in a pluralistic society like Nigeria is solely on national disunity that breeds primordial bias. Primordial sentiments occur when people appear to project and pursue personal or group interests at the expense of communal value in a competitive situation.

In most cases, the elite interest per se is conflictual instead of consensual, leaving communities at deep animosities. The basis for an elite primordial character is that elites in a community possess the political and economic leverages that produce the willpower to instigate, sustain, resist, and avert conflicts. The usefulness of elite leverage lies in the influence to mobilize and manipulate individual and community members' emotions to exacerbate the hostile relationship between communities that ultimately drive conflict (Tang 2015). Consequently, given elite greed and perceived injustice thwarted by an individual within and between groups, elite mobilization and manipulation become inevitable after evaluating the marginal benefits over the marginal cost of the conflicting goals for self. Despite a plethora of literature on sub-ethnic conflicts, little or nothing is known about the persistent character of the elites in mobilizing, fueling, and sustaining sub-ethnic conflicts in Southeast and Igboland. What is this character, and why has it persisted? How does the character of the Igbo elite in the southeast recreate sub-ethnic conflicts in the Oruku-Umuode conflict of the Enugu states?

Hence, the remainder of the study proceeds to test the hunch in the political and economic character of the elites and the sub-ethnic conflicts thereof in Igboland with a departure from the Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts Enugu state, Nigeria. Firstly, the study conceptualizes sub-ethnic conflicts and discusses the methodological considerations for this study. Next, we review the predominant literature on the causes of sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku and Umuode. In the third section, we explain the theoretical framework adopted. In the next section, we gave an insight into the historical development of the

Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts. Fifth, we tested the hypothesis with the help of a local data framework. Finally, we conclude the study on how best to address the sub-ethnic conflicts in the southeast.

Methodological considerations

The study explored the character of the Igbo elites in the southeast as a dominant factor in the emergence and interpretation of sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku and Umuode. For that purpose, the study adopted an explanatory research design to explain the general research objective. As a corollary to explanatory research, the case study analysis using Oruku and Umuode in the Enugu state fits the dominant character of the Elite in understanding who and why sub-ethnic conflicts persist in the Oruku community. Besides this, of five southeastern states in Nigeria, Enugu state behind Anambra state is among the hotbeds of deadly sub-ethnic conflicts, which have rendered many homeless and caused hundreds of people's lives in the region.

The study, therefore, generated data through documentary instruments and sourced secondarily from Enugu state Government White Paper reports of 2009, archives, and online publications on sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku-Umuode. Consequently, the data generated were represented in textual and tabular form to show the relationship of the concepts and their components to the central idea of the study. Besides this, the study used a map to draw other imagery of the Nkanu Local Government Area in the Enugu state. Nonetheless, the study relied on inductive analytical and historical methods to analyze the data collected. In doing this, the study adopted content validity to measure the capacity of the opinions, attitudes and actions of the Igbo elites that focus on sub-ethnic conflicts in their community. Finally, the study used the Logical Data Framework (L.D.F.) to guide the discussion of the hypothesis.

Review of the Literature

Literature on sub-ethnic conflicts has witnessed a substantial underlying interpretation of the causes of intra-ethnic conflict in the southeast, particularly in Oruku and Umuode. One of the underlying causes lies at the heart of the power struggle within the homogenous community. The struggle aimed to control the supremacy of the decision-making traditional institution of kingship. The quest for kingship positions in the institution has been central and, to a large extent, laid the foundation for the cause of sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku and Umuode. As a dominant narrative in the Oruku community conflict, the traditional Kingship system has flourished remarkably in rural areas in Igbo dominance in Nigeria. Historically, the traditional institution is recognized chieftaincy position with an individual who gained official recognition and political backing in Nigeria before introducing the 1976 Local Government Reform (Harneit-Sievers, 1998). Since then, there have been more tussles to acquire powers inherent in the chieftaincy institution as one of the most conspicuous causes that have torn apart different communities in Igboland (Njoku & Mba 2018).

Thus, while this institution in Igboland existed before colonialism, its official recognition and the magnitude of power attached to the position in a traditional rural community have made the chieftaincy tussles a source of sub-ethnic conflict. The reason is

that most influential personalities seek this post to gain power, influence, and access to the institution's enormous social, cultural, and economic privileges at the community levels and beyond (Awedoda, 2009). On that note, Nkwopara et al. (2016) assert that most communities in the five southeastern states of Nigeria have experienced crises over the selection or election of their traditional rulers. This ugly situation across the five states in the southeast has led to the killing of influential personalities like monarchs and witnessed various court cases challenging the selection, appointment, or election of chieftaincy rulers (Blueprint Editorial 2020). Today, there are more controversies attached to the chieftaincy institution in Igboland despite laid down customs and traditions as to the emergence of the ruler.

Part of the narrative of the controversies in the Igbo traditional institution is the consolidation of powers attached to traditional rulers before the 1976 Local Government Reforms. At Nigeria's independence, particularly under the 1960 and the 1963 constitutions, the Council of Chiefs, the traditional institution, was established in Southeast Nigeria, and some Chiefs rose to become regional Governors. Before independence, the traditional rulers played a vital role for the political elites and colonialists in gaining public acceptance and dousing communal conflict at their local levels. However, the 1976 reform to the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stripped traditional rulers of all their powers. The constitutional vacuum for the powers of the traditional rulers has undermined the institution's stability with unsavoury elite manoeuvring and politically motivated aspirants struggling for the throne against the laid customs and traditions for the emergence of the traditional kingship system. In southeast and other regions in Nigeria, state governors appoint associates and friends and dethroned and deregulated enemies to the position, thereby violating the laid down customs. The manipulation and distortion of some of these customs in most communities, like the Oruku sub-communal conflicts by the elite group, have undermined the traditional values of the chieftaincy position and created deep rivalries.

For instance, when the first Igwe from the Umuchiani clan of the Oruku community in Enugu state died in 1983, the hereditary institutionalized system could not handle the crisis that later emerged. Due to political manoeuvring between the Elite in the communities who replaced the late Igwe despite traditional stipulate guidelines. In a study to ascertain the causes of the Oruku and Umuode conflict, Umunnakwe (2009) confirmed that chieftaincy tussles caused much friction, leading to killings and loss of lives and property. He later explained that the chieftaincy position in the rural communities accounted for 40.20%, the highest percentage cause of sub-ethnic conflicts in the Enugu state. In support of this view, Ayua (2006) explores why chieftaincy-related conflicts are the product of linkages between access to the benefits of chieftaincy, such as land, economic benefits and political patronage. In that manner, Ayua (2006) insisted that when such linkage exists, particularly with land at the centre, intra-inter-ethnic conflicts take place. While Oji et al. (2015) alluded to this link as a contributing cause in the Oruku and Umuode conflict, they added that the disagreement over land in the communal communities and the indigene-settler identity question contribute to the causes of sub-ethnic conflicts in the Southeast and Oruku and Umuode in particular.

Specifically, the indigene-settler identity question has been identified as one of the major sources of sub-ethnic conflicts in Igboland. However, some scholars such as Sayne (2012), Campbell (2012) and Olakunle, Joseph, & Segun (2016) prefer not to attach sub-ethnic conflict in Igboland to indigene-settler discourses. The reason is that the repeated reoccurrence of indigene-settler conflicts beyond the rural communities nullifies the attribute. These scholars generalized and considered the cause of sub-ethnic conflict as a nationwide endemic problem unhealthy for peaceful coexistence. Osaghae and Suberu (2005) blame dominant primordial groups that have adopted the indigene-settler question as a discriminatory practice that denied settlers, migrants, and non-indigenes equal access to community resources while violating their rights and privileges. These denial and exclusion practices have been one of the dominant factors outside the disagreement over land resources on the causes of major sub-ethnic conflicts in the southeast.

For instance, in the Ezza and Ezillo of Ebonyi state, the indigene-settler question became a recurring decimal whenever disputes over land ownership emerged. The Ezillos, regarded as indigenes, sought the relocation of the Ezza, referred to as settlers, to Eguecheara land. The typical disagreement over who is an indigene and a settler has continued to fuel the sub-ethnic conflict in Ebonyi (Anthony & Humphrey 2017). In the Aguleri-Umuleri of Anambra states, one of the most cited sub-ethnic conflicts in Igboland, the identity question became the 'created narrative' to challenge the rightful ownership of Otuocha land located at the headquarters of Anambra-East Local Government Area by the two communities. In the Oruku-Umuode communities of Enugu state, the indigene-settler nexus is a dilemma that is still breeding hostile relationships between the two communities. Generally, this dilemma has circled the question of citizenship identity in Igboland. Ibeanu and Mbah (2012) referred to indigene-settler conflicts as part of the complexities of the construction, primordialization and intensification of contradictory cultural identities in southeast Nigeria. As the web of complexities, Mandani opines that the Rwanda genocide of 1994 was a product of the natives' violence that began as a counter to violence by the settlers' violent denial of humanity. He further maintained that in 1994 when violence occurred, it became an interpretation of violence by yesterday's immigrants, becoming today's indigenes (Mamdani 2001).

Generally, the consensus in Igboland is that the indigene-settler question has resurrected the historical lineage of the communities in Igboland. One interpretation of the historical lineage in Igbo history of bias and cultural conflict in southeast Nigeria is the Osu identity and interpretation. The Osu caste system has become a historical premise that has partly become the basis for analyzing the indigene-settler question. Therefore, the Osu caste system becomes a top contending offshoot narrative in the sub-ethnic conflicts dilemma in Igboland. Laying the foundation for the Osu caste system that induced sub-ethnic conflicts, Nzongola-Ntalaja (2012) posits that identity conflicts due to social exclusion have laid the foundation for deepening sub-ethnic conflicts in communal societies. Social exclusion creates divisions that question the identity of community members. For instance, in many Igbo traditional societies, the Osu caste debate is one social exclusion crisis. The Osu identity implies a person dedicated and owned by god and is considered a living sacrifice, an outcast, untouchable and sub-human (Achebe 1959, Dike 2002).

Despite the Eastern House of Assembly laws abrogating the Osu caste system in 1956 (Modestus & Anyim 2016), Ugobude (2018) argues that in Igboland, the stigmatization of Osu identity on a person because of his birth into the Osu caste remains part of the Igbo system till date. This 'imposed identity and interpretation was one of the causes of the Oruku/Umuode intra-ethnic conflict in the Enugu state. In the conflict, the Oruku community referred to the Umuode as ex-slaves despite the Commission of Inquiry by the Government of Enugu State and previous military regimes and civilian administrations that addressed the Osu caste stigmatization. However, Okechukwu (2014) maintained that the Osu caste system practised in Oruku did not trigger the sub-ethnic conflict, contrary to some writers' opinions. The reason is that the two communities had lived peacefully for years without Osu caste identity and controversies. Therefore, the nexus between the indigene-settler and the Osu caste system creates a double tragedy that often breeds hostilities between host communities and settler communities, as witnessed in Igboland for years and the Oruku community.

In a separate narrative, Madulu (2005) draws our attention to a neglected variable in the sub-ethnic conflict in Igboland. Accordingly, Madulu insists that population growth and human activities on land generate pressures on natural resources. This pressure results in increased land use to earn a living and other demands by community members, leading to conflicts in rural communities (Madulu 2005). Earning a living on the land has linked the driving force of land for continued commercialization, development and housing (Madu, 2012). Specifically, Madu (2012) contends that population pressure has resulted in a broad spectrum of human activities in rural areas in southeastern Nigeria. One of these spectrums has been the strong links between population pressure and sub-ethnic conflicts, particularly in Igboland extraction communities where land is valued and considered an ancestral heritage. An empirical study by Egbe and Augustina (2015) and Erena (2013) has shown that population pressure could trigger communal land conflicts among rural communities. Therefore, the continuing tendency for the contest and struggle is the strong relationship between land resource availability and population density (Okafor 1991).

Thus, in Igbo society, the traditional system of land ownership abhors the sales of landed property. Today, land is a source of all material wealth. It has become an essential commodity sought out by every human on earth, and as such, the struggle for economic gains has generated sub-ethnic conflicts within ethnic communities. Nevertheless, the foundation of sub-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria linking the struggle for land ownership in Igboland is traceable to colonialism. Colonialism encouraged ethnically competitive and divisive policies on land ownership. Specifically, Nnoli (1980) asserts that colonialism encouraged micro-ethnic and often competitive identity politics in southeast Nigeria. For instance, we had competitive communities within the Igbo ethnic group like the Ado (the Onitsha Igbo of Anambra state) and the Wawa (the Northern Igbo of Enugu State). We had the Jookwa (the Afikpo of Ebonyi state) and the Ohuhu (Central Igbo land). In the Ijekebe we had (the old Onitsha colonial province), all have emerged mainly from clans increasingly claiming a sub-ethnic identity through land contest and expansion.

By and large, the study lends substantial credence to the character of the elites in Southeast Nigeria. The understanding is the hunch that sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku and Umuode and generally in Igboland have the fingerprint of the Elite, given their political

and economic character. Given the intractable nature of sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku, Umuode, and Igboland, the study ascribes to the hypothesis. Moreover, the study recognized that the literature is inadequate in deepening the discussion on sub-ethnic conflicts in southeast Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

The study adopted the elite theory to highlight the character of the elites in mobilizing and sustaining sub-ethnic conflicts in the southeast, particularly in Oruku-Umuode. The prominence of elite literature has consistently attributed the elite struggle for power to political or communal violence (Alapiki 2004), which re-established Gurr's idea that lack of relative loss of power by men who sought it has been associated with innumerable outbreaks of collective violence (Gurr 2016). Therefore, this study explores the basic tenants of elite theory to offer insight into elite behaviour, elite interaction, elite transformation (López 2013) and, ultimately, elite competing political power and fictionalization that the study attribute to Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts.

The philosophical idea of elite theory began as classical elitist scholars such as Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels developed the elite theory. The theory rejects pluralism and seeks to describe and explain modern society in the context of power relationships (Akintola & Yabayanze 2017). In classical elitist literature, elitism is capacity, personality, and skill. By that, a tiny minority assume leadership of an institution, its policy planning, formulation and enforcement to create further political, economic, education, and social ties and hold power in society. This idea made Pareto sees the elites as those who resembled the lion (domination by force) while "the crowd" were those who resembled the fox (domination by persuasion and skill). This viewpoint is similar to Machiavelli's political philosophy.

The premise of the elite theory is that every society is divided into two major groups: the elite and the non-elite. The former distinguished themselves based on particular characteristics by possessing political, economic, social, educational and military power. As Mill notes, these powers are composed of men; which positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women and in positions to make decisions having major consequences? (Mills 2000). For the non-elite or ordinary men and women, their qualities are often defined by comparisons with elites regarding material well-being and behaviours undertaken or displayed in a broader social context (Lohse & Valdez 2017). However, the degree of mobility, that is, changes in the location of subsistence or occupational activities, are common for non-elites to adjust to political and economic circumstances and to resist oppression by the ruling elite and state (Inomata, 2021).

Nonetheless, a distinguished character of the elite is that there are selected groups in a society that is superior in ability or qualities to the remaining group members. The distinguished character informed Mill's assertion that whether or not the elite profess their power, their technical and political experience far transcends that of the underlying population (Mills 2002). These select groups are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society. In that manner, the group share a consensus on the fundamental values of the social system. Its preservation and the allocation of the value of

the society (Chuma 2009). Hence, elitism is dynamic dominant individual strata in a group within groups who have control and domination in the pilot of affairs in that group in which he/she belongs. These dynamic individuals are currently actors controlling resources, occupying the key position and relating through power networks (Yamokoski, A., & Dubrow, 2008). The dominant minority group aimed at maintaining the status quo, which is maintaining the society in which elite members continue to benefit from their position, including positions such as elite lawyers, mechanics, thieves, and even elite prostitutes.

While this minority is a central actor in politics by prevailing over non-elites (Higley 2010), elite crises in a polity caused by relative deprivation, notably regarding the capturing of state power, have remained prominent in the discussion of conflict in Nigeria. This struggle aligns with the political process theory is the emergence of contentious politics, meaning all kinds of collective political struggles (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly 2003) that breed all forms of elite crises. Elite crises involve a sudden flaring of belligerence by one or more of the elite groups that are jockeying for personal interest and powers in all strata of the society, including communal position. The rapid escalation of the crises, volume and intensity by political actors greatly increased elite insecurities (Dogan & Higley 1998).

In applying the fundamental proposition of the elite theory to Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts, the study lends credence to two scenarios of elite mobilization in Oruku-Umuode conflicts. The first is the grievances among the individual Elite in Oruku-Umuode communities in their quest to reclaim their rightful traditional position. The second is on the quest for an autonomous community. On the road to these two scenarios, the Elite from both communities, while claiming collective action, instigated, mobilized, and manipulated community members in the Oruku community.

The first evidence of the grievances of the elites of the Oruku community lies in the controversy and primordial sentiments of a few elites surrounding the constitutional amendment of the Oruku town in 1976. The amendment follows the death of the traditional ruler of Oruku town, the Late His Royal Highness Igwe Nwatu Okenwa. Consequently, the mistrust in the processes leads to the emergence of the new traditional ruler of Oruku town, H.R.H. Igwe Dr CA Nomeh. Subsequently, the outcome created deep animosity among the Elite and members of the Oruku community. Among these individuals, Elite is a retired federal permanent secretary from the Oruku community on the one hand and, on the other hand, a former minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from Umuode extraction. The strong grievance between the two elites from the two rival communities during the constitutional amendment provides the logic to facilitate the mobilization of the people around perceived injustice.

Thus, this individual Elite is motivated to mobilize the small or large community population for private gains. Whilst a small number of ethnic rural communities like Oruku and Umuode serve as a potential population sample for quick elite leadership to mobilize and engage during conflicts, the Elite's success depends on how many supporters are likely to join his claims. When this claim is of broad goals like chieftaincy position or community land acquisition, the Elite will organize those for whom the deprivation is personal and, when necessary, pay selective benefits to keep non-elite in the fold. This non-

elite supports the elite conflict when calculating the anticipated gains, cost, and estimates of the possibilities that such support for a group becomes necessary (Regan & Norton 2005). Either as a sub-ethnic or inter-ethnic group, the elite agenda seeks redress from the perceived injustice or relative deprivation and an ethnic tribal affiliated group that is more effective than other groups affiliated with economic or political identity. In the Oruku community, the primordial practices underlie the elites' motivation to replace the rotation principles of electing a new Igwe with a 'Merit System' that sowed suspicion and deprivation. Furthermore, because the root of grievances is deprivation and mistrust of individual concern, conflict is produced and can manifest collectively.

The second elite mobilization is the quest and tussle for creating the Umuode autonomous community. There is a consensus that literature on the quest for autonomy by few individuals or groups in a community tends to insight intra and inter-ethnic divisions towards separation. The idea is that autonomy requests construct a new identity for communities likened to discrimination against inhabitants within a community. While autonomy presumption is on discrimination, request community, sometimes the minority genuinely hopes for better access to create and manage resources collectively. However, it is paradoxical that an unsuccessful and successful new autonomous community is not a significant source to manage intra or inter-ethnic conflicts. For that reason, deep animosities and asymmetric relations between the two communities may sometimes lead to a relapse into conflicts.

The concept of the autonomous community came in following the 1976 local government reform. Bentor (2008) asserts that the autonomous community was an administrative unit of stable precolonial Igboland communities that provided common migration history and heritage. Bentor opines that the stability and fictive historical claims of descent of communities' migration are sometimes imposed and central to each community's sense of belongings (Bentor 2008). The sense of belonging reflects Umuode leaders' decision in 1998, who lobbied the Military administrator, Col Sule Ahmed, for an autonomous community. The dispute has been on the land for the resettlement of Umuode in the new community.

According to Okechukwu et al. (2019), each community leader from the Oruku community claims ownership of the disputed ancestral Aguefi land. While the Enugu state government created a new autonomous community in 2019 for peace to return to the community after years of conflicts, the breakup process was never entirely peaceful, even for development purposes (Bentor 2008). In 2020 communal conflict in the Oruku community, Ojiego asserts that fewer than 50 houses were destroyed and community members displaced. Ojiego maintained that while the conflict is traceable to age-long moves of the Umuode community to become an autonomous community, it has made another set of people from the Umo Ode clan in the Oruku community want to separate from the entire Oruku town allegedly (Ojiego, 2021).

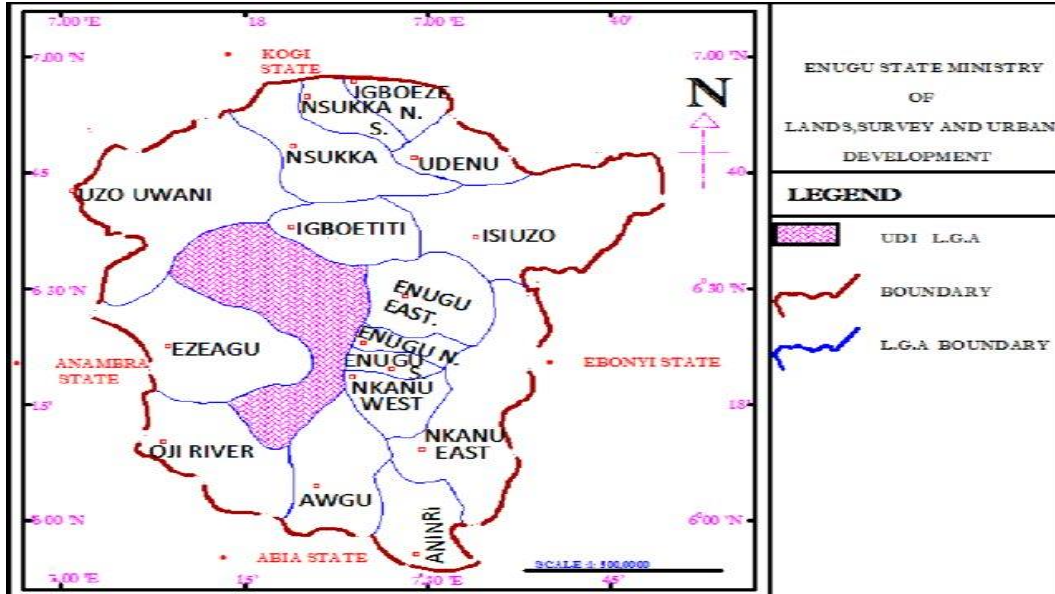
Nonetheless, in the conflict mapping of the Oruku-Umuode sub-ethnic conflict, the Elite's behaviour in the two communities is instrumental. There are instrumental in the sense that when the elite rebel, they instigate, mobilize, and manipulate other communities' members to see the rebellion as a collective injustice, mistrust and grievances. The mobilization is possible given possession of the political and economic

powers, including influence to determine the viability of the conflict. In such viability, the Elite employs a vulnerable group, the community youth, to execute the perceived cause. Numerous pieces of literature undoubtedly explain why youth are mobilized or become an element of voluntarism in communal conflicts (the literature on youth bulges, coercion, youth grievances, the prospect of profit and excitement, and elite mobilization). Despite multiple factors to voluntary youth engagement in communal conflict, the elite factor can provoke, lengthen, and sustain youth instrumentalization of communal conflicts. The elite mobilization of the youth highlighted the role of "agent provocateurs" who deliberately exacerbate communal conflicts for primordial gain (Hilker & Fraser 2009). One such process that fuels exacerbation is the youth's militarisation to add to the complex web of communal conflict to address elites' grievances and perceived injustice.

Historical Development of Oruku-Umuode Sub-Ethnic Conflicts

Oruku and Umuode communities are two communities under the former Oruku community. The Oruku community is one of fourteen in the Nkanu East Local Government of Enugu State. The two communities, formerly the Oruku community, lie 10 kilometres north of Nkanu East Local Government Area (L.G.A.) of Enugu State. With the L.G.A headquarters at Amagunze, Oruku and Umuode communities are 18 kilometres from Enugu, the capital of Enugu State. The two communities-Oruku and Umuode, are surrounded by other communities in Nkanu East L.G.A: Akpawfu, Amaechi Idodo, Amankanu, Amagunze, Ihuokpara, Mburubu, Nara, Nomeh, Nkerefi, Ugbawka, Ogbahu, Onicha Agu and Owo. Aneke (2008) posits that historically, the Oruku community consists of twenty-three (23) family units. The family units are grouped under three clans, namely, Umuchiani (12 families), Onuogowo (6 families) and Umuode (5 families), as officially registered and recognized as families in the Oruku community by the Nkanu East Local Government Council of 1976. Today, Umuchiani and Onuogowo clans make up the present Oruku on the one hand, while Umuode remains a single clan.

Figure 1. MAP SHOWING NKANU EAST L.G.A OF ENUGU STATE



Source: Okwu-Delunzu et al (2018)

Asogwa, Ugwu, Ochie, Didiugwu, & Odoziobodo (2017) posit that the genesis of the sub-ethnic conflict between the Oruku-Umuode started in the late 1980s to early 1990s following the death of the first Igwe from Umuchiani of Oruku in 1983 and the contest between the three clans on the chieftaincy position. The demise and the quest to fill the vacant position reignited the indigene-settler identity question between the Oruku and Umuode. The question of identity fan the flame of the Osu caste system against the Umuode.

Therefore, in 1987, the Umuchiani clan initiated the proposed amendment of the 1976 Oruku constitution on the Chieftaincy position to be non-rotational. The proposition did not go down well in the Oruku community, especially between the Onuogowo and the Umuode clans. Given the controversy, the Onuogowo clan opposed the proposed amendment after Umuchiani, and the Umuode clans ratified the constitution. However, in a twist of mind, the Onuogowo clan accepted the proposed amendment. In 1991, the amended Oruku constitution was used to elect Hiss Royal Highness Igwe Cornelius A. Nomeh from the Onuogowo clan based on merit. This suspicious move deepened the already division in the Oruku community and elicited further discontentment from the Umuode clan, who perceived conspiracy against them by the Umuchiani and the Onuogowo. In January 1991, the Umuode filed suit No E/450/91 against Igwe Cornelius Nomeh. In the suit, Umuode sought an injunction restraining the Enugu State Government and any of its functionaries from recognizing Igwe Cornelius A. Nomeh as ruler of the Oruku community, hence setting the stage for the deepening of the conflicts (Okechukwu et al. 2019).

Before these chieftaincy tussles, there were long-age land disputes on a disputed land called Aguefi land between the three clans-Umuchiani, Onuogowo and Umuode, against the Akpugo community, a neighbouring village. So, in 1994, the Supreme Court decided the disputed land (Aguefi land) case in favour of the Akpugo community, their

neighbouring community. The three clans decided to seek a political solution with Akpugo. So, when Umuchiani and Onuogowo proposed the Inyaba River as a boundary for the political solution with the Akpugo community, Umuode rejected it and proposed sharing Aguefi into two parts among Akpugo and Oruku as a political solution. Whereas this effort to reach a political consensus among the four factions on the disputed land was ongoing, Umuode negotiated the purchase of the disputed land through a sectional group of the Akpugo community called Umuanubreke. Other groups of Akpugo challenged this action to sell the disputed land to Umuode at the Akpugo Customary Court. They claimed that the Supreme Court judgement never awarded the disputed land to a sectional group of Akpugo instead of the entire community (Okechkwu 2014). Given this, parallel relationships and suspicions existed among the three communities of the Oruku community and a section of the Akpugo community.

Consequently, on 9 October 1995, violent conflict between Umuchiani and the Onuogowo against Umuode led to the cold-blooded murder of the Umuode people. Even the destruction of houses forced Umuode people to seek refuge in neighbouring communities, where they lived as refugees for six months. This violent crisis prompted the Enugu State Government to set up the Dimoji panel to investigate the causes of the crisis and make recommendations. It further worsened in 1998, when Col Sule Ahman's regime granted an autonomous community to Umuode pending the community identification of virgin land. While Oruku people donated Abari land for the settlement of Umuode people, Umuode refused to go to Abari but instead demanded Aguefi land, claiming to have purchased the land from a section of Akpugo community called Umuanubreke (Umuode Memoranda 1995).

The era of Military Administrator of Enugu state Navy Captain Adewunmi Agbaje in 1999 worsened the situation by acquiring the disputed land for the settlement of the Umuode community. This action created hatred among the communities such that from the first civilian administration in 1999 of Dr Chimaroke Nnamani to Barr Sullivan Chime in 2015, hostilities between Oruku and Umuode persisted. However, in 2019, the Government of Enugu State under Governor Ifeanyi Ugwanyi laid to rest by intervening in over 25 years of sub-ethnic conflicts by creating Aguikpa Oruku Autonomous Community, Nkanu East local government area of Enugu state (Amodeni 1999).

TABLE 1. LOCAL DATA FRAMEWORK OF ORUKU AND UMUODE SUB ETHNIC CONFLICT

Hypothesis	Major variables of the hypothesis	Empirical indicators of the variables
Political and economic character of the Igbo elites accounted for persistent sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku/Umuode of Enugu state	(X) Political and Economic character of the Igbo elites	(X) ❖ Instigator and collaborator of sub-ethnic conflicts ❖ Intractable court cases and Failed white paper reports ❖ Youths militarisation & mobilisation of security agencies
	(Y) Persistent sub-ethnic conflicts in Oruku/Umuode of Enugu state	(Y) ❖ Deadlocks/rejection in government and other agencies panel reports since 1996-2020 ❖ Continuing existence of sub-ethnic conflict in Oruku and Umuode since 1990, 1994, 1999, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2013, and 2016. ❖ Greed vs grievance syndrome ❖ Destruction of lives and properties in Oruku and Umuode

Source: The Author

Hypothesis

Analyzing the Political and Economic Character of the Oruku and Umuode Conflict

To understand the political and economic character of the elite in any society, the socio-political formation order of that society is a critical factor. Nwabueze (2002) explains that the socio-political formation is, by nature, a form of that society's social positioning of individuals, groups, and social classes with a dense network of the social relation of subordination and domination between and among them. In all facets of social formation, the elite circulation psychologically explains the elite character's foundation for political and economic dominance in Nigeria. From independence in 1960 to date, all the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria's socio-political formation order harbour and represent an elite class's interests and political circulations. Beyond the elite circulation in politics, the Elite in Igboland is at the centre of sub-ethnic conflicts instigation, mobilization, and manipulation from the onset of intra-ethnic conflicts escalation and de-escalation.

In Oruku and Umuode, the elite circulation underlie the primacy of the influence of the Elite in two aspects. The first aspect is the political and economic character of the Elite in the Oruku community. The political character explains their political culture, manifested in their behaviour and how they influence government decisions in their favour. The economic character interprets the elite economic base for executing sub-ethnic conflict. The execution implies youth mobilization and militarisation and the employment of the town union leaders and security forces during conflicts. Paniagua and Vogler (2020) explore the economic power of the elites. They argued that the Elite is a set of individuals who are often in multiple subgroups, who own and manage, process, and trade-specific resources, goods, and derivatives to promote and advance their interests or the interest of other groups. The promotion of the elite agenda makes economic and political networks a strong link, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. The network's success is due to the overdeveloped state apparatus where an economic elite can wield the state apparatus and control the government's machinery and agencies in its favour. During conflicts, the

manoeuvring of this state apparatus has been a recurring decimal among the political and economic elites across the southeast.

In the overall characteristics, Daloz referred to it as the political Elite's symbolic superiority. Daloz (2018) opines that symbolic superiority has always been a crucial resource for elites who did not challenge elite status distinction and communities with no hereditary status. In Oruku and Umuode, the superior status has formed a socio-political order with the political and economic character of the elites as big men leading status that are dominant. The leading status commands the respect that amasses and redistributes valuables with a calculated generosity to create allies of obligation and trust.

Commenting on the Elite's political character and culture, Seiyefa (2017) posits that the development and sustenance of organized conflict groups across Nigeria's zones is the product of elite political behaviour that either provokes or leverages conflicts to achieve political targets. In Oruku and Umuode conflict, the evidence of the leverage is the repeated attacks among the two communities attributed to the mobilization and manipulation of a few influential individuals. Obi-Ani (1999) explains the elite orchestration of Oruku and Umuode sub-ethnic conflicts for a long time simply because of the parallel interest of a few individuals who are shadow stakeholders in the two communities. These shadow groups or individuals are key actors in mobilizing, manipulating, and sustaining intractable conflicts when competing over scarce resources like land and protecting personal or group identity (Vallacher et al., 2010).

Similarly, in the study on the framework for resolving Oruku-Umuode conflicts, Asogwa et al. (2017) isolated two principal actors in the Oruku-Umuode conflict after identifying other major actors. The two principal actors were a retired federal permanent secretary from the Oruku extraction and a former minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from Umuode. The study found that the two had a prior and functional relationship before the conflicts. However, conflicts emerged due to power struggles, grievances, and personal disagreements between the two, which later drew support from their various constituencies. The propensities of two actors with dialectical voices drove the conflicts in Oruku against the concocted narratives from other quarters (Asogwa et al., 2017).

For Poulantzas (1973), these actors, the retired federal permanent secretary and the former minister, are the petty bourgeoisies. Taking the terminology of petty-bourgeoisie further, Ibeanu insists that the Elite take the form of a petty-bourgeoisie, and their dominance is prevalent in Nigeria. However, their prevalence is a characteristic of an overdeveloped capitalist state like Nigeria. In such an overdeveloped society, the petty-bourgeoisie emerged as the determinant class and ruling class, with the interventionist state dispensing privileges and functioning as a politically and economically dominant class (Ibeanu 2012). For Warren and Troy (2015), the elite subgroup is relatively small entrepreneurs.

However, it has a solid incentive to mobilize factional violence, secure leadership positions, or seize a more significant portion of the group's resources. These elite political and economic characteristics explain the persistent nature of sub-ethnic conflicts despite elite efforts at arriving at peaceful coexistence. Whilst there are elite attempts to reach a peaceful coexistence, elites whose line on peace and stability in their community is

dominant cannot actualize unity in conflict negotiation (Ibeanu 2012). Ibeanu offered the paradox of any form of peace championed by the elites or petty-bourgeoisie, given the Elite's primordial sentiment and the only lip service to unity while dividing the communities (Ibeanu 2012).

In the second aspect, the study linked the persistent violent clashes between the two communities and the disregard of court decisions as attributed only sustained by the Elite in that community. Okechukwu et al. (2019) opined that 9 former Governors of Enugu state, both military and civilian, had made efforts to resolve the conflicts during their tenure. The efforts at peaceful resolutions by the government, the church, and other intervener groups have failed to douse the conflict. This specific violence between the two communities explains elite rhetoric for peace in two aspects. First, we find evidence of elite mobilization by militarizing the youth and providing sophisticated small arms and weapons witnessed freely in Oruku-Umuode communities beyond the communities' source of wealth and resources, known as primarily agrarian. In Governor Chime's committee panel report of 2009, the Committee directed the Nigeria Army and the Nigeria Police to commence an immediate arms disarmament, given the two communities' proliferation of arms and ammunition.

The second aspect is sustaining the financial cost of 25 years of litigation beyond the communities. Whilst we do not assume entirely that rural communities in the southeast cannot collectively finance litigations, we maintained that the communities could not sustain the overall financial capacity of community land court cases. In other words, community land disputes in Nigeria, particularly in the southeast, take decades to settle, a presumption that the regular contribution of individual members without the financial support of an influential and political member of that community is unsustainable. The possibility of these two aspects being unbearable for the respective villages explains the role of elites whose interests are paramount.

For instance, between the Oruku community and their neighbour Akpugo community, there have been several court cases on the disputed land Suit No. E/161/71, Suit No. E/24/76, and Appeal No.SC/203/1989. Between Oruku and Umuode, the protracted civil justice system on a land dispute in the Enugu High Court Suit No E/450/91; Suit No. HAGB/6/2006; Suit No. E/271/2009; and to Suit No. (HAGB/16/2019) (Okechukwu et al 2019). In these suits, numbers lie deep grievances between communities, as evidenced by the civil justice system in conflict resolution on sub-ethnic conflicts of Oruku and Umuode. The potency of the civil justice system is that it negates the culture and the socio-political environment to solve land-related conflicts. This trait of the civil justice system appears prevalent in Oruku-Umuode and other sub-ethnic conflicts across the southeast.

In that contest, the parties in dispute showcase their political influence and financial muscles to prolong court cases for decades despite Supreme Court judgment. The flagrant disregard for court orders and other government reports, including Catholic Church interventions and other agencies' efforts, shows an external force beyond the commitment of the two communities. The danger of these gross violations of government decisions and court judgment is that it serves as a breeding ground for a culture of impunity. This culture of impunity led to the murder of the Umuode monarch, the late His Royal Highness Moses Ugwu Ode 1 of Umuode, on 9 October 2012, by a suspected Oruku indigene, Ejike Mba.

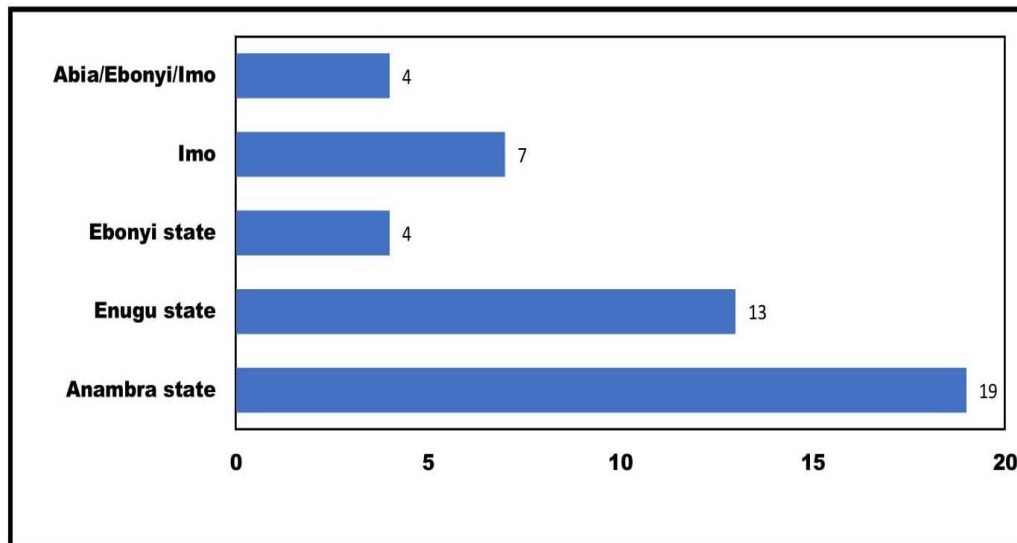
While this accusation was levelled against the Oruku community, the Oruku community condemned the unscrupulous elements of a few individuals who had worsened the conflicts by solidly supporting them through their evil plans (*Nation Newspaper*, 2014). The existential threat to peace in the Oruku community by these few perceived opponents from both communities has become so real that arsonists are armed while patrolling the community. Accordingly,

'One Major Raphael Okenwa of the Nigeria Army came back to the village and organized some boys in his family compound and told them to ignore the government peace accord made between Oruku and Umuode that Umuode must pack out from their land and government cannot do anything or stop them that he will sponsor them (247ureports 2021, p.5)

Notwithstanding the arrest made by the police in the murder case, the Chairman of the Oruku community, Mr Ejike Ani, has alleged that some influential personalities in the Umuode community have continued to use the police to escalate the conflict and thereby jeopardizing possible peace efforts. In 2019, when a historic peace accord was signed, Oruku leaders threatened to sign the peace document. The unfairness in the 30 per cent land allotted to Umuode in the forced peace accord underscores favouritism, suppression and inducement (Okechukwu et al. 2019). However, this contention comes after Uzodinma (2019) reported that since 1985, some prominent members of the Umuode community have boasted that they would use their resources and vast influences to ensure that at the end of their struggle with the Oruku community, the latter would cease to exist. Uzodinma's assertion confirms Ezea's (2020) report that the magic wand of the present Governor of Enugu state has failed to reconcile prominent political elites. In his report, Ezea (2020) argued that different political learning in the state and their political differences and struggle for power, by all means, have been threatening the peace and security of the communities.

Overall, the two elite characters offer an interpretation of the conflicts in Oruku and Umuode from the prism of elitism. The interpretation explains that when conflicts occur in any form, either under cover of inter-ethnic conflicts, sub-ethnic conflicts or religious conflicts, a multilateral framework where government and other agencies' intervention appears realistic means the inclusion of the Elite for a peaceful resolution. While the Elite is one of the key actors in conflict management, on the contrary, government intervention appears final. However, government decision comes with mixed reactions in most cases because since the government is the most influential central Elite, any action envisaged by any of the parties of the Elite to be disfavoured are likely to be hesitant to cooperate with the government decision (Brosche 2015). The basis of this hesitation is that the elite relationship hinges on the elite interaction theory and consensus that focuses on particular shared behaviour among individual elites that encourages close ties (Presthus 1973).

Figure 2: NUMBER OF OCCURRENCES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN SOUTHEASTERN STATES.



Source: The author's data derived from the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution (2017, p. 313-325)

Elite characters in other Southeast states

Figure 2 explains the frequencies of communal conflicts in the Southeastern states of Imo State, Ebonyi State, Abia State, Enugu State, and Anambra State. Anambra state is the highest in these states, with 19 cases of communal conflicts at the end of 2016. Enugu state with 13 occurrences, Imo state 7 cases, Ebonyi state 4 cases, and Abia, Ebonyi/Imo states combine with 4 cases. The combination of the three states is due to inter boundary disputes. The above statistics on the Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria (SCAN) published by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) totalled 47 communal cases in Igboland. Specifically, the reports by IPCR maintained that before 1999, communal conflicts in the southeastern states were more sub-ethnic than inter-ethnic conflicts over land use and land ownership (Eze et al., 2003). In the consolidated zonal report of SCAN, IPCR (Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2017) explicitly identified 29 intra-and inter-ethnic land conflicts, 2 indigenes-settlers segregation disputes, 21 traditional chieftaincies, and leadership tussles in Southeast Nigeria. Among these causes, the findings revealed how prominent political elites in each community mobilized and sponsored the youth leaders who are the instrument of violence across the states (Arinze-Umobi 2017).

Specifically, in Ebonyi State, the land-based and settler/indigene identity conflicts have reached unprecedented volatility. The volatility that precipitates the sub-ethnic conflicts in Ezza-Ezillo of Ebonyi state showed how the political elites mobilized the youths to advance their land interests with a primordial affinity (Igwe 2020). In Anambra state, Aguleri and Umuleri are two communities where local elites played crucial roles in sustaining the conflicts for decades. To be sure, Angela (2013) posits that the two local elite groups, Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra state, are known as 'patriotic citizens' from the two communities. The two groups separately sourced and controlled funds for executing,

purchasing weapons, and fanning the flame of conflict. To these groups, Angela (2013) insists that any attempt to compromise or settlement of the communal conflicts by state actors and other non-state actors is considered a sign of weakness and often rejected by insisting on the prosecution of the conflicts to its logical conclusion

Therefore, because sub-ethnic conflicts are fundamentally political and entrenched with civilian mobilization with arms (Kraus, 2019), political entrepreneurs would have incentives for political reasons to provoke other groups. The Elite employs antics such as mobilization and manipulation to create division in people's minds for elite provocation to succeed. Kia and Vurasi (2013) believed that such antics by the political Elite discriminate not as the reason but produce a grievance in the struggle for power and influence. The psychological manipulation of these antics by the political elites in rural communities during sub-ethnic conflicts has been more destructive than ever in the number of sub-ethnic conflicts in the southeast region.

For instance, in the Oruku-Umuode conflicts, the destructive nature remains visible. Overall, it has severely affected lives and property, development, and damages to already inadequate infrastructure in rural communities in Oruku-Umuode. The magnitude of destruction by the youths during sub-ethnic conflicts is barbaric, which includes countless burning of houses and rampant killings in various ways (Ogunde 2002). That is why Njoku insists that the occasional burning of houses and multiple deaths has brought economic activities standstill for over two decades from both sides of the community. Njoku's claim points to over 40 houses with several shops and markets burnt in the 25 years of sub-ethnic conflict, with only the old left in the two communities (Njoku 2021). Reflecting on the Oruku and Umuode hostilities, Edike argues that before the police were deployed to restore normalcy in Oruku-Umuode a few years ago, five houses were destroyed, and several other people were displaced. The hostilities between the two communities have claimed lives and properties, such as the primary school constructed under the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) at Umuode under the World-Bank-assisted project (Edike 2012). In 2020, there were reported cases of over 35 houses and 20 shops in the Oruku community being razed by cultist groups suspected to be working for some influential individuals who refused to give peace a chance (Adibe 2021)

FIGURE 3: HOUSES RAZED DOWN IN ORUKU AND UMUODE CONFLICT



House A razed by suspected cultist group (Adibe 2021)



House B razed by suspected cultist group (Adibe 2021)



House C razed by suspected cultist group (Adibe 2021)



House D razed by suspected youth (Webby 2021)



House E burnt by arsonists (Ojiego 2021)



House F razed by suspected youth (Webby 2021)

Source: the author

Despite the carnage of violent destruction of houses shown in figure 3 that far outweighs the value of disputed land, the futility of violence and bloodshed is a viable option to resolve the dispute between Oruku and Umuode. These communities are often compromised by the delusion of the warlords that their bad feeling amounts to weakness to make concessions for peace (Ugwoke 2019). Therefore, the preceding discussion has shown that while sub-ethnic conflicts cause in Igboland have multiple factors, the political and economic character of the Elite is a recreation factor in the Oruku and Umuode sub-ethnic that have continued to widen the conflicts. Irrespective of other causes discussed and the recent effort of the Enugu state government in 2019, there is compelling evidence that elitism and its social-political formation in Igboland support the elite character during any conflict. In that manner, supposedly elderly politicians of the Oruku and Umuode communities who ordinarily would have demonstrated an exemplary leadership role are now the community's mobilizers and instruments of communal atrocities.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, sub-ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts have been constructive and destructive, but destructive elements are more frequent than constructive ones. Whilst inter-ethnic conflicts have reduced in frequency recently, sub-ethnic conflicts have become more rampant than inter-ethnic conflicts. In the southeast, the frequency of destructive sub-ethnic conflicts has been linked to many interpretations, such as the literature on intra-communal land disputes, population pressure, the Osu caste system, chieftaincy tussles, indigene and settler identity questions, and inter-boundary disputes. Despite adequate attention to the sub-ethnic conflict in Igboland, its repeated occurrences regarding elite mobilization and involvement have remained under-reported. Given this, the study hypothesizes that the political and economic character of the Igbo elite is responsible for the reoccurrences of sub-ethnic conflicts with a focus on the Oruku and Umuode communities.

Given the hunch, the study reviewed scholarly works on sub-ethnic conflicts in Igboland. The study identified several factors that directly and indirectly led to the cause of the Oruku and Umuode sub-ethnic conflict. A dominant factor among the several factors points to the involvement of the Elite, particularly the political and economic character. With an elite theoretical framework, the study demonstrates how the minority class with the political and economic characters are in circulation to hold the network of powers in any society and determine the nature of constructive or destructive conflicts. Given the historical account of the conflict, the study identified possible elite attributes in fuelling and sustaining the conflict using the local data framework.

Therefore, the study set out to investigate these elite attributes using the logical data framework to identify the role of the Igbo elites in the long-age Oruku-Umuode conflicts of the Enugu state. The study argues that while conflict is inevitable, the rational choice theory makes individuals avoid conflicts' enormous human and economic costs by seeking traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. However, in most conflicts, mainly rural, local elites assume to fill the vacuum of the human and material cost of conflict.

In the southeast, particularly Oruku and Umuode sub-ethnic conflict, the elites were instrumental in mobilizing, polarising, and militarizing the communities while sustaining them with their political and economic power and networks in the civil judicial system. This elite influence in the Oruku and Umuode leads to the impunity and courage to violate government white paper reports and years of peaceful negotiation. The fallout of years of mediation to date despite creating an autonomous community in 2019 for the Umuode community by the Enugu state government signing elite conspiracy in lip serving and rhetoric for peace. The failure to reach an elite consensus has prolonged the conflict by turning the peaceful Oruku community into divided communities at war with itself.

In light of the above conclusion and findings, the study recommends state government abrogate the quest for an autonomous community in Igboland. Southeast states should discourage any attempt by individuals or groups to create a new local government or state. Moreover, if it must create a 'new autonomous community or L.G.A or state, the government should consult traditional council elders and gazette the official decisions. In addition, the idea of state government taking the responsibility of appointing traditional rulers in rural communities should be stopped to avoid the impression and suspicion of

politically appointed traditional rulers in the communities. In that manner, attaining a chieftaincy position in southeast states should be hereditary against the Governors' selection of traditional authority.

Finally, communal conflicts of any type, inter and intra should be referred to as Obi-in-Council and elders of the communities instead of a civil justice system that breeds animosities and unnecessary delays. The reason is that the traditional means of conflict resolution in the southeast before the colonialist has been considered less controversial than the civil justice system in recent times. Traditional councils can limit the Elite's influence and character in actualizing their primordial interest while transferring it into communal or sub-ethnic conflicts. To actualize long-lasting peace and harmony, the government should engage with the communities through town hall meetings, not individuals on land conflicts. Also, the state government in the southeast should build schools and hospitals on any disputed communal land between communities in conflicts for mutual use and sanction any individual violating the peace agreement.

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