AUTOCHTHONY OF BELONGING IN UMULERI / AGULERI WAR: THE PEOPLE AND INDIGENOUS MECHANISMS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Autochthonous claims of belonging to a particular land are a major source of war in Africa. People have continued to search for the cause of communal conflict between Umuleri and Aguleri for over one hundred years. Studies on this conflict have largely focused on economic principles like inequality of access to land and the impact of colonial manipulation. However, the question is how did the people resolve the intractable conflicts forty years after independence? Did it involve redistribution of ownership of the lands between Umuleri and Aguleri? Are there causes of the war beyond horizontal inequality and colonial manipulation? What were the mechanisms followed in the management and resolution of the conflicts? What basic philosophy underscored the resolution of the conflicts? The study searches for answers to these questions. In-depth interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) were used to gather the data; guided by constructivist and primordialist theory.

Keywords: Autochthony of belonging, Colonial manipulation, Communal conflict, Horizontal inequality, Ownership of the lands

Introduction

Common to humanity is a search for belonging. It is either people are consciously seeking to belong to some institutions or community or they are getting acculturated into particular institution or community. To the extent that some people define, their existence from the point of belonging to particular community stresses the importance of the struggle for claims of autochthony. To belong, sets the contours for exclusion and inclusion that sets the milieu for cultural attachment including guarantee for economic rights. While cultural attachment and economic rights of particular group within a community can be mutually reinforcing, it will take rigorous research to discover whether it is the economy or the culture of the people that determine the people's behaviour. Most studies suffer from the fallacy of extrapolation. Drawing from similar studies, some scholars are

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hoodwinked at picking empirical issues and basing their conclusion on them, not willing to search beyond observed disparities in economic level or claims of marginalization by disputing parties. This is insufficient reason to attribute causation, more so as group leaders may differ on certain opinion and the leaders' opinion may differ from other members of the community. While verifiable factors are important for analysis, it is also rewarding to examine the substratum that provides in most cases root causes of local conflicts. Lederach (1997) has argued that people practicing conflict resolution must draw upon participants' tradition and symbols, their way of being, doing, and their natural knowledge, which are often available in the form of metaphors, stories and proverbs. Cohen (2001) posited that modern mechanism for conflict resolution has relied on the existence of a fixed linguistic and behavioural framework, permitting the drawing of conclusion valid for all nations, which proves to be inadequate in dealing with conflicts that occur at different cultural settings. Malan (1997) also argue that the virtues obtained from the insights perhaps of less known but probably very relevant perspectives of indigenous structures cannot be undermined.

Post-colonial African politics largely provides a paradigm for economic interpretations for causations of conflicts. Ellis (1996) presented a critical argument that shows that African States are worst hit because of failure of post-colonial states to fulfil the economic expectations of her citizenry[1]. Earlier, Mafeje (1999:3) argue, "this was not simply an expression of general disillusionment with independence whose leaders had failed to deliver but a revulsion against African governments which had become unbearably autocratic and oppressive." Though Ake (2003:3), extends the blame to colonial period where he argues that the character of the state remained much as it was in the colonial era, however, political independence brought some changes to the composition of the state managers. Post-colonial states reflect apparatus of violence, a narrow social base, and extract compliance based on coercion rather than authority. Young (2004:23) posited, "the serious erosion of the stateness of many African polities by the 1990s limited the scope for effective reform and opened the door for a complex web of novel civil conflicts". Jackson and Rosberg (1982) query the empirical basis of African states and argue that its existence largely rest on the juridical definition sustained by the international community and not on the basis, that they are able to meet the economic challenges confronting them. Chege (1992:147) posits, "Africa remained little more than an unfailing source of bad news; famine; dictatorship and economic collapse; blatant violations of human rights and gross

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[1] Ellis argued in the paper that in most extreme cases, the combination of these and other factors has weakened some African States to the extent that they can hardly fulfill the basic duties expected of them by the national community (that is, their own citizens) or by international community. Such duties include the maintenance of an effective monopoly of violence over national territory. P[8]

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carnage wreaked by merciless warlords; a region where unashamed autocrats still tightened the screws of their despotism while their counterparts around the globe were being hounded out of presidential palaces by popular revolts."

It goes without saying as expressed by these scholars that economic factors may largely influence research on conflicts in African societies. Such assumption may suffer from the fallacy of determinism. Other normative variables can be instrumental to conflicts in Africa. Homer-Dixon (1999) contested linking land to conflicts when he argued that environmental scarcity is not sufficient by itself to cause violence; when it does contribute to violence, research shows, it always interacts with other political, economic and social factors. The work by Raines's (2009) on land related conflicts show that there are land related conflicts which are not based on economic interest. It shows how some group of people can embroil in fierce debate over land and one group insisting on sanctity of the land or harmony with nature, while others speak of land serving for progress and development. Conflicts of this nature are common in societies where the people have cosmological values toward possession of lands. Conflict mediators unaware of the different dispositions have tendency to attach economic principles to the conflict relating to lands, undermining the sacred values attached to it and in such case may rather exacerbate the crisis during intervention than resolve them.

The neo-Malthusian attempt to establish a causal link between scarcity and violent conflicts is not without challenge Boserup (1976). The neo-Malthusians assumed that a given environment has a certain carrying capacity for the human population. If the point of equilibrium overshoots, hunger, environmental disaster or conflict will follow until new equilibrium is reached. Boserup identified two important factors that are often glossed over in the neo-Malthusian assumption. First was that the theory focused on technology of food production and thus ignoring other type of technological change. Second, the theory ignored the effects of demographic change on both environment and technology. den Berg and Janoski (2011:73) work argued that the:

> Marxist branch of conflict theory does seem to have lost much of its original appeal since its brief revival in the 1970s. In view of the apparent decline of much of the traditional class-based left/right politics of the first half of the twentieth century, even in the old European heartland and the related rise of various alternative forms of \identity' politics involving race, gender, religion, and ethnicity.

The work by den Berg and Janoski showed a great deal that other factors rather than economy can cause conflict. The studies on irredentist wars show that people of the same descent located across international or national boundaries have attempted to join their

kin's men despite their poor economic status as exemplified by the Balkan conflicts. Our worry is the simplistic singular causation, which scholars in African conflicts have tended to posit, and such unexamined assumption can be seen against the theorization of Umuleri and Aguleri war. The problem is that some scholars rely more on literature done on a particular society than engaging in field study, which may provide new insights to existing corpus of knowledge. This paper therefore presents research findings on Aguleri/Umuleri war, which shows that other mundane issues contributed to the conflicts than economic variables and how the conflicts was resolved through traditional mechanism. The second part of this work examined few literatures on Igbo society, third part looks at land in historical context in the south east Nigeria, part four Aguleri and Umuleri in historical perspective, five the commencement and causes of Aguleri and Umuleri war, six the resolution of the conflicts, and seven shows the conclusion.

Literature on Igbo Society

Ofomata (2002) in a edited a book, titled *Survey of the Igbo Nation*, divided into four parts, examined the history of Igbo people; the writing of scholars on the Igbo environment; information on the arts and culture of Igbo people; and the information about resources and development in Igboland south east Nigeria. The work contains useful information about Igbo people that can be seen from the contributions by other scholars like Kalu, Uzozie and Amaucheazi. Kalu (2002) on *Igbo Traditional Religious System*; argue that a thorough grasp of the world-view of any group of people is a fundamental pre-requisite for the understanding of the rest of the interconnected beliefs, ideas, values and practices of the group.

The work by Basden (1921: 167-171) in his book *Among the Ibos of Nigeria,* on Igbo culture, and village setting, largely shown to have been written for travellers and explorers focused on the pristine culture of the Igbo people. It described the people as warriors, always fighting wars. It posits that "with all savage peoples, the Ibos, prior to the British occupation of the country occupied their spare time with fighting, generally town against town. The impact of this was not so much on the bloodshed, but rather the paralyzing of trade and intercourse." The portrayal not withstanding we argue that the description of the people as being involved in a perpetual war falls short of capturing all aspect of their social life. The anthropological report about the Igbo's which portrays them as always seeking for war goes to show that more study is needed to discover those mechanisms which provided social harmony and continued existence before the coming of the colonialist. It is important to argue that without such mechanisms "war of all against all" would have exterminated the entire race before the coming of the Whiteman. Embedded in the work is the notion that conflicts among the people predates colonial incursion in the

area and even affected communal form of production. This notion is largely glossed over by scholars who blame inequality and wars in Nigeria on colonial incursion. Therefore, this study is very necessary since it seeks to discover those mechanisms through which the people were able to resolve conflicts.

Ibeanu (2003) in his work *Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict in Anambra State* undertook a survey of the major cause of conflicts in Igbo society south east Nigeria. The study showed that in 75 major conflicts of varying degrees of violence, 49 of the 75 or 65% involved land. The work also contained a case study of Aguleri-Umuleri war over boundary demarcation. It presented account of the intractability and the violence that occurred during the 1995 and 2000 conflicts. Modern approaches for conflict management and resolution, such as the court system and intervention by state government did not resolve the conflict until when the people through their local civil society, were able to apply traditional mechanism called *Iko mmee,* (oath taking that involves the use of animal blood) between the two communities that brought the hostilities to an end. However, it is important to argue that the work did not tell us whether the application of *Iko mme* was a means to an end or an end in itself. We argue that absence of hostility may not denote that the conflict resolution has taken place because the situation can depict cease-fire in contemporary terminology. Our present concern therefore is to elicit whether there are mundane issues that caused the conflicts, which may pose great challenges to modern mechanism in attempt to resolve the conflicts.

Onwuzuruigbo's (2011) work on *Horizontal Inequalities and Communal Conflicts: the Case of Aguleri and Umuleri Communities of South-Easter Nigeria* shows how horizontal inequalities between Aguleri and Umuleri became the triggering factor for the conflict in the area. The work followed the writings of earlier works on the area and posited that Aguleri became the first to sell land to European companies such as Royal Niger Company, John Holt and CFAO, thereby enhancing their financial status as against Umuleri that inhabits the same area with them. It also shows that there had been intermarriages between the communities before colonial penetration but during the conflicts, the confidence that women married from each side would remain committed to their husbands against their kinsmen became in doubt, as a result the women were compelled to take oath of secrecy and allegiance to their husband's sides. It is equally important to point out that the work revealed that relative deprivation could be a source of violent conflict and tussle over land was highlighted to have contributed largely to the conflicts. This goes to confirm that increase in dependence on land for economic sustenance tend to exacerbate more conflicts. However, the work failed to show whether there was absence of both hierarchical and horizontal inequality before British incursion in the area. It is also important to examine if the tussle over lands were for economic sustenance alone. Nevertheless, the work revealed the importance of the people's tradition by showing that women from both sides took oath

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to affirm their loyalty to their husbands. This practice largely shows how much confidence the people have on oath taking.

Onwuzuruigbo's (2011) work titled *Old Wine in New Bottle: Civil Society, Iko Mmee and Conflict Management in Southeastern Nigeria* also focused on *Iko Mmee* as instrumental to the resolution of Aguleri-Umuleri conflicts. It is important also to argue once again whether *Iko mmee ritual* is a means to an end or an end in itself. Does the ritual (that involves blood of goats) interpreted as *Igbandu* or oaths taking apply in the same manner in other Igbo area? However, the work helped to show that Igbo people still rely on the traditional instruments for conflict management and resolution even in the 21ˢᵗ century despite influence of modern values. It is important to note the fact that Aguleri was the first community where Catholic Church was established in Igboland and the community that produced the first Catholic priest to be canonized by the Catholic Pope in Rome. Reliance on traditional institutions for conflict resolution by the people raises the critical question of the erosion of traditional values by modernization.

Land in historical context in the south east Nigeria

Land is central to pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Igbo people and arguably forms their worldviews or cosmology. The people are essentially religious because of the essential positions they accord to land as deity. Been object(s) of worship they tend to mould their life around the sacredness of land. Ejizu (1985:142) and Metuh (1987:61) captured the above position in their writing. Ejizu underscored the importance of world-views in the emotional and psychological levels of the people when the work argued that: for in daily life, the values and attitudes, which the people aspire to and exhibit, are the direct expression of their dominant beliefs. While Metuh argued that, a world-view seeks to answer fundamental questions about the place and relationship of man with the universe. Explanations to these fundamental problems provide man with the blueprint for controlling his environment and establishing his social and political institutions. Oath taking ranked 70% in Igboland (Iwu 2014) cannot be consummated without the disputants referring to land as a deity providing justice for the living and the dead. Pointing fingers strait to a portion of land, standing bare footed on a land and swearing by beckoning on it has been the surest way of proving innocence by an accused person or group in Igboland. Ibeanu (2003) on spiritual dimension of land in Igboland shows it as a major pivotal factor in conflicts in the South-East Zone. Land (*ana*) is linked to spirituality in Igbo culture as expressed in the prominence of the deity *Ana* and the importance of the yam tuber and the celebration (referred to as yam festival) that accompany it. It reflects in the general view that the land is the spiritual connector of the living, the dead and the unborn.

Consequently, land is a very serious issue among the Igbo since it touches both the material and the spiritual, the very essence of Igbo ontology.

Studies show that Igbo people being the second largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Coleman 1958), inhabit the smallest land space compared with other major ethic groups. Hodder and Ukwu (1969) show that in 1952, the population density in Igboland was 346 per square mile against Northern Nigeria's density of 60 and Nzimiro (1972) posits that the presence of the Igbo people in most major cities in the country has been credited to land hunger in the heavily populated eastern areas and scarcity of fertile land. Hallett (1975) confirm that Igboland to be one of the most densely populated area of modern Africa. Early in the twentieth century, the rural Igbo districts had about 800 people per square mile, whereas by contrast, many parts of Northern Nigeria did not have more than 25. The area faces more challenges arising from erosion ravaging the area. Egboka and Banlanjo (1994) posits that more than 1000 erosion sites exist in south eastern Nigeria with Anambra State being the worst hit as a result of the topography and the nature of soil with more than 700 erosion sites. Recent study by Adesanya *et al* (2013) on Igboland show that with 5,700 erosion sites in Nigeria, southeast has share of 4,000. This phenomenon may cause some scholars to attribute land as a singular causation to conflicts in Igboland.

Rather than focus on economic factor we argue that other forms of belonging can serve as explanatory paradigm to Aguleri/Umuleri war. Ancestral worship is central to Igbo cosmology (Ekwuru, 2009). An Igbo person attaches great importance to grave of their ancestors and equally to their parents because of their belief in ancestral worship. Belonging to such land evokes some feeling of emotions and claim of originality over such land is more of religiosity than economy. However, if movement of one group from one location to another characterized African past, using burial sites as autochthony of claims will be highly problematic and increases the possibility of conflicts. BØås and Dunn (2013: 2, 9) argue that:

> autochthony discourse link identity and space, enabling the speaker to establish a direct claim to territory by asserting that he or she is an original inhabitant, a 'son of the soil'……. autochthony discourses therefore often have the character of a Pandora's box: they have no limit or end. A person can go to bed as autochthonous, wake up the next morning, and discover that his status has changed.

Our worry is the tendency to draw a conclusion on economic factor as the prime cause of conflicts between two groups whose essence of belonging transcends material benefits. Harneit – Sievers (2006) posits that to be an indigene in Igboland does not require residence: it usually means to be identified by birth or link of ancestry with a particular

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community of origin. This implies certain rights and entitlements such as access to land or security. Earlier work by Hagen (1962) on social change shows that economic theory has rather little to offer toward an explanation of economic growth and that broader social and psychological considerations are pertinent. Therefore, while the economy of any society may be an important explanatory paradigm, yet it is insufficient to see it as precursor of societal action.

Dependency theory has largely influenced scholars in Africa, which tends to locate African plight to the capitalist incursion. It is important to argue that colonialism was not able to completely erode some traditional forms of social inequality, interaction and control (Iwu 2014). Therefore, it begs the question of how much we can sustain the capitalist interpretation of African history especially as regards to structuration of local communities and conflict triggering factors. It will be more real to argue that at the point of contact with Africa, some pre-colonial modes of social relations were transformed and some new forms introduced. Marxist inspired scholar, Frank (1969) overstates the impact of capitalist contact with developing countries and therefore tends to establish ontological origin of inequality in these countries to this period. Randall (2008) captured an argument by some political scientists who questioned what they perceived as assumption that political modernization would eliminate traditional elements of politics such as caste and ethnicity. Rather they argued that aspects of political modernization could positively invigorate these traditional elements albeit in a changed form, and that these elements would invariably influence in some measure the form and pace of political change. The osu^2 caste in Igboland has produced social stratifications that transformed into a consciousness of leadership and followership. It is against this backdrop we contest that horizontal inequality not necessarily based on economy has been a feature of Igbo society no matter how pristine and sufficient to cause conflict alone.

 the case of Igboland (Aguleri and Umuleri not exempted), there are certain indigenous cultures which clearly differentiates them from others in Nigeria such as individualistic predisposition, emphasis on achievement and *Osu* caste system all of which connotes inequality. The *osu* caste system has sustained a culture of inequality not based on wealth. Possession of wealth has never served as a means of social relation between a wealthy *osu* member and non-member. Therefore, the people have lived several thousands of years under the conditions of horizontal inequality and have fought several wars before the

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[2] Osu caste is an indigenous tradition practiced in Igboland, which discriminates between people dedicated to service of deities and others. Interaction between the free citizens and the osu is highly abhorred. Status based on economy or education etc, does not create for a linkage between similar statuses within the free citizens. This practice has continued even to present despite several litigations and protest against the tradition (Ezeala 1992, 2000, Lemchi 2011)

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coming of the White man, not based on inequality of land but on such issues as desecration of indigenous values. There has been a serious debate on the origin of inequality. Rousseau cited by Pearce (2008:94) posited that its origin lie in the possession of 'private property'. Supporters of French revolution of 1789 anchor their position that it was to correct the imbalance occasioned by private property. The writings of Marx 1845-6 traced inequality to division of labour as well as private property and even extended to the nucleus family where the relation of wife and children to husband are regarded as slaves relating to their master. One problem with the above position is that it negates as argued by Weber (1970: 180-1) that 'man does not strive for power only in order to enrich himself economically. Social status especially that of caste in India or *osu* caste Igboland and possession of land for spiritual purpose are such statuses derived from rituals and not on economy.

Aguleri and Umuleri in Historical Perspective

Aguleri and Umuleri are two communities located in Anambra East local government area in Anambra State. The local government headquarter is situated at a portion of land called Otuocha. It stretches to the Agukwu on the East in Njikoka local government area, to Ibuzo in the Delta State on the westwards and to Idah in Kogi State in the Northward. Central to the contest is the question of origin. The claim of autochthony over land is anchored on the first inhabitant of the area. Myths of origin have always been a contextual issue and in this case Umuleri and Aguleri have different account of their origin but the common issue in both positions is that each side wants to claim direct son of Eri, the ancestor claimed by both groups. Aguleri argue that Eri married one wife called Nono who gave birth to six sons and a daughter called Adamgbo, who did not marry but gave birth to other children in her father's house. The children from Adamgbo were not permitted to officiate in some kinds of cultural rites according Igbo custom. However, the children answered the same surname with their mother Adamgbo. On the other hand, Umuleri (that also claim children of Eri) argues that Eri married many wives one of which is Iguedo that gave birth to Umuleri and three others. Therefore, the success in the claim of autochthony by any of the group will confer ancestral rituals to the group. In Igbo custom, an individual or group linkage to the foremost ancestor of particular area is a prime definition of person's identity and dignity.

Commencement and Causes of Aguleri and Umuleri War

The conflicts between Aguleri and Umuleri can broadly be seen from two periodic frames. One frame of reference is the period when the conflicts involved some levels of skirmishes, quarrels, *itu ogbe* (litigations to elder's assembly), and other forms of vexations. Since conflict is inevitable in every human society, it goes without saying that 'the two

brothers' must have encountered one conflict or the other and were able to manage and resolve them before the coming of the Europeans. However, the field study showed that conflicts of a minor hostility occurred during colonial era because of interference by some layers of authority that undermined the customs of the people. The second frame of reference is from 1995 to 2000 when the conflict transformed into actual war.

Open hostilities between the two groups as revealed during the field study has two causes. The first cause as affirmed by the respondents was the desecration of the deities worshiped by the people. The second (but contested by some respondents) was when *"our people"* began to sell lands to *Ndi-ocha* (white man), which dates back to the late 19th century. The first cause can be regarded as the latent cause. As was asserted, *"Deities in Aguleri and Umuleri caused our brothers (Umunne) to be killing each other". The reason is that our people gave or sold lands where some deities were housed to the white people, who later destroyed the shrines and carried some deistic symbols away. Our people allowed them and started worshipping their God. Then our deities became annoyed and caused the two brothers to be fighting. When we realized this, we have to start begging our deities.* Idigo (1990) referred to the fact that some of their people did not embrace Christian religion where he wrote that

> Chief Ogbuanyinya Onyekomeli Idigo of Aguleri had many deities and was the Priest of the great Aroh, a deity that drives off the old year and announces the appearance of the New Year. When he was converted, the White priest told him that he has to put away the deities and retain only one wife as the law of God forbids the contrary. The chief complied with this instruction to the chagrin of the diviners or fortune-tellers who were there. He pointed out that the greatest challenge that faced the church was the antagonism of the pagans who persecuted the new converts who were preaching to the people to abandon their traditional religion (ibid 17-18)

The above imply that while the sale of land or foreign occupation of land can be regarded as the triggering or exacerbating factor, the destruction, carrying away and worship of other God was the latent factor. Sale of land constitutes the manifest cause. Lands at that time were given to church missions and even sold to *Ndi-ocha* that wanted to establish business. For example, Idigo (1990:6) noted that before 1918 a part of Eziagulu Aguleri land called Ekpele-mmili was given to Ugume and Umudiana of Umuleri for use. In the course of time, the grantee began to claim ownership of the land and narrated long legends on how they came to be in possession of the land. For this reason, the people of Aguleri and Ugume/Umudiana of Umuleri came to the verge of a deadly fight in order to settle the dispute by force of arms. In 1918, the then political officers settled the matter in

favour of Eziagulu and the aggressors were purged out of the disputed land. The reason for the claim over the ownership of the land was that sale of lands has begun as a source of wealth in the community. This situation was what Onwuzuruigbo (2011:567-587) referred to horizontal inequality that spurred the conflicts between Aguleri and Umuleri.

However, we argue that to attribute the phenomenon of horizontal inequality as the cause of the crises between the two communities is highly problematic. It assumes that one group has equality among its members and collectively is well above the other group and the collective advantage used against the other group. Instances of horizontal inequality were identified during the field study. There were wealthy families such as the Idigo family from Aguleri community and Odugbo (powerful family) from Umuleri who owned more parcels of land than did others within the same community. Inequality over the numbers of parcel of land between the two groups was not used against each other. The respondents from Aguleri said that the problem is *"blamed on the hospitability of our people"*. *"Our hospitality is to a fault"*. They argued that because the lands in which they (Umuleri) are occupying today was given to them as *'brothers and sisters"* it is difficult to draw a line (boundary) demarcating the two sides. Land was *"given or sold for amount that appears to reflect symbolic relationship between the two brothers than the real monetary values"*. However, the horizontal argument can be inferred from the information from Igwe of Aguleri who argued that the sale of the lands either to the missionaries or to the foreign corporations raised the stakes and the monetary value of the lands. In the words of Eze C.N. Idigo IV (Ogalagidi) Igwe of Aguleri during the interview in this study *"Nobody killed each other before. Even my grandmother is from Umuleri. We are brothers".*However, we can argue that contact with colonial authority only exacerbated conflicts in the area and not the first cause and only cause. In addition, the imposition of colonial rule on indigenous people could have crippled their indigenous mechanisms for dealing with their own problems. This situation provided opportunities for members of the in-group and out-group either genuinely or not, to take advantage that whatever that cannot be substantiated through empirical evidence cannot be held to be true. There could have been conflicts over ownership of lands within the in-group but because of common enemy, the conflicts were downplayed.

The modern method of confirming truth runs contrary to African custom and practice before colonial incursion. Symbolic interactionism now required material evidence for substantiation in a society where the people's values and principles were based largely on cosmology, replicated in their material cultures like artifacts and sustained through oral traditions. Zartman (2000:1) argues that traditional societies in Africa and elsewhere are reputed to hold secrets of peace-making locked in their ways, formed from centuries of custom before the disruption by colonization. The attack on traditional institutions by the

modern institutions as posited by Attah-Poku (1998:105) is blamed for the intractable and ubiquitous conflict in Africa. The work argued that the disarticulation, disorganization and disorientation of the traditional structures have been the bane of violent conflict in Africa. The work states thus:

> The activities of the colonizers and most of the political elite in Africa have either destroyed or weakened the traditional systems that could have served as effective preventive mechanisms in modern times. The kingship and elderships reconciliatory and arbitration powers have been dramatically minimized. It is not that they do not exist but they exist in crippled forms (ibid 105)

In the same vein Nwolise, Harunah and Oluyemi (2003) blamed the conflicts on the disorganization, disarticulation, and disorientation of the traditional value system by the colonial incursion in Africa. The table below shows that the legal formalism occasioned by the colonial rule provide opportunity for each group to utilize their acquired power in pursuit of their case through formal court. However, lack of confidence on the judicial process marred its success.

Social cleavage theory could provide explanation to the polarization of two communities who maintained a cordial relation with each other before colonial incursion. As cited by Manza, Brooks, and Sauder (2011:202), the concept of social change can be traced to the intersection of Marx's class-cantered model of history and social change and Weber's distinction between class, status groups, and organizations in capitalist societies. This study drew on the social cleavage by looking at how social networks of friends and family can create social cleavage that can be mobilized in terms of crises. A warring group on the ground that they have a social link with the other group has often attacked people belonging to the same lineage and kindred. This phenomenon is common in communal settings where everyone associates largely on kinship lines. The situation creates for arms acquisition or pre-emptive attack by members of the same community who are not directly involved in a particular conflict but could be attacked when the member(s) of the same community is warring with another and such scenario makes communal conflicts in Igboland spreads like wildfire.

The second phase 1995-2000, depicts the period of the hostility between the two communities. The war took the same precision of military strategy. Our study discovered that there was no difference between the weapons used during the Nigeria civil war 1967-1970 from the weapons used to execute Aguleri and Umuleri (except air craft). The respondents said that:" The war in 1999 did not last long but destructive and disastrous. It can only be likened to the war between Nigeria and Biafra because all the instruments were used, bombs, flying

Ogunigbe (rockets). Obansajo visited and was almost in tears. Wondering what brothers could do to each other".

Table 1 COURT CASES OVER OTUOCHA LAND, 1920 – 1984

Year	Place	Plaintiff / Appellant / Lawyers	Defendant/ Lawyer	Ruling
1920	Native Court	Umuleri	Aguleri	Not available
1933	Native Court	Umuleri	Aguleri	Captain O'Connor ruled in favour of Umuleri
1933	Onitsha High Court	Aguleri (Appeal against 1933 case)	Umuleri	Justice Graham Paul reversed O'Connor's ruling
1935	Onitsha High Court	Umuleri	Aguleri	Umuleri was non-suited (directed to return to status quo before the suit)
1950	Umuiguedo Native Court	Umuleri (Onyeama; - Soetan & Osadebay)	Aguleri (L.N Mbanefo)	Case was transferred to Onitsha Supreme (High) Court
1951	Onitsha Supreme Court	Umuleri (Messrs. Soetan & Araka)	Aguleri (Mr. Balonwu)	Justice W.H. Hurley ruled in favour of defendants in 1955
1955	West African Court of Appeal	Umuleri (Mr. Dingle Foot, QC)	Aguleri (Mr. Pheneas Quass, QC)	Justice Cyril Hubbard and Foster Sutton ruled in favour of the defendants
1958	Privy Council	Umuleri (Appeal against WACA ruling)	Aguleri	WACA ruled in favour of Aguleri
1964	Onitsha High Court	Umuleri	Minister of local government	Suit was overtaken by the civil war
1975	Onitsha High Court	Aguleri	Umuleri	Justice Umezinwa ruled in favour of defendants
1978	Appeal Court, Enugu	Aguleri (Appeal against High Court ruling)	Umuleri	Appeal court reversed Umezinwa's ruling
1984	Supreme Court	Umuleri(Appeal against Appeal Court ruling)	Aguleri	Supreme Court restored Umezinwa's ruling

Adapted from Ibeanu (2003:208-209)**.**

The study discovered that 1999 war between Agulei and Umuleri started on the day Aguleri was burying one of their son who was the chair of Anambra East local government called Mr. Mike Edozie. Respondents said that Umuleri choose the day of the burial to lunch a deadly attack on Aguleri because they believed that the late local government chairman used his position while in office to cause a lot of misfortune to them. However, the respondents from Aguleri have the same complain against the same local government chair. *"He did not use his position to favour us". "Umuleri plan was to carry his corpse cut it into pieces and fling them to vulture to eat". "Umuleri has people who are rich. One of them called Ndike-Asa or Nwoke-Asa (a man with everything) brought people from Ido area in Lagos state. Those who can fight and equally swim including Native Doctors, to use charms on Aguleri people".*

The respondents constantly blamed the war that occurred in 1995 on the activities of chief Dan Ekwevi, popularly called *Okwu oto ekene Eze* (literally translated a man who greets the king while standing straight on his feet) a native of Umuleri *who is rich*. The crisis erupted when he built a petrol station where Aguleri people claimed to be their land (land in Otuocha and erected a signboard with Umuleri inscribed on it. Destructions and killing followed when the youths from Aguleri went to disrupt the workers on the site and the youths from Umuleri came on counter attack. Aguleri people asserted that Umuleri planned to carry out three-prong attack. One section as noted above was to attack the people conducting the burial and kill all of them, take the corpse, cut it into parts and throw them to vultures. The second was on the road and Igwe's palace to destroy it. Respondents from Aguleri said that Umuleri said, *"that if they demolish the palace they will be alright".* The third was to go and demolish St. Joseph Catholic church, the oldest church in Igboland where Rev. Father Tansi was baptized. The group that operated at the burial "sector" succeeded in killing many "*as people was unaware of what was going on and thought it was mere play when they saw people falling on the ground, however the warriors did not succeed in carrying away the corpse which was buried by our people".* The respondents also said that, "*Umuoba-Anam (another community within the area), couldn't have been involved in the war because they "mounted white clothe at their location to signify that they are not part of the war but the leader of Umuleri army with his machine gun went to where Umuoba-Anam people converged with their leader called Odugwu (a powerful man) to machine him down. After that Umuoba-Anam went to sign a pact with Aguleri to protect them if they fight alongside their force".*

We were taken to see some areas where un-rehabilitated buildings that were burnt down during the war still dot the environment. It will beat the imagination of some, how the people will resolve the conflicts by themselves having carried out such level of destructions. The respondents had some difficulties estimating the quantum of destruction of property and the number of people killed during the two wars that broke out between 1995 and 1999. We were told not to believe whatever the police or newspapers reported. They argued that how could police

report how many people that were killed when they (police) could not face the firing power of Aguleri people (boys). They also asked how we could know those who were killed, those who were missing and those who died of heart attack during the war. They further posited that both sides could have under reported the number of deaths, because it is a sign of weakness for any group to show that it has lost so many people in the war. However, there was assertion that they (Aguleri) killed Umuleri people so much that they started having pity on them.

> Umuleri people first attacked us in 1999. They have been preparing for the war for a long time. People told us but we did not believe them. You know our people do not know how to struggle with people but we know how to stop people if we want to. We went into the war, their things were terribly destroyed, their side was cleared, and it was horrible up to Oyi. Everybody have to be involved whether you see the action as right or wrong because if you don't want to be involved they will come and kill you. Our lady of Victory was the cynosure of the fight. That was where the fight was total. The church was pulled down. Everything was pulled down. The catholic priest there was asked to leave (vacate) the place before everything was destroyed. We wouldn't say who destroyed them.

The Resolution of the Conflicts

The effort to resolve the conflicts intensified in 2000 when some civil society groups embarked on mediatory role after the total failure of government institutions including the court system. The study discovered that these civil societies (mainly from outside the two warring communities) did not succeed because of some distrust established by both groups. Churches and pastors were said to have initiated several peace moves but according the respondents, *"we did not welcome their proposals"*. According to Igwe of Aguleri, *"they failed"*. Ohaneze (a socio-cultural) *organization also intervened through its prominent members but it failed. When their members got to Aguleri they first met at Obu-Gad. Obu-Gad is the seat of the king who migrated from Isreal. Aguleri people respect the stool and event initiated there has some relevance to the people. Anambra East Brothers intervened but their effort was not as fruitful as Ohaneze because they came during the war. Eri Brothers did same thing it also failed. You know third party is never too good but it was Umuada that started the peace that came"*.

Umuada (daughters married outside their matrilineal homes) is very strong and a respected indigenous institution in Igboland. The study revealed that women *(umuada)* married to both communities were prevented from visiting their matrilineal homes on the suspicion that they *could give out some information that may help their brothers.* However, this suspicion did not deter them from meeting as a group. The study discovered that those who live in the city like Onitsha initiated the peace action and involved the ones at home.

Their mediation led to first indigenous ritual practice called *iko mmee (*a ritual practice unique to groups who could trace their lineage to Eri ancestor in Anambra State but predominant in Aguleri and Umuleri). The ritual must be carried out before two groups or individuals who shield blood against each other can meet together in one "table" to eat kola nut and discuss their issues. *Iko mmee as* the study discovered was a means and not an end in itself. It is carried out to commence discussion. The study discovered that there were oath-taking ceremony carried out by the two groups, where the adherents of African traditional religion swore in the name of their deities and the Christian members of the communities swore using bibles. The respondents revealed that there were eight "*flash points*" contested by both groups but only five of them have been resolve but asserted that they were "*quite sure the remaining three flash points will not lead to war again"*. It is highly necessary to show that the people through problem-solving approach came to a compromise that sustained the peace in the community today. For example, the respondents asserted that:

> To make it functional we established sub-committees. 1. Executive sub-committee. 2. Emergency sub-committee. Each sub-committee has two chairmen and two secretaries. One chairman and secretary to come from Aguleri: and the other from Umuleri. The reason is that when a minute of each deliberation is read we will compare and discover if there is no conflicting information or disagreement on the minutes. The executive sub-committee takes decision after meetings to decide what should be done next time and to brief the Igwe of each side. The emergency sub-committee is to respond to any problem, whenever they hear that there is any problem they can call emergency meeting, or they call police to stop problem anywhere. This is to ensure that nothing escalates. This was useful because there are people who do not want peace. We agreed to choose two weeks' interval for the peace meeting. One meeting took place in Aguleri, two weeks after, in Umuleri. The reason is that people can see that we mean the peace process. Umuleri came first to Aguleri then after two weeks Aguleri went to Umuleri. Aguleri people were afraid initially because there was much destruction there but when they went and came back nothing happened to them.

The respondents affirmed that they have to first identify the cause of the war. But that day we asked ourselves what is actually causing this trouble? What is our problem? We established that it was boundary problem. Nobody killed each other before. Our grandmothers are mostly from each side. We are brothers. Now we know that it is boundary problem we must focus there. But we ask ourselves do we return to original boundary. If we have to return to original boundary, we must start buying arms to fight

war again because each person will establish his boundary again. At the end, eight flash points were identified. We adopted a philosophy referred to as give and take approach.

Conclusion

Autochthony of belonging as examined in this paper shows the conflicts as resting on cosmology rather than on economic conditions. Modern mechanism deployed to handle the conflicts either during colonial or postcolonial era failed because it focused on deprivation and horizontal inequality conditioned by material evidence and formal legalism. Caution must be taken against extrapolated mechanism for conflict resolution championed by some scholars. Identification and analysis of people's cultural values and interpretation of reality is often glossed over by conflict resolution practitioners who usually operate within a timeframe to accomplish their assignment or may not consider probing into remote causes through involvement of the local people in the process. The cosmology of the people despite how it appears to outsiders constitutes social realities that deserved scholarly attention. The two communities locked in fierce battle are invariably contesting over ancestral lands where the graveyards of their great grand fathers were located. While colonial incursion increased the tendency for land to be used for pecuniary purposes, the driving force for autochthony of ownership is the fear that their source of identity is tempered and the expected consequences of allowing the 'bones' of one's ancestor to be in possession of another.

The insufficiency of dependency theory in providing explanation to the cause of the war between the two communities can be established against the backdrop of the failures of modern mechanisms in resolving the conflicts. Horizontal inequalities in the areas of land ownership remain a feature of the two communities. Drawing from their traditional practice of rituals, their ancestors were appeased and the two communities have maintained their initial abode and usual social interaction restored after 100 years of litigation and hostilities.

This case study has clearly shown the difference between modern and traditional mechanisms for conflict management and resolution. It also showed that the people have no confidence in modern mechanism for conflict management and resolution. The people themselves reverted to their traditional mechanism, believing in its efficacy in the resolution of the conflicts that lasted for over 100 years to heal the wounds inflicted during the conflicts. Taking oath that on no account shall any problem between them result to inter-communal war again this solemn agreement has helped to heal the wound and restored strong confidence between the two communities?

Plate 1

Source: Field Study (2010)

Nevertheless, a number of questions can be asked such as: why did the application of oath and use of shrine came last? If some group swore by the bible and some by the deities, can we measure the efficacy of Christian of African traditional worship in the conflict resolution process? Did the people agree to find truce because they are already exhausted from a conflict that lasted about 100 years? These questions notwithstanding the whole processes of the final resolution of Aguleri and Umuleri revolve around the efficacy of the traditional institutions available to them for conflict management and resolutions. For example, we discovered that since after the resolution of the conflicts Aguleri people had sold quite a member of lands to Umuleri people and both have built houses near each other and intermarriages have resumed. To ensure that everyone in Aguleri community internalizes the resolution of conflict, a statue was built at the centre of a pavilion where every indigene of the community gathers to deliberate on matters affecting the community. The in-depth interview conducted revealed that the statue is a reminder that Aguleri people should not kill Umuleri again because if they do, they will be one to bury them.

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