CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE: IGBO PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract
Conflict resolution theorized as the approaches and routes involved in enabling the peaceful ending of tussle and struggles, vengeance and retribution. Its importance and utility of the processes lie in the fact that they strive 'to restore a balance, to settle conflict and eliminate disputes', through the customs and traditions of peoples of Africa. This study will examine how the Igbo society of African descent resolved dispute. The method of Analysis is used. African conflict resolution method promotes consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions, as well, enactment of order in the society. Further, it finds out that, while the western world placed more emphasis on the judicial system presided over by council of elders, kings' courts, peoples (open places) assemblies, etc; for dispute settlement and justice dispensation. African traditional conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, and negotiation, as well as cross-examination employed by them in the past, offers great prospects for peaceful coexistence and harmonious relationships in post-conflict periods than the modern method of litigation settlements in law courts.

Key Words: Conflict Resolution, African Indigenous Knowledge, Mediation, Reconciliation, Adjudication, Negotiation

Introduction

In traditional African society, conflict exists whenever or wherever incompatible events occurred and may result in "win-lose character". The resolution, transformation, knowledge applied as well, management of conflict most at times produce win-win situation, why? Because, conflict resolution in traditional African societies precisely in Igbo nation provides opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, this interaction provides consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions and enactment of order in the society. Conflict is as natural as the concept of peace contrary to the global or universal conception. Africans have particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. According to, *Onigun, Otite* and *Albert*, conflict is "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their

rivals".[1] African traditional conflict resolution processes are well-structured, time-proven social system geared towards reconciliation, maintenance and improvement of social relationships. These processes and regulations are deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of Africans. However, for *Choudree*, the traditional processes of handling conflict are relatively informal and therefore, less intimidating, why? Because those who use them are also more at ease in a familiar environment. The role of chiefs, elders, family heads, and others is not only to resolve conflict but also to anticipate and stop/or intercept conflicts. Group relationships and rights are as important as individual ones as emphasis is on restoring relationships and reconciling groups[2].

Hence, this study examined the patterns or mechanism for conflict resolution in traditional African societies with particular reference to Igbo societies in Nigeria. Further, submits that the western world placed more emphasis on the judicial system presided over council of elders, kings' courts, people (open place) assemblies etc; for dispute settlement and justice dispensation. It concludes that traditional conflict resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, and negotiation as well as cross examination which were employed by Africans in the past, offer great prospects for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships in post-conflict periods than the modern method of litigation settlements in law courts.

Conceptual Analysis
Conflict takes various forms and dimensions in African societies. It is significant to note that conflict is difficult to be defined from the perspective of the Africans. For, it seems to be part of excitement for networking relationship, whether negative or positive. Consequently, conflicts are in the magnitude of rage, rift, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars, public insurrections and assault. It also includes chieftaincy and boundary disputes. These storms of conflicts are wide spread in Africa. According to Omotosho, Conflict is a situation that emerges when two or more parties could not agree on an issue. The parties to such conflict may not necessary be the government or nation states. In an incompatible stage among nation states, every part involved seeks to achieve certain objectives, such as additional or more secure territory, security, access to markets, prestige, alliances and the overthrow of an unfriendly government.[3]
However, the study of conflict in Africa has not always been mindful of the need to consider the interaction of local and international factors in the evolution of conflicts between African nations. African conflict is not susceptible to prediction, although it can be explained. For Robert in his *German: political conflict on the Horn of African, "*overt manifestations of conflict are seldom unremitting, even in relations between rival cultures"[4]. For Quincy Wright, Conflict is a particular relationship between states or rival

factions within a state which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subversive economic or military hostilities.[5] Conflict can thus be described as a condition in which are identifiable group of human beings weather tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural or otherwise is in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human group because these groups are pursuing what to be incompatible goals. Moreso, conflict arises from the interaction of individuals who have partly, incompatible ends in which the ability of one actor to gain his ends, depends to an important degree on the choice or decisions that other parties will take. Conflict could be violent on uncontrollable dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable under various sets or circumstances. For A. Mohammed, he argues that conflicts are inevitable wherever severe resources are unequally distributed among competitors and inequity is reflected in cultural and political relationship between groups.[6] With regards to various issues in dealing with conflict, it is important to bear in mind not just overt, physical violence, but also the sometimes subtly disguised forms of structural and cultural violence brings in conflict.

In fact, Robert's position on conflict, states, that there is nothing wrong with conflict, because, it is a critical mechanism by which goals and aspirations of individuals, groups are articulated, it is a channel for a definition of creative solutions to human problems and a means to the development of a collective identity. Hence, he assert that "the repercussion of conflicts between person to person, group to group, community to community, state to state or nation to nation rarely cease with the termination of overt hostilities"[7] why, because conflict can solve contentions issues between nations or it can further exacerbate them, in any case, the consequences of conflicts are usually felt for some time after war ends. Thus, the consequences that may arise is what Africans are more interested in, and how best to curtail it for further occurrence, as well, achieve permanent peaceful coexistence. Many scholars have defined conflict in many ways from different perspective. But, we submit to the definition given by Wadinga which portrays African conflict in perspective. Wadinga described African conflicts as phenomenon which are frequently brushed and dismissed as been chaotic, or worthy of some value pity or humanitarian concern, but rarely of any in-depth political analysis. He further says that, the divide and rule policies of colonial administrators assured the docility of different ethnic groups and this shielded them from the menace of insurrection.[8] This is how African conflict is been seen among scholars from African perspective. Hence, need to its solution, which indigenous knowledge among Igbo-African sort to provide. The onus lies, how African indigenous knowledge would be a panacea to conflict resolution? Thus, the crux of our next sub-heading would be how African indigenous knowledge will bring a lasting peaceful coexistence among the people.

Essence of Conflict Resolution and African Indigenous Knowledge in Igbo-African Context

In the pre-colonial days, there were many principles involve in conflict resolution in the traditional African societies. This is because for those who want their conflict resolved must have confidence in the tribunal that would resolve the dispute. These include elders, chiefs, priests, priestesses, secret cult where necessary etc. This disputants must have confidence in them. They (disputants) must be ready to summit themselves to these constituted authorities. However, conflicts in traditional understanding can be interpersonal, or inter-communal, and these may range from person to person, person to community, nation to nation. Moreso, we are meant to know that "truth" is a major significance of conflict resolution in African traditional knowledge, and what makes it to be so, is because, the presence of the ancestral forces belief, has been the major factor that always make both disputants to be truthful, likewise the mediator, arbitrator and judge. This belief goes onto the extent that some may be forced to say the truth because of the ancestral forces factor. The mediator, judge and arbitrator must be well prepared because truth is not static. Truth is also a covenant logo disputant or parties in conflict must not miss. For one of the conflicting party to have come to the tribunal, it means that party is ready or agreed to settle or resolve dispute.

However, in traditional African societies, the law enforcement agents, traditional police and courts were responsible for ensuring compliance with the laws of the land. Disputants often take their cases to elders and neighbourhood mediators who can be depended upon to resolve conflicts with dispatch in local language using familiar standard of behavior. These agents listed above have their method of resolving conflicts, but before we discuss about these method, let first bring to bear scholars ideas on conflict resolution through the indigenous knowledge. For F. Mensah, Traditional conflict resolution mechanism is a social capital, he defined it as "The capability of social norms and customs to hold members of a group together by effectively setting and facilitating the terms of their relationship i.e sustainability that facilitates collective action for achieving mutual beneficial ends".[9]Over the years, these have developed inter group conflict over land; increasing reliance on formal contracts to regulate relationships and crate understanding; and shifts in methods of conflict resolution, for the fact that, mediation seems to have given way to more confrontational statutory approaches based on formal court procedures, despite these, traditional methods still prevail, especially at the grassroots level.

For Kealotswe, there is a need to manage conflict optimally, so that it won't escalate and lead to broader crisis. According to him, conflict resolution deals with settlement of conflicts that has already existed, and it is different from

ordinary peace building that has to do with reducing crisis through any means. He opines that Africans has spiritual dimension method of conflict resolution, "the spiritual dimension of conflict resolution refers to creating and restoring impaired relationship with God, the spirits, ancestors, family and neighbours as the case might be, this is critical in restoring other relationships at the physical level"[10].   In all these, rituals play an important role in the reconciliation process.   They help to link people to the past, present and future.   Moreso, for Brock-Utne, conflict must be understood in their social context, involving 'values, beliefs, fears, suspicion, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, relationship and networks…'   Thus, the root causes of conflicts must be explored to emphasize shared understandings of the past and present.   Brock-Utne notes that: "The immediate objective of conflict resolution in African knowledge is to mend the broken or damaged relationship, rectify wrongs and restore justice".[11]   Another aim is to ensure the full integration of parties into their societies again, and to adopt the mood of cooperation.   In African indigenous knowledge, these objectives of conflict resolution, is to move away "from accusations and counter accusations, to settle hurt feelings and toreach a compromise that may help improve future relationship".[12]   The effectiveness of the process and sustainability of the outcomes, generally, are attributed to such factors as simplicity, participatory nature, adaptable flexibility, complete relevance, and comprehensiveness. Also, roles of the key players may change from time to time as the situation demands since there is no standard model.   This approach is flexible and dynamic, the whole process and content are too influenced by the social context.   The social situation of those involved is also important.   The approach also seeks to build consensus, often requires tact and patience. Therefore, when agreement is reached, it is shared with all parties involved.

Moreso, indigenous conflict resolution knowledge has general advantage, because it gives room to 'shared understanding of the conflict', encourages harmony through active participation of all parties in the process.   For Okrah, traditional societies understand conflict as something resolved through internal and external social controls.   "The internal social controls use processes of deterrence such as personal shame and fear of supernatural powers.   External controls rely on sanctions associated with actions taken by others in relation to behaviours that may be approved or disapproved".[13] Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms focus on the principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in dealing with common problems which underlie the essence of humanity.   For Murithi, cultural approaches to resolving and managing disputes play a vital role in promoting peace and social order in communities.   Hence, he opines, "cultural values and attitude provide the basis for interaction and the norms by which individuals and the norms by which individuals and communities live".[14]   These also promote sharing and equitable distribution of resources, thus promoting a climate for peace.   African cultural principles relate to the very essence of existence and

being human, and how all humans are inextricable related. Conflict resolution in African indigenous knowledge is underscored by the principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. This is because society places greater emphasis on communal life. Therefore, creating and sustaining positive mutual relations which are shared tasks involving everyone, it is believed that people are linked to each other including disputants as perpetrators or victims.

Generally, conflict resolution is a community process involving the identification of the root cause of the problem, and bringing all parties involved to address the underlying issues. This usually ends with the quilty accepting wrong doing, leading to reconciliation which may include compensation or just forgiveness. The process of conflict resolution has to do with how indigenous structures and systems ensure action in bringing peace at the individual and community level relationships. In this respect conflict resolution procedures are generated from general cultural life and daily experiences of living. In this context, for Kendie and Guri, indigenous "refers to the structures and the units of organization in a community and encompasses also the norms, values, beliefs and Cosmo-vision that guide social interaction".[15] Thus, African understanding of conflict resolution comprises a complex network of forces surrounding the parties in the conflict. It is a healing process in which all stakeholders contribute positive energy. The task is to re-establish the energy flow within individuals, families and communities so as tore-build social harmony. For Ndume, he asserts that, "reconciliation often requires symbolic gestures and associated rituals including exchange of gifts, and slaughter of animals (Chickens, goats, sheep, cows) and these are done by stakeholders involved in the crisis, so as to establish lasting peace and harmony".[16]

Conflict Resolution Methods among Igbo-Africans
Here, we are going to briefly consider some of the methods of conflict resolution among indigenous Africans which includes; mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation, then, also extends to extra-judicial devices and usage of legal maxims to persuade people out of conflict.
Mediation: Mediation is an old method of conflict resolution. It involves non-coercive intervention of the mediators called third party either to reduce or go beyond, or bring conflict to a stop. Olaoba, described this mediation as a method of conflict resolution that had been so critical to traditional society. "The mediators usually endeavoured that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society at whatever level of mediation".[17] This is also usually coincided with the dictum of 'no victor… no vanquished' as buttressed by the maxim, if we apportion blame to the quality person, we must do the same to other party in conflict. Mediators are sought from elders within the communities or

societies of the parties concerned. Elders are respected as trust worthy mediators all over Africa, because of their accumulated experiences and wisdom. According to Bright-Brock, their roles depend on traditions, circumstances and personalities.[18] Accordingly these roles includes; pressurizing, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasizing relevant norms and rules, emisaging the situation if agreement is not reached, or repeating of the agreement already attained.

Adjudication: In traditional African society, Adjudication is a very vital method in conflict resolution. For Olaoba, he defined it as a process which involves bringing all disputants in the conflict to a meeting usually in the chambers or compounds of family heads, quarter heads and palace court as the case may be for a dialoque.[19] This dialogue entails much, because, it was linked with the adjudicatory processes in traditional pattern of African society.

Reconciliation: this was the most significant aspect of conflict resolution. It is the end product of adjudication. After the disputants have been persuaded to end the dispute, peace is restored. This restoration of peace and harmony is always anchored on the principle of give a little and get a little. This buttresses the idea of the disputing parties to give concessions. A feast is usually organized to confirm the readiness of the conflicting parties towards reaching points of compromise.

At least, as characteristic of African traditional society, conflict resolution method is the use of arbitration. Olaoba opines, the reconciliation function is practiced by the authority that mediates between conflicting parties but is empowered to make binding judgments. The purpose is not to render a judgement in law but to reconcile the conflicting parties and its norms. The relationship, between the authority and the community is cushioned by community representatives who advise authority.[20]

Negotiation: For William, negotiation is, "the secret is to harmonize the interests of the parties concerned".[21] Thus, even when the conflict is between one and his society, there is an emphasis on bring the errant member back into his place in the society. The reinstatement of a dissident member can just as well be seen as the restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community, which gives room for negotiation which serves as a consensus value in conflict resolution method among Africans, as well, plays the role of social cohesion that favours the concerns parties.

These methods has played a vital role among Igbo-Africans from time immemorial till date. Its uses can never be over emphasized, and its benefits is there to be seen.

Conflict Resolution and African Indigenous Knowledge: Igbo Perspective
The crux of our discussion here would be centered on the "Igbo perspective of conflict resolution" which happens to be the nucleus of our study. Here, our instances should be drawn from selected communities in Igbo nation which includes; Umurebo-Umokuzu, Umuleri-Aguleri-Umoba-Anam. These communities patterns of conflict resolution as well, other communities across Igbo nation have ushered in a lasting peace among the people till date. Thus, the Igbo traditional institutions for conflict resolution as seen in these communities which include; the family, Amala (council of Elders), Okpara system (eldest male), Umunna (clan), Umuada (female born in a town but married out), age grades, assembly of the people, Ohanaeze (assembly of the people and the King), hunters' Association (where necessary) and Agbara (local deities or oracles), are very significant in conflict resolution among the people of Igbo nation and their role is paramount in every pattern the conflict resolution will take place, perhaps, these institutions are not different from the one found in other traditional African societies.

However, Olurunsola, wrote, that prior to the advent of the Europeans, the Igbos consisted of over two hundred independent territorial groups divided into villages. The internal organization of these groups rested upon patrilineal clans and lineages. These groups were autonomous with regards to governmental processes, but social bonds were strong among them.[22]

The piece of land with regad to Umunebo and Umuokuzu communities is called *Alaihuokpaula or alamkpoku,* it is located between Umunebo and Umuokuzu clans of Obokwu village in Obinze, which is in the Owerri West local Government Area in Imo State, Eastern Nigeria. Several peace efforts geared towards resolving this land dispute prove abortive.Even the elders of Obokwu Village made several futile third party mediation efforts. The Nwanwa grouped (men and women whose mothers were born at Obokwu Village) also intervened but failed. The autonomous traditional ruler (Obinze) and his cabinet also intervened. While these efforts were heading for roots too, a decisive warning were receiving by both clans from the ancestors through the chief priest of Obinze, the messenger of *Aka-Iwn* (big earth deity) saying that they are seeing an impending blood flow, insisting that there must be no bloodshed henceforth, therefore, the dispute over the land must be settled peacefully. Thus, this becomes the end of the communal clash.

Moreso, coming to Aguleri-Umeleri clash, since 1933, the pathetic dimension of the conflict is that the Aguleri and Umuleri people have one ancestral origin in Eri, and had been living peacefully side by side in Otuocha for decades before the focus of division and anarchy emerged. The land conflict, before the disastrous war had passed through the court's strategy, political, bureaucratic, and military strategy without solution and peace in sight, before

the traditional strategy was applied. According to nwolise the traditional formula which led to the peaceful resolution of the Aguleri-Umuleri-Umuoba-Anam war involved oath-taking declaration of "No more war" peace treaty and the performance of a cleansing ritual called Ikomue.[22] The first traditional oath which took place on 25th January, 2000 involved only Aguleri and Umuleri, while other communities latter join in order to avoid further wars and destabilization in the Omambala area. All those communities came with their respective representatives, as well as local deities (oracles) to indicate their commitment to peace.

The oath which is binding on every indigene of the participating communities was taken to the effect that the contracting parties accept peace and there would be no more war and bloodshed amongst and between the communities. Violators of this oath face the wrath of the deities present, and the ancestors, who in the presence of the gods constitute the source of moral sanctions and peace guarantors. This first oath taking process relaxed tension in the war torn area and paved way for the processes that brought the final peace. However, before this oath taking, it must interest us to know that the traditional methods previously discussed were adopted in the peace treaty making by traditional rulers and leaders of thought led by Igwe Kelly Nzekwesi, for sanity and rigidity.

It was however observed that the traditional leaders and rulers were also being touched, encouraged and propelled into action by the message on peace and the direct challenge to them in President Olusegun Obasanjo's speech when he visited Aguleri-Umuoba-Anam conflict area. In his words:

> "I will be addressing our traditional and religious leaders here. What are we saying in the communities in which we are? What are we saying and what are we doing to really dampen these types of senseless killing, this type of senseless destructions of lives and properties? You only need to go down there (Otuocha) and you will anybody tell me that these three communities are not related? Are they not brothers and sisters? The governor told me that they came here and asked same questions and you said you are not… A small community like this, you have turned it into ghost town. A community, that known God as it should be known, this type of thing will not be happening… what has happened to our traditional way of life where elders intervene and help to resolve differences? Are there no more elders in the community? Have they abandoned their responsibility? If not, then what are they doing?"[24]

Hence, this led to oath taking in the year 2000. After the first oath process of 25th January, 2000, a second oath took place on 6th April of the same year. In this second oath, the leaders of Aguleri, Umuleri, and Umuoba-Anam were invited to the centre of the field. Each community was asked to come with a big goat, a small he-goat, some kolanuts, etc; along with symbol of their community deity and its chief priest (Ezemmoo). After reading the contents of the oath, each community appointed one representative to take oath on its behalf and in the presence of its deity, and other communities' deities (oral interview with Ediagbonya Michael).

On the Igbo traditional institutions, one cannot but agree that the two case studies focused upon viz; Umuerebo-Umuokuzu, Aguleri-Umuleri, provides serious evidence of continued efficacy of both traditional methods as well as sanctions for conflict resolution. Nwolise, noted that given the Christians in these communities were called out to swear according to Christian doctrine, i.e to Christian ritual performance. All these communities mentioned were led by their respective priest of the Catholics and the Anglicans with their Bibles. Each denomination appointed a representative who took oath on behalf of others.[25] Without sacrifice, it would have been difficult for members of these communities to eat together. It is also believed in the Eri kingdom that the spirit of those killed in the war would go on vengeance against their own people who eat together with their murderers. From that day, peace was restored, true reconciliation began and social harmony was restored among these communities.

Benefits of Indigenous Methods of Conflict Resolution among Igbo-Africans
Indigenous methods of conflict resolution among Igbo African has a lot of benefits which include; It creates opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity and effects of conflicts. During formal and informal meetings, conflict resolution exercises permit a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding options to crisis and to divergent point of view. Those who organize conflict resolution exercises or meetings usually constitute the third party in a triangular arrangement and consist of traditional rulers (Kings, chiefs, etc). Conflict resolution performs a healing function in African societies. It provides opportunity for the examinations of alternative positive decision to resolve differences. Failure to resolve conflict over access to commonly valued scarce resources, and over divergent perceptions of socio-political situations, has the high potential of degenerating into genocide or fratricide. In traditional African society, extra-judicial methods were employed in conflict resolution. These took the form of ordeals and the innovation of supernatural forces to expose all sides to the conflict. Olaoba has shown quite

clearly that oath taking which was one of the extra-judicial methods usually assisted the judge or adjudicators to locate areas of weaknesses in the conflict. Conflict resolution promotes consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions and re re-enactment of order in society. Conflicts hardly break up societies, as stated by Otite and others. For conflict resolution, the obvious implication is to view conflicts as non-isolated events in its social context. Such perspective is not narrowly focused on a conflict and its resolution. It takes into account the cultural settling and the social context. It looks at the history of preceding events which led to the conflict concerned. And while concentrating on the conflict itself and process of resolving it, it takes possible implications for the future seriously.[26] A wider look is taken than one which just includes the disputing parties, possible consequences for others in their families and social network are also taken into consideration. Potential effects on relationship and interests are envisaged.

Conclusion
In conclusion, each people, race, or identity group has their own ways of doing things especially as they concern conflict resolution. While in Europe, for example, the police is the agent of crime detection. However, several African societies relied on oath-taking and divination in pre-colonial times. These methods still thrive today in some places on a very limited scale alongside torture and skull breaking in the name of interrogation and confession extraction. Also, while the western world placed emphasis on a judicial system presided over by lawyers and judges; traditional Africa uses council of elders, king's court, people (open place) assemblies, etc. for dispute settlement and justice dispensation. Nwolise, opines, that in Africa, conflict takes various forms and dimensions. It is worthy to note that conflict does not have a single definition from African perspective. It could be a kind of social unrest or relationships, whether positive or negative.[27] Consequently, conflicts are in magnitude of rage, rift, misunderstanding, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars. These kinds of conflicts are wide spread in traditional African societies.

Nwolise further says "a society which neglects the instructive value of its past for its present and future, cannot be self-confident and self-reliant and will therefore lack internally generated dynamism and stability".[28]

The essence of dispute settlement and conflict resolution in traditional African states include to remove the root-causes of the conflict; reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely, to preserve and ensure harmony, and make everybody involved in the resolved conflict happy and be at peace with each other again, and this required getting at truth; to set the right milieu for societal production and development; to promote good governance, law and order, to provide security of lives and property and to achieve collective sell-

being and happiness. These are different from what does obtain today where nobody cares about the truth. It Africans have to put the falling apart together; her original values must be revisited.

We conclude that, it is the advent of the slave drivers and colonial masters in Africa, that adulterated, and in some areas, wipes out the African methods of monitoring, preventing, managing and resolving conflicts. Africans also had their peculiar ways and manners of effecting peacemaking, peace building and confidence building. These peculiar and very effective methods have today been wiped out by the forces of colonialism, including psycho-war forces. This resulted to instability and retarded development. Dialogue between disputants is today replaced by fighting, and the mediating role of elders, and other more peaceful institutions as age-grades, highly revered societies are replaced in several clashes with police actions (teargas) military "peace keeping" operations, and endless court proceedings. This reminded us to the old saying that a people live out their culture and tradition for self-confidence, self-reliance, positive change and stability, and that a people without their culture are as dead and forgotten.

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