

Conflict Resolution in Pre-Colonial Ughievwen Society, Ughelli South Local Government Area, Delta State: A Historical Overview

Felix Ejukonemu Oghi & Ehimare Nelson Aigbokhan

Abstract

The study examined the pre-colonial conflict resolution mechanism in Ughievwen land, Ughelli South Local Government Area, Delta State. The study aims to demonstrate the fact that pre-colonial African Communities were not only politically organized, but also to demonstrate the point that internal mechanisms existed within African Communities that promoted peaceful co-existence, from which contemporary Nigeria could draw lessons and thus make the Nigerian State a “bride” of the world. The study used the historical method of investigation that involved the collection and interpretation of data. The data used in the study were sourced from primary and secondary sources having subjected them to textual and contextual analysis and further interviews conducted for the purpose of authentication. The presentation is essentially narrative, descriptive and analytical. The study found that traditional dispute resolution techniques helped to keep the Ughievwen Society intact and fostered unity among the people. This cord of unity could be adopted by the Nigerian society of contemporary times and overall, the society would be a safe “haven” for all.

Keyword: Conflict, Pre-colonial Ughievwe, Society, Conflict Resolution and Nigeria.

Introduction

Societies in the world at different climes have always evolved ways of handling their problems and challenges. These challenges have been made known to us through different disciplines. One of such disciplines or fields of dissemination of such knowledge has been the humanities. Unfortunately, in Africa, the humanities, as recently described by CBN Ogbogbo, the former President of the Historical Society of Nigeria, is “in retreat and so has been historical scholarship” (Ogbogbo, 2016, 13).

Historical scholarship, he continued, “which only some years ago, was a major platform for African renaissance and the fight for independence of African State, is today gasping for the breath to survive” (Ogbogbo, 2016, 13)

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Interestingly, it needs to be borne in mind that amongst the myriads of communities in pre-colonial Nigeria, the knowledge of history was "taken very seriously and was central to their worldview" (Ogbogbo, 2016, 15). This study therefore, not only throw light on how Africans managed their internal problems successfully without external interference, but also goes to confirm that if well managed and passed on to successive African leaders, the continent would not be negatively painted as was done by some European writers (Saligman, 1930). It could therefore, also be recalled that the histories of various communities in Africa have been transmitted through what Toyin Falola called "Ritual Archive" (Falola, 2016). This study would certainly contribute to such archives. The summary thus, is that "Historical knowledge is a necessity for the integration and survival within the pre-colonial societies in Africa (Ogbogbo, 2016, 17-18). Conflict, it must be noted, is unavoidable in any human society, (Oghi, 2015) because as humans differ, so also are their interest", where such conflicts are not resolved, the parties involved and indeed, the larger society is also affected". This study is thus, divided into six sections. The first section is the introduction which examined the rationale for conflict resolution and the need for the discipline of history to properly take cognizance of the internal mechanisms for sustaining same in pre-colonial Africa. The second limb of the paper discusses the geographical and historical background of the Ughievwen society which was one of the five major clans in Urhoboland prior to the coming of colonial rule; while the third section of the paper examined economic, social and political issues necessitating conflicts that demanded resolution in pre-colonial Ughievwenland. The fourth section of the study discussed the mechanism for the resolution of the aforesaid conflicts. The fifth part of the paper focused on the lessons which the Nigerian nation-state could draw from the discussion in order to engender more united country where peace would be the concern of all, while the concluding section imposes a duty on Nigerian leaders and statemen to harness these pre-colonial strongholds for the betterment and emergence of a virile and forward-marching country where the efforts of our past heroes, would not go down the drain.

Geographical And Historical Background of Ughievwen People

A major part that strikes the attention of any scholar working on the history of African communities is the fact that the pre-colonial state in Africa has been the subject of debate. The main issue has been whether such state had their origins in conquest or emerged through peaceful development in a process of integration of different groups or communities (Naomi Chazan's Chapter: Chazan, 1988, 5, Rothschild & Chazan (Eds), 123). The Ughievwen people presently domiciled in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria is a sub-cultural area with its administrative headquarters in Otughievwen (Oghi, 2014). Its territory is bounded on the South and South-East by Okpara or Ekiagbodo creek in the Udu Local Government Area of Delta State, on the North-East by Agbarho Clan and on the East by Ughelli Clan (Pipah, 1999). The Area lies wholly in the tropics and could be located roughly at 5,12N and 5,88E occupying about 279 square kilometres. Ughievwen land is situated in the rainforest region of Nigeria. The area, just like the rest of the Niger Delta, has a humid climate that is sub-equatorial with a long-wet season that lasts from March to October and alternates with a shot dry season that occurs from November to February each year (Oyaide, 1991). The annual rainfall in the area is as high as 2500m (Oyaide, 1991, 2). Raffia Palm pullulates the forest of the area that is essentially swampy while savanna vegetation also occurs in the area and is in continuous patches on the creek

flood plains. Only few trees such as Oil Palm and Spear grass (*imperata cylindricat*) are dominant in the area. There are also creeks and rivers that provide the main physical routes through which contacts with neighbouring peoples are made. During the rainy season, communication between villages is interrupted because most of the village paths are flooded. The Okwagbe river (then called Ganagana River before the coming of the European) provided the main source of transportation both within Ughievwen Clan and the neighboring area. As a result of this geography, the main occupations of the people included: subsistence farming, fishing, trading, palm wine tapping (local gin production) and local crafts (Orogun, 2024).

The early history of Ughievwen land indicate influences and association with Egypt, Benin, the Niger-Benue confluence Area and Ijo Origins. Whereas previous non-historians had emphasized some of these claims (Johnson, 1932, 285-286). A more recent study has traced the settlement of the people on the area now occupied by them to the early decades of the eighteenth century (Oghi, 2014, 51-54). The Version that traced the early history of the Ughievwen people to Egypt in line with previous works on the Binis, has been rejected on the ground that they were attempts to seek glory because of the well-organized system of life which astonished such scholars (Basden, 1966, 414, Egharevba, 1968, 1, & Talbot, 1969, 276-278). The second claim is that which associates the Ughievwen people with Benin (Nukueye, 2003, 13). J.E. Nujueye is a strong apostle of this school of thought. The claim is to the effect that the Urhobo people migrated from Benin at about 1370A.D. Ughievwen, this source claimed, founded a settlement called Otughievwen which means “Land of the Ughievwen”. This school of thought was founded on a tradition which postulated that at the time the Urhobo left Benin, during the reign of Egbekah (Nukueye, 2003, 4). The people were led by one Koku. From Benin, they arrived the Ethiope River. However, the identity of this said Koku is not explained and no reference is made to Ughievwen in the narratives. In fact, the meaning of the name of Ughievwen seemed not known to the people who emphasized this version, (Nukueye, 2003, 4) but it is in all probability agreed that one Musumo, from Oginibo (one of Ughievwen Villages) used to visit the Oba of Benin after the abolition of the slave trade (H.R.H. Okotete, 2010). It is even alleged that upon arrival, the people first settled at Otor-Edo. Of course, there could be some undoubtable link with Benin, because for a village in the clan to have been named after a Bini lends credence to some interactions that could have existed. Indeed, link to Benin has some historical validity going by the oral accounts of Djervbudu John (Djevbudu, 2011). As it stands, it is quite obvious that lack of detailed information on Koku’s identity encourages speculative rather than definitive comments. It is possible to regard him as one of those associated with voluntary migrations in search of new homes due to population pressure. No evidence at present exist to support this, and consequently the claims is dismissed.

Next, is the Niger-Benue Confluence version of origins of the Ughievwen people. This version recognizes the Niger-Benue confluence as the original homeland of the Ughievwen people (Barr. P.A. Ideh, 2010). This tradition was introduced by writers after the rich Nok finds and other discoveries linked with the area. Ughievwen people had made up their story to identify with this tradition. This tradition appeared to be gaining followership (Ijoma, 2010, 16-18). It now seemed common among ethnic groups of southern Nigeria. Impressed by the tradition, A.E. Afigbo had stated that: the Igbos, like their immediate neighboring Kwa-speaking groups, probably started off from around the region of the Niger-Benue confluence (Afigbo, 1981). The attribution of the Ughievwen origins to this tradition

appears to have been based on linguistic affiliation. There is the view that groups of people might speak the same language at the one period, but with the passage of time and their drifting apart, they lose contact with each other; develop different dialects of the same language and finally, acquire different languages. However, no clear explanation has been given as to why the Confluence area must be regarded as the special cradleland of the Kwa family of languages to which Ughievwen belong.

Furthermore, geologically the Nige-Benin Confluence area perhaps remains for long under the sea, while other places around it did. Taken further, the coastal region of the Niger-Delta where the Ughievwen live today have never been part of the earth during the post-Eocene period (Ntukidem, 1976). The Ughievwen people even used the antiquity of yam cultivation (which the people call *Ole*) to support the argument for migration of its people from the Niger-Benue confluence area (Chikwendu, 1979, 44-48). It needs to be stressed however, that the Ughievwen area was not known for yam cultivation if anything, such argument could perhaps make some sense for Igbo who prized yam cultivation highly. The fact that yam was one of the staple foods of the Ughievwen may not be enough to support the argument. It has been emphasized that yam do not thrive well in the rainforest because they need sufficient sunlight. While an archeological site in Igbo land has yielded a date of 1200B.C for yam cultivation. ((Ijoma, 2010, 16-18) It has not been so for Ughievwen land. It is also true that many archeological sites in Ughievwen land are yet to be explored. It is not however, safe at this point, to associate any knowledge of yam cultivation in the area with the origin and migration theory of the people, until perhaps, more detailed studies (archaeological or otherwise) are carried out. Consequently, even if the confluence area may have for long, been a region of cross-cultural activities for many Nigerian people, for now, there might not be any satisfactory reasons to identify the confluence as the original homeland for the Ughievwen people.

There is also the version that links the history of the Ughievwen people to Ijoland. This version seemed to be the most popular tradition concerning the settlement of the people in their present abode. It was the version recorded by colonial officials who had to produce intelligence reports, relying much however, on stories narrated to them by the people. This version maintained that the early history of the Ughievwen people was identical with that of Ewu clan (Johnson, 1932, 8). This Ijo tradition claimed that the Ughievwen people migrated from Ijoland, Ogboibiri, in present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria (Johnson, 1932, 8). The tradition contends that as a result of increase in population and the resultant congestion, some families, decided to leave Ogboibiri and they were later joined by two other families; the Ewu and the Ughievwen (also spelt Jeremi). The families; the Ewu and the Ughievwen (Jeremi) family finally settled near the present site of Ekiagbodo. How long this journey lasted is not known; but it is stated that the people were continually harassed and their territory raided for slaves by the surrounding mein Ijos (Johnson, 1932, 9-12). In order to avoid these harassment, further movement resulted and later settlements emerged in different areas such as *Imode*, *Eyara*, *Agbowhiame*, *Erhuwaren*, *agbaghare*, *Ayagha*, *Oginibo*, *Iwhreoku*, *Okwagbe*, *Ekrokpe*, *Ekakpamre*, *Urthiephron*, *Ughevbughe*, *Otokutu*, *Egbo* and *Iwhrekeke*. The period of settlement of these people, in a recent study has been traced to the early decades of the eighteenth century (Oghi, 2014, 51-54). Without delving into the arguments raised in the claims and counter-claims of these traditions one thing certain about the Ughievwen people, which is the focus of this study, was that by the close of the nineteenth century they already emerged as a people with distinctive and admirable

culture, organized political system, though not of the same magnitude with the western world, but nonetheless, had internal mechanisms that kept the Ughievwen society cohesive and united.

Political, Social and Economic Institution in Pre-Colonial Ughievwen Society

Ughievwen pre-colonial political institutions was made up of the kinship structure and the kingship political system. While the kinship arrangement recognized the family, the kingship system was said to have been altered by two major considerations by the middle of the nineteenth century. In the kinship structure, the family played a major role. It was made of the nuclear and extended members. Each extended family was headed by the oldest man in the family, *Okpako Orua*. The oldest man represented the immediate family in lineage or kindred and village meetings. However, women could not become family heads. The reason could be attributed to the general state of the acephalous nature of some Nigerian communities in which women, as noted, by Okonjo “were not involved in the mainstream of decision making” (Okonji, 1974, 45). Decisions were taken through democratic process and family pronouncement were made by family heads in Ughievwen land as in other Urhobo and Ijaw area. Legislative and judicial functions were not regarded as separate functions (Pa. James Dase, 2011). There was also the lineage or kindred. This was made up of a group of related extended families. The size of lineages varied from one village to another. The lineage was headed by the eldest man, his authority was reported by all members of the lineage in all village meetings (Pa. James Dase, 2011). The lineage-maintained law and order among its members and also ensured that decisions taken during village meetings were strictly complied with by all lineage members.

Next was the village. It was the basic unit of political organisation in Ughievwen clan before the introduction of the trade in palm oil and kernels (Pa. James Dase, 2011). This was confirmed by S.E. Johnson, who in 1932, wrote “... as in all Sobo clans and indeed, in all tribes inhabiting the Niger-Delta region, the village group council was the keystone of social organization” (Johnson, 1932, 22). However, rules and regulations for public security, welfare and protection from foreign aggression were also made (Johnson, 1932, 23). Another vital aspect of the kinship structure was the age-grades. The highest grade that could be attained was the grade of *Ekpako* (Plural of *Okpako*). When a man had passed through the stage of Otu, reached a fairly ripe age, and became responsible authority for a small community which could be termed the domestic family, he was admitted into the deliberations of his quarter council, and later to the sub-clan council. He was then said to be of the Okpako grade. The Ekpako had no distinctive badge, dress or staff of office (Pa. James Dase, 2011). But the head Okpako in the village group council was assisted by the *Akpile Otata*. Decisions of the village group council were transmitted by the messengers known as Ikor. Each village group had its own Ukor (Singular of Ikor) who were employed by the council on errands of importance to summon council meetings at the instance of the Otota and brought before the council, persons summoned (Pa. James Dase, 2011).

There was also, the people’s Assembly, *Awhare Ovworho*, which was a meeting of all the adult males of the village. It was held at the residence of the eldest person in the village (*Okpako Orere*). Males within the community or village attended and expressed their opinions on issues for deliberations. The population of attendance at such meetings depended on the degree of public interest in the matters to be discussed (Pa. James Dase, 2011). At such meetings, issues were thrown open for free discussion by all present. After issues had been fully discussed, elders representing each lineages examined the matter under discussions more closely. This was called *Ume* and thereafter, a consensus was reached (Pa. James Dase, 2011). Such decisions were presented to the *Awhare* for ratification. Contribution from the younger ones (*Uvwie*) was also recognized. This included the females

(*Otu Emete*). Meetings of the *Otu Emete* were held in the compound of the eldest among them *Okpako Emete*, while those of the women (*Ewheya*) was held in the compound of the *Okpako Ewheya*. In some cases, where mischief was reported, protest was led to the *Okpako Orere* to register their grievances.

As earlier stated, two major factors altered the political system of Ughievwen clan by the middle of the nineteenth century. First, was the abolition of the slave trade and second, was the introduction of the new trade in palm oil (H.R.H. Okotete, 2010). This is understandable when one recalls the fact that before this period, the trade in slave was one profitable business in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, in addition to fishing and farming from which the Urhobo in the hinterland supplied agricultural products to the Itsekiri (Ikime, 1971, 4). The new trade in palm oil had two basic features, namely; the “Trust” system and the need for participants to have fleets of canoes, which according to Obaro Ikime, “were manned by slaves” (Ikime, 1971, 6). It was probable that in this circumstance, institutions like *Aden*, *Ebo*, *Igbun-Otor* and later *Igbun-Eshovwin* emerged in the Ughievwen clan; otherwise, what led to the emergence of these institutions has not been explained and nobody seemed to know (Akpanugie, 2008). Even one of the latest efforts at recording/documenting the past of the Ughievwen people also mentioned this view (Pippah, 1999). By the beginning of the nineteenth century therefore, the Ughievwen people had institutions that could handle conflicts or misunderstanding of any sort and thereby promote peaceful coexistence among the people.

Resolution Of Conflict In Pre-Colonial Ughievwenland:

Ughievwen land, like other parts of the world, had conflicts that were related to political, social and economic issues. In the political sphere, there were issues like land boundaries and those of succession, while concerning social issues, there were those that were involved with inheritance and childlessness or barrenness. Issues of economic nature included: taxation, recovery of debts and trespass. All these issues were traditionally resolved in pre-colonial Ughievwen land by the institutions earlier discussed *Supra*.

(i) Political Conflicts/Disputes:

Boundary disputes, traditionally called *uphru* were common in pre-colonial Ughievwen land (Solomon Koyor, 2009). This was particularly the case in areas where there were no natural demarcations, which could be valley or rivers (Solomon Koyor, 2009). Once there was a dispute over a particular boundary, the matter was handled by the *Aden*. Membership of *Aden* was open to males only and as soon as one became a member, visitation by the gods was expected to be reported by such person to the head of the group called *Odede* (Solomon Koyor, 2009). Such member visited was expected to formalize initiation rite called *gorhovwen*, after which an official ceremony, *Edjere Eshe*, was held of the *Aden* cult (Solomon Koyor, 2009). Difficult or more serious matters were referred to the *Okubaro* to mediate and his decision was binding on the parties. Once a boundary dispute has been settled, the boundary was demarcated by the planting of *Okhriki* tree (Chief Osemwingie Ero, 2018).

Another set of political dispute/conflict that was experienced by the Ughievwen people in pre-colonial period were those related to succession. Recent studies on the Ughievwen people have shown that there was monarchical system of government before the schism in the area that may have influenced S.E. Johnson’s adumbration that there was restiveness, until the arrival of government (Johnson, 1932, 12). Where issues of succession arose, the emphasis by chiefs who handled such matters such as the *Aden* and *Igbun*, the principle of primogeniture was strictly followed. In the case of hereditary titles, only eldest male children whose mothers were married traditionally to the deceased, had the right to inherit or succeed their father. This was subject to satisfactory performance of necessary

rites (Orogun, M. Weneso, 2023). Children that were given birth to (*Emo Osen*), outside wedlock, were not entitled to inheritance or succession.

However, there were occasions where two or more persons laid claims to succession or inheritance. Where this arose, traditional measures were used to ascertain the right person entitled to inheritance. This was done in two ways: first, claimants were summoned to one of either the *Aden* cult or that of the *Igbun*, where oaths were administered on the claimants. The second method, which was rarely applied, was the type in which, for instance, the property of the deceased may have been verbally willed to a particular son, before the death of the holder (Orogun, M. Weneso, 2023). Rituals were performed and those who witnessed it are summoned to testify to the claim, while in the first method, the spirit of the ancestors (*Erimwin Iniemo and Erinmwin Esemo*) were involved to ascertain the right claimants. There were occasions where the deceased property was shared among the children by the family (Igbafé, P. A, 1979, 405). (*Okpako Orhua*) Thus, like the practice in Benin kingdom, in which the people were related, issues that concerned inheritance (*Ukun*) were handled traditionally without recourse to war.

(ii) **Social Conflicts/Dispute:**

Social conflicts/disputes are phenomena that have been part of human existence and daily living. The occurrence of this category of conflicts, from the view of scholars, is due to interactions that occur among social groups. These groups, as argued by O.D. Oche, “are product of incompatibilities and differences between individuals and groups” (Oche, O. D. 2006, 11). Marriage in pre-colonial Ughievwen land experienced this form of conflicts. As it were, marriages in pre-colonial Ughievwen land were determined by tradition and customs, it was different from the westernized type of marriage that emphasized monogamy. The Ughievwen could marry as many as his income could afford. In fact, it was socially debasing if one’s children had no half brothers or sisters (Orogun, M. W, 2023). However, as soon as a woman was married to a man, it was difficult if not rare, to think of divorce because it was not indigenously encouraged (Orogun, M. W, 2023). Marriage was preserved by traditional ethos that ensured disputes were amicably settled by families of the couples. Even where in a dispute, the means of persuasion failed, the woman still remained in the house of the husband (Orogun, M. W, 2023). This arrangement ensured that discipline existed in the families.

Another angle to social conflict/disputes in pre-colonial Ughievwen land was the issue of childlessness which could set families on edge (Peter Gorume Adjoro, 2023). Most failed marriages in pre-colonial Ughievwen land were propelled by either accusation of witchcraft or inability to have children. Witchcraft, in the words of John O. Ubrurhe, was “the most potent destructive agency in the Urhobo traditional society” (Ubrurhe, J. O. 2003, 52). Generally, its activities are so anti-social and inimical to the growth and development, such that all untoward occurrence are attributed to it (Ubrurhe, J. O. 2003, 52). On its part, childlessness was believed to be caused by natural and non-natural causes. It could be on the part of the man, or the woman, or could be linked to the wrath of the ancestors. There was the beliefs that that when a man or a woman died, either of a natural or man-made cause like suicide, at the burial obsequies of such person, depending on the sex, a sponge was given to someone known to have had children, to bathe the deceased before interment (Orogun, M. W, 2023). Other possible causes of childlessness were: rape and adultery (Opharien), (Orogun, M. W, 2023). Where conflict/disputes of childlessness arose, traditionally, the matter was brought to the attention of the family head (*Okpako Orhua*) who thereafter, summons members of both parties (families of the man and his wife) and such matter was amicably resolved. In situations where deadlock was the case, resort was to the *Okpako-Orere* (the eldest man in the town). There were situations where allegations of witchcraft

may have been made as precedent to the dispute. On the consensus of both families, the truth was unearthed by the visit to *Aronwonka* somewhere in Kwale land. However, it is important to state that such disputes never elicited war or quarrels of greater magnitude.

Adultery was another issue that elicited social conflicts or disputes in pre-colonial Ughievwen land. Adultery was regarded as a taboo and a sign of evil. It could be done or committed by men or women. Whether done by men or women, if discovered, it attracted punishment. Whereas for women, it attracted sanctions like disgrace, eviction, payment of fine and banishment; for men, it elicited fines like *Osadje* (a kind of reparation for the atrocity done). However, in all of the socially detected crimes/conflicts, the divinities had a major role to play. Generally, Ughievwen people like other Urhobo, believed that *Oghene* was not the only creator and sustainer of the world, but also the source and end of morality. Divinities existed that acted as intermediaries between God and the people. In fact, the point has been stressed that the Urhobo generally, do not have a particular Divinity which is worshipped by all (Orogun, M. W, 2023). Rather, each of the twenty-two clans or socio-political units have their divinities (known as *edjo* and *erha*) – an indication believed to have aided the people during process of migration, settlement and wars of expansion (Ubrurhe, J. O. 2003, 52). For the Ughievwen, the deity *Ogba-Urhie* for instance, was highly revered and respected. Throughout Urhobo land, the belief existed that different *edjo* and *erha* rendered the guns, cutlass and other weapons of the enemies ineffective (Ubrurhe, J. O. 2003, 52).

(iii) **Economic Conflict/Dispute:**

A key element that has been instrumental to peaceful and harmonious coexistence of societies all over the world, have been the way and manner in which the economy of such area is organized. Mismanagement and exploitation of resource lay the bastion for conflicts of economic nature; hence, economic historians have felt concerned with economic factor in the organization of societies, (Burton, J, 1990, Bendel, M., & Malone, D. M. (Eds.) 2000). By the close of colonial period, the economy of most African states were drastically affected by the manner in which they were managed by the colonizers (Boahen, A. Adu. 1985, 782-809). Pre-colonial Ughievwen society had a tax system that was indigenous and useful in the recovery of debts (Adjoro, P. G, 2023). Debt recovery was handled by persons that had integrity with the permission of the *Ovie* (the king). Debt recovery was within the ambit of *Igbun* chiefs in pre-colonial Ughievwen land. The *Igbun* society was open to persons who had distinguished themselves in the art of warfare and other deeds of valour. Holders of this title functioned as the soldiers of the kingdom. They were of two categories – *Igbun-otor* and *Igbun-eshovwin*. Each of these two groups had its *Odede* (leader) who was chosen on the basis of length of membership. For this group to which this informant belonged, an initiate was addressed as *Odjegbere* or *Ogbirhue* (Solomon Koyor, 2009). The belief that underly this stratification was that while the *Igbun eshovwin* were brave warriors who fought in air (traditional type of air force), the other category, *Igbun-Otor*, were those who fought on land (traditional army) (Solomon Koyor, 2009). These *Igbun* chiefs performed economic *cum* judicial roles. The cult adjudicated over case of theft and also had the authority to collect debts on behalf of creditors that sought their services (F.E. Oghi, 2014, 83-84). In the course of carrying out their debt recovery work, they were permitted by custom to kill and carry away any domestic animal, the cost of which was borne by the debtor (Solomon Koyor, 2009). Also important in the ladder of economic conflicts was the issues of trespass. Majority of trespass matters bothered on land matters. The village was the land holding unit in pre-colonial Ughievwen land (Weneso Orogun, 2023). An individual was allowed to farm anywhere within the village. Once there was issue of trespass raised, the attention of the elders in the community (*Ekpako orere*) was drawn to it. The *Otu-Ekpako* deliberated on it and took decisions that were binding on the parties involved. Ancestral landmarks and natural boundaries such as rivers, streams or valleys were used to

determine issue of trespass in pre-colonial Ughievwen land. Once decisions had been reached, an *Oghriki* tree was planted to demarcate such boundaries. Parties may not be satisfied with certain decisions; where this was the case; appeals were made to the “*ovie*” (the monarch) who either affirmed the previous decision or caused an enquiry to be done all over. It was considered *egha* (Sacrilegious) to destroy economic crop (*Emu Okakun*) in pre-colonial Ughievwen land (Weneso Orogun, 2023).

Implications of Conflict Resolution Mechanism in Pre-colonial Ughievwen Land for the Nigerian State:

The foregoing discussion has brought to the fore, five important points about African communities before the era of colonialism. First, is the issue of challenges of maintaining cohesion in the society. Societies all over the world, have had challenges which were managed internally without the interference of external bodies. African communities were no exception. Second, early European writers/scholars had erroneously believed that the Europeans were the force behind development in Africa. They had contended that development in this part of the world was hinged on the Western world. C.G. Seligman for instance, was forefront in this regard, with the publication of his *Races of Africa* in 1930. Third, the discussion so far, in this study has also shown that Africa, like other parts of the world, had indigenous institutions that took care of their political, social and economic needs. These institutions, at the occurrence of disputes, also managed conflicts, to ensure peaceful coexistence. Fourth, as in different parts of the world where the peoples’ cosmology of the world differs, in Nigeria, the story was not different. In Ughievwen land for instance, the study has shown that the people had belief in *edjo* and *erha*, which helped the supreme God, in the control of the universe. This is not peculiar to Africa. It existed in different climes of the world. The ultimate objective of having them is their assistance in peaceful and harmonious living, their nomenclature notwithstanding.

Fundamentally too, this study has also shown that the Nigeria state as it is today, no doubt, is a secular one that accommodate different religion. These different religions co-exist and have one thing in common, love and unity. Adherence to these religions, therefore, should apply the ethos of their religion to build a united and peaceful country. If done, the degree of fissiparity among the people that elicit heinous crimes like kidnapping, theft and conflict will abate. The beauty of the Ughievwen case, was not ingrained in the magic of the then-existing institutions, but the preparedness of its subjects to accept the bindingness of the decisions reached. This can also be done in the Nigerian state. All that is needed, is the spirit and preparedness on the part of its citizenry to subjugate themselves to the ethos of the society.

Flowing from the above too, it could also be argued that even if colonial rule had not taken place, in all probability pre-colonial Ughievwen would have continued with its traditional conflict resolution mechanism. Emphasis now should be on the need to properly examine why societies prior to modern times, were intact. There is need for a study of the administrative initiatives of the past; a call for administrative history. It is now obvious that if Africa, and indeed Nigeria, is to extricate herself from the litany of developmental challenges, we must dig deep into the past. Such effort could provide alternatives that would be valuable to policy-makers and thereby move history from the state of antiquarianism to one that would help fashion contemporary solutions to contemporary problems. Basically, absence of peaceful co-existence imply insecurity. The more a community is faced with the headache of insecurity, development would be stifled. As was recently expressed by a

scholar, O. B. Osadolor, “the scope of complexity of insecurity in Nigeria and other West African nations require cross-cutting integrated approach for a common security strategy and harmonious actions in the region (Osadolor, O. O, 2019, 2018). There is the urgent need to look closely at what existed in pre-colonial Nigeria such that, the past acts as guide in identifying leadership that emphasizes change and is devoted to its implementation (Osadolor, O. O, 2019, 2018).

Conclusion

The study discussed conflict resolution mechanism in pre-colonial Ughievwen, Ughelli-South Local Government Area, Delta state, Nigeria. From the analysis made in the study, it could be seen that pre-colonial Ughievwen land had internal traditional mechanisms for resolving disputes of political, social and economic dimensions. The need to proffer solutions to these conflicts affirms the opinion of Alan Ryder, who, over fifty years ago said “the monarchical traditions, the creation of a complex political and social hierarchy and arising from these two, the growth of an imperial tradition (Ryder, Alan, 1967, 29), were indicators to the fact that development in Africa were not induced from outside. Traditional dispute resolution methods were in existence before the coming of colonialism. The later, no doubt, over the decade, was interpreted to have been a major propellant in the pauperization of the less developed countries by the policy of accumulation by dispossession. Of course, crises are common occurrence all over the world, but for the continent of Africa, there were internal devices of checkmating conflicts as demonstrated in the case of the Ughievwen of Western Delta of Nigeria, discussed Supra. The Nigeria state should take a cue from this.

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APPENDIX: Oral Interviews

- Barrister P.A. Ideh, an 83-year-old legal practitioner from Effurun (Barr. P.A. Ideh, personal communication, November 17, 2010), shared insights on the early inhabitants of the area.
- Akpanugie, O. O, personal communication, Ekreobe Quarters, 94 years, Farmer, Orwahwa

Village June 14, 2008.

Adjoro, P. G, personal communication, December 28, 2023.

Chief Osemwingie Ero, personal communication, the Edobayokhae of Benin Kingdom, 84 years, Benin City, August 30, 2018.

Djevbudu John, a 60-year-old farmer from Otor-Edo Village personal communication, July 13, 2011.

His Royal Highness Okotete, (H.R.H. Okotete, personal communication, September 28, 2010) shared insights that were corroborated by Traditional Chiefs Koyor Samuel and Dozen Ogbariemu). Otughievwen Royal Palace, Delta State.

Orogun, M. Weneso, personal communication, retired Journalist, 68 years, December 27, 2023.

Peter Gorume Adjoro personal communication, 66 years, Builder, Eyara Town, Ughelli South Local Government Area, December 28, 2023.

Solomon Koyor, personal communication, the *Ogbirhue* of Ughievwen Kingdom, Eyara November 14, 2009.

Samuel, Omoni, a 74-year-old resident of Owahwa Village (S. Omoni, personal communication, June 28, 2009).