

**HERMENEUTICS OF ỌKỌNKỌ SOCIAL PRACTICES IN CONFLICT
MANAGEMENT IN UMUAHIA, ABIA STATE, NIGERIA**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this research work was carried out by Ugochukwu Samuel, ANIGA of the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme, Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

To the Almighty God alone!

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of colonialism, African societies have had to contend with hybridity of modernity and traditional cultural forms such as the juridical Ọkọnkọ Society social practices of the Umuahia people of Abia State, Nigeria. However, extant studies on Ọkọnkọ Society have focused largely on the group being an adult male Igbo secret cult, thereby neglecting the important role it plays in conflict management. Therefore, this study examined the role of Ọkọnkọ Society in the sustenance of peace with the view to identifying the various linguistic and cultural practices of the people of Umuahia.

This study used Michael Forsters' model of hermeneutics on the interpretation of utterances and understanding of texts, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of signs that deals with cultural significations, and Can-Seng Doi's cultural mediation theory on the maintenance of cultural systems. The research adopted qualitative method, using ethnographic research design. Purposive Sampling technique was used to garner relevant data from cultural specialists. Twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with Ọkọnkọ members from four clans: Ibeku, Ọhụhụ, Ubakala and Olokoro. Four focus group discussions were conducted in each clan, while a series of non-participant observations took place in community halls and farmsteads. Thirty proverbs were collected and studied. These included Ugo eberule na ngbagbu (The eagle has perched to be shot dead), Ndi nwe ala n'ejị ala (Those that own the land control the land), Anwuta si na oka nma ina ata ahu na abuo (The mosquito says it is better to bite in twos) and, Onye ozi anaghi atu ilu (A messenger does not speak in proverbs). Data were analysed using interpretive method.

Ọkọnkọ Society served as an appellant court when conflict management fails at ama ala (kindred) level. The people of Umuahia respect the Ọkọnkọ Society and trust its interventions and judgments. Ọkọnkọ served as a cultural enforcement mechanism against community crises. Because of its cultural authority, Okonko is able to check crimes in the society and disciplines persons of questionable conduct. Ọkọnkọ is not consulted in murder cases as that is usually left to the police. During Ọkọnkọ's rites at market squares, Igbo language and cultural symbols were used. Women, children and uninitiated men were allowed to observe and be entertained by the masquerades. The ọmụ (palm frond) and uhie (drum) were the emblems and language of Ọkọnkọ Society. The ọmụ symbolised authority while uhie represented the society's symbol of communication. Proverbs were used by Ọkọnkọ Society to express complex messages during conflict mediation and to give final verdict at the conclusion of investigations of judicial proceedings. Proverbs thus served as tools for conflict management, peace building and crime control.

Ọkọnkọ Society successfully managed social conflicts among the people of Umuahia using linguistic and cultural strategies. The government can learn from Ọkọnkọ Society's effective conflict management strategies.

Keywords: Ọkọnkọ Society, Umuahia, Ọmụ and Uhie, Igbo proverbs, Abia state Nigeria.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The central and general function of language is that it is first a means of human communication in sociocultural and psychological contexts to determine our view of how language should be modelled (Butler, 2005: 4). Because language is both sociocultural and psychological, Croft (1995: 492) argues that the linguistic system of a language, that is its grammar, is autonomous from what he calls 'integrative functionalism', a situation whereby the linguistic system of a language cannot be enough except with external motivating factors. In other words, a functional theory depends on external factors to be effective. So the language system and external factors that include the cognitive structures, the processing constraints and social factors are combined to have an effective communication.

The dynamism of language is the fact that meaning is flexible. For instance, meaning can be based on semantics usage (dictionary use) and pragmatics (contextual use). Communication, according to Vazquez (2005: 79) is derived from the Latin infinitive, *communicare*, meaning to share. Vazquez argues that language is a tool for sharing information and ideas. Communication may be transmitted linguistically or non-linguistically. Vazquez (2005: 79) also says that communication can be through different extra linguistic tools that include sounds in smiling, laughing, and coughing.

Takashi and Wilkerson (2005: 329) throw some light on what they call 'Discourse and Culture'. According to them, language's cognitive place is for the recognition of objects and construction of propositions while the emotive function of language is for the expression of emotional attitude and communication of attitudes to others. They also touched on interactional function of language, and opined that it is for the management of participatory activities or actions and for the coordinations of joint utterances.

Listening is an aspect of language because through it, one is able to decipher what has been said. It is possible for us to hear what one is saying, yet we do not understand or do what is expected of us. Gamble (1996) defines hearing thus:

... hearing occurs automatically and requires no conscious effort on your part. If the psychological elements within your ears are functioning properly, your brain will process the electrochemical impulses received and you will hear. However, what you do with the impulse receiving them belongs to the realm of listening.

On the other hand, Ogunsakin (2003) writes that listening 'must always precede understanding, as it demands attention. It therefore takes conscious effort to listen'. It is clear that listening well demands discipline and commitment. If you are not committed to what is being said, there is no way you can listen. You may not listen when you are hostile to the person speaking. I want to say here that listening is our prime means of taking in information. It is however, not easy to listen effectively owing to the inability of some listeners 'to determine the listening or involvement level appropriate to a situation' (Gamble, 1996).

It is impossible to give a feedback, for instance a student, giving a feedback in form of writing an examination when he or she had not listened effectively to the teacher during the series of lectures. If we must retain what we hear, we must first learn how to focus our attention and then learn how to make certain that we understand what we have heard. Once this is done or put into practice, listening as an aspect of language has been inculcated so that information can effectively be passed and procured too.

On thought and language, Chafe (2005: 59) highlights four attributes of thought as follows:

1. Thought is dynamic;
2. Thought is segmented into foci of a consciousness;
3. Thought is constructed of ideas of events and states and their participants;
4. These ideas are oriented in various dimensions, including time, space, epistemology, emotions, interactions and contest.

James, (1890: 229-237) had more than a century earlier posited that language is dynamic and constantly changing through time, and language and thought are interwoven. Chafe (2005: 59) went ahead to posit the principal components of language and says that thoughts precede semantics, followed by grammar, then phonology and lastly sounds: thoughts, semantics, grammar, phonology and sounds.

Chafe (2005: 57) is very instructive on the relation of grammar to thought:

Language associates thoughts with sounds, but those phenomena are so different in nature that several kinds of adjustments are necessary before such an association is possible. Among those adjustments are selecting what will be verbalized from the realm of thought; categorizing the elements selected; orienting them in time, space, epistemology, and other dimensions of thought; and combining those choices within established patterns. Thoughts are thus organized into semantic structures, which would be amendable to representation by sound, were it not for the historical processes of lexicalization and grammaticalization. Those processes modify semantic structures to produce grammatical structures, which constitute the input to phonological representations.

The preceding explanation gives some understanding of the popular Sapir-Wolf hypothesis which posits that language determines how one thinks. The hypothesis is in two folds – linguistic determinism which states that language determines how one thinks, and the second, linguistic relativity which argues that no two languages see things in the same perspective. The latter, linguistic relativity has been widely criticised. The argument being that if such hypothesis were to be true, then cultures cannot be compatible.

Language is important in people's lives. It is with language that people communicate their ideas (Crystal, 1987:10). The ideas people communicate to one another cover, among other things, ways of doing things that are cultural beliefs which bind members of the society together.

'A language', refers to the speech form of a given community of people (Fowler, 1974). The meaning of 'language' is different from 'dialect' in that any speech form described as 'a language' is mutually unintelligible with any other speech form in the world. The second perspective defines 'language' as a system of communication for giving, receiving, and even hiding information. This perception of language covers what Chomsky sees as 'a set of very specific universal principles which are intrinsic properties of the human mind and part of species genetic endowment' (Downes, 1984:20).

Culture is the way a people have chosen to live and interact. The thinking of a people is measured by their culture and culture makes their life significant (Haris, 1983;

Rosoldo, 1989). Hall (1976) believes that no survival is possible without a culture. Culture as language is indispensable. It is with culture that a person truly has an identity with which to move around and exist as a human, not an animal. Cultures vary. Some are horizontally built while others are vertical. The horizontal aspect of culture recognizes collectivism, equality; that is, some communality of sort. Vertical culture emphasizes on hierarchy, that is, a culture that is operated on stratification: from monarchy descending to aristocracy to middle class set and down to the proletariat or the masses. This was the case in the ancient Roman, Spanish, and English worlds where kings and queens were seen as lords and where your wealth determined whom you were.

A culture is sensitive to change. No culture is better than the other but cultures influence each other, the knowledge, awareness, and acceptance of other cultures amounts to acculturation which may bring both positive and negative changes. For instance, the western culture of dressing, marriage, governance and even worship has positively and negatively influenced African cultures. Cultural sensitivity therefore underscores the fact that there exist differences and similarities among cultures. When this is understood, the interpretations of how peoples behave and act become more realistic.

On the dynamics of culture, the zeal to explore what does not exist in one's culture leads to advocacy for a change. The dynamism of culture makes it a near impossibility for a people to see themselves as not needing ideas from other worlds. So culture is also a historical study. It keeps on changing, yet unique for the good and advancement of a given set of people, for example the Umuahian people who operate on Igbo culture and values.

Originally hermeneutics was concerned with the interpretation of religious texts especially with the Catholic Church (Ranberg and Gjesdal, 2009). But today, hermeneutics has gone beyond biblical interpretation to all forms of linguistic material and understanding in general (Boel and Cecez Kecmanovic, 2010:134). Heidegger (2002) argues that self understanding and world understanding are inseparably interwoven. What Heidegger implies is that the way one perceives or understands things is connected to the global worldview, though there will be differences in perception.

Boel and Cecez-Kecmanovic (2010) analytically sees literature review, a normal academic concept in research as basically hermeneutical. They argue that in the course of consulting materials, they are interpreted in order to understand the context and how such literatures could fit into an existing research being pursued. In other words, it is not only the linguistic combination that is being interpreted *per se*, rather, the human values and vices inbuilt in the literature.

In the context of this work, the hermeneutical theory will explore the language-culture of the Okonko members in their conflict management styles in Umuahia, Abia state Nigeria. Their use of idioms and proverbs during the conflict management sessions will be studied with the view to determining their effect in the process. Their body language, signs and symbols will also be interpreted in line with the cultural beliefs of the people being studied.

Lack of knowledge about cultural traits in a language prohibits full comprehension of the message being passed across. In other words, no meaningful discussion of language can be fully achieved in absolute neglect of culture. Culture is a strand of language, both are in constant interplay (Risager, 2006).

An examination of the following Igbo proverbs will reveal that culture is communicated in our use of language:

Onye na atuturu onye ara nkwa, ya na so atu ya
(He who picks sticks for a mad man indulges in the act of throwing them with him)

A non-Igbo speaker or person who does not comprehend the cultural background to the above utterance may not fully understand the action. The above statement is borne out of the Igbo conception that a mad man is a destructive agent. It follows therefore, that if someone picks sticks for a mad man, he or she is invariably helping him in the act of destruction. Besides this explicitly expressed meaning, there is the other implicated meaning which derives from the knowledge of the context of culture of the text.

Another Igbo adage goes thus: 'A person who eats the head of a ram owes the spirits.' To a non-Igbo, this may make no meaning to him as he sees no logical connection between dead spirits and a ram. But to a native, who understands that the ram,

especially the head, is a vital or significant part of a special sacrifice, the meaning will not be lost.

The people of Umuahia are predominantly farmers and traders. They engage in many cultural activities especially: New Yam festival, marriage, burial and Ekpe cultural dance which takes place every year. Umuahia is the capital of Abia State in the southeastern Nigeria. Based on 2006 Nigeria census, her population is 359,230. Umuahia is a city established by the British Colonial Administration in the early 20th century. By 1916, Umuahia was well known as an agricultural market centre. Umuahia is one of the few towns with railway, and this makes it a collecting point for crops such as yam, cassava, corn, taro, citrus fruits and palm oil and kernels. Umuahia people produce palm oil in quantum.

Umuahia is made up of two local government areas: Umuahia North and Umuahia South. Five clans make up Umuahia and each has its distinctive dialect though all the dialects are similar to each other and they understand each other when they meet in markets and other places. The five constituting clans are Umuopara, Ibeku and Oḩuḩu forming Umuahia North Local Government Area; and Olokoro and Uḩakala making up Umuahia South Local Government Area. In each of the clans, the villages observe specific market schedules for their markets and their cultural engagements like New Yam Festivals and conflict management sessions. The four market days are *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. Ibenye-Ugbala (2008: 20) gives insight of towns with calendrical markets in Igboland which in his words, 'dating from prehistorical till date ...' Umuahia markets were given as examples by Ibenye-Ugbala. Umuahia people also bear names depicting the market days they are born. Hence, the people bear Ekeoma, Okorie, Okonkwo, Nwafo, Nwankwo, Nworie, Okeke and Okafor.

Before now, Umuahia was home to the prestigious Government College, Umuahia and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Umudike is now in Ikwuano Local Government Area. Despite this, the media and the general public still refer those institutions as being in Umuahia. Umuahia has two distinctive industries, the Golden Guinea Brewery and the Ceramics Company built close to each other. The two

industries were moribund but now being resuscitated by the government to boost employment.

For history purpose, Umuahia was declared the second capital of the defunct Republic of Biafra on 28th September, 1967 after the fall of Enugu. On June 28th, Umuahia was captured by Nigerian troops; but was recaptured by Biafran troops that same year. Umuahia eventually ceased to be capital on 24th December, 1969. As a result, Umuahia still has the so called, 'Ojukwu Bunker' as a tourist haven for those seeking to know where Ojukwu, the warlord of the Biafran army operated from for a period of time during the 1967-1970 thirty-month civil war.

Coming to traditional justice system of Umuahia people, it is historically and contemporarily gerontocratic. What this means is that the institution that dispenses justice is made up of elders of integrity. The youth do not constitute those that dispense justice. They only observe. They do not talk, they only watch. Both men and women of integrity participate in collective justice dispensation in conflict management and peacebuilding. However, only men are involved in land dispute resolution. Women manage women oriented matters as punishing women who have erred in the society and settling and advising women in dispute over their trade in the markets leading to fights. Men and women of integrity headed by traditional chiefs also team to resolve issues based on cultural stipulations and using the Igbo language as a medium. When a party is found guilty, some fine is imposed to act as a deterrent.

Ọkọnkọ is a society whose practices are both social and spiritual. It is open to men alone. It has different initiation stages before a member becomes full fledged. The social aspect of Ọkọnkọ is open to the public. These social practices involve playing a crucial role in traditional conflict management of the people, on one hand, and on the other, filling a number of executive functions in the society. For the former, they are involved in mediation in community conflicts, especially in land disputes. The spiritual or the confidential side of the Ọkọnkọ members is not the object of this research. This area of the society makes them to be seen as a secret society. All their activities in this aspect are nocturnal and their language is esoteric. Their social language is however exoteric.

Generally, the group is called secret society since they do not reveal their spiritual activities to outsiders.

The hermeneutics of Ọkọnkọ's social practices will focus on the use of the Ọkọnkọ's language and culture. For instance, their use of proverbs while engaging in conflict management. Ọkọnkọ people also use basic semiotic symbols like the palm frond, cola nut, white chalk, *nzu* and palm wine, in their day to day social and cultural engagements. The hermeneutical interpretations will involve these signs and symbols.

Danesi (2004:4) describes a sign as anything that stands for something other than itself and gives examples like colour, a gesture, a wink, and an object. Danesi (2004:16) says that there exists between a sign and a perceived interpretation what he calls representation. In other words, it is the representation of a sign or utterance in a given culture that leads to interpretation. Gongs bells and drums according to Sebeok (2001:11) are example of signals. These signals are some of the instruments of the Ọkọnkọ.

Ọkọnkọ is a society responsible for enforcing verdicts in the village assembly. Only men with proven integrity are allowed into the fold. Anybody that does not belong to *Ọkọnkọ* is called *okpo* (meaning an empty person), and such dare not meet with Ọkọnkọites when they are in session.

The first stage of initiation to *Ọkọnkọ* is *ida iyi* which amounts to 'baptism'. This takes place at midnight when the old members surround the about to be 'baptised' with *ọmu* (palm frond). The priest now reveals the seven secrets of the Ọkọnkọites to the newly initiated, which he must not reveal to anybody. *Akang*, *mboko* and *ekpe* are the three stages of initiations. One becomes an *Ezumezu* (a knower of all) after the three stages.

Let us now talk about Igbo language. It is the mother tongue of the Igbo nation of the South East of Nigeria. The Igbo nation comprises: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States as well as parts of Delta and Rivers States.

The Igbo language is the medium of communication of the Igbo people; and it is used among other things, for conflict management and peacebuilding. The language is

replete with proverbs (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994:165), a fact that shall be fully explored much later in the work.

A conflict can be caused, according to Albert (2001:4-5) by these four factors, competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value system, psychological needs of groups and individuals, and manipulation of information. All these causes are relevant to our topic as community conflicts are based on clashes of interests amongst the people.

There are, however, different types of conflict. They include intra-personal conflict which deals with a person's problems with say, how to manage his time, finance, who to marry and what course to study. The second type is inter-personal, conflicts between friends, colleagues and family members. The third is intra-group conflict, about conflicts within a group, fourth, inter-group conflict, to do with conflicts between two groups. The fifth and sixth are intra-national and international conflicts respectively. The former deals with a national conflict while on the other hand, the latter deals with conflicts between two or more nations.

For our work, only the interpersonal and inter-group conflicts are relevant. This is because the work is not investigating why a person or a group is in conflict. But it is investigating when two persons or groups are in conflict. National and international conflicts are not the focus of our work because our scope is community-related conflicts in Umuahia, Abia State in Nigeria.

Albert (2001:6-8) outlines four conflict handling styles: avoidance, confrontation, third party, and Joint Problem Solving (JPS). The first and second are negative handling styles because they tend to escalate a conflict. The third and the fourth handling styles tend to be positive and they help in de-escalating a conflict that has got to a violent stage.

Finally, there are six stages in conflict (Ihejirika, 2001:9). They include: the formative stage, the escalation stage, the violent stage, the de-escalation stage, the improvement stage and the transformation stage. The stage one centres on early warning signs which include visible antagonisms and behaviour leading to two that entails inflammatory public statements (Ihejirika, 2001). Weapons are freely used as law and order are virtually disrupted in stage three which is the climax. Stage four is ceasefire to

enable external force to intervene. Stage five brings about dialogue while the sixth centres on sustaining peace.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There are many exant works on modalities and instruments in Igbo Conflict Management which have tried to address the mechanics of the system. These works includes Uchendu (1965) who wrote on Igbo judicial matters. He says that they are tantamount to ad hoc affairs, that is to say that a group of persons meets to look into one conflict or the other in a special way that the society is protected from further conflicts . For Nkwo (1984), he writes on the role language plays to the Igbo worldview with a particular attention to the use of proverbs. He argues that the Igbo language is made unique by the use of proverbs. In other words, that with Igbo proverbs, the people communicate much better with one another and in the course of conflict manangement. Anyanwu (1989) and Uwalaka (1996) have extensively researched on the significance of *ofọ na ogu*, both concurring that these instruments of judicial concerns are symbolic and are a link between the people and their ancestors. Isichei (1977) in particular discussed the *Ọkọnkọ* as being part of the judicial system in the Southern Igbo. Her discourse in *Ọkọnkọ* society was based on 1972 interviews she held with some *Ọkọnkọ* top members.

Recent works by Nwosu (2009, 2010 and 2012) have added a new dimension in the studies about *Ọkọnkọ* society. While Nwosu (2009) discusses the secrecy theory of *Ọkọnkọ* society and *Ogboni* (a Yoruba society similar to *Ọkọnkọ*), Nwosu (2010) looks at a critical analysis of *Ọkọnkọ* and Christianity in Igboland, stating that ‘*Ọkọnkọ* Society is a society of “*Ndi katara isi*,” i.e. responsible men, (Nwosu, 2010: 29). In another work, Nwosu (2010:165), opines that *Ọkọnkọ* ‘covers the traditional, religious and social lives of the Igbo prior to the advent of western culture and Christianity.’ In other words, Nwosu’s works centre on comparative analyses between *Ọkọnkọ* and *Ogboni* on one hand, and *Ọkọnkọ* and Christianity on the other hand.

The main instruments according to them are *Ofọ* and *Ogu* in the course of seeking for truth during one conflict or the other. None of these researchers as far as this researcher knows focused on the *Ọkọnkọ* society in connection to the role of language

and culture in Igbo people's conflict management. Igbo language and some other Nigerian languages are neglected and hardly taught in schools. English language, Nigeria's lingua franca has become the preferred language over others in Nigeria. This negligence is a big problem. This is because Igbo language carries with it the cultural beliefs and worldview of the Igbo. The problem of the study is that many people do not know the power in their language – culture, especially in relation to conflict management. This negligence, even among conflict managers, is the central point of the study using Ọkọnkọ society as a case study is poised to address.

Before now, the extant literature had not linked the synergy between Igbo language and culture with the Ọkọnkọ's ways of conflict management. Many authors wrote on Igbo language and culture without linking it to Ọkọnkọ's conflict management while others researched and wrote on Ọkọnkọ's society without recourse to Igbo language and culture.

The gap filled is the fact that it is a major moment in using Igbo language and culture as a formal discursive and postcolonial tool in the effective management of community conflict managements, especially the land disputes which are prevalent in the Igbo nation, Umuahia inclusive. The stakeholders that include the people and the conflict managers and in the Igbo nation now become sensitive of the power of language and culture in the process of finding peace. This is because the roles of language (the use of symbols and proverbs) have extensively been stressed in this work. In other words, the research now affords the stakeholders the opportunity of realising that without recourse to a people's language, beliefs (cultural worldview), attainment to peace could prove difficult in a given community.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions were administered during the field work:

- what is the role of the Ọkọnkọ Society in the conflict management culture among the Umuahians?
- how do Igbo semiotics aid the community conflict management process in Umuahia?

- what is the language use of the Ọkọnkọ society in dispensing justice among the Umuahia people?
- how relevant is the use of proverbs to the present day conflict management process of the Umuahia people?

1.4 Research Aim and Objectives

The research focused on four objectives, as to:

- ascertain the role of Ọkọnkọ Society in conflict management culture in the Umuahia;
- explore how Igbo semiotics aid the community conflict management process in Umuahia;
- investigate the language use of Ọkọnkọ Society in dispensing justice among the Umuahia people;
- explore the relevance of the Igbo proverbs to the present day conflict management process of the Umuahia people.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is on the role language and culture has played in the conflict management of the people of Umuahia in Abia State of Nigeria. The conflicts studied were community based, especially, land disputes. Murder cases were not included since the courts take care of such.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The primary significance of the study is that it explains the importance of Igbo language in Igbo people's lives in our study area. Our point of view is that without language, people cannot effectively communicate their ideas, whereas with language, one identifies oneself with a group of people with a unique culture and a set of beliefs. The focus of language is seen as a positive development in the management of conflict among the Igbo people of Umuahia.

The work is appropriate because Igbo language is the mother tongue of the people of Umuahia. The Igbo language is central to the people's culture. The research being community- conflict based on the Umuahia people can only be best settled or managed in the language with which the local people communicate.

For efficient peacebuilding, some conflict sessions take place even in the farmlands, shrines and market places where it is ethically and spiritually expedient the Igbo language is the medium of communication. For instance, in the course of conflict sessions, kolanut may be broken and libations poured to the ancestors. Igbo language must be used for such exercise for Igbo idioms and proverbs are used by the elders who most times are the conflict managers.

Another significance is that it is hoped that other Igbo communities, and indeed other languages and cultural groups will become aware of the power of language in managing conflicts in their societies.

1.7 Conceptual Clarification

Three cardinal concepts constituted this work. They include hermeneutics, language-culture dynamics and conflict management. The contexts in which these concepts will be applied in this research are briefly outlined below. Also included are some of the terms used in the study that are Igbo.

Hermeneutics

For this work, hermeneutics deals with the context analysis of a particular oral or written speech in a given language. It investigates how people communicate, and whether or not there is only one understanding to an utterance or written speech. Hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation aimed at achieving an understanding of texts, and speeches and utterances.

Language-Culture

Chomsky's perspective of language is the central focus of the research. Chomsky sees language from social and psychological analysis. The social deals with culture while the psychological focuses on human behaviour and human interactions. Language and culture

are symbiotic in our context because culture deals with the social and human behaviour of a given people.

Conflict Management

Conflict management is a gradual process of resolving conflict. It involves the interference in an existing conflict process with the aim to reducing the violence and destruction. It is a temporary solution which helps to bring the two conflicting parties to agree to settle as in having a ceasefire (Lund, 1997: 32). Conflict management is therefore an intervention in a dispute by a third party not involved in the dispute, but eager to help terminate the dispute through inquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and adjudication (Raczmany, 1988: 9).

The aspect of conflict management to be adopted here is mediation. This is because mediation helps in negotiation process when there is a deadlock. Mediation synchronises positively with the positive role of language in conflict management, which is a central goal in the work.

Ọkọnkọ

This is a secret society in Igboland with executive and judiciary powers. Though a secret cult, *Ọkọnkọ* Society exercises social practices which ensure effective conflict management for members and non-members in the land.

Okpo

An adult male in the community who is not initiated into *Ọkọnkọ* Society. It implies that such an adult male is not worthy to be called a man, and is viewed as weak.

Ida iyi

This is *Ọkọnkọ*'s initiation exercise where a male adult is literally baptised in the society.

Ezumezu

This is a full-fledged *Ọkọnkọ* member that can participate in the society's spiritual and social meetings and functions.

Ọmụ

Ọmụ to the man on the street is a palm frond. But to the Ọkọnkọ society, *ọmụ* is a physical, legal, and spiritual symbolism. *Ọmụ* is the flag of the Ọkọnkọ society. It is respected, honoured and revered as done to national flags of countries.

Uhie

Uhie (a wooden drum) forms the emblem of Ọkọnkọ society with *ọmụ*.

Ọfọ

Ọfọ is both a concept and an action. For the former, *ọfọ* is a wooden instrument which symbolises authority and spirituality. Holding the *ọfọ* is like holding a covenant box. It stands for truth, integrity and impartiality. The latter meaning of *ọfọ* is an *action* where utterances are made using strong words that depict swearing, prayer, and even a curse for whoever errs or misleads the others.

Ogu

Ogu gives a spiritual force to *Ọfọ*. It is the spoken word itself. It is common to hear the phrase ‘*Ọfọ na ugu*’ in Igbo lexicon. *Ogu* is seen as the twin sister of *Ọfọ*. *Ọfọ* is given precedence as the first born but is not effective without *Ogu*, the utterance.

Nkpara

These are the sticks that act as the beacon in the boundaries between two lands. It is an abomination for anybody to adjust them after they have been placed by the *umu nna* or Ọkọnkọ.

Ọba

This is a special cup the elders prefer to drink with, a special deep local cup made from *oba* tuber. In Ọkọnkọ, they drink using one *oba* during meetings and occasions. The *oba* stands for naturality, oneness, and trust. When it falls, it hardly breaks.

Okpu Egwurugwu

This cap depicts completeness, an identity. No Ọkọnkọ member attends an occasion without it. During conflict managements, land inspections, funeral services, it is the unique thing that marks an Ọkọnkọ man out.

Abuba Ugo (Eagle's feather)

Abuba ugo is a synecdoche being seen as the whole or entirety of the eagle. Sticking *abuba ugo* in one's cap creates the imagery of honour, greatness, integrity and attainment to the apex.

Ọji Igbọ (Igbo kola nut)

Ọji Igbọ is like a covenant. *Ọji Igbọ* is the centre of Igbo culture. Kola generally in Igbo culture is held in high esteem and it is believed cola understands Igbo language alone. *Ọji Igbọ* in particular is the Igbo culture. It is used for traditional marriages, sacrifices and ọfọ practice. One can break ordinary kola with knife. This is not so for *Ọji Igbọ*. It is broken with the bare hands and it could comprise four, six or more parts or lobes (*ibé*). The more the lobes, a piece of Igbo kola nut has, the better the symbolism it represents for a given occasion.

Uha tree

This is a tree which hardly dies. After years, its leaves wither and it reproduces again. The tree of *uha* is also seen in shrines. It symbolises long life.

Umu nna

These are the kinsmen of a hamlet, or a village, or a clan of a particular Igbo community.

Ama ala

This denotes a specific kindred (more of a place, unlike *umu nna* that denotes the people that constitute the place).

Opara

The first son of the family. He becomes the father of the rest of the family in the death of the family. It is the *opara* who speaks on behalf of his siblings when the family invites the *umu una* for the sharing of their father's lands. He also gets the largest shares of the property left by their father.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The review centres on what has been written before now about different aspects of language and culture. First, we shall discuss works of authors who wrote on language and culture generally. Secondly, we shall shift to Igbo authors who have written on Igbo language and culture, as well as on conflict management of *Ndi Igbo*, that is, the Igbo people. The review will also examine the people of Umuahia and their different cultures and how they have contributed to Igbo culture.

2.2 Language, Culture and Conflict in Society

Language and conflict are related for the very reason that language is an integral part of culture and it is also a vehicle of interaction, communication and a practical tool for state administration, in both modern and ancient times. By adopting a certain language, a particular group in a society declares what identity it wants to assume to the rest of the world. In the light of the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that language becomes a source of conflict since two persons and groups usually disagree or clash with the use of language.

Even-Zohar (1986: 126-135) succinctly explains that a language does exist as a vehicle of communication when used by various groups, individuals and peoples in territories. He further states that language becomes a vehicle of semiotic system and a toll for identity construction and; negotiation and a possible site for conflict generation, since identities can clash.

Let me narrow this relationship between language and conflict to a very simple illustration. Conflict is both positive and negative, depending on how it is managed. The same goes for language; its usage can be positive or negative. When it is the former, conflicts are avoided while the opposite is the case when foul and abusive language is used against another. We have equally discovered that culture determines whether or not language is appropriate. Mr A may use expressions that are not offensive in his culture

and Mr B may frown at them as being offensive. Even-Zohar summarises the relationship between language and ideological conflict this way:

Once the dissident group manages to organise its activities, language conflicts may go on, as long as the ideological conflict is not solved. They may then become part of a political struggle, dragging the state to interfere, and end with geographical and/or political separation, between the groups. Indeed they may not end at all.

Language-based conflicts do not always result from language diversity (bilingualism or multilingualism) in Nigeria, diversity of languages, and of course cultures have caused conflicts. But this is not necessarily the case in other places. Even-Zohar (1986:126-135) reports about the sociolinguistic situation in Paraguay thus:

... in Paraguay, there is a peacefully harmonious relationship between Guarani, an India language that practically everybody speaks in everyday life and Spanish, which is the only official language of the state or society. With very few exceptions, nobody has tried to standardise Guarani and transform it into the official language of Paraguay. Paraguayan identity is, of course strongly felt by the population.

There is no conflict over the above example in that the two languages exist in a diglossic situation. Guarani is the language of everyday life (just like Nigerian Pidgin) and Spanish is the official language of administration, a sort of the written language of the state. Egbokhare (2004: 4) does not see language as a mere means of communication but, according to him, '... a huge resource, a reservoir of knowledge and folk wisdom, an encyclopedia of sort, a window to reality and a vehicle of culture'. Egbokhare discusses the negative use to which language can be put:

Language may constitute a barrier in several ways. To the extent that it can confer social, political, educational and cultural privileges. In this way, exclusion language may also be a limiting factor in educational achievement where children are required to use language other than their mother tongues as medium of instruction.

Haugen (1966) corroborates Egbokhare's analysis of language barrier above. Haugen argues that there exists standardisation in language which does affect the stage of

affairs in state. Those that are privileged to speak the standard language have better access to social opportunity unlike those whose mother tongue does not happen to be standard in a certain country and they, the latter, do nothing to study it.

In the opinion of Shell (2002:1), language is a battlefield for national and cultural conflict. 'We never think about it. We just completely take it for granted. On this submission of Shell, it becomes pretty clear the role language plays in conflict generation. But studies on peace and conflict situations rarely see language as a direct and fundamental cause. In 1989, Slobodan Milosevic ordered Albanians to speak Serbian. They refused. Shell (year) believed, in his essay, that it is useful to see their refusal as a specific cause of conflict – more useful than understanding the war only in the ethnic and religious terms.

We believe that language is much more tangible than race or religion. Some scholars see race to be a fiction – belonging to one another group is more a social and historical matter than a biological one. It may be difficult to determine the ethnicity or nationality of a person on examination. A South African white, as matter of fact, may look like a Russian or an American. But the story will be different when it comes to language. For the simple reason that the two or three languages see reality from different ideological angles, a Chinese, a Greek and a Hebrew may disagree regularly. Shell states that often, the more vulnerable group is, the greater its ethnocentric attitude to its language. He buttresses this belief with this analogy:

Most Americans don't have a close tie to their language of which they are aware. Most don't believe for example that God spoke English. But if we are Muslims, we may believe that God spoke Arabic, or if we are Jewish, Hebrew.

Language diversity is often portrayed as incendiary and it has been metaphorically referred as the 'Tower of Babel', an allusion to the biblical account about the genesis of multilingualism. Laitin (2000:1) buttresses the above metaphor when he tells the story of a Kurdish rebel's leader in Turkey, Abdulah Ocalan. He, in 1999, told a certain judge that the restriction on the Kurdish language was the principal motivating factor for the war against Turkish rule. The implication of Ocalan's defence suggests that language grievances are a spark that can all too easily set off ethnic wars or violence. Language

grievances, when compounded by religious grievances, may breed violent conflicts. Reducing a language's status or banning its use may lead to erroneously armed conflict which may be blamed on religious, ethnic or political factors.

In an article on Saturday Punch, December 25, 2010, Antony Awunor looks at the use of Nigerian languages in Nollywood with particular interest in Igbo language. Awunor in the article, 'Keeping Igbo Language Movies Alive wonders why Igbo films in Igbo are not common as those of Yoruba. In his words:

The truth remains that we have our comparative advantage in local movies, if carefully produced in group among the Nigerian movies industry however, is that of Igbo language films. The implication is that Igbo films have systematically become films acted by the Igbo in English language.

The fact the article tries to make is the relegation of Igbo language to the background. This situation does not contribute to the social well being of the Igbo people. In other words, Awunor calls for the promotion of Igbo language by Igbo film producers. He supports his position thus:

It is therefore, very important not to forget so soon that it is Living in Bondage – that popular Igbo film produced by Okey Ogunjiofor for NEK Videos Ltd in 1992, that ushered in many of our famous home videos that form what we know today as Nollywood. It was so well produced that the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) rated the film high in the world at the time. (Sunday Punch, December 25, 2010)

What Awunor is driving at is the fact that UNESCO can as well recognize and commend what is done in Nigerian local languages. The film then was in Igbo but subtitled in English, as done by Yoruba films. The single object of Awunor's sentiment is that Nigerian mother tongues, especially Igbo language, can be developed, both for social and cultural benefits.

It is now very glaring that the symbiosis between language and conflict is not to be underestimated. The two are interwoven in light of the arguments already made above. Language and conflict are therefore, phenomena that we must be mindful of, phenomena that are capable of mending, or destroying a given group. We are of the belief that the

less the number of languages are despised (i.e. those ones the standard languages see as inferior), the less conflicts will be experienced.

Language and culture in society and conflict, from what has so far been discussed are invaluable in the sense that, without language and culture, there will be no society. Additionally, conflict can be caused and managed by the use of language and its unique culture. There is no way a user of a language can effectively communicate without recourse to culture. Hymes (1972:277), in support of the intertwined relationship between language and culture, opines that a speaker ‘acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner’.

To have a better society and conflict free situation, Hymes identified various contextual variables. They are as follows:

- Setting
- Participants
- Ends
- Acts
- Key
- Instrumentality
- Norms
- Genre

Many at times, conflicts have arisen because speakers refused to give considerations to the SPEAKING. In the context of the acronym, let me define them in phrases:

- Setting – the place of a speech event.
- Participants – the actors and their relations with one another.
- Ends – the general goals and individual aims.
- Acts – whether an individual asks questions, criticizes, clarifies.
- Key – the tone, friendly or hostile, humorous or serious.
- Instrumentality – the medium and the channel-speaking or writing.

- Norms – behaviour that accompanies language, how loudly should one speak, should there be interruption or not?
- Genre – deals with category of language: riddles, praise poems, proverbs, and idioms.

Every language situation or activity type has its own SPEAKING. The way the Europeans reason and conduct themselves differ from the way or manner Africans, or Asians do. In essence, society affects language and culture vice versa.

In order to avoid conflicts, one must be mindful of his utterances. Apart from the utterances, one must understand and strictly follow the cultural norms guiding proceedings. This is why conflicts always emanate when two parties of different languages and cultures are in business. English cannot be appropriate for an Igbo man and a Hausa man (especially when both do not have good grasp of English) in resolving their differences. This is why I believe that the Igbo language can effectively play a significant role in conflict management and peacebuilding among the Umuahia people. The people understand the Igbo language and its culture and tradition. Language and culture can therefore cause obscurity and ambiguity on one hand, and clarity of purpose on the other hand. My thesis centres on this.

Discourse theory, which deals with the real context of language usage, pays serious attention to appropriateness, purposefulness and coherence (Aniga 2004:43).

Aniga expatiates:

Discourse involves utterances made in one place or the other. It is verbal. Utterances are therefore, activities in discourse because when utterances are made, language and thought are at work. The appropriateness, purposefulness and coherence of an utterance made in private or public plays a great deal of role in the handling of issues, especially conflicts. Discourse theory brings to fore, the fact that speaking of a language is part of an activity, or form of life. When one speaks in a gentle manner, it quietens anger, while the opposite is the case when a harsh tone is used. It stirs anger.

Greenberg (1971:156) supports strongly the view that language is indispensable. The indispensability of language, in my understanding, is, because ‘Language is the prerequisite for the accumulation and transmission of other cultural traits... Language is

not only a necessary condition for culture, it is itself part of culture' (Greenberg, 1971). What this assertion means is the fact that the society cannot do without language. Because negligence of language means, negligence of culture and this amounts to clashes of interests. Put simply, language and culture must be respected. In doing this, efforts must be made to use words appropriately so that what is said is what is meant.

Alston (1988:10-31) argues that the problem of meaning must be taken into consideration, else there will be problem of effective communication. The philosophical worldview of the language must be of paramount importance so that there will not be misrepresentation of thoughts. To bring this segment of the review to an end, it is now established that language and culture are interwoven. When one talks about a language, he indirectly refers to the culture of the people; the same way reference to a particular culture can be done with adequate direction to language.

2.3 Language and Culture

Benedict (1971:31) believes that culture, like an individual, is more or less a consistent pattern of thought and action. Since language and culture are indeed interwoven, as each affects the other, it becomes logical that since culture influences language, the latter has a vital role to play in conflict management, as the people involved are involved in culture and tradition. When two people are from different cultures, they see language and reality in different perspectives and this plays a role too, because the actors in the conflict should be made to realise this by the conflict managers in order not to misunderstand the thought of the other.

The thinking, feeling, and acting of a set of people are embedded in their culture (Harris, 1983). Rosaldo (1989) states that culture makes the human experience look significant: It refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives.

What Rosaldo seems to be suggesting boils down to the popular saying that culture is the identity of a people. There is no doubt that people express their beliefs and their values through language. Hall (1976) posits that without culture which the researcher equates with language, no survival is possible. The implication of Hall's claim is the fact that everything (including language) is influenced by the culture of the people before it is seen as a reality.

In the view of Taylor (1991:91), culture is a historically transmitted pattern of meaning, embodied in symbolic forms, by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes towards life. The keyword lies in communication. Without communication, knowledge cannot be spread. Conflicts may continue to flourish argued Vayrynen (2001) because enough efforts have not been made to really appreciate that some conflicts in our world today are culturally based. He argues that culture offers a grammar for acting in and reinterpreting the world.

This researcher believes that language conflict is the bane of world conflict in the light that when one does not understand the other's language, he concludes their personalities and values vary. This is evident between the races of the world: the Arabs, the Jews, the Asians, the Europeans, the African, and the Americans.

Language and culture rub off on each other. They are crucial to proper interpretation of a discourse or decoding of a message. Lack of knowledge about cultural traits in a language prohibits full comprehension of the message being passed across. In other words, no meaningful discussion of language can be fully achieved in absolute neglect of culture. Language and culture as a means of conveying thought (including in conflict management and peacebuilding) situations, is capable of having psychological impact on things people communicate about (Tomasello, 2003). Even expression of emotion in the face, body and mode of speech shows that bodily expression (language) of emotions varies across activities (Wierzbicka, 1999).

This goes without saying that conflict managers should be watchful in the course of their duties as 'little' things like the body movement and the state of the actors' faces could indicate whether talks are being negative or positive. The mental imagery experiment varies from one culture to the other. This implies, according to Kovcses (2002) that no two cultures may view things the same way. Language plays a role too in emotionality of man and human physiology. Because they are a part of an integrated system which determines one's behaviour at a particular situation (Kovcses, 2003).

Furthermore, Kovcses (2005) posits that it is possible for metaphorical thoughts to be relevant to an understanding of culture and society. Supporting this claim, David (2006) suggests that human emotions like love, fear, anger, envy and shame are not

constant but are dependent on the cultural background. For instance, expressions of emotions in Greek are at variance with that of other parts of the world.

Aristotle further corroborates this by stating that 'it is not pain that is frightening us rather those things that portend it, for example, a poisonous snake or a poised spear. The tract of a snake in the sound, or a rattling sound, is frightening in turn because they indicate that a snake is nearby. Fear involves knowledge and inference'.

The implication of the above statement is that one expresses his sentiment as a result of how his culture views particular things. This sentiment can be measured in that owing to one's perception of a phenomenon, one becomes subtle or aggressive when discussing it. All this hinges on language and the roles it does play in the course of building peace.

2.4 Cultural Changes

Hoijer (1964: 457) believes in the concept of cultural change. What Hoijer posits is the fact that time and technology can alter the established ancestral cultural beliefs and values of a people. For instance, there is a noticeable movement from subsistence farming, with local implements to the present improved method of using tractors and fertilizers for enhanced produce. In Hoijer's (1964:457) words:

Anthropologists, too, have until recently been more concerned with the study of specific aspects of culture than with the problem of cultural integration. This has led, especially among those primarily interested in culture history, to the conclusion that culture is a mere assemblage of traits, held together only by the accident of existing in the same society at the same time. With such a view of culture, the study of cultural change becomes, like much of historical linguistics, a record of the results of change rather than a study of the forces responsible for change.

Within the past twenty five years, however, anthropologists have increasingly turned their attention to the development of concepts which have not only better described individual cultures taken as wholes but have also accounted for their integration (for a review, see Opler 1984). As a result, it has become clear that a culture is more than a fortuitous assemblage of traits; each culture possesses, in addition to its

trait content, a unique organization in terms of which its distinct components are significantly related to one another.

From the above analysis, what cultural change implies is similar with linguistic change because whenever a language is influenced by another, such languages change to reflect the new infusion. Based on this fact, cultural changes take place due to some external linguistic additions, on one hand, and on the other, global technological inventions. Hoijer (1964:457-48) expatiates on the latter:

When, for example machine tools were first introduced to western European civilization, shifts in the economic system followed almost immediately. Capital accumulations derived from industry and trade rapidly replaced land and agriculture as the major wealth-producing sources. This in turn reordered the relations between individuals and groups in western European societies.

To the questions posed by Hoijer (1964:146) I am of the opinion that on whether or not there are infusions of external culture into another could affect the local languages semantically and phonemically, it can. It is therefore logical to say that cultural changes lead to linguistic changes vice versa. As culture changes, the worldview of the people also changes.

A study on the morality and language of the people of Nupe in the Northern Nigeria by Nadel (1964) is an apt example how cultural changes often parallel linguistic changes. Something does not have local names in some cultures, and for the people to convey their minds, they either borrow a word from another language to represent it or apply a euphemism. It amounts to a cultural change when a people now coin a phrase or borrow a foreign terminology so that a concept can be explained. Nadel (1964:264) explains further, dwelling on the sensitive notion of cohabitation:

The word for penis, eba, is rarely heard even though there is no accepted metaphor for it. The vagina on the other hand, can be described, more or less, indirectly, by a series of words. The specific name, dzuko, which has no second meaning, is definitely a “dirty” expression and is usually replaced by enya (‘thing’) or yeta (‘in front’); scholars use the Hausa word kafa (‘opening’).

Till recently, in Igbo language, for instance, in support of the above statement, there were no terms for the English terms for university, professor, and AIDS. This is owing to the fact that these concepts are new to the language and the worldview of the Igbo nation. In order to make up for these new terms, the following terms have been coined and they are now parts of Igbo lexicon:

- *'Mahadum'* for University
The new lexeme means, 'knowing it all' to stand for the universal notion of 'university'.
- *'Okacha manu'* for professor
The coinage simply means, 'he that knows best' to stand for the concept of an authority in a specific academic discipline.
- *'Oberu na aja ocha'* for AIDS
This phrase depicts the extremity of AIDs. The coinage means, 'that ends or expires in grave'.
- *'Ogbunigwe'*, for bomb.
This means 'that which kills in great number.' It was coined during Nigeria-Brafra civil war (1976-70) when the Igbo developed a local bomb which aided them in waging the war against the federal army.
- *'Anwuru Ike'* for India hemp.
'Anwuru' has always been Igbo name for snuff which elders grind and put into their nose. But 'Ike' means 'strong' or 'hard'. The addition of the adjective to describe 'anwuru' is to underline the hardness of Indian hemp when compared with snuff.
- *'Onyohonyoho'* for television.
This coinage literarily means 'the shadow'. So, because television brings out images, the Igbo deemed it fit to call it 'the shadow.'
- *'Asambodo'* for certificate.
Academic certificate came with colonialism. The coinage implies a flat paper as all certificates are flat.
- *'Ugbo elu'* for aeroplane

'Ugbo' has always been a vehicle. Since an aeroplane is a new invention, the adjective 'elu' meaning 'high' describes a vehicle that flies high (in the air). As 'Ugbo ala' goes for a motor car. 'ala' stands for 'ground'. 'ugbo mmiri' goes for 'canoe' or 'ship'. 'mmiri' means 'water'

- '*Agha Ozuru mba*' for world war
'Agha' means 'war'. 'ozuru mba' means 'that which spreads everywhere, The Igbos may have avoided the phrase 'agba uwa' meaning 'world war' because the world wars were not of the world, but wars which spread the whole world.
- '*Alamaajijji* for earthquake
This literally means 'shaking of the earth'.

Commenting on Igbo language and cultural change, Ugwuoke (1997:168), reasons that every living language, Igbo language inclusive cannot do without absorbing the linguistic features of other cultures that have covertly come into contact with it.

2.5 Igbo Sociolinguistics and Culture

Igbo language is the mother tongue of the five south-eastern states of Nigeria (Emenanjo, et al, 2011:2). These states are: Anambra, Abia, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Igbo language is also spoken in parts of Delta, Rivers, Edo, Benue, and Akwa Ibom States and it is spoken as first or second language by least 35 million people (Emanajo et al, 2011:2). In this segment, we shall discuss Igbo dialectology and diglossia as well as aspects of cultural expressions in Igbo.

Igbo language is a tonal language and comprises various dialects (Fardon and Furnis, 1994:66). Of these dialects, Owerri and Umuabia groups belong to the central Igbo standard which are accepted by missionaries, writers, publishers and Cambridge University (Oraka, 1983:35). Emenanjo et al (2011:3) gives more light on the language:

It is also one of the three Nigerian languages recommended in the National Policy on education to be taught both as first and second languages in the secondary school system. Furthermore, it is available as a language of a study in many tertiary institutions in Nigerian and outside Nigeria. It is also one the three Nigerian languages for which Microsoft Corporation is developing necessary Information Technology (IT) Software.

2.5.1 Igbo dialectology

There are numerous dialects of the Igbo Language. In other words, a dialect in a given language is to a great extent, intelligible to other dialects. Ubahakwe (1981:92) says that ‘the dialect problem has plagued the study of the Igbo language since the earliest formal study of the language was started by the missionaries in the 19th century... In effect, we cannot draw a dialect map at the moment but, dialect maps of Igbo, depending upon the linguistic criteria used.’

Till date, after over four decades of Ubahakwe’s work, the dialect problem still continues. The commonest dialects in Igbo Language cut across the entire Igbo Language speaking states. They include Nsukka dialect (Enugu State), Awka and Onitsha dialects (Anambra State), Afigbo, Ohazara and Izaa dialects (Ebonyi State), Owerri, Mbaise, Okigwe dialects (Imo State), Asaba, Agbo dialects (Delta State), Ikwere dialect (River State) and Ngwa, Bende, Ohafia and Umuahia dialects (Abia State).

‘*Bia*’, the Igbo word for ‘come’ is probably the only word that is constant and unchanged in all the dialects. Even ‘go’ has various terms in Igbo dialects.

<i>Jeme</i>	–	Owerri
<i>Gawa</i>	–	Umuahia
<i>Jebe</i>	–	Onitsha
<i>Gaba</i>	–	Considered Central Igbo.

Below is another dialectical variations using the simple question: Where are you going?

<i>Ebone ka ina ga?</i>	–	Central Igbo
<i>Ọfọle ka ina ga?</i>	–	Umuahia
<i>Obee ka idi ga?</i>	–	Ngwa
<i>Olofe ka idi ga?</i>	–	Ohafia

2.5.2 Aspects of Cultural Expressions in Igbo

As earlier stated, taboo phenomena, kingship terms and phatic communion make up the present segment. Taboos in Igbo culture have some international acceptability. For instance, it is a taboo for blood brothers or sisters or simply put, blood relations to have

sex (incest) or to marry. The Igbo religious customs also vehemently frowns at every ramification of murder – suicide, infanticide, matricide and patricide.

On peculiar taboos in Igbo culture the following are common:

- Abortion;
- A woman dying in pregnancy;
- A person dying on Eke day, a day seen as an evil day;
- A woman eating the gizzard of a hen or cocks; as it is preserved for men alone;
- Whistling at night;
- Cracking perm kernel at night;
- A man failing to kill instantly a cock that crows at night.

2.5.3 Igbo Diglosia

This is a situation in which two languages or two forms of a language are used under different conditions in a community. When people of a same dialect are in community meetings, conflict management sessions, they normally use their dialect for effective communication. But the central Igbo Language is normally spoken in schools comprising peoples of different dialects. The central Igbo Language is also used in state documentation, on radio and television.

The dialects and the central Igbo Language can therefore be seen as diaglossia. In other words, while dialects are used for informal purposes, the Central Igbo Language with a standard orthography and pronunciation is used for formal use. For instance, during Igbo Nation Conferences, speakers should be less dialectical and speaks in the standard everybody would easily understand.

The commonest dialects in Igbo Language cut across the entire Igbo Language speaking states. The culture comprises the various customs, practices and traditions. The culture also comprises recently borrowed, external cultures, visual arts, music and dance form, attires, cuisine and language constitute the culture of the Igbo. The Igbo culture begins in the kindred.

The kinsmen normally called *Umu nna* are the strength of Igbo society (Edmund, 1974:11) even in this era of Christianity. The ethics of the Igbo society are imbibed in the *Umu nna* mechanism (Agbasiere, 2000:12). The women gather for deliberations from time to time to discuss the welfare of their households. The Igbo culture recognises a calendar of four days making up a week and till date determines market days (Holbrook, 2007:35).

Nwogu (1975), Onwuejgwu (1975), Ejiōfōr (1984), Nwachukwu (1995) and Nkwo (1984) are among the known Igbo writers that have written on Igbo language and culture. Nwogu (1975:194) writes on the role language, with regards to Igbo worldview, plays with special attention to proverbs.

It is necessary; I believe, to make a distinction between the figurative statement in a given proverb and the inference that can be drawn from the proverb, with regards to the worldview of the Igbo.

What Nwogu is saying is that the Igbo language is made more unique by the use of proverbs. They do not see it as a tool for creating imagery, but a cultural tool that explains how witty a person is. Madu (1996:189) defines a proverb as a ‘... condensed wisdom drawn from experience...’ He goes ahead to quote the following definitions by Kjar, ‘... anonymous traditional sayings about human life’, and for Barley, ‘... a standard statement of moral or categorical imperatives in fixed metaphorical paradigmatic form...’ and lastly for Mulyumba wa Mamba, ‘... a proposition or group of propositions deriving from the experiences of the wise men of the society affirming either clearly or metaphorically popular indisputable truths.’ All of these definitions put together, makes it clear that a people’s proverbs are such a people’s laconic means of expressing their thoughts.

Writing on cultural revival in Igbo land, Ejiōfōr (1984:114-8) outlines why the Igbo language should be respected.

... If I have spent so much time pointing out the weakness of the English language, and the strength of Igbo, my objective is not to ridicule English... No... My objective is to show that an objective assessment is made. English which is learnt by ‘everybody is in many cases more complicated than Igbo which is too much despised.

Even though the author is emotional about his language, suffice it to say that his sentiment is not novel. Every person sees in his language, better qualities than in others. One Igbo proverb asks: '*Onye si na ofe nneya siri adighi uto?*' which translates to, 'Who dare say that his mother's soup is not sweet?' Because an Igboman owns and speaks the Igbo language, he should be at home with its pronunciation and tenses even if the person did not go to a formal school and may therefore not be able to read and write it. Ejiṣofor seems to be saying that an Igboman certainly should be able to communicate his ideas better in Igbo as he pronounces the words well and surely knows the meaning of the words. There is no doubt that proverbs constitute a significant place in African cultures, the Igbo inclusive. Nwogu (1975) has stated this fact in his work, but the role proverbs play during conflict management sessions has not been looked into.

On Ejiṣofor's account, he has emotionally stated in his argument why the Igbo language is superior to the English language. But he has not, in any way, pointed out the significance of this superiority in the course of conflict management and peacebuilding. Igbo language has a significant place and role in the conflict management and peacebuilding in Umuahia, and in fact, the entire Igboland. In the course of conflict management and peacebuilding in the town hall, market square or even in the *Ọfọ* and *Ogun* shrine, language plays a role that cannot be overemphasised. For instance, the *Ọfọ* holder while presenting sacrifices speaks in Igbo languages all his divinations, libations and incantations are not in English, but in Igbo language. The interaction between the people and the *Ọfọ* holder is in Igbo language. The verdict coming from the shrine to the conflicting parties is in Igbo language.

The research does not focus on Igbo language's superiority over other languages of the world. Rather, our focus is in the fact that traditional instruments of conflict settlement and their instruments are best expressed in Igbo language which is the natural medium of both the people and the instruments, *Ọfọ* and *Ogu*, for example.

The thesis is therefore, on the ground that conflict management and peacebuilding in Umuahia will become easier and more meaningful when Igbo language is given its

rightful place. A place that addresses Afigbo (1981:371) accusation that the elite have not helped the growth of Igbo language and culture:

The educated Igbo failed their language even more than the Europeans political service did. In fact it could be said that Igbo language is one of those aspects of Igbo life and culture which came to be almost completely overwhelmed by British imperialism. The Igbo resisted British political and economical domination but allowed their language to fall the abject victim of the English Language. The clearest demonstration of this fact is while there is hardly any Igbo literature to talk of the Igbo elite are in the vanguard of those who created what is now popularly known as African literature in English....

Even in the present era, one finds out that the Igbo language and culture are plummeting day by day. The Yoruba and the Hausa, and even the Ibibio now have films acted entirely in their languages. This is rare in Igbo. They rather speak English!

2. 6.1 Conflict Management

Conflict management implies a process of engaging the conflict actors and stakeholders to understand their differences (IDASA, 2004:28). In this context, conflict management comprises negotiation and mediation. Negotiation is a type of conflict management process where the parties in conflict educate each other about their needs and interests; with the intention of finding a solution that will be beneficial to the two parties (Moore 1996:8). Usually, negotiation is a voluntary bargaining. Negotiation, therefore, aims at establishing contact between the parties, identifying topics to be addressed, and determining how discussions will be conducted and also seeking to influence each party to obtain satisfaction to enable them reach final approval for agreement and implementation (Albert 2001: 72-03).

However, a negotiation can break down, according to Albert (2001:79) when one of the parties only tries to acquire information from the opposing disputant for embarking on litigation or arbitration, thereby violating procedural agreements and engaging in lying.

Peacemaking, according to (Galtung: 1969) adopts a conflict resolution approach which fits into asymmetric conflict whereby strong actors throw resources and

resourcefulness into the conflict. On the Other hand, peacebuilding is seen as an associative approach whereby structures must be found that remove causes of war (Galtung, 1976: 298). Peacebuilding is normally slow because it ‘includes the slower processes of psycho-social reconstruction and preparation of ex-warring individuals and groups for reconstruction and forgiveness. Reconciliation cannot be accomplished within a span of, say five years’ (Adekanye, 1997:52).

Peacekeeping becomes successful when four characteristics are taken care of: personnel, values, functions and context (James, 1990). The implication is that the personnel must be well equipped and accepted by their hosts; the guidelines must be spelt out which must be central to the concept. The functions must be in the line with UN principles which includes being the police for peace while the ceasefire lasts.

On the context, there must be a competent authority to take the decision to establish a peace keeping operation and make provisions that are necessary. Again, there must be the consent of the hosts before peace keeping becomes binding. ‘The principle of host state consent’ writes (James, 1990), ‘also operates in reverse, in that the withdrawal of concert normally requires the withdrawal of the peacekeepers.

To prevent reoccurrence of conflicts is the duty of peacebuilding. The United Nations (UN) and continental organisations like African Union (AU), European Union (EU) should be more proactive. Traditional rulers in the case of Nigeria should also be involved, not waiting till a conflict has consumed the people.

Diamond and Mcdonald (1996) have outlined in what they call Multi-Track Diplomacy, nine tracts they suggested for peacebuilding to be effective. They include government, non-governmental/professional organisations, business, private citizen, research, training and education, activism, religion, funding, and communication.

Peacebuilding involves putting structures in place for removing the roots of conflict. Albert (2001:132) sums it up, thus: ‘Peacebuilding is aimed at putting in place the social, economic, political and environmental mechanism necessary for making lasting peace possible. It is not a question of constructing make-shift or temporary shelter...’

Peacebuilding can be pre-conflict or post conflict. The former tries to prevent a conflict from breaking out. The latter is reactive and includes reconstruction of social infrastructure, the rehabilitation of displaced persons and reconciliation or mutual cooperation (IDASA 2004:30). Akinterinwa (2003:147) writes that ‘peacebuilding is essentially non-coercive and comprises all efforts necessary to make the environment conducive for peace to reign.’

Because it does not employ coercive means of intervention it gives the parties in conflict the option to sit down and discuss a means of embracing peace. Even though peacebuilding is probably the best strategy aimed at securing peace in the world, Akinterinwa (2003:146) laments that this technique ‘has not been well taken care of in international relations....’

Despite the fact that language can cause or mitigate conflict because of its positive and negative powers (Aniga, 2004:82), people, unfortunately, hardly think about it but take it for granted (Shell, 2002:11). When people are sensitive about their language, language tends to be a positive tool in life. Adeyanju (2006:46) describes it as a medium of ‘mass mobilization and socio-political engineering’. However, the reverse is the case when people are careless about their language about how they express themselves. The destructive power of language can be avoided when the language user understands the cultural and the linguistic sensitivities of the person being addressed.

The more reason why language plays a significant role in conflict management and peace building hinges on the fact that language is part and parcel of culture, and culture in itself is a means in which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge and attitudes towards life (Taylor, 1991:91). In support of Taylor, Benedict (1971:31) opines that culture plays a role in language because culture is like an individual with consistent pattern of action. Since no society functions without culture, and culture is symbiotic with language, it is evident that language must have a place in the management of conflicts and peacebuilding which are cultural and peculiar to a given society like the Igbo people this research centres on.

It becomes even more difficult when one cannot communicate effectively in a language whose registers are not well mastered by the user. The English language in

Nigeria's judiciary, that is, in the law courts, is a good example for most people because the language in use there is not clear to many people. Even the interpreters may not express accurately in English the real meaning of non-English speakers to the magistrate for various reasons. In such a case, conflict will be difficult to manage. But when the language in use is well understood by the two parties in conflict, it is easier for the conflict to be managed or resolved.

2.6.2 Igbo Indigenous Conflict Management System

Uchendu (1965:17) writes that Igbo judicial matters are *ad hoc* affairs whereby the injured party takes the initiative by appealing to the head of the compound of the offender or to a body of arbitrators for redress. If this fails, the injured party may beat the village drum to summon the *Ama ala* (the kinsmen). The special friends of the litigants are invited to help resolve the matter. Other institutions which may be appealed to for judicial opinion include the age-grade society, the *dibia* fraternity, various title making societies, and *Okonko* society. Jurisdiction may be taken away from human tribunals and given to such supernatural tribunals as the oracles. The last court of appeal, they are used when all the tribunals of the land fail to give the litigants satisfaction.

Okonko secret cult plays a crucial role in the traditional conflict management of the people of Umuahia. Isichei (1977:91) describes this secret society as one filled with a number of important executive and judicial functions and was widespread among the southern Igbo till date. *Okonko* secret cult exists in Umuahia judicial system. In an interview conducted in 1972, Isichei (1977:92) interviewed Uwaga Okeanya, an *Okonko* priest from Ogbodi Ukwu, Umuopara. Among other things the about 90-year old priest said was the admission that *Okonko* enforced the verdicts of the *ama ala* (the village assembly) and was a kind of a court of appeal. Part of the interview is as follows:

In the past, if the *Okonko* music was played near the house of anybody, anxiety was created as to the reason of the beating of the drum and if a palm leaf was left behind in the main's house, it meant that the person was to appear before the *Okonko* court of appeal ... wherever there was a statement in any *Okonko* decisions, the *Okonko* society would consult other recognized *Okonko* societies in other areas for mediation... One thing I must tell you is that most of these things which the white men came to destroy are still with us

and shame to us if we abandon the religion and practices of our father.

Uwalaka (1996:09) gives an insight into what Igbo conflict management entails.

The parties involved usually consult the leader of the *Ofọ* men who announces to them the demands which *Ofọ* has imposed on them and which must be fulfilled before *Ofọ* lends ear to their complaints. Usually, for the settlement of a land case, each of the disputing parties is expected by *Ofọ* to produce a cock, a male dog, four cola nuts, four alligator pepper, four jars of palmwine, a bottle of home-made gin, eight dishes of fufu.

The rather expensive demands of *Ofọ* notwithstanding, the Igbo believe in the fairness of its judgment. In what he terms the crisis of distinctions, Anyanwu (1989:104) describes *Ofọ* and *Ogu* as:

... two distinct traditional symbols which, because they are so commonly used together, appear to be one and the same symbol. In this apparent marriage of symbols, *Ogu*, which forms part of everyday life of the Igbo, although very few realize it, tends to be submerged in *Ofọ*, to which it gives spiritual force.

Ofọ is a piece of wood symbolising a symbol of authority. *Ofọ* men are revered as upright men whose words are truth. They are seen as representing the ancestors. For the Igbo people, they have this culture that whoever violates the law has not only angered the people but the ancestors and the gods (Nkwo, 1984:52). Uwalaka (1996:05) further explains how the Igbo man views the *Ofọ*:

Ofọ is a divine power that directs the affairs of men all over the universe. *Ofọ* is usually involved with its twin sister, *Ogu*. *Ofọ* is given precedence as the first born. Yet whoever holds *Ofọ* automatically holds *Ogu*.

The *Ofọ* holder, who is, in our context, a peacemaker, represents the Igbo language and cultural identities. Because the *Ofọ* system is the central base of Igbo justice, its custodians are looked upon to manage conflicts effectively in line with the custom and tradition of Igbo people and their philosophy (Uwalaka 1996:25).

These authors have explicitly highlighted the powers and relevance of *Ofọ* and *Ogu* in Igbo people's conflict management. Both *Ofọ* holder and of the *Ofọ* itself are

revered. They are seen as sacred. But the question these writers have failed to address is the issue of how the *Ofọ* and *Ogu* are related to. Does the *Ofọ* holder speak English or Igbo to the gods? And what is the significance?

The place of language in the process of finding justice was not highlighted by the authors. In Igboland, it is believed that kola nut does not understand any other language other than the Igbo language. In the light of this, the researcher believes that the role of language, which is our focus must be addressed in view of its significance.

2.7 Umuahia in Igbo Culture

Umuahia is the capital of Abia State. Its neighbours include Ngwa, Bende and Ikwu-ano in Abia State, Obowo in Imo State and Ikot Ekpene in Akwa-Ibom State. Umuahia is made up of two local government areas, namely Umuahia South and Umuahia North. Umuopara, Ibeku, Oḣuḣu, Uḣakala and Olokoro are the five clans that make up the Umuahia people. First and foremost, *Umuahians* speak the Igbo language, though with different dialects which are mutually intelligible. As the dialects differ, so also are the customs and traditions of the constituent clans. But the people have a common culture with regards to conducting of marriage rites and burial rites, farming traditions, music, attires and grooming, conflict management and food.

There are lots of spirituality in marriage tidings between the two families involved. It is a covenant between the two villages involved, not just the couples. Goats are slaughtered, drinks are drunk and *okazi* and *achara* are cooked to cement the covenant. And of course, the men pay dowries and other things. If the father of a girl is late to be given out in marriage, an extra goat is provided by the husband to be for a special sacrifice.

During burial rites, *Umuahians*, like other Igbo, bury the dead in their compounds. Cemeteries are literally not available in the towns or villages. For a dead woman, it is her paternal people that will eventually put her in the grave which is dug by her husband's people. But in a situation where the woman dies without her dowry paid, her corpse is buried in her father's compound.

When an old man dies, the burial rites will depend on his age, status and the society he belongs to. For example, if the deceased belongs to the *Okonko* secret cult, the final burial dance is at the market square, where different masquerades parade to usher in the soul of dead ancestors. It is usually a solemn occasion when the children of the man file in procession to dance. The first son leads with a cock. All of them dress traditionally. Farming is the people's main occupation. It is subsistence farming where yam, cassava and corn are grown. The people also produce lots of palm oil and palm-wine. Hunting is a popular engagement among the people too. Cultural dances are part and parcel of the people of Umuahia. Each of the clans and even villages have their peculiar music. Some of the used musical instruments are local drum, gong, bell, *oyo* and some others. The dances are normally danced barefooted and tying only wrapper dressing. The dances add colour to marriage, burial and childbirth ceremonies.

The Umuahia people are known for *okazi* and *achara* soup. It is the only soup eaten during marriage and burial ceremonies. It is served with *eba* or *akpu* (fufu). The soup is the cultural trademark of the people and they are proud of it.

Conflict management and peacebuilding activities take place at town halls, market squares, and even on farms if the conflict is over a piece of land for farming dispute. For the latter, the preliminary conflict management may be in town halls and market squares. But the farm or land in dispute must be visited. The verdicts sometimes are on the farm or land. When a particular conflict lingers on so much and no breakthrough is in sight, the *Okonko* secret cult is consulted for spiritual interpretation and oath taking. It is the last option. The two parties in conflict swear before the oracle. Sometimes, it is the accused that swear, calling on the oracle to kill him before a year if he or she is guilty as accused. The accused dies within a year should he be guilty. But surviving beyond the period specified in the oath exonerates him of any accusations. The survival is normally celebrated by the oath taker and; his family and friends.

Of all the above mentioned cultural beliefs of the *Umuahians*, *Oji*, the kolanut plays a significant role. No celebration is done without consulting the ancestors. Doing this entails breaking of the kolanut and pouring of libation using palm-wine. Consulting of ancestors during burial rites, marriage ceremonies and festivals are done with *Oji-Igbo*,

not *gworu*, that the Hausa normally eat. *Oji-Igbo* is smaller in size yet strong in spirituality. One could contain as much as seven lobes. The more the lobes of broken '*Oji-Igbo*' for any incantation, the more successful the occasion. This is the people's belief.

Dressing has a place in the lives of the people of Umuahia. The women dress like every other Igbo woman – a scarf, a blouse, and two long wrappers, one tied with a rope while the other is placed on top and can be adjusted at will. Women of Umuahia are fashionable. They always have one uniform or the other for occasions. Umuahia's men's pattern of grooming differs from those of other Igbo men from Enugu, Onitsha, and Owerri. A titled Umuahia man wears a special cap with a tail that flings. This is against other Igbo men's caps that look like European Cowboy hats. To attend important occasions, an Umuahian man wears a singlet with a tied George wrapper and staff. The youth normally wear European wears. However, the girls and the boys emulate their mothers and fathers during weddings and special occasions. That is why an Umuahian girl leaves to her new husband's home in full Umuahia woman's attire; while the groom dresses like the real men he has joined.

New yam festival is common in the entire Igboland. But it is unique in Umuahia. The reason is the fact that the festival goes with the *Ekpe* cultural dance. The beating of *Ekpe* is like a war song. The youth and the elderly participate. The youth dance and run around, while the elders, who must belong to the *Okonko* cult, do the spiritual aspect of the dance. The climax of *Ekpe* in any clan of Umuahia is the *Ekpe* masquerade cutting of the head of a goat. It must at once. Immediately the masquerade cuts off the head, the jubilant youths hang the head on a strong stick and begin to dance with it through all the villages. It is a symbol of victory and ancestral approval for the new yam to be celebrated. But, if the masquerade fails to cut the head at a single attempt, gloom envelops the people as it is a bad omen.

The annual New Yam Festival takes place every August. The event attracts a large number of well-wishers and visitors. New yams are harvested. They are used in preparing pepper soup (*mmiri oku ji*) or pounded yam for consumption with *utazi* soup which is the most popular soup on the day. The yam can be roasted too and eaten with

raw palm oil, especially by the elders. Other supplementary refreshments like palm wine, kola nuts, stockfish, meat, oil beans, and garden eggs are served lavishly.

The event is heralded with gun shots the night preceeding the day of the New Yam Festival. These shots assure or confirm that the festival must take place the following day. Early in the morning of the festival, the traditional rulers, along with their aides kick-start the event in their palaces. Thereafter, the event starts in every home. The five clans choose different days for their festival. In the course of the fieldwork, more facts shall be got on the 'culture' of *Umuahians* as a subset of Igbo culture.

2.8 Ethnography

Coined from the Greek compound word 'ethnos graphein' meaning 'folk/people' and 'writing', ethnography is a research stratagem often used in the social sciences, especially in anthropology and in some branches of sociology. According to Maynard and Purvis (1994), ethnography deals with the gathering of empirical data on human societies and cultures. The data collection is often done through participant observations, interviews and questionnaire.

Ethnographic studies, therefore seek to study the place where the people live, the improvement they have made to that place. The questions of how the people provide food, housing, energy and water for themselves also form the studies. Marriage customs, and, of course, what language the people speak are not left out in ethnographic research methodology.

While ethnographic research is not evaluated in terms of philosophical points of view, positivism and emotionalism, for example, there is no consensus on evaluation standards. Richardson (2000) opines five criteria that might be helpful to ethnographers in their research. These include: substantive contribution (that is, whether or not the research contributes to our understanding of social life), aesthetic merit (how successful the research is aesthetically) and reflexivity, (this answers the question on how the researcher came about his write up). By reflexivity, the researcher shows its level of self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view.

The other two criteria are, impact and expresses of reality. The former focuses on the emotional and intellectual significance of the research on the ethnographer. The latter,

however, seeks to address the credibility of cultural, social, individual or communal sense of the reality of the people.

Ember and Ember (2006); and Heider (2001) see ethnography as being holistic. These include, a brief history of the culture in question, an analysis of the physical geography to include the climate, ethno botany and ethno zoology. Kinship and social structure-age grading, peer groups, gender, voluntary associations, clans and moieties, if they exist are also included.

Furthermore, according to Ember and Ember (2006), ethnography encompasses the study of languages spoken, dialects, and the history of language; practices of childbearing; acculturation and emic views; as well as rites, rituals and other evidence of religion

In working on the role language and culture plays in conflict management and peacebuilding in the lives of the people of Umuahia in Abia State of Nigeria, efforts were made to investigative areas of ethnographical concerns, especially on Igbo language, its cultural influences on how the people see reality. To achieve this goal, I was guided by Fine (1993) sentiments about ethnographic research methods ‘classic virtues, ‘technical skills’, and ‘the ethnographic self’. According to Fine (1993), an ethnographer should be kindly, friendly, honest, precise, observant, unobtrusive, candid, chaste, fair and being literal against being figurative.

My work, which is both linguistic and cultural, was carried out, as discussed in this literature review. Boas (1964:15) states that In line with Boas (1964) sentiment that no reasonable account of data can be achieved without a good command of the language of the people being researched. This researcher is aware of this. Boas (1964:15) expatiates:

... we must insist that a command of the language is an indispensable means of obtaining accurate and thorough knowledge, because much information can be gained by listening to conversations of the natives and by taking part in their daily life, which to the observer who has no command of the language, will remain entirely inaccessible.

To Boas, an ethnographer without a command of the language of his study area is likened to a researcher studying primitive tribes of China, or Japan or Mohammendan life

in Arabia without being proficient in Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic languages respectively. Boas concludes that such a study cannot be authoritative (Boas, 1964:15).

I agree with Boas, because depending on interpreters can be counter productive since the interpreters may find it difficult to relate effectively for the two parties, the researcher and the studied.

Somehow corroborating Boas is Greenberg (1964:28). He argues in his evaluation of linguistics and ethnology that the main preoccupation of a linguist in research situation is not what investigation of utterance meanings within context. What he implies, in my understanding, is the fact that with a good command of a given language, emphasis will not be on syntactic, rather in meaning of words and utterances within contextual. This further implies that the researcher should be vast in the culture of those being studied as their cultural traits affect their body language and thought and reality. Greenberg (1964:29) aptly underlines my submission when he writes that “in semantics, we find a direct reflection of the contents of culture, while in the field of pragmatics, we deal directly with cultural behaviour”.

I believe that with my knowledge and interpretation of the nuances and proverbs of the people I am going to study, the study will be credible. On the nuance of the people, while on field, I shall be able to work on the four aspects which according to (Oxford Dictionary Edition) include: difference of meaning of a term, sound, colour, as well as somebody’s feelings that is not usually very obvious. For instance, I should be able to appreciate these terms to mean the following:

Akwa- ‘egg’ with heavy emphasis on the last vowel

Akwa – ‘cloth’ with slight stress on the last vowel

Akwa – ‘bridge’ with emphasis on the first vowel

Akwa – ‘crying’ with strong emphasis on the first and last vowels.

Ethnography, being interested in the history of a language, will afford us the opportunity to appreciate the role of proverbs in Igbo language. Historically, the proverbs are part and parcel of Igbo language (Akpovobaro and Emovon (1994:165). The Igbo, therefore use the proverbs freely with the hope that the listener understands the deeper meaning and implication. In conflict management and peacebuilding sessions, proverbs are used so constantly that sometimes, he that uses them more often and more effectively

tends to have better respect from audience. This is why Boas and Greenberg feel it is impossible to undergo an ethnographic study successfully without good command of the language of the studied.

Boas and Greenberg's arguments make sense in my research since the Igbo people do not express themselves without proverbs, and peculiar body languages that are completely cultural. The researcher does understand Igbo language so well that he should be able to follow all proceedings during his interactions with the people.

2.9 Theoretical Frameworks

Three theoretical frameworks, hermeneutics, semiotics, and mediation were applied.

Hermeneutics

This theory concerns itself with the interpretation of texts, oral and written. With this theory, idioms and proverbs as well as non verbal language could be objectively studied.

Human science approach of the theory of hermeneutics was adopted because it suits the study being language-culture based. This adopted theory is not a mere historical facts, but an attempt to empirically investigated the wage of a text linguistically and culturally.

In his article, 'Hermeneutics', Michael Forster (2007) simply defines 'hermeneutics' as a theory of interpretation, i.e. the theory of achieving an understanding of text, utterances, and so on. Historical inquiry which helps the understanding of a people's cultural belief is a common practice in the world. To this, Ricoeur (1976:683) argues for philosophical hermeneutics:

Philosophical hermeneutics moves with more assurance along the ascending path Way forward ontology, which carries it away from the practicing historian's find of inquiry forward consideration as the historicity of human experience in general. The descending pathway which leads back forward historical inquiry is less familiar to it, yet it is along this trajectory that we encounter the most significant questions for hermeneutics. The ascending dialectic, Plato said, is arduous. But the descending one is even more so.

Ricoeur is saying that hermeneutics is more than a mere historical inquiry. Being an aspect of philosophy of language, hermeneutics is concerned with not just historical facts, rather going deeply to study the fact with the view to interpreting them. In other words, hermeneutics is not a method like historical inquiry, but addresses itself ... to the most radical level of historical understanding (Ricoeur, 1976:683).

Historical inquiry is interested in the interest of knowledge, is also interested in the interest of using the knowledge for communication. But hermeneutics combines the two and goes further to integrate the knowledge in a scientific and cultural intelligible way.

While Ricoeur's angle of hermeneutics centres on philosophical perspective, (Hoy, 1980) given its holistic importance or application on social research. According to Hoy, hermetic has outgrown its 19th century status of being a branch of philosophy concerned principally with methodological questions about how to acquire correct understanding and interpretation of texts to a broader philosophical field in the 20th century as a result of its resistance to tendencies in philosophy toward objectivism, scientism, or positivism (Hoy, 1980:649) in the 21st century therefore hermeneutics has kept on growing wider in scope. The implication being that contrary to the belief that hermeneutics involved text analyses alone, it is now more complex.

In what she terms 'the Hermeneutic circle' Hesse (1972:276) seems to be arguing that interpretation is relative to one's cultural milieu.

'hermeneutics circle' arises when the language, categories, and frameworks of our culture are used to interpret and understand alien texts, alien cultures, and even other individuals and groups in our own culture or society. This is because the language and thought forms we are studying are not themselves intelligible without interpretation but our own language thought forms are not adapted to fit them. Therefore, interpretation is always problematic and accompanied by distortion.

Elsewhere, Hesse (1978) has argued that the social sciences differ from the natural sciences perspective. She sees the social sciences while the social sciences are guided by value goals. Taylor (1979) on the other hand counters this belief. He says that human sciences need the social sciences for an ideal hermeneutics interpretations.

Hermeneutics, in the opinion of this researcher is not holistic with one approach. The situation one finds himself determines the approach to be adopted. For instance in the current research being undertaken on Ọkọnkọ Society, the suitable theory should be natural science driven because the language-cultural dynamics of the society involved is crucial.

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of meaning-making. The study of semiotics concerns itself with signs and the things they refer. Semiotics is analogical and metaphorical in sense. It also studies non – linguistic signification and very useful in cultural anthropology.

Semiotics studies is apt for the work because Igbo culture and in particular the Ọkọnkọ have much to do with signs and symbols in their conflict management sessions:

Fresh palm fronds	–	sacredness
Kola nut	–	friendship
Ọfọ	–	authority
Nzu	–	peace

Historically, it was Hippocrates, a Greek medical doctor (460 – 377 B.C.) who established semiotics as a branch of medicine for the study of symptoms (Sebeok 2001:14). Semiotics being the study of signs also attracted philosophers like Aristotle (384 – 322 B.C.) who defined the study of sign in three categories of physical part, the referred and thirdly its evocation of a meaning. St Augustine (A.D. 354 -430) a philosopher and a religious thinker and John Locke (1632 1704) an English philosopher were among early exponents of semiotics (Sebeok 2001:4).

Semioticians only agree on one thing – signs and their meaning. They are like philosophers. Philosophers believe in knowledge but understand knowledge from various perspectives. For semioticians, they see signs and their meaning from scientific, cultural, linguistic, medical, biological and even zoological angle of which Thomas Sebeok (1920 – 2001) is known for. Interpretation of signs is very crucial. Different peoples or cultures can interpret a sign in different ways. Winckler (2011:148) translating Juan Magarinos de Morentin (2011) opines that interpretation or act of interpreting is an

operation which involves observation, ‘A precise description of the behaviors involved in the task of interpretation is, thus an essential requirement for understanding what, we are talking about when dealing with possible semiotic worlds.’ Attempting to differentiate between signs and interpretation, Danesi (2004:16) posits that ‘The brain’s capacity to produce and understand signs is called semiosis, while the knowledge-making activity that capacity allows all human beings to carry out is known as representation.’

Our main semiotician for the study is Roland Barthes (1915 – 1980). He was a French literary theorist and semiotician. He critiques pieces of cultural material to expose how bourgeois society used them to impose its values upon others. To Barthes, a picture of a full, dark bottle is a sign, the bourgeois, while the signified, the people are a fermented, alcoholic beverage – wine.

Mediation:

This is an intervention when negotiation fails. Mediators help disputants find solution to their disagreement. Mediation is the intervention in a negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authority or decision making power but assists the parties involved in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute (Moore 1996:15).

Albert (2001:86) outlines three types of mediation, as follows: (1) social network mediators who are individuals that are invited to intervene because of their closeness to the disputants; (2) authoritative mediators, based on their position of authority, i.e. because they are respected and recognised; and (3) independent mediators, who, as the name implies, are neutral mediators whose impartiality since they do not know any of the disputants is expected to be much more professional.

Generally, negotiation and mediation are related. Mediators do help in the negotiation process when there is a deadlock. Irrespective of the type of mediators mentioned above, they all virtually aim at one goal: to help disputants find a solution to their disagreement (Albert 2001:91).

2.10 The Main Identified Gap

In respect of Igbo Language and culture, on one hand, and Igbo conflict management and peacebuilding, on the other hand, authors have extensively researched and written on them. But none to the knowledge of this researcher has researched on our identified gap. This gap is the place, or role, or impact language and culture plays in the process of finding justice in the course of conflict management and peacebuilding.

2.11 Conclusion

Igbo language has a significant place and role in the conflict management and peacebuilding in Abia State, and in fact, the entire Igboland. In the course of conflict management and peacebuilding in the town hall, market square or even in the *Ofọ* and Ogun shrine, language plays a role that cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the *Ofọ* holder while presenting sacrifices speaks in Igbo language. All his divinations, libations and incantations are not in English, but in Igbo language. The interaction between the people and the *Ofọ* holder is in Igbo language. The verdict coming from the shrine to the conflicting parties is in Igbo language.

The research does not focus on Igbo language's superiority over other languages of the world. Rather, our focus is in the fact that traditional instruments of conflict settlement and their instruments are best expressed in Igbo language which is the natural medium of both the people and the instruments, *Ofọ* and *Ogu*, for example.

Our thesis is therefore, on the ground that conflict management in Abia State will become easier and more meaningful when Igbo language is given its rightful place.

The review has proved that language indeed is invaluable to man and cannot be taken for granted. We have also given an example why language and culture are interwoven, as a result, having a crucial role to play in conflict management in general and in Umuahia's case in particular. Lastly, the review has strongly emphasized that language is universal, cultural, and psychological. In other words, that language is an essential tool in conflict management anywhere in the world.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research method was adopted, using ethnographic research design. This is in order to directly deal with people's experience, feeling and interpretations in the situations they find themselves in. Primary and secondary data were used. For primary data, in-depth interview, focus group discussion (FGD), and observation techniques were used. The interviews were in Igbo language, just as the researcher partook in conflict management sessions in non-participant status. For the secondary data, the researcher depended on books.

A qualitative research method was adopted because of the ethnographic studies that the work sought to find about the Umuahia people. The history of Igbo language, culture, acculturation, rites, rituals (religion) were studied. Ember and Ember (2006); and Hoijer (2001) see the aforementioned as integral parts of ethnography.

The objective of the researcher was to evaluate the respondents' responses on what roles language and culture has played in the day to day conflict management in their area. All the respondents were members of the Ọkọnkọ society.

3.2 Study Area

Umuahia is the capital of Abia State, Nigeria. It comprises two Local Government Areas. Ibeku and Ọhụhụ clans constitute the Umuahia North Local Government. While, on the other hand, Umuopara, Ụbakala, and Olokoro make up the Umuahia South Local Government Area. Umuopara from our investigation does not practice Ọkọnkọ anymore. As a result, the study area consisted Ibeku, Ọhụhụ, Ụbakala, and Olokoro. Umuahia population based on 2006 National Population Census was 359,230.

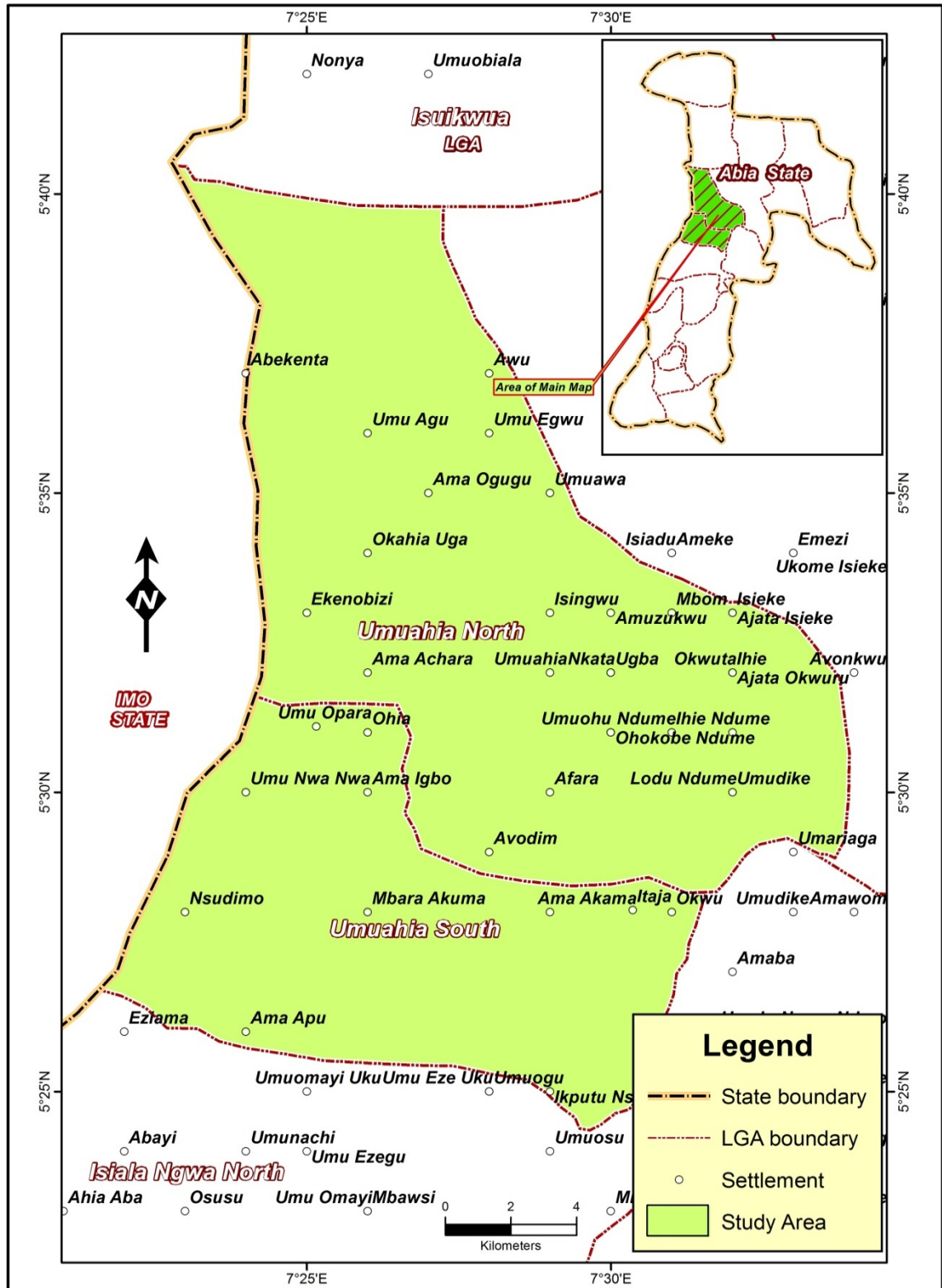


Figure 1: Map of Umuahia North and South

Source: Dept. of Geography, University of Ibadan

3.3 Study Population

The study population comprised about 8,000 Ọkọnkọ society members across the four studied clans of Ọhụhụ, Ibeku, Ụbakala, and Olokoru. Each of the clans has not less than 2,000 Ọkọnkọ society members.

3.4 Sampled Population

All members of Ọkọnkọ society are male. Twelve full-fledged Ọkọnkọ members were interviewed. And four Focus Group Discussions were held, one in each of the clans.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Sampling technique, according to James (1971:52) determines the means of choosing the subjects as well as getting information from the subjects. The scoring of collected data is part of sampling technique. The purposive sampling was used in this study. Purposive sampling means the researcher's resolve to select those that best meet the purpose of the study.

The places selected were places having ongoing sessions for the research study. The researcher selected a village or two from each of the four studied clans. There were twelve in-depth interviews. One focus group discussion was conducted in each of the four clans in villages the Ọkọnkọ members were willing to assemble for the group discussions.

3.6 Sources of Data

There were two basic sources, primary source and the secondary source. For the former, In-depth Interview, Focus Groups Discussion as well a non-participant observation were the means of data collection. For the latter, books, journals and the internet were the sources.

3.7 Instrument of Data Collection

According to Olasehinde-Williams (2014:30), 'Instruments are used to generate data in research.' The researcher developed an observation schedule where he attended series of Ọkọnkọ panel's sessions at Olokoru clan's hall where cases were brought before

the Ọkọnkọ society's judges for deliberations. The researcher also developed an in-depth and Focus Group Discussion Guides. These were in Igbo language and consisted of the research questions and some probing emanating questions.

The validity and reliability of the instruments were carried out by the researcher. This was achieved with credible reliability owing to the fact that the researcher conducted the structured interview by himself without any interpreters. This is in tandem with ethnographic research which states that the researcher should be knowledgeable of the language of a people being studied. The direct non-observation of the conflict management sessions by the researcher also aided the study's validity and reliability because the researcher did not depend on what was told him but saw everything recorded firsthand.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

In-depth interview, non-participant observation and focus group discussion were adopted by the researcher. The researcher observed on-going conflict management sessions in village halls and farmlands. This was to investigate the role language and culture plays during those sessions as the deliberations were entirely in Igbo language which the researcher understands.

The interview was structured; this was to restrict the respondents to specific terms of reference. The research questions earlier outlined were adhered to, to align with the objectives.

Interview: An interview provides a researcher the opportunity since it is an interactive encounter to explore issues much better than in the administration of a questionnaire (Albert and Akande, 2014: 98).

Observation (Non-Participant): The researcher engaged in non-participant observation in conflict management involving Ọkọnkọ Society. These sessions were in the town hall and in the disputed farmlands. This direct participation was to enable the researcher a first hand style of the people in the use of Igbo language in resolving disputes.

In doing so, the researcher got a first hand information on how language and culture aids the dispensation of justice in Umuahia, Abia State. The researcher during the non-participant observation sessions was able to study with the intention to interpreting the proverbs, body language, symbols that are used in Umuahia people's conflict management.

Observation method according to Manhein and Rich (1991:12) helps the researchers to see and hear events for themselves in order to gain an understanding of them.

Focus Group Discussion: This type of qualitative research instrument encourages discussants to open up with a researcher on issues on ground. The discussions were held in conducive atmosphere that included under the trees, and in the halls. The researcher had four Focus Group Discussions, one each in the four clans. Only men constituted the four focus group discussions.

For each of the discussions, 90 minutes was spent to enable the researcher enough time to introduce the discussion, purpose of the discussion and ground rules for order to reign.

The questions the researcher asked were the research questions in this research. The research questions were the stem questions. The researcher, who acted as the facilitator of the discussions, depending on the participation of the discussants asked probing questions.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The interpretive technique was employed in ascertaining the real validity and reliability of the research findings. The researcher contextualized the Ọkọnkọ society's use of proverbs and semiotic symbols in their day to day administration of social justice, especially in land dispute mediation cum adjudication in Umuahia, Abia State.

The researcher also juxtaposed all the voices of the 12 in-depth interviews and the four focus group discussions on the Ọkọnkọ members in the four clans of Umuahia with the view to identifying their beliefs and relevance to the Igbo language and culture, on

one hand, and to the people in general. All of this was supported by the series of non-participant observations the researcher had in the community halls and farmlands.

Being an ethnographic cum hermeneutical study, the researcher tried to interpret not only the voices but the nuances and the body language of the respondents in the field. In addition, the researcher as much as possible contextualized the proverbs and symbols towards Ọkọnkọ's practices in order to really identify the relationship between the Ọkọnkọ Society and the Igbo language and culture in the present dispensation.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1 Preamble

The following interviews were conducted in serene individual homes of the interviewees. Each of the interviewees before any of the interviews vowed or maintained that Ọkọnkọ secrets were forbidden to be told to anybody outside the fold. In other words, the interactions were basically for academic purposes. The series of information given were social, pertaining to Ọkọnkọ's legal formation on one hand, and Ọkọnkọ's spiritual significance in the Umuahia communities, on the other. More persons were interviewed in Olokoro because there was only one person who agreed to speak in Ọhụhụ.

On the Focus Group Discussions, each of them was begun after a complete cultural and traditional performances that included breaking of the Igbo kola nut and pouring of the libation to the ancestors. All this was in Igbo language, in fact in each of the clan's dialects. The *Ọji Igbo* (the Igbo kola nut) was never broken with a knife. It must be broken by mere hands. The discussants no matter the age difference saw each other as equal. They greeted in their special language, *Oje, Oje, akaahi oo'*. *Akaghi oo* reminded all that the secrets of Ọkọnkọ must not be revealed. The discussants were at ease to contribute in the sessions when they were convinced that the researcher was not a spy, but only trying to project the essence of the Ọkọnkọ Society.

On the non-participant observations, the researcher participated in series of conflict management sessions at Olokoro Hall where Ọkọnkọ panelists treated conflicts brought before them. The researcher also participated in a land inspection by Ọkọnkọ at Itu Olokoro.

The two following Igbo terms will be interchanged for each other; though they have some slight difference in meaning. *Ama ala* literally means the 'kindred', while *umu nna* means the kindsmen. So, while the former connotes the location where the people are, the latter stands for the people themselves. In other words, the place where a people live in and the people themselves are synonymous with each other.

4.2 Interviews

4.2.1 An Interview with Mazi Dr David Okebaram Onuegbu, a Trado-Medicine Practitioner and Vice Chairman, Ndume Ibeku Okonko Society: 70 Years

In Igbo culture, we use Okonko to control the society. In fact, it is like the traditional and cultural government. For instance, when brothers fight or quarrel, when Okonko intervenes or comes in, they stop. For land dispute, when Okonko is consulted, *Omu Okonko* is hung on the land to show that there should be a judgment to determine who actually owns the land. When an omu is hung, the defendant is informed and warned not to enter the land. The two conflicting parties will see the Okonko head together and a date is slated when the case will be looked into. They are told what and what they are to provide for the inspectors cum judges of Okonko. Table fee for the inspection of the land could be from ₦5,000.00 depending on the size of the village and number of people coming for the inspection. Others include for each of the two parties, cola nuts, palm wine, schnapps, sizeable meat and food. All these will be provided for morning session and afternoon session. The parties are advised to call on their friends, relations to observe the proceedings. The parties are also advised to mention their witnesses on the day of the judgment. On the day of judgment, for the *Omu Okonko* to be lowered for non Okonkonites, each must pay a specific fee else such will not be allowed in. Some take ₦500, some ₦200. This affects women and all okpos (non Okonko's men). After the *itotu omu* (removing of palm fronts), the witnesses are called in and later told to go, that they would be called later. Before these witnesses leave, the Okonko officials, chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, provost, and the PRO will take their seats and the conflicting parties are told to take their seats. Lest I forget, attendance is taken before the judgment starts. Even while the judgment is on, whoever comes in must write down his or her name under the eagle eyes of the secretary. Not just the names but from where one comes from. The attendance is important for security reasons. We go with it to the court, to the police, and even to the shrine when the need arises.

Before the judgment, announcement is made by the chairman or his vice, being me if guidelines guiding the houses. There are fines paid for every offence in the course of the proceedings. For example, it is forbidden for anybody to cross his or her legs. Okonko sees it as a 'shut up' to the group. Executives on the table are exceptions. They can cross their legs if they so wish. No interruptions are tolerated. Any interruption attracts a fine. For

instance, when a plaintiff is speaking, the defendant should not interrupt, vice versa.

When any of the parties ask questions, the secretary records everything and may decide to stop a question seen as irrelevant. In the course of this, any floor member that interrupts is fined. If he or she does not have the money there, he is owing ọkọnkọ. If the person proves stubborn, such is walked out by the house – no matter who such is. Ọkọnkọ does not know or have a brother or sister during sessions.

Few floor members are asked to ask questions. Such may come from different villages. After which, executives may now comment.

Mazi Okebaram gave the names of the executives to include:

1. Chief Obioma Ezeigbo from Umuafai.
2. Chief Charles Uguru from Umuana Ndume.
3. Ben Oguru from Ihie Ndume.
4. Chief Nzeadibe Ọjimadu from Ofe Oke Ndume.
5. Mr Tom Nwangage from Ohukuebe Ndube.
6. Dr David Onuegbu from Umuaroko (my humble self).
7. Chief S. O. Ufomadu from Umuafi (chairman).

When the chairman finishes asking questions, the adjournment is announced. We normally finish between 2.00 and 3.00 p.m, after which entertainment follows which the two parties are responsible.'

Mazi Dr Onuegbu however said that when any of the parties rejects the verdict of a village Ọkọnkọ such is free to appeal to the clan level, which is Ibeku Ọkọnkọ branch. Each of the parties should be given the verdict documents for future purpose. Should the loser appeal, Mazi Dr Onuegbu said that the village Ọkọnkọ will also accompany the parties to the appeal level. At appeal level, the Ibeku Ọkọnkọ will study the village's documents, with the view to knowing whether or not the lower court has judged well. Mazi Dr Onuegbu said all this had been before colonial days and the judiciary courts in Igboland. Before the final judgment, different groups go on Ikpa izuzu (brainstorming), after which they come together to harmonize their deliberations which facilitate the final verdict. The respondent further clarified:

All the earlier mentioned processes in the village, judgment apply in the appeal level. That is, there will be morning and afternoon entertainment by the two parties. Each party provides in addition eight Igbo kola nut both in the morning and in the afternoon. In other words, thirty-six Igbo kola nuts are shared between all the villages around. The foreign villages also participate in the picking of the kola nuts.

Before any of the entertainments, Mazi Dr Onuegbu said the ancestors should eat first:

In group we say *ofò* using one *oba* (cup) that whoever sees the truth and does not say it, let the land kill him. The one *oba* is filled with some portion of hot drink, beer and palm wine. With it and one Igbo kola nut, the *ofò* is said. The prayer is a covenant.

Mazi Dr Onuegbu told a story about two brothers who had a land dispute:

In January 2015, in Ohokuebe Ndume, Ifeanyi Ohaeri brought his brother, Levi Ohaeri before us the *Ọkọnkọ*. The two are half brothers because they have different mothers. On two sessions we met, the defendant refused to appear. Ifeanyi kept on spending in hosting us. On our third meeting, Levi Ohaeri refused to appear. Instead, his son arrange for some cult boys who came and disrupted our sitting. The cult boys came from Michael Okpara University, Umudike where Levi Ohaeri's son schools. *Ọkọnkọ* simply advised Ifeanyi Ohaeri to report the incident to D7 Umuahia Police Headquarters. He did.

The *Ọkọnkọ* decided to inspect the land in dispute whether the defendant, Levi Ohaeri was present or not. The slated date was 26th May, 2015. On our way to inspecting the land in dispute, Levi Ohaeri and his two sons armed with cutlasses accosted the *Ọkọnkọ* people. The police knew about the date of the inspection. From nowhere, a police Hilux appeared and the police arrested Levi Ohaeri and his sons and handcuffed them and took them to the station.

I personally went to the police station. The wife of Levi Ohaeri was crying and begging me to tell the police to release her family.

You see, *Ọkọnkọ* is organised and patient. We go to the police, to the high court, to the shrine with our attendance and verdicts. We have nothing to hide. We are transparent. *Ọkọnkọ* works with integrity and for the truth and lasting peace in the community.

On symbolisms, Mazi Onuegbu said the following:

(1) Okpu Egwurugwu

As identity of Okonko. That wearing it to the left is the right way. That when one wears it and it faces the front, it connotes annoyance, i.e. the wearer is going to make a serious complaint somewhere.

(2) Nzu (white chalk)

Mazi Onuegbu said that Nzu is not common in Okonko but he uses it. When nzu is used to make a mark of a cross on one's hand, it signifies a positive welcome and precedes the presentation of kol anut.

(3) Omu

Peace and authority.

(4) Abuba Ugo (Eagle feather)

Honour.

(5) Oji Igbo

For Igbo ofo, for truth.

.....

Following Mazi Onuegbu's account, it supports Uchendu (1965:17) which states that it is the injured party which takes the initiative of inviting or appealing to a body of arbiters for redress. This is very clear in the manner the aggrieved consult the Okonko for redress when they feel that the *umu nna* have not been fair in handling a conflict. The account by Mazi Onuegbu also upholds Uwalaka (1996:09) that Igbo conflict management is costly. We have found how expensive it amounts to to consult the Okonko society and entertaining them before and after land dispute settlements between brothers in the community.

4.2.2 An interview with Mazi Obinna Orji from Okwulaka Afaraukwu, Ibeku: 50 Years

When brothers have misunderstandings they might call on the *umu nna* to mediate for them. When the *umu nna* come, they will investigate. The guilty one is blamed and they will settle the rift and advise the siblings not to quarrel again.

In sharing of land, the brothers consult the umu nna, tell them their plan and entertain them. The umu nna share the lands according to seniority. If the late father had for instance, two or three wives, the lands will be shared between the first sons of the respective wives. The first sons will then split theirs with their immediate younger brothers. Ọkọnkọ only comes in when invited by any of the siblings who feels cheated. Ọkọnkọ's symbol is ọmu, palm frond. When it is hung, nobody can enter the property again till ọmu is removed by Ọkọnkọ.

Every Igboman knows himself. When a Yorubaman or a Hausaman speaks Igbo, the intonation is different. Asusu Igbo is our identity. It is what we use to manage our culture. Igbo language and culture help in conflict management because the parties in conflict are Igbo and the mediators speak in Igbo. It is easier to communicate one's thoughts between parties and those resolving the matter.

Ọkọnkọ in Afara here does not just enter a land uninvited. They must be consulted formally. They first 'proscribe' the land with ọmu, plam frond. The two parties are asked in their first session of meeting Ọkọnkọ if they want *ikpe* (case) or wish to resolve within themselves. If they say yes, the case could even begin at once or a date is given for a sitting. They collect some legal fees.

On the day of the *ikpe*, the two parties cook, buy drinks to host the panelists. The two parties normally have witnesses. The secretary of the panel takes records of all statements. The two parties give their statements and they are cross-examined by the panelists. The conflict parties are allowed to ask each other questions after statements.

During the land inspection, the witnesses come to testify. The panelists ask the witnesses questions. Records are taken, even the farmland. After the witnesses have testified, the panelists will go and have a brainstorm session (*izuzu*) in the absence of the conflict parties and witnesses. The panelists are entirely independent and seen as impartial. It is after the brainstorming sessions that verdicts are pronounced. Oath taking may come in if a party rejects the verdict.

Generally, Ọkọnkọ is unique. The music is unique. For *Ọkwụkwụ* (special funeral service), it is for those whose dynasties have been doing it for generations.

There are terms one cannot play with in Ọkọnkọ. They include:

Ọmu – a symbol of peace and authority;

Uhie – a symbol of communication;

Akang – a branch or segment of Ọkọnkọ;

Ekpe – a branch of Ọkọnkọ;
Nboko – a branch of Ọkọnkọ.

People today do not appreciate proverbs. Those of yesteryears appreciated proverbs. I wish proverbs would be taught in our schools here in the southeast. With proverbs one hides information and at the same time passes vital information. The use of proverbs depends on situations.

Mazi Orji gave the following proverbs:

Otile nlemere onwenye anya, ya lo nkupru udara.

(Let the anus which has looked at itself very well, go and swallow udara's seed).

The proverb is replete with didacticism, caution, and self discipline.

Mazi Obinna Orji corroborated Mazi Onuegbu position that Ọkọnkọ society does not step into any land dispute between families excepted it is invited. He also corroborates with Mazi Onuegbu that the palm front is hung by the Ọkọnkọ society to announce its presence. This present account aligns with the Mazi Onuegbu's that the two parties in conflict do cook and buy drinks to host Ọkọnkọ panelists that have been invited to settle land dispute. On the role of witnesses for both parties in conflict, the two accounts also agree that Ọkọnkọ society depend a lot on witnesses' accounts to aid their settlement. In other words, Ọkọnkọ society uses the information given by the witnesses to aid its findings and subsequent verdict.

Mazi Orji was able to provide us with other branches of Ọkọnkọ society which never appeared in all the literatures consulted. They include Akang, Ekpe, and Nboko. He would not expatiate.

4.2.3 An interview with Mazi Obi Mbiwi of Akata Afaraukwu Ibeku: 56 Years

The *opara* (the first son) can with his younger brothers share their dead father's lands by themselves. But this is rare. But it is possible if they can do it without having problems. If they cannot do it themselves, they call on the *ama ala*. The *ama ala* will then

tell them what to do. The ama ala can also be called upon when two families are having *oke* (border or boundary) conflict.

Now is August. It is time for *Ekpe* dance. It is the turn of Afaraukwu to organize it in Ibeku. We shall cut a goat. Before we start, we normally go round the tomb of the man who taught us *Ekpe*. Here, Afaraukwu is the opara (first son or village) of Ibeku as a whole. We eat our new yam on *orie* day. And before the *Ekpe* (a masquerade) cuts the goat, we go to the tomb of our founder again – Sunday Nwoko from Imizu Afara. After the *Ekpe*, we organise our money, share some, and keep some. *Ekpe* dance during our New Yam Festival is a good instance of our culture. This dance keeps us together, happy and all we do is in Igbo language of course. Women dance with us. With the dance, enemies become friends. You cannot hear our beatings and rhythms and not get attracted.

The culture of a people is greater than the people themselves. The culture and asusu Igbo control us and determine who we are. Just come and see our *Ekpe*. Everybody is so excited that you will never imagine that we are from different homes and with one burden of life or the other.

During our *Ekpe* we roast a special yam. We slice the yam and it is eaten with salt alone. It signifies togetherness. The elders pour libation in Igbo. The *Oji Igbo* (Igbo kola nut) has eyes. The elders may simply pour away the eyes, eat the main kola. The mixture of beer and gin is used for libation.

The cock is significant in *Ekpe* dance. It is slaughtered after the goat's head has been cut off by the *Ekpe* masquerade. It is used for yam pepper soup. The head of the goat belongs to the *Ekpe* masquerade. The man behind the *Ekpe* masquerade is expected to cut off the head of the goat in one attempt with a well sharpened machete. If it is not cut in one attempt, it is a shame for the *Ekpe* and the entire community. *Nkpoholi* is the term for cutting a goat's head in two or more attempts.

As I speak now, a man who once had *nkpoholi* died not up to a year. So, a set of people were saying we should not go ahead to dance *Ekpe* this 2015 as a means to avert such misfortune as the departed man. But a greater number said no, we must go ahead and dance our *Ekpe*. The latter won. In other words, in my own opinion, a culture is greater than one man living or dead. Sons and daughters return from near and far to join in this unique cultural dance. You cannot hear any song in English. All sings, jokes, plays and some fights are in our language.

Cultures are different. Ọkọnkọ is a unique culture. In Ọkọnkọ, if one goes against the laws of the land, Ọkọnkọ will go for *iri olu* (a special way of disciplining a stubborn fellow).

Years back at Isi Ama a poultry owner offended Ọkọnkọ. We visited him with *iri olu*. He called the police. The police refused to come. We slaughtered his chickens, roasted them with logs of firewood spotted around and ate them. It lasted for about a week. Even people from Ụbakala and Olokoro and even wider places joined us. You must however be part of Ọkọnkọ to eat during *iri olu*. Again, it is not permitted for anybody to take anything home. Just come, eat and leave (smiling).

People fear to offend Ọkọnkọ. When an *okpo* (an uninitiated man) or woman by even accident sees the Ikpu ulo ceremony which is normally at night, if a man, such must be initiated soonest else *iru olu* will be visited on the person. That applies to a woman. Apart from *ori olu* on the woman, such woman must be told what to bring to appease the society.

Ọkọnkọ has an excellent history for settling land disputes. They depend on witnesses and what evidences they see in the land itself. Verdict is given after inspecting the land(s) in dispute. They are impartial. They judge under oath that the land should kill them if they are partial.

As I speak to you now, Ọkọnkọ is handling a land dispute I am having with a man from Ohokobo. The first session has held. My opponent has no witnesses. I have. It now remains the land inspection to take place and the verdict will be passed. Nobody bribes the Ọkọnkọ.

On *Ọkwụkwụ* (special burial ceremony), it is for those who got to seventy years and above to be celebrated with masquerades at the market square. This special ceremony is very important to protect people from spiritual untimely deaths. It is part of conflict management. Recently a man who had not done the *Ọkwụkwụ* of his late father went to a place where the ceremony was going on. He ate something there. He hardly got home before he slumped and died. This type of story is common due to negligence.

Ana eru eru na anu nmanyi orie.

(Wisdom is attained by age).

Okuko nno nuhu anaghi aha mara, ya buo na ezi ya ha mara.

(Home chicken does not produce fats at home but does so when it is outside).

Proverbs are essential but must not be used loosely. If they are used wrongly, they could trigger conflicts rather than causing peace. Some are talented in proverbs. Those who are not should not engage in it. Wisdom is attained by age and experience.

Chicken is chicken whether at home or outside, whether fatty or not. I prefer speaking in plain words that all will understand to speaking in proverbs that may not be immediately understood. Bleating, tapping of leg on the floor and tapping the head with a finger are body languages that speak as loudly as proverbs and much easier to understand. They all mean ‘warning’, that one should mind his speech, actions, etc.

Mazi Obi Mbiwi was able to address involvement in music and entertainment using his Afara part of Ibeku Umuahia as example. This role was mentioned in the background of the work. With this role, Ọkọnkọ participates in the yearly New Yam festival using Ekpe Masquerade to entertain the people: men and women of the community and those invited or who choose to come and grace the festival. He further said that during the festival the elders pour libations to the ancestors.

Mazi Mbiwi touched the issue of *iri olu*, a kind of angry invasion of Ọkọnkọ against anybody that has offended them. This exercise is anti-social practice capable of causing conflict in a community. This is because Ọkọnkọ members in the course of this *iri olu* for days destroy their offender’s property and eat his food and plants as much as possible. The disturbing aspect of it was that when the police was called by the ‘victim’, it declined to come and stop Ọkọnkọ from feasting on the distressed man. This is a new dimension about Ọkọnkọ as nothing of such was mentioned in the literatures consulted.

4.2.4 An Interview with Mazi Chukwudimuko Harrison Onyema, The General Secretary Ọhụhụ Ọkọnkọ Society, Umuahia, Abia State: 74 years

Ọkọnkọ had been in existence even before our great grandfathers were born. It was a kind of Government before the coming of the colonial masters. When the white men came they did all they could to be taught the secrets of Ọkọnkọ. They were only taught the music of Ọkọnkọ, and not the Ọkọnkọ itself. In those days the Ọkọnkọ would plan and take bad people and bury them over night and the secrets remained. Ọkọnkọ fought for the rights of widows, ensuring that they were not maltreated (especially in land issues). Ọkọnkọ believes in pouring of libation which the churches today are against. Pouring of libation is for truth to the ancestors.

Ọkọnkọ for the young ones are a symbolism for the attainment of manhood. It is a symbol of pride. Such young man must be of character who do not talk anyhow. Hence, it is a society of 'akaghi' which means 'do not say or reveal'. No betrayal. My father told me that a certain reverend, an Igboman in 1918 or 1920 came to ascertain the secrets of Ọkọnkọ because to non-Ọkọnkọ people, the society is mysterious. The songs are great. There are six. I am one of the music players. The reverend was not told. He began to castigate the society – as evil. I want even you my dear young researcher to join the Ọkọnkọ so that you will become a full fledged man.

Mazi Onyeama also touched on the symbols of Ọkọnkọ

Ugirisi na ọmu are the symbols of the society in entire society. Peace is ọmu. But with *Ugirisi* and ọmu placed somewhere, it means the society is in session there. When a non-member is coming in, the ọmu is brought down for such to enter.

When ọmu is hung on a land, it means peace. To avoid fight, the ọmu stands for an impending mediation from the third party.

Mazi Onyeama said that the origin of Ọkọnkọ might have been Itu in Akwa-Ibom cum Calabar area. That the first people that began it in Igboland were the Bende people. Ọkọnkọ's headquarters remains in Bende, Abia State. That Ọkọnkọ has dimensions though it is the central of all. The others which are connected or interrelated to Ọkọnkọ include, *Ekpe* and *Okpane-elu*. Each of these has instruments and their music have different languages. They have entertainment aspects.

Ọkọnkọ was a means of communication. When they play their *uhie*, it invites members to come, out for important discussions. For instance, during wars, it is during this kind of meetings that strategies are mapped out and secrets are kept.

Women are not allowed in the society because they cannot keep secrets. But women can dance the dance during funerals. There is nothing bad in Ọkọnkọ. It is a society that keeps discipline just as a good government does.

Ọkọnkọ does not have shrines. Ọkọnkọ does not go into sacrifices, except during *Okwukwu* (spiritual burial of a member with masquerade at the market square).

The Igbo Ọkọnkọ (Ọkọnkọ box) is a great antiquity to Igbo culture. I shall permit you to see it, but you will not open it. It is *akaghi* (do not say). I will not tell you what Ọkọnkọ is. Even the father cannot disclose it to his son. I am happy that some judges and even the policemen know the relevance of Ọkọnkọ.

In Ọhụhụ, we play so well. Even when Michael Okpara was alive, he never played with Ọkọnkọ. In Ọhụhụ we have 20 markets and each has a unique Ọkọnkọ music and dance.

Mazi Onyeama said Ọkọnkọ was a pride. A man who is not in Ọkọnkọ is a woman who cannot be free to move around. He also spoke on the unity. For instance, they drink with one cup irrespective of status. The benefits of Ọkọnkọ to the society according to Mazi Onyeama are so many to enumerate. He frowned at the churches which criticize Ọkọnkọ blindly stressing that Ọkọnkọ does not even have a shrine. On the efficacy of the society spiritual beliefs, he recounted a certain day years back when he and his colleagues were in a gathering of Ọkọnkọ to play, himself being one of the instrumentalists. A jar of palmwine was given to them and no cup was provided. The group pour libation straight from the jar. This brought about an immediate consequence from the ancestors. From nowhere, bees gathered at once and began to sting Mazi Onyeama and others, and all ran away. The elders quickly intervened by properly pouring the libation with a local cup, the 'oba' to appease the ancestors. The bees disappeared and the music was started with further problems. The 74-year Mazi Onyeama said he has staunch belief in culture. As a result, he chose to attend the Church that believes in cultures and the ancestors. That Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints' in Umuahia city, with its headquarters in the United States.

In conclusion, he went historical to what happened in 1984 in Afuguri Ọhụhụ. A woman called a certain pastor to come and destroy Ọkọnkọ's property in her house. Her husband before his death was the keeper of the property. The pastor did as the woman wished — he brought the property out and destroyed everything. Due to this, there was *iri olu*, a kind of war and destruction mission. All Ọkọnkọnites converged at the woman's village for a week destroying everything and eating whatever they saw. According to Mazi Onyeama, goats and other things were caught from any part of the village, slaughtered and eaten. It was a show of anger. The pastor ran away. After the one week *iri olu*, the Ọkọnkọnites performed some pacification ceremonies to appease the ancestors. The woman died soon after.

Mazi Onyeama said that Ọkọnkọ is an age long society which believes in pouring of libations to the ancestors. He collaborated with the earlier interviewees on the issue of palm front being Ọkọnkọ's most important instrument. He gave an insight of the origin of Ọkọnkọ as being Itu in the present day Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. His account of iri olu in 1984 supports Mazi Mbiwi's account which paints the exercise as barbaric and repressive.

4.2.5 An Interview with Mazi Alozie Ukaegbu, the Interim Chairman of Olokoro Branch of Ọkọnkọ Society, Umuahia, Abia State: 70 Years

The head of the family, the *opara*, the eldest of the sons takes care of the family when their father dies. But when there is a problem the *umu nna* first intervenes because we believe in the power of neighbourliness. *Onwegi nwa Aru na amaghi ibeya* (Nobody is an island). Ọkọnkọ only comes in into family conflicts when one of the family members consults them when *umu nna* have failed to settle the conflict.

On Igbo language and our culture, the language is our heritage. There is power in one's language. *Nku nno na mba neherewe ji* (a people use their local firewood to roast their yam). Igbo language is an instrument we use to drive our culture. The two go together. Without them, no society. Without them, no conflict management, no peace; without them, no progress.

It is one's language that one uses to educate his children. One's language is stronger than flogging a child. Respect is not honour. Igbo language and our culture are our honour as a people. We can get outside respect when we have a unique honour.

Ọkọnkọ is like a militant group.* Ọkọnkọ makes a child dependable. Ọkọnkọ bases on personal development. It creates in you, the man you never knew existed in you.

Ọkọnkọ practices embrace all you see in the Church doctrines. Ọkọnkọ combines religion and culture. The absence of culture is the problem in religion today.

* He stressed that the white even found it difficult to penetrate Olokoro because the Ọkọnkọ in Olokoro then and now has always been strong.

He supported his point with the following story:

A certain man, an Okonko man was not disposed to going to church. But his child had to be baptised that the Christian priest gave a condition that the child's father must be in church for the baptism to take place. The man was persuaded and he reluctantly went for the occasion. By the time the priest was in procession to the church with the Mass servants, the Okonko man was so fascinated and relaxed seeing that one of the Mass servants was holding an instrument from which flames were coming out due to the swinging from left and right. After the baptism, he gladly told the priest that what the priest did with his Mass servants were the same thing they used to do during their sessions.

Mazi Ukaegbu stressed that Okonko was not evil, and frowned that people refer to it as a secret cult. He defended having some secrets which only the members know. According to him, it is not everything a group knows and believes in that outsiders should know.

Mazi Ukaegbu threw lights on the semiotic relevances of some instruments in Okonko. The few he commented are as follows:

i. Okpu tree

This tree is normally found in Okonko homes. It signifies an 'ofof' which could be interpreted as 'oburu m', meaning, if it were me. In other words, holding the leaf of the okpu tree or planting it translates to the fact that if one were in one's shoes, would he harm the other? The tree therefore stands for security, truth and purity.

ii. Uha tree

Uha tree produces a popular soup name, 'Uha soup' which is popular in Anambra State as okasi soup is in Umuahia. But the tree in Okonko's semiotics signifies longevity or invulnerability. The tree is normally owned by individuals in private homes. Spiritually, the tree hardly dies. When it grows old, all the leaves wither and drop, and before long, new leaves come up again. The Uha tree therefore stands for long life.

iii. Avoshi

Symbolises relics.

iv. Ngbara

These are sticks that are used in creating boundaries in a farmland. When the community shares the land for a group people of sons of the same father, it is the *ngbara* that are used. Whoever adjusts them secretly has offended the gods, the ancestors and even the living. According to Mazi Ukaegbu, the *ngbara* symbolise *justice*. He cited an incident years back where two persons were quarrelling at the farm, arguably over the boundary of their farms. It is said that because it is an abomination for people to quarrel in the farmland, one of the persons quarrelling was mysteriously struck dead by the *ngbara* to establish instant justice.

v. Omu

This is the palm frond. Ordinarily, the *omu* can be used casually to tie small packs wrapped in green leaves. For the Christians, especially the Catholics and Anglicans, they use the palm frond for Palm Sunday celebration. In Igbo culture, an Okonko semiotics in particular, *omu* stands for peace and authority. In fact, the symbol of Okonko comprises *omu*, on one hand, the *uhie*, the latter being a small gong that looks like okoro (a big gong normally used for alerting the community of danger or special information). *Uhie* is beaten to alert the Okonko people alone. The ikoro is for the general populace men. The *uhie* has different tones depending on circumstances.

Mazi Ukaegbu stressed that *omu* wherever it is hung is like an injunction. He stressed his interpretation with two quick proverbs:

- *onu agaru olee uka shiri laruiwiri?*
- *ngbe oge ruru, nwashi ga ike onye nyuruya.*

The first proverb simply means ‘Where did the mouth go that a dispute has gone so far?’

The second proverb is rather sarcastic and can be translated thus, ‘When the time comes, an excrement will reveal who excreted it.’

The *omu* therefore is a legal and spiritual injunction that all complaints and quarrels must stop immediately so that Okonkonites could wade in and make peace.

vi. Okpu Egwurugwu

This is a unique cap that implies that one wearing it has undergone the three stages of the Ọkọnkọ initiation stages. When the cap is put to the right, it signifies a mere *ezumezu*. But the cap is put to the left with *abubaugo* (eagle's feather) to indicate that such has distinguished himself in the society. The *abubaugo* is collectively given to the distinguished person as a mark of honour and respect.

Mazi Ukaegbu believes that Ọkọnkọ is like a militant group which reforms the society in a radical way. To him, Ọkọnkọ is like a religion with peculiar rules that must be kept. He even claims that Ọkọnkọ is not a secret cult even though it has secrets known only by the group arguing that every other groups have peculiar rules or principles tantamount to 'secrets'.

He said that Ọkọnkọ is tantamount to Igbo culture because through it, the culture is interpreted and guarded. He took time to explain some vital semiotics and their significance. His position is in agreement with Sebeok (2004:11) which states that a sign or symbol is anything that stands for something other than itself, for instance – colour, a gesture, a wink, and objects like a gong and in the situation of Ọkọnkọ, the palm frond, the *uha* tree and the *ngbara* (the sticks used to demarcate borders).

4.2.6 An Interview with Mazi Ndubuisi B Nwosu: 50 Years

Ike uwa (the sharing of property, '*uwa*' literally means 'the world' standing for property) begins with the sharing of *elu elu* (far distant) farms before coming home to *ọrụ uhu* (farms near the houses). The *opara*, the first child normally calls all his male siblings of his father to agree with them that time has come for the sharing. They will then call on *umu nna*.

The *opara* uses the following to host the *umu nna*: palm wine, a sizeable meat, *Ọji Igbo*, garden egg, ground pepper mixed with palm oil and other ingredients and a bottle of gin. With these, the *opara* now tells the *umu nna* of their intention to share their lands. He would tell the *umu nna* the day he wants to be. The *umu nna* may accept or reject the date with reasons of the latter. The *opara* son is very powerful. He is the father of the other sons. *Okata*

mkpo okadu bu nifeye (meaning, you determine how things should be when you are the owner). He speaks for his younger brothers.

When the date has been fixed, the *umu nna* now tells them the things they, the children will present on the day of the sharing. The sons then will give the same quantity of things, food, drinks, etc. It is in ratio of seniority. The *opara* spends most and in return, he gets the largest portion of land. Please note that the sharing of the lands are yearly for the particular family. Farmlands are situated in different places and farmed in different years. In Olokoro, a farm lasts for five years before it is farmed again. So, if the family in question has farms in Otayi, Alo Oji, Mkpokoro, Ohirite and Arurota, it means *ama ala* will be called five times in five years to share the lands. The lands at home, *oru uhu*, may be shared at once.

For the sharing proper, the children will show the *ama ala* the portion or portions of land for sharing. After this, *ama ala* instructs the entire children to go away. The *opara* is normally asked to point the side of the land he would prefer before he and his brother or brothers are sent out. This is a mark of respect. Please note, the sharing is in ratio of seniority. The *nkpara* are used to show the *oke* (borders or boundaries). With this done, the sons are called to come and get their shares. They are asked if they accept the sharing ratio. If all say yes, good, but if any of them says no, conflict has begun. *Ama ala* asks the person or persons saying 'No' to give reasons.

They may be asked to go out again for them to adjust the borders to appease the one or ones that are not contented. If on return, the 'No' response continues, a *mazi* in their midst is asked to hang *omu* on the land. This means that *Okonko* has come in.

Lest I forget, it is advisable to do *Okwukwu*, an after burial ceremonies for the departed father of the sons sharing the property. This is to avert spiritual attack from the ancestors. It is another deep aspect of conflict management which we will not discuss now.

On your second question on *asusu Igbo na omena ala Igbo*, I shall be brief. *Icho Oji* (presentation of kola nut) is cultural. *Igo ofo Oji* (prayer) is done by an old man. All of this is in Igbo language. *Ofo* is like oath, that all will go well. That anybody who has come with an ulterior motive should be dealt with by the ancestors and the Almighty God him self. Our language and culture are one and serves as our identity.

Ekpere-ngwa symbolises a serious warning: that all should be quiet. Whoever violates the warning is seriously dealt with. The *uhie* is the instrument used in this warning message. The beating is:

Kakokoko, kenku, kenku.

This means keep out.

Egwu ike maka olulu is a war music for warning. When they go, they take things and destroy things to serve as deterrent for others. You dear not retaliate. This is to forestall disobedience to the laws governing the community. In 2012, at St John's Anglican Church, Itaja Olokoro, a pastor who happened to know the Ọkọnkọ's forbidden secrets for the 'outsiders' was flippant on the pulpit. He began to discuss these secrets. That was indiscipline on his part. The news filtered to the ears of the Ọkọnkọnites and action was immediately taken.

The church was badly damaged. The pastor's car's tyres were deflated. The pastor fled.

Mazi Nwosu spoke about the significance of *ọmu* as well as internal conflict management within the Ọkọnkọ society.

The Ọkọnkọ society does not deal with the state police with the above story, they are themselves police. They could be harsh in disciplining whoever steps on their toes. The action of the pastor was to them an act of indiscipline.

When a piece of *ọmu* is dropped during any disagreement, it symbolises "stop, and be careful!" When an Ọkọnkọ member gives a fellow Ọkọnkọ member a piece of *ọmu*, the warned must keep quiet, else the group has been disobeyed. They are very strict. This strictness is what brings orderliness in the community.

Mazi Nwosu employed two proverbs in summarizing what Ọkọnkọ symbolises. The two proverbs are as follows:

i. Uka anaghi ano na afo jonjo

This is its interpretation: 'What you have, bring it out, so that it could be dealt with'. The suggested literal meaning is, 'a dispute or case does not stay in the stomach and go bad.' With this proverb, the Ọkọnkọ society encourages the people in the community to be bold to call on them for dispute settlement with neighbours, brothers and sisters.

ii. Ashi ka aburu, ka aburu chaa

The interpretation could be, 'Let us be peaceful; without pretences or conditions'. The literal translation is, 'If we must be one, let it be to the fullest.' Ọkọnkọ society believes in the adage which says that a problem shared, is half solved. Mazi Nwosu said that an Ọkọnkọ member does not say, 'That does not concern me'. He sees two persons fighting, he will serve them *ọmu*. The one who strikes after the *ọmu* has become the law breaker and therefore faces the wrath of the law.

The tone and body language of Mazi Nwosu portrayed he saw nothing wrong in what the Ọkọnkọ society did to the erring pastor. This is apparent based on his thought of anybody who cannot keep simple secrets:

My brother (referring to this researcher and with a concerned tone and his right hand supporting his jaw), the so called secrets of Ọkọnkọ society are not so big or overwhelming. But they must be kept to show discipline, maturity and independency. Let me ask you this ugly question. (He coughs, adjusts his seat and smiles rather cynically). No matter how open mouthed you are, is it right for you to go about telling the world how you made love to your wife in the bedroom. The things she told you while the intercourse lasted? Even if that relationship ceases, it is bad and not ethical to discuss such with people. So also it is with the Ọkọnkọ secrets. It is unethical to let non-Ọkọnkọ people know the secrets.

The secrets are their own mysteries. Every organization has one secret or the other. Secrets are what make an organisation unique from others.

Even the Bible reveals that God keeps secrets from his own begotten son, Jesus. Do you remember that Jesus does not know when he will come back. Only the father does. Is that not a secret? That makes God unique from the rest of the trinity.

Mazi Nwosu took time to analyse the way the people share land in Umuahia and how conflict might emanate when one of the male siblings is aggrieved and decides to consult the Ọkọnkọ. He links the land to the spiritual, that for a dead man's lands to be shared by his male children, such man must have been given a befitting burial. In his opinion, Ọkọnkọ is itself the police force of the people so that all and sundry respect it. He defends Ọkọnkọ keeping its secrets to themselves saying that even the Bible reveals that God keeps secrets from his own begotten son, Jesus. He argues that what makes Ọkọnkọ unique is their mysterious secrets.

4.2.7 An Interview with Mazi Emeka Nwosu, 58, from Okaiga Okwu Olokoro.
He represents Okwu Village in Olokoro Panel

Mazi Emeka Nwosu like others said that the Ọkọnkọ society stood for peace. Again, he said that the society was before the coming of the whitemen the only government in Olokoro and by extension, Umuahia. Even in the present dispensation of 21st century, Mazi Nwosu said that Ọkọnkọ was still the conspicuous government which ensures orderliness, equity and justice.

H explained the procedures of Ọkọnkọ's conflict management thus:

An appeal to Ọkọnkọ costs a thousand naira. With this, an ọmụ is hung on the land in dispute to avert incursion. Nobody sees the ọmụ and goes into the land. It is the Ọkọnkọ which sends one of its members to officially go and inform the accused that he or she has a case with so so so.

On the day of the land inspection, each of the parties in conflict gives us two jars of palm wine, two bottles of schnapps and ₦10,000.00 which serves as legal fee. We do not ask for food. Ọkọnkọ panelists or inspectors are not spirits, we depend on boundaries of the land or lands in dispute. We also depend on the witnesses given by the umu nna to determine the owner of a given property. When it is very difficult to determine the real owner of a land, the last resort is to take oath. Normally, it is the plaintiff who gives it to the accused. Ọkọnkọ does not have any spirit or god to wear to. But Ọkọnkọ oversees the administration of any of the gods to be sworn to. The god to be sworn with could come from anywhere as far as the plaintiff could afford it. If the accused swears and lives a year, he is declared the winner. But if he dies within the twelve full months, the plaintiff takes the land.

Very strong gods, I do not want to mention names, protect the ones that have sworn by them so that such will not die within a year if their hands are clean. It is believed that one who took an oath could eat excrement in order to render the oath powerless. Some gods cannot be rendered impotent by such action.

Mazi Emeka Nwosu also spoke on the language and culture of the Ọkọnkọ society when it comes to the music and dance of the society.

Our culture from our great grandfathers has not changed despite the presence of the uncountable churches today. After the burial of a man, such need to be spiritually buried to ensure a successful passage to the great beyond. All the music and dance with one or two masquerades take place in the compound of the deceased

should the person die before the age of seventy. But if the deceased is up to seventy, the dance and music and of course the masquerades take place at the market square. The exercise is both spiritual and social. If it is not done by the children of the deceased, they could get the wrath of the ancestors. This special exercise is to clear the way for the children. You can call it a special conflict management. The social aspect is merely to entertain everybody and make all happy. The music is very organized with a great rhythm.

The occasion begins with deep and spiritually provoked proverbs called, *iwa obubo*. It is the *obubo* that awakes the spirit of the people and the instrumentalists. The *obubo* is followed by the *atang*, the bell. The carrier goes round the market square swinging the mighty bell. This bell swinging and the resultant rhythm herald the music proper and the masquerades of the day.

Our culture is so unique that the family celebrating their deceased father could decide to request from their father's mother's place an extra masquerade. Igbo culture holds in esteem, the homeland and the people of one's mother. So much that when a man is dying, his mother's people are called to come and see him before he dies. On the burial day, it is the mother's people that first see him lie in state before others file in. It is an interesting culture.

4.2.8 Interview with Mazi Ogbonna Ifeanacho of Nbarama

Okwu Olokoro: 58 Years

Mazi Ogbonna Ifeanacho has beaten *Okonko* music for more than thirty years. He inherited the skill from his father. Before speaking on the language of *Okonko* using the music beatings as examples, he briefly analysed *Okonko* as a society that polices the community and entertains.

The *ama ala* are responsible for land dispute settlements. The *amala* will call in the witnesses to testify on the boundaries. *Okonko* only comes in when the kindred, the hamlet and every other effort by friends and relations have failed. *Okonko* is like the mobile court. When it is appealed to, it moves to settle the land dispute with the help of *umu nna*'s testimonies. *Okonko*'s emblem is *omụ* which stands for peace.

On the language and culture of the *Okonko* society, Mazi Ifeanacho mentioned six beatings of which each is interdependent to the other.

They communicate with each other. The different beatings are symbolic of one spiritual meaning or the other. They have meanings. We use it to communicate with the Ndi Ichie (the ancestors). We also use the Ọkọnkọ music as a means of entertainment. During Ọkwukwụ (the final burial usually in the market square), the music which herald different masquerades entertain both men and women, boys and girls.

Mazi Ifeanacho gave the six beatings as follows, refusing to comment on the deeper spiritual implications:

1. *Nbebe or Oke ngwa* – the lead drum.
2. *Oduta nbebe* – responses to the lead drum.
3. *Nwaintaku*
4. *Ihi ngwa* – the main drum.
5. *Abia Iyi* – the bass drum.
6. *Onye Ike* – the brave one.

He commented on the significance of doing Ọkwukwụ which many a Christian sees as idolatory:

Ọkwukwụ is simply a memorial service for the dead one. Animals are slaughtered, the number and types based on the age of the deceased. Ọkwukwụ is like giving one his rights. It is only meant for men. It is vital to do Ọkwukwụ to avert ancestral conflicts. Ọkwukwụ is for security reasons. The children who fail to do it when their father dies are exposing themselves to danger. It has been our culture from time immemorial.

The masquerades and the music or what we call egwu Ọkọnkọ are symbolisms of farewell to the departed. In Okwu here for example, we have seven hamlets. Each of the hamlets has their own peculiar masquerades. Other Olokoru villages and Umuahia clans have their own masquerades. In Okwu here, Itirimiri is the lead masquerade. It is the masquerade to come out first, slaughters a cock with his knife to declare the occasion open. Every village here has it. Other masquerades include as far as Okwu Olokoru is concerned with the following:

- *Akatatepa*
- *Nwa-iraa*
- *Akpane ekpo*
- *Nne ebu oti isi*
- *Atu*
- *Awuragwo*
- *Agu*
- *Itiri miri.*

In the view of Mazi Ifeanacho, Ọkọnkọ has no evil intentions. He linked it to the people of Okwu's popular traditional dance – *Okpom*. Like *Okpom*, he said Ọkọnkọ brings the people together. He stressed this by saying two proverbs as follows:

(1) Ndi nwe ala, ne eji ala

It is those that own the land that control and polices the land. In other words, Ọkọnkọ is the cultural instrument the people of Umuahia use to maintain order.

(2) Nbiarabia amaghi nga ala ruru.

Hermeunetically this proverb translates to the fact that a stranger does not know where an abomination took place. The argument being that it is the owners of the land that know, and are those who are capable to restore order.

Mazi Ifeanacho being an Ọkọnkọ drummer spoke on the uniqueness of Ọkọnkọ's musical instruments and how they impact on the social practice of Ọkọnkọ. In other words, by the Ọkọnkọ's music and masquerades, Ọkọnkọ acts as an agent of entertainment and collectiveness as everybody is allowed to come and enjoy the music and dance and interact freely without recourse to the question of whether one is a male or and Ọkọnkọ member or not. This aspect of Ọkọnkọ impacting on the community is line with the literature where Rolsaldo (1989) states that culture makes the human experience look significant. This is to say that by the culture and language of the Ọkọnkọ's music, life is made significant for the people as everybody can come together to listen to the music and watch the masquerades in the market square; thereby creative a conducive environment for better social coherence. By coming together in like manners, the account supports the literature based on Taylor (1991:91) that without communication, knowledge cannot be spread. It amounts to cultural discourse when the community gathers in the market square to see the masquerades.

4.2.9 An Interview With Mazi Eze John from Itu Olokoru, Umuahia: 36 Years

History has it that Itu here brought Ọkọnkọ to Olokoru. As a result, Itu is seen as the headquarters of Ọkọnkọ in Olokoru. Ọkọnkọ is a unique society. It has several means of communication. For instance, the sound of uchie summons all the members for a meeting. The sound of ntu ala (a special type of gun buried in the ground with gun powder) has a special call on the people. The

culture did not start today. The bell is in itself a communication. The bell is called atang.

Let me tell you this. When the bell is swinging with the sound, kang, kang, kang, the proverbs being said by the bell swinger or the man next to him with the obubo (series of proverbs and wise sayings) do rhyme. In Ọkọnkọ, it is dying in many places. The strongest bases of Ọkọnkọ today are Abiriba, Ohafia, Ibeku and some parts of Umuahia. In Abiriba and Ohafia Ọkọnkọ is like a festival. Every adult is expected to join it as it used to be here in Olokororo years back. Today, it is optional. But in Abiriba and Ohafia, it is more or less mandatory.

Ọkọnkọ is so united that when they mean to achieve something, they go to the summit without fear or favour. In 1992, when Itu made Abu nkwu (a kind of palm tree spiritually and culturally constructed by the people of Itu every 20 years), one certain night, the Ọkọnkọ people were beating their songs and the normal thing was that every outside light must be switched off. The sound is korunko torunko korunko torunko. Then in 1992, all the electricity wires were moved at Itu main road to allow the Abu Nkwu easy passage to the market. So people resorted to generator sets.

An Anglican priest in one of the parishes along the Itu main road refused to turn off his generator set. The priest was dealt with. Things were damaged that night resulting that the parishioners petitioned the priest for transfer so that he would not bring them further troubles. So Ọkọnkọ upholds our age long culture. The priest left the parish within a week.

This interviewee, Mazi Eze John apart from giving us some historic background of how Ọkọnkọ came to Olokororo (through Itu village which synchronises with the earlier report that Ọkọnkọ may have originated from Itu in Akwa Ibom State – a possibility that Itu Olokororo may have migrated from Itu in Akwa Ibom State), he shed a lot of light about some Ọkọnkọ instruments which semiotically give uniqueness to Ọkọnkọ. He analysed the swinging of the Ọkọnkọ bell with the onomatopoeic sound of kang, kang, kang, a not being a mere swinging but a rhyme that rhymes with the series of proverbs being said in succession by the bell swinger. Mazi Eze John's assertion is in line with Danesi (2004:16) which argues that a sign and a perceived interpretation leads to a representation. The bell swinging in this context is a representation of the invocation of the ancestors of the Ọkọnkọ members.

Mazi Eze also expressed some fear that Ọkọnkọ was somewhat diminishing in some parts of Umuahia, a fact that was confirmed when the researcher went to Umuopara and found out that Ọkọnkọ was literarily non-existent. This is in negation to the literature (Isichei 1977) where she interviewed an elderly man from Umuopara in 1972 who was apparently a staunch Ọkọnkọ member.

4.2.10 An Interview With Mazi Nnabuike Orji, Umuota Itu Olokoru: 60 Years

I am the traditional ruler of Umuota, Otaogu One of Umuata. I am also the Ebutue Dike of Umu Ako Itu Nta, Ikwuano. I am High Priest of Godian Religion, Olokoru Branch, and Administrative General of Godian Religion, Worldwide.

Olokoru clan is united, respected and a very strong people among other clans in Umuahia. We are God fearing and we put God first. This makes Ọkọnkọ stand firm. Unity begins with the family. After the father, it is the first son, Opara. The opara is so much respected in Igbo culture. When the father is dead, the opara takes over the family. Whether the opara is poor, rich, educated, or not, the younger ones must respect him. In sharing of things he takes first. He is the first among others. Even in villages, clans, we have the 'oparas'. For instance, Umu Amaocha (also known as Agbo Miri) is the *opara* of Itu. For Olokoru, Umuoparazara is the opara. We do not have many conflicts because things are organised here. Of course though, land disputes are common here. The ama ala and then Ọkọnkọ take adequate care of them.

Culture is culture. It is the religion of all cultures. I call it religion because it is the covenant between a people and God. A culture makes a people different. Religions are derived from cultures. Language is part of a people's culture. Through language, people communicate with their ancestors and God. Language makes a people unique. Here in Olokoru kinsmen or relatives cannot marry. But in Ohafia they marry one another – even cousins can marry. In other words what is good in another culture may be the opposite to the other.

A people should try to approach their gods with their language. It is sensible to do so. It reduces misunderstandings. It is wrong to pray to God with a foreign language. The Igbo should pray to God in Igbo language for such prayer to be effective. There is potency in one's mother tongue. The Jews pray to God in Hebrew, the

Arabs in Arabic, the French in French, etc. Here in Olokoro, we value our dialect.

People understand their language than others: denotatively and connotatively – parables, idioms and proverbs. Our language, asusu Igbo makes our conflict management much easier. No interpreter is needed.

One of the religions in our land is Ọkọnkọ. I do not see it as a society. It is a medium of keeping order. It is the most effective way of keeping discipline. It is not meant for all. It is for the righteous disciplined minds. Others borrow from the culture of Ọkọnkọ. The baptism in Ọkọnkọ is *ida iyi*. To become a full fledged Ọkọnkọ man, one undergoes *ikpu ulo* which is tantamount to confirmation. The whites came to borrow from Ọkọnkọ. Before one is admitted, he must be scrutinized. He must not be a criminal and a slippant. There is no sin in being in Ọkọnkọ. If you are a member, you talk less. You must be progressive. You must have a means of livelihood. One is expelled when found wanting. If one is found to be *onye nshi* (one that buries medicine for people to step on and die or be physically or spiritually maimed; or poisons people's drinks), he is expelled. If you are old enough to marry and you still remain single, Ọkọnkọ may expel you.

Ọkọnkọ stands and makes peace. If one is seen as a nuisance, even a married woman, Ọkọnkọ is used to discipline her. She will be sent home, to her parents' place when an Ọkọnkọ masquerade after several warnings. Before one is expelled from Ọkọnkọ or even exiled, such may have been subjected to one or more punishments which might evolve him or her to sacrificing *okuko* (cock), *ehu* (goat) and even *ehi* (cow).

When there is a threatening issue or an uproar, Ọkọnkọ can come in to make peace without being invited. In this kind of situation, they come with *Abia*, a special drum with a unique sound. But when people are in conflict – relatives, brothers and communities, Ọkọnkọ are invited to hang their *ọmu* (palm frond) which symbolises injunction and 'Let there be peace'. Ọkọnkọ makes use of three types of information instruments: one, a metal kind of gong, *ikpo*; two, a wooden kind called, *uhie*; three, a drum type, called, *abia*.

In making peace, Ọkọnkọ employs *igo ọfo* practice. *Igo ọfo* is nothing but prayer. Today, people say that *igo ofo* is satanic. Why? But *igo ọfo* is Igboman's way of praying. The Church criticizing *igo ọfo* also na *ago ọfo* (also do so). My father when he was alive, would every morning come out saying,

Chineke, imine. (Almighty God, thank you).

Obasi no ne'lu, were Ọji oro. (God in heaven, take kola oo).

Very short prayer but very powerful.

Igo ofo is Ọkọnkọ's way of taking permission from God. Before we judge, we call on God. That is ofo. Libation is secondary. The church also pours libation by the use of olive oil and the so called 'holy water'.

I agree with Chinua Achebe that proverbs are the oil we use in eating words in Igboland. Ndi Igbo cannot do without proverbs. They portray and explain very deep and complex thoughts. For example, for our context,

Onye ajuju anaghi efu uzo.

(He that asks questions does not miss his way).

You are here to ask questions. You have done the right thing. No intelligent man here speaks without proverbs. Some proverbs are though ambiguous. It is like speaking in tongue. When wrongly understood or interpreted, proverbs can be destructive. We use proverbs to hide information. Proverbs are for mature minds. Speaking literarily could cause problems sometimes in serious conflict management sessions.

Please, let my kinsman, Obi Ekeleme who has been listening to us say something. Obi, give us even if it is a proverb.

Obi Ekelemi: (Smiling). *Miri atala, azu anwula.*

(Let water dry not, and let fish die not).

Aha. Let us stop with that. Our dear researcher thank you for coming.

.....

Mazi Nnabuike Orji was holistic in his discussion of Ọkọnkọ. He argued that Ọkọnkọ is his people religion as well as culture personified. To him, Ọkọnkọ is not a society rather a religion thereby supporting what earlier assertion of Mazi Ukaegbu. He saw nothing in performing libation which he said was prayer as Christians pray in their own way.

He also said that Ọkọnkọ does not wait till it is called or invited when there is a threatening issue or an uproar and that Ọkọnkọ comes with *Abia*, a unique drum with a unique sound. This drum is different from *uhie* the more known or popular drum. He said that when Ọkọnkọ finds one to be a nuisance to the community, the person is warned severally by Ọkọnkọ and if no change is made in the conduct of the 'nuisance' Ọkọnkọ could excile such a person. In the position of Hoijer (1964:457) a cultural change is

possible due to time and technology. One wonders if Ọkọnkọ can still exile one in the modern era, as such a culture as even recorded in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* seems to have faded.

4.2.11 An Interview With Mazi Hon. Kanu Joel Stormy, 65, an Instrumentalist of Ọkọnkọ Music and an Executive Member of Ụbakala Ọkọnkọ Society

When a family decides to share their father's property, land of course, it is the *opara*, the eldest son who calls the *umu nna*. For this preliminary *oku* (a call), he will present cola, a reasonable meat, beer, soft drinks, one jar of palmwine. He tells the *umu nna* that they wish to share their world. The *umu nna* will ask him if he has told his brothers. They will drink and go.

The *opara* will call the *ama ala* again. This one is seen as the real first *oku*. The following will go with his call on the *umu nna*.

a carton of beer
a crate of soft drinks
a reasonable meat
four *Ọji Igbo* (Igbo kola nuts)
bitter cola (any reasonable number)
anara (garden egg)

Then *ama ala* will tell him what to do. Then they will go. The *opara* will call on the *ama ala* again for the second time (*oku nke abuo*) and lastly for the third time (*oku nke ato*). The preliminary *oku* is not counted. The *opara* is to produce for the *ama ala* all the items he gave them in the first *oku* at the second and third ones. That is our culture (laughing).

After the third *oku*, the *ama ala* now tell them what to cook. The quantity of food for the *opara* is different from those of his younger brothers. Their uncle alive has a role to play. He will carry the first *okwa*. He will give *ama ala* a carton of beer, a bottle of gin, a reasonable meat, cola, bitter cola and *anara*.

After the sharing of the land, the *ama ala* is given one live goat. Six gun shots must sound to show the completion of the exercise.

However, if there is just a son, he shall inform the *ama ala* that he now wants to possess his father's lands. Officially, he will give *ama ala* drinks, food, and a one live goat. There will be six gun shots as well.

Ọkọnkọ is consulted when there is boundary encroachment. The consultation fee is ₦5,000. *Osu Ọkọnkọ* (messenger) places *ọmu* (palm frond) which symbolises peace.

To me, a language tells you who a person is. Igbo language is my language. You can identify me with Igbo language and the culture of *Ndi Igbo*. To me, Igbo language is sweet to the Igbo world. Igbo language

brings peace and unity between those that own it, understand it, and speak it. Igbo language is our culture. One Igbo proverb says, ‘*Omena ala mba na eherewe ji*’ (a people’s culture fries or roasts yam for them). So, all we achieve and will achieve will depend on our closeness to our language and culture. They are a people’s power. We cannot do anything without *asusu Igbo* and *omena ala Igbo*.

Ọkọnkọ has a sweet music. Nobody can describe it. I beat one of the drums. Whenever Ọkọnkọ music is played, people come together and be at peace with one another. Even women dance it and partake in watching Ọkọnkọ masquerades in the market square. Ọkọnkọ is not occultic. Women are not part of us because they cannot keep secrets.

Ọkọnkọ makes one say the truth. In the olden days, it was black cloth, *ọmu* and *Ọjikirishi* (leave) that were used to show that people were meeting. Today, it is the *ọmu* (palm frond) and *Ọjikirishi* leave. *Ọmu* means peace. *Ọji Igbo* (kola nut) symbolises a bond between us and the ancestors. An Ọkọnkọman does not wear trousers when in serious session. Our dressing is as follows: George wrapper, white shirt, white towel on the neck and *abuba ugo*. The last two are for very senior Ọkọnkọ elders.

Ọkọnkọ music comprises six components (*Nkwa isi*). They are as follows:

- *Ekpere nkwa* (three in one persons/drums). They are in front.
- *Ihi nkwa*.
- *Ntigha*
- *Oboni*.

On *Ọkwukwu*, it is a memorial service. If your father was in the dynasty that did not do *Ọkwukwu*, you do not do it when he dies. But if your ancestors have been doing it from generation to generation, it is advisable it must be done before the sharing of lands. Ọkọnkọ supervises this *Ọkwukwu* ceremony. It is a big conflict management between the living and the dead.

Proverbs form part of Igbo language and culture. Proverbs are used to identify a wise person. It is used to converse deeply. After judgments, the verdicts are given in proverbs. It is used to placate.

Mazi Kanu Joel Stormy’s account looks at the expensive cost of hosting Ọkọnkọ during its conflict management session in his hometown of Ubakala as seen in Ibeku clan as well. He also commented on the role Ọkọnkọ music and symbols play in the Ọkọnkọ social practices. To him, doing the final burial of one’s father *Okwukwu* ceremony is a big spiritual conflict management between the living and the dead.

4.2.12 An Interview With Mazi J. Ntigezuweuka Okebuugo, Patron of Okonko Society, Ubakala: 83 Years

When things go wrong, a gong is beaten so that such will be discussed. When it cannot be resolved at once, it is rescheduled. *Ndi ama ala* blame the guilty one and may impose some fine to be a deterrent to others.

During farming season in January every year, we clear the paths leading to the year's farms and streams. Whoever does not come out is sanctioned. The women cook for us. Years ago, somebody did not come for path cleaning. When we, the *ama ala* went to fine him, he went to call police. The police did not listen to him. He even paid us double for calling police on us.

For land sharing, the eldest, the *opara* will call the *ama ala*, give them drinks and kola and things that follow them. And then tell them the reason he called them. He will call them the second time giving them the same drinks and kola as in the first one. They will then schedule the day for the sharing. Okonko only wades in when the sharing of the land is faulted by one of the brothers. Such brother is usually the one who goes to consult the Okonko.

Asusu Igbo helps to keep secret from those that do not understand the language. One suppose to mind his language and culture. In 1943, I went o Maiduguri to see my brother. When I got there, I met a youngman from Anambra. My brother's wife began to speak our Ubakala dialect. The Anambra man got confused because the dialect was too different from his; and too difficult to understand. For that every nation and community has a language. It is against our culture that a boy of two or three years cannot understand simple Igbo Language. It is wrong and a bad habit to leave our language and culture. It affects our unity.

The laws of Okonko are strong. When conflicts occur, for instance, dispute over land, palm fruit and palm wine trees, and Okonko are called upon, they simply hang *omu* (palm frond) on the site. It means 'stop'. It means 'caution'. When the *omu* is hung, an Okonko messenger, *Osu Okonko* will go and inform the accused of the *omu*.

In those days, it was cheap to host the Okonko. Today, it is expensive – food, drinks and some legal fees.

Proverbs are for mature minds. Proverbs are to cut down the length of statements. There is a way a proverb will be given or used, it will give an immediate signal that one should be careful and vigilant. Some people do not like the use of proverbs, yet it is indispensable in peace management in the community. Na obughi oria igafughiri ifu oto nneghi na obu nnaghi (if not for bad health, one would not have seen the nakedness of his mother or father). So, circumstances make people use proverbs, especially during conflict management.

Mazi Ntigezuweuka Okebuugo's contribution spread across what Ọkọnkọ stands for, including wading in into land dispute when ama ala's shared land is questioned by one of the parties of brothers. His unique contribution however hinges on the power of language and culture. To him, Igbo language is the identity of the Igbo and a very invaluable tool for the Ọkọnkọ's conflict management which includes the proverbs.

A Report on Umuopara Clan in Umuahia South Local Government Area

It was apparent that Ọkọnkọ Society in this part of Umuahia is non-existent. Both the elders and youth seemed not to know anything about it. The seven villages that make up the Umuopara clan are:

1. Eze Leke
2. Ogbodi Ukwu
3. Ekenebizi
4. Ehume
5. Ogbodi
6. Umunwanwa
7. Umu-ih

Two out of the seven villages were visited without seeing anybody who claimed to be of Ọkọnkọ Society. Ubadire Ikerionwu, a youth from Eze Leke said he heard the society was years back in existence. He quickly added that Umuopara people however have their traditional way of keeping peace in their domain. He mentioned the umu nna as an example and that when umu nna cannot deal with a case, the parties in conflict go to the customary court situated in Umuopara. Another man from Eze Leke who should be in his early fifties spoke in just two sentences. His name is Onyekwere Samuel Anyanwu. He said:

Before, our ancestors were part of Ọkọnkọ. After the Civil War in 1970, there has not been interest in the society.

Another youth from Ogbodi Ukwu who gave his first name alone – Chidozie said the society was not in existence. He promised to discuss with his father. His father

confirmed that the society was no more popular in Umuopara as it used to be in the olden days.

Another Umuopara man, about sixty-five years of age who hails from Ogboli but works at Eze Leke said he used to hear about the Okonko Society but never himself involved in it and claimed that it did not seem to be existent anymore in Umuopara as a whole.

4.3.1 Focus Group Discussion with Ndume Ibeku Okonko Society Members

The session began with a short prayer in Igbo language. This was followed by the breaking of Igbo kola nut which was eaten before deliberations actually began.

Only six people out of eight invited could make the session due to the day's heavy rain. Those present included:

- Mazi Sunday Ufomadu, 75 years
- Mazi Ucheabuotu Oguru, 79 years
- Mazi Obioma Iruke, 58 years
- Mazi Charles Uguru, 52 years
- Mazi Okebarano Ukaegbu, 70 years
- Mazi Godwin Nzeadibe, 70 years

Mazi Obioma Iruke

Conflicts are in different forms. They include family problems like sharing of a late man's property, conflicts between communities, and of course, land disputes between brothers and communities. The kindred first take control of a conflict between persons of same kindred. When the kindred fails to resolve it, the village may come in.

Okonko comes in, especially for land disputes because they are always very difficult to resolve. When Okonko comes in, *omu* is hung on the land. It stands for peace. People think *omu* (the palm frond) signifies danger. No. When *omu* is hung, it means peace and that all should get ready for peace. For peace to reing, Okonko pours libation (*ofof*) that whoever tells a lie should die in the course of the investigations leading to the final verdict. Before our present era, every Okonko man after any judgment struck his *ofof* stick on the same spot with others. Such stood for unanimous decision. But today, everything is written down with a full attendance.

Mazi Okebaram Onuegbu

First and foremost, the umu nna are called to look into the case. Whoever that is found guilty is blamed. Ọkọnkọ does not just come in. It must be consulted and briefed. The Ọkọnkọ will now summon the accused for a sitting at a date and place to be so stated.

Mazi Godwin Nzeadibe

Before the accused is summoned, immediately the ọmụ had been hung, the head of the kindred or village is officially informed by the Ọkọnkọ officials.

Mazi Sunday Ufomadu

When there are lies and things are complex, Ọkọnkọ approves for oath taking within fourteen days. Failure to do so, the person that consulted the Ọkọnkọ is declared the owner of the land. The oath taker must last a year after swearing the oath to be declared the owner of the land. Should the man who swore the oath dies before the one year duration, the man who gave the deceased the oath takes the land.

Mazi Ucheabuotu Oguru

The oath taker must not shave his hair, nails or bears within the one year period. If he does, the god will strike him.

Mazi Ucheabuoto Oguru

Giving of a kola is culture. It symbolises a warm welcome. *Omena ala* (culture), is a way of life. Ọkọnkọ itself is culture. So culture makes things easier in the society.

Mazi Obioma Iruke

Asusu Igbo (Igbo language) is part of our culture. *Asusu* helps in identifying one. When the whites came, interpreters were necessary because asusu Igbo is our medium of communication – spoken and written. We do not speak English. Our language and culture helps us to control the society.

Mazi Godwin Nzeadibe

Ọkọnkọ has its special language – greetings and responses. A language is a unique and peculiar identity of a given people or organisation. *Ojeyi ojeyi akaghi oo*. This is our greeting, it is our culture. You cannot respond to it if you do not understand it. In other words, language and culture, Igbo

language is indispensable to the Igbo world. Without a people's language and culture, that society is dead!

Mazi Sunday Ofofomu

Ofofomu is important. Some people, due to their money and status intimidate others. Church is good but it cannot protect a widow. But for Ofofomu a widow or an underprivileged can consult Ofofomu and it will act and address their situations in the hands of their oppressors. Ofofomu is fearless.

Mazi Ucheabutu Oguru

I have a good example. This happened here in our village. A certain man had six male children. Four of them attended one church. The other two attended another different denomination of church. The first group of four brothers connived and tried to usurp the land of one of the two brothers going to another church. The conspirator ran to Ofofomu and when Ofofomu investigated the case, Ofofomu found out that the conspirator actually owned the land. The verdict still stands.

Mazi Obioma Iruke

When two people quarrel and the church cannot stop them from quarrelling, when Ofofomu wades in, the fight stops.

Mazi Okebaram Onuegbu

Proverbs are used to solve conflicts much faster. Proverbs summarise volumes of thought in a few words.

Mazi Sunday Ufomadu

Let me give you this single proverb and we shall all go. '*Amadi, mezie ibegi, maka ohe nkegi.*' The proverb translates to, 'Man, treat others well because of your own day.'

4.3.2 Focus Group Discussion with Afuguri Ofofomu Society Members

The meeting began with the breaking of the colanut. This was followed by a libation or what the group refers to as Igo ofo. The ofo was a special prayer to the ancestors and to the Almighty God for the success of the meeting. The following ten members of Ofofomu formed part of the discussion:

Eze Ofofomu*	Julius Ichite	73 years
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* The group preferred to be referred to as 'Eze Ofofomu' against the normal title, 'Mazi'.

Eze Ọkọnkọ	Chukwudimuko Onyeama	74 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Uchechi Ichite	53 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Obioha Amos	46 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Chiekwero Ogbonna	75 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Antony Uwaeke	77 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Felix Nwokocha	73 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Young Ukauwa	52 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Onyeama Nwachukwu	53 years
Eze Ọkọnkọ	Ifeanyi Akandu	37 years

Eze Ọkọnkọ Chukwudimuko Onyema

When a case comes up, the chairman of the Ọkọnkọ will ask what the hamlet knows about the dispute. When the hamlet presents its version of the story, we now know how to come in. Without the hamlet involvement, Ọkọnkọ will not come in.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Julius Ichite

You are right. Ọkọnkọ does not come in without being invited.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Obioha Amos

Ọkọnkọ people are called upon because they are truthful.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Onyema Nwachukwu

Our culture is that Ọkọnkọ is guided by what the hamlet and the village have to say. Ọkọnkọ's duty is to juxtapose what the witnesses had earlier said. From there, Ọkọnkọ verifies all evidences before giving its objective verdict without fear or favour.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Ichite

In Ọhụhụ, we have twenty Ọkọnkọ groups. During our final deliberations, the parties in conflict are sent out. *Anaghi egbu anu na ihi onya.* (You do not kill an animal while it is still in the trap). The reason for this is to arrive at objective verdict without any emotional attachment that may arise if the parties are allowed to be there.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Young Ukauwa

Ọkọnkọ comes in because it is independent. You cannot influence Ọkọnkọ. You cannot intimidate it either. It does not fear. Rather it is feared.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Chukwudimuko Onyeama

A dialect or language is easier to control and hit the nail on the head. A foreign language does not hit in like Igbo language fits with our culture. *Nkpisi nnwe eze, ma eze ya.* (A toothpick knows the teeth that fit it). Do you understand the proverb? You know if you use a toothpick that does not fit in with a set of teeth, blood will ooze out. That same goes with *asusu Igbo na omena ala* (Igbo Language and culture). It is only our language that goes well with our culture.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Uchechi Ichite

Ọkọnkọ society is appealed to, especially for land dispute. They hang *ọmu* to avert troubles. The accused will be served. A day is fixed. The society does not fear. The two parties are encouraged to call their friends and relations – to serve as observers.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Chukwudimuko Onyeama

(Cutting in) There is always a pouring of libation by the oldest person, praying that the land will kill whoever takes bribe. The whole people will respond, '*Ihaa*' (Amen).

Eze Ọkọnkọ Julius Ichite

Libation is A to Z.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Obiora Amos

Another way Ọkọnkọ takes care of land dispute is by administering oath.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Felix Nwokocha

It is unfortunate the church condemns Ọkọnkọ.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Iheanyi Akandu

If you are being maltreated, Ọkọnkọ society protects you.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Alison Onyeama

The final verdict is normally in proverbs. *Nwata aturu ilu, kowaya, ego eji luo nneya furu efu.* (When a child is told a proverb, and the proverb is explained to him, the child's mother's dowry is worthless).

Eze Ọkọnkọ Uchechi Ichite

There is a way a proverb can be used to correct a person. It is didactive.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Young Ukauwa

The Igbo people use proverbs to give verdicts. Older Ọkọnkọ people used proverbs to teach younger ones how to judge. The use of proverbs implies wisdom and brevity.

Eze Ọkọnkọ Onyeama Nwachukwu

Nwata tuliri nnaya otọ, oğodoya ga awuchiya ihu. (The wrapper of a father will cover the face of a child who dared throw him (father) up).

4.3.3 Focus Group Discusson with Ipupe Ụbakala Ọkọnkọ Society Members

The meeting began with a short prayer in Igbo language by the group's patron, Mazi Patron Achimologu B. Okechukwu. The breaking of kola was the next item, after which, the cola and drinks were shared. The following constituted the Focus Group discussion:

1. Mazi Patron Achimologun B. Okechukwu, 73 years
2. Mazi Ukairu Irokwe, 72 years
3. Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwereekowe, 67 years
4. Obiajunwa Okigbo, 71 years
5. Mazi Ibeegbulam Okpuroko, 55 years
6. Mazi Okeke Ironkwe, 65 years
7. Mazi Nwankwo Nwakpara, 72 years
8. Mazi Azunwa Ndubuizi, 64 years
9. Mazi Chimezie Joseph, 45 years

Mazi Patron Achimologu B. Okechukwu

At first, we start from the *ezi na ulo* (the family) that own the property, land especially. In that family, there must be an elder. It is that elder that is expected to look into the conflict and get it resolved. But when it is between families, it is the *ndi ama*, or *ama ala* that are called to look into it. When *ama ala* come, you give them kola, drinks, food and some money for elders to use, to buy snuff. The people for the land sharing normally invite their maternal kinsmen, friends and well wishers to witness the *iwa ala* (sharing of the land).

After the sharing, if any of the beneficiaries is not satisfied, such can go ahead to consult the *Okonko* Society for redress. Let me stress this, it is the *onye opara*, the first son that normally gathers his younger ones and tell them that time for sharing of the land has come. He calls the *umu nna*, he spends most, and he is given the largest portion of the land or any property *ama ala* is entitled to share. *Ikwa okwa* entails giving the *ama ala* what they demand. The *opara* gives the largest, followed by the second son, on and on like that. *Opara* provides half of everything. The maternal kinsmen and friends need to testify that the sharing is good. The maternal influence is significant in Igbo culture.

When *Okonko* comes in, they depend on what the *ama ala* had earlier done. They inspect the land in dispute before coming up with a verdict. (Patron Okechukwu unfortunately had to leave the Focus Group Discussion due to urgent call from home. He took permission, apologised and hurriedly left.)

Mazi Ukairu Ironkwe

My contribution is, *Okuko ehechere, ya afo oluye* (the cock is cooked but it remains the neck). In our culture, if all of us here are from, the same father now, and our father dies, the *opara* becomes the father. He controls the affairs of the family. He is the link of the family to the *ama ala*. On the issue of *Okonko*, when *Okonko* rules, the court normally accepts it.

Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwereekowe

Igbo bu otu si ebe ruo Aru. (Igbo is one from here to Aru). The issue on *ama ala* and *Okonko* is *anokota na ashi buro, atoo ngwugwu udele* (the secret of the culture is made open when people of like minds come together). *Ama ala* stops where *Okonko* begins. They work hand in hand to make peace. The presence of *Okonko* is *omu*, which means peace. It is a powerful instrument of *Okonko*. My earlier two proverbs suggest that Igbo culture is the same and that there are organisations that aid *ama ala* to achieve peace. In our part here, *Okonko* supports *ama ala*, and *ama ala* supports *Okonko*.

Mazi Engr. Chibuike Enwereekowe

The integral part of our language, *asusu Igbo* is proverbs. We use proverbs to solve conflicts. Everything we do is in the Igbo language. Proverbs are part of Igbo language. We use proverbs to get verdict.

Mazi Ibeekpulam Okpuroko

When washing an old woman's cloth, you get something.

Mazi Engr. Chibuike Enwereekowe

It is inbuilt. We drink it from water.

Mazi Ibeeghulam Okpuroko

The Yoruba and Hausa respect their languages. Their languages are their lives. So also for us the Igbo; it is our identity. If a white man is in our midst, we use our language to confuse him. We speak Igbo language for confidentiality and better understanding of one another.

Mazi Azunna Ndubuisi

One's dialect helps to identify him and where such comes from.

Mazi Obiajunwa Okigbo

Igbo language is different from other languages. It is important to use your language. It helps to settle peace easily. For instance, we Ezumezus have our unique language and culture. It is our guide, our pride. If you are not a member, you cannot understand us. We will not teach you (laughter).

Mazi Nwankwo Nwakpara

Oji (kola nut) has a name, *Oji Igbo* and *gworu*. The Igbo people use *Oji Igbo* for all their traditional and spiritual ceremonies. If you were observant, you will notice that while we were breaking the colanut, we used our fingers, not knife. *Oji Igbo* understands the language of the fingers not the knife.

Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwereekowe

Ọkọnkọ has existed for over 3,000 years. It is transferred from generation to generation. We first put *omu* (palm frond) which stands for peace or injunction. Ọkọnkọ people are middlemen. We do not dangle into family conflicts. We douse conflicts. Ọkọnkọ must be consulted. Ọkọnkọ

empowers the *Osu Okonko* (messenger) to hang the *omu* on the disputed property.

Mazi Okeke Ironkwe

Okonko in itself is a culture which helps in bringing peace to the community.

Mazi Chimezie Joseph

People love the Okonko music. It brings the people together irrespective of one's Christian affiliation.

Mazi Azunna Ndubuisi

We pour libation – with *Oji* and drink. Okonko instills peace. Before engaging in land settlement, we pray that land should kill whoever has come with deceptions.

Mazi Ukairu Irokwe

We do not take bribe. We are honest.

Mazi Chimezie Joseph

We keep secrets. Keeping secrets is part of making peace.

Question Four

Mazi Engr Chibuikwe Enwerekwe

Ilulu (proverbs) in Igbo are invaluable. *Onye bu aturuya ilu akowaruya, ego eji luo nnaya furu okporo* (the person that is told a proverb and explained it to him, such person's mother's dowry is in vain).

Mazi Ukairu Irokwe

We use proverbs to conceal secrets.

Mazi Chimezie Joseph

The use of proverbs is for economy of words. Let me give you this common example. *Nwa nmaru asu, ya suo ne ikwo, nke na amaghi asu, ya suo na apata*. (A child that knows how to pound pounds in the mortar, but he who does not know how to pound, pounds on his laps.)

Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwereekowe

Let me add to that. *Nte otu ukwu ne site na otutu na atu onu.* (A one legged cricket begins to make his hole earlier.)

4.3.4 Focus Group Discussion with Members of Ọkọnkọ Society at Okwu Olokoro

The session began with a presentation of kola which was broken, shared and eaten by the entire group. The group comprised the following:

1. Mazi Obasi Edo, 105 years
2. Mazi Nwabunze Enyidedeye, 95 years
3. Mazi Onyemachi Obasi, 67 years
4. Mazi Ajomiwe Ekeleme, 61 years
5. Mazi Johnbull Eze, 55 years
6. Mazi Ugochukwu Okorie, 55 years
7. Mazi Eze Sunday, 50 years
8. Mazi Okechukwu Umebeala, 46 years
9. Mazi Ezenwa Ozurumba, 30 years

Mazi Obasi Edo, being the oldest of the group, said the prayers over the kola and drinks in Igbo language.

Mazi Ugochukwu Okorie

If it involves land dispute, the *umu nna*, the kindred will first look into the matter. One of the conflicting parties must have called on them for intervention. The *umu nna* hear the two parties and come up with a verdict after series of discussions which will include the inspection of the land or lands in questions. If the settlement is not accepted by one of the parties, he can consult the Ọkọnkọ. When the Ọkọnkọ Society comes in, they first hang *ọmu*, the palm frond to warn against anybody going into the land. When they finish investigating the land or lands, they tell whoever that does not own the land or lands to hands off.

Mazi Okechukwu Umebeala

The way Ọkọnkọ settles the land dispute is that every hamlet settles its own case. So also it is in every village. What I mean is this, Ọkọnkọ has branches to the extent of hamlet level. The hamlet level may invite the village level while the village level can invite the clan level. If it is so

organised. Every conflicting party must have at least one witness who could give the history of the land.

Mazi Ezenwa Ozurumba

Even when Ọkọnkọ comes in, they to a large extent depend on the umu nna witnesses in the investigations and findings.

Mazi Johnbull Eze

Igbo language is the identity of the Igbo. It is effective in conflict management because it is not everybody that understands English language. Since Ọkọnkọ is based on truth, it is Ọkọnkọ that can bring peace. It is more than going to the pastor or a priest to look for holy water. The church does not and cannot settle local or family problems or disagreements. Ọkọnkọ does not understand English. It is Igbo language that it understands. And the language oversees the culture. If one goes to court, the court will still ask you if you have seen your people?

Mazi Obasi Edo

You must understand Igbo language and culture for you to be an effective Igboman. In Ọkọnkọ, everything is done in Igbo language. All the practices are based on traditions.

Mazi Nwabunze Enyidedeye

It helps in creating confidence in whoever understands it. Igbo language is our cultural heritage. It is in culture that peace is determined. The Igbo language and culture are more or less our clothes. Without them, we are stark naked. When you are naked, people laugh at you.

Mazi Eze Johnbull

Ọkọnkọ comes in when things have gone out of hands. When people in conflict come to consult the Ọkọnkọ, they are hopeful they will see truth. No bribery. Any Ọkọnkọ man taking bribery is looking for his death.

Mazi Obasi Edo

Ọmụ is the symbol of Ọkọnkọ. It symbolizes peace. Whoever defies it is looking for problems. Ọmụ is the flag of Ọkọnkọ. You must respect it.

Mazi Ezenwa Ozurumba

Ọkọnkọ is like the Supreme Court. Whether you are a traditionalist or Christian, every body respects Ọkọnkọ. It does not discriminate. It is therefore very relevant till the present day.

Mazi Eze Johnbull

The palm frond is a symbol that the music has changed. It does not have papa and mama. Anybody can be fined in Ọkọnkọ and your father cannot talk. No discriminations as Ezenwa said. If my twin offends Ọkọnkọ and I am the head of Ọkọnkọ, I must shut up for the laws of Ọkọnkọ to prevail. Ọkọnkọ is superior to any of the members and non-members in the community. You people that went to school will say, *numero uno*.

Mazi Ugochukwu Okorie

Before the coming of the colonialists, it was Ọkọnkọ that was controlling the community. It was the government. It was also the police force. If you like the military.

Mazi Nwabueze Enyidedeye

Ọkọnkọ is the police. It polices the community. It does not use guns. Its gun is the ọmụ. Ọkọnkọ is more effective than the police. Because the people believe and respect them.

Mazi Ugochukwu Okorie

1. *Onye gara ogu gbute nkita, gbuteru mmadu.*
(Whoever goes to war and kills a dog, has also killed a person).

Interpretation

Mazi Eze Johnbull

It means a warrior, a strong man.

2. *Eweru ife aneji egwu anunu gwuo anunu, ihu efuo*
(When you are given what you want, you will be happy)

Interpretation

(i) Mazi Eze Sunday

This proverb in this context could mean that Ọkọnkọ society is capable to make peace between brothers or communities.

(ii) Mazi Onyemechi Obasi

This proverb could imply that a right thing has been done. A proverb could have many interpretations depending on situations.

Mazi Ajomiwe Ekeleme

(i) *Ekwela ife gburu nnaghi gbuo gu.*

(Do not let what killed your father, kill you)

(ii) *Onye asi weru miri huo ahu, odughi ife ojoo emeruye.*

(Whoever that has been told to bathe with water, has not been ill advised)

Interpretation

(i) Mazi Obasi Edo

The first proverb is meant to instill maturity and carefulness. On the other hand, the second proverb preaches showing of appreciation without exhibiting ego.

(ii) Mazi Johnbull Eze

The first proverb is very heavy. It simply implies that the person the proverb is told to should be careful. It may be that it is obvious that he is on the wrong path that will bring him doom. To me, the second proverb is similar to the first. It is a bit sarcastic, yet it is obvious that the person it is meant for is not on the right path.

Mazi Ezenwa Ozurumba

Nberede nyiri dike, nberede ka eji maru dike.

(Suddenness is enimical to a warrior, the same suddenness is what you use in knowing a warrior.)

(The group looked at one another, shaking their heads in disapproval).

Interpretation

(i) Mazi Okechukwu Umebeala

This is a hard proverb. It is not meant for peace situation.

(ii) Mazi Ezenwa Ozrumba

I know. Does it matter? It is a proverb of praise for valour.

(iii) Mazi Johnbull Eze

Anyway, you are right. The researcher simply wants proverbs and their role in conflict management. This particular proverb to me can still help our university brother. The proverb addresses the truth that no matter how courageous and fearless one is, such is always endangered when his enemy suddenly strikes. In another interpretation, it means that a real warrior or courageous person must face tribulations and problems squarely without running away in defeat.

(iv) Mazi Ajomiwe Ekeleme

Who says it does not apply to our discussion? Proverbs are ambivalent. They are two sided sharpened sword.

The four conducted focus group discussions have addressed the research questions and objectives almost in the same manner. First, each of the sessions began with a breaking of kola nut followed with a short prayer to the Almighty God in Igbo language.

- All the discussants in the four groups said and agreed that *Ọkọnkọ* is a society for peace and that the palm frond is its main symbol.
- The entire discussions were in Igbo language and all attested to the importance of proverbs helping in the conveyance of thought and meaning in line with the literatures consulted according to Barley (1972) who says that proverbs are statements of moral imperatives in a fixed metaphorical

paradigmatic forms; and Madu (1996:189) who posits that proverbs are condensed wisdom drawn from experience.

- The four groups' positions were in agreement with all the in-depth interviews conducted on Ọkọnkọ as a group that comes in to look into land disputes when invited by an aggrieved party.
- The role of the kinsmen in the Igbo conflict management system as portrayed in the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions support the literature consulted where Edmund (1974:11) says that the *umu nna* (the kinsmen is the strength of the Igbo society. In support of this established claim is Agbasiere (2001:12) who says that the ethics of the Igbo society are imbibed in the *umu nna* mechanism.
- None of the groups mentioned the aspect of *iri olu* in contrast with the in-depth interviews where two interviewees said the exercise is part of Ọkọnkọ's way of maintaining discipline in the community.

In all, the four fora just as the twelve interviewees touched on the four objectives that prompted the research.

4.4.1 Non-Participant Observation at Olokoro Civil Hall, Ahiaukwu

On Monday, 29th June, 2015, an Afoukwu Day, at Olokoro Ahiaukwu Civil Hall, the Olokoro Ọkọnkọ Panel sat and received complaints on one hand, and gave verdicts on cases earlier begun on the other hand. The session began at 11.00 am and ended at 1.15 pm. The Panel, as Ọkọnkọ usually calls its judges comprised on this day, nineteen members. On the table were four principal officers including the chairman, the secretary by his left who wrote down every proceedings. These two were flanked by two other principal officers. The other members were in two roles in the two sides of the hall.

The day's sitting began with calling of the people with one case or complaint or the other. All of them with their witnesses as well as their relations and friends sat at the hall. With everybody seated, the chairman of the Panel who can be referred to as the chief judge stood and addressed all. He told them that Ọkọnkọ stood for peace and they were

there to make peace. He gave a short prayer calling on Almighty God to oversee their deliberations. He ended in the Christian way of 'In Jesus Name'.

The first case had begun earlier. It was the first assignment of the day. A woman was called up. She was being owed some money. The debtor refused to pay and the woman reported him to Ọkọnkọ Society. Before everybody, the chairman called on the entire members of the society to his table. They all converged and bent down and put heads together for some five minutes. The whole hall was silent. When they went back to their respective seats, the chairman gave their verdict. He told the woman that Ọkọnkọ made their investigation and really found out that the said woman was being owed money by the accused man. He further told the woman that Ọkọnkọ's hands were tied because the debtor did not step on the toes of the land or of the society by borrowing and refusing to pay. He advised the woman to sue her debtor in normal court, telling them that she had earlier been to Ọkọnkọ which advised her to do so. The chairman said the society would be a witness if called upon at the court with their own investigation. In other words, Ọkọnkọ does not deal with debts, but basically land issues.

The second deliberation was on land dispute. It was between two brothers from Umudere, one of the fifteen villages of Olokoro. The chairman of that village led the two brothers to Ọkọnkọ panel. It was a complaint of sort. According to the Umudere chairman, the land in dispute belonged to the two parties's dead brother. The deceased did not marry. The ama ala people had earlier judged on the case which one of the parties, the elder of the two brothers rejected. The ama ala in their verdict gave the land to the younger man based on the ground that the deceased while living said all his property should belong to the same brother of his. But the older brother contested the 'will' saying that it was he who took care of the dead brother when he was ill.

The chairman of the Panel made all present know that it pains the society hearing such cases. He thanked the Umudere village for their judgment, intervention and goodwill. Before all, the chairman of the Panel asked the brother that rejected the ama ala verdict of his present stand. The aggrieved man said he stood to his ground. To this, the chairman officially asked the aggrieved man to appeal the verdict to Ọkọnkọ for a fresh retrial. The entire group left the hall just as the first woman did.

The third proceeding was between two men from Umuajata in Olokoru. It was a land case. The plaintiff questioned the verdict on the land dispute whose verdict was in favour of the defendant. The defendant presented the verdict document to the Panel. The Panel studied it briefly, asked the two men some vital questions. The defendant maintained that the plaintiff was on ground when the verdict was given many years ago. The plaintiff said he was actually on ground but at present the plaintiff, not an observer he was then. The chairman told them that from their responses, almost all the actors and witnesses mentioned in the verdict document had died. His decision backed by his colleagues was that the two parties should go and return in a eight days time – Afoukwu. This according to him was to give the Panel enough time to study the verdict document. He categorically told them that the eight-day's sitting could only hold if the verdict document was conveniently studied by them. In other words, the sitting might not hold if they were not yet through by then. The two parties paid their appearance fees of ₦1,000.00 and left.

The fourth case was an appeal. The plaintiff to Ọkọnkọ hailed from Agbaama, another village in Olokoru. He appealed a land dispute verdict by his village's Ọkọnkọ branch. The defendant refused to appear for the day's sitting. Instead, he wrote a letter of refusal to the Ọkọnkọ, Olokoru branch through his lawyer. The letter was fully read to all by the Panel's secretary. According to the lawyer, his client refused to come because he believed in the earlier verdict which gave him the ownership of the piece of land. The decision of the chairman was not accepted by the fellow panelist. For the chairman, Olokoru Ọkọnkọ would not remove the ọmụ they put on the said land. He advised the appellant to stay away from the land for now, pending when the defendant took him to court. The majority of the panelists vehemently disagreed. According to them, for refusing to appear before them was an insult to them by the defendant who chose to write them through his lawyer. They agreed to go and remove the ọmụ from the land. For them, the defendant could then go ahead to sue the appellant if he so wished. The majority voice prevailed over the chairman's position. To this, the plaintiff cum appellant was told to pay ₦1,000.00, a fee for removing the ọmụ so that he could enter the land.

The fifth case was very short. A man from Amuzu Olokoru appealed to Olokoru Ọkọnkọ over a land issue. His relation, by-passed the boundary of his land to begin a

fence of a house. The boundary had earlier been determined by the ama ala people of the conflicting people. The defendant failed to appear. To this, the panelists asked the appellant to go and leave the rest to them to investigate.

4.4.2 Non-Participant Observation at Olokoro's Hall at Ahiaukwu, 23rd July, 2015 by Oḱonḱo Panel, Olokoro Branch

The day's session lasted for five hours – 11.00 am to 4.00 pm. It was the same number of panelists as recorded in the first session this researcher attended; four officials on the table and fifteen other members by the two sides of the frontage of the hall before the public. Each of the nineteen members seated were elected for a four-year tenure.

The chairman, Mazi Uche Onyenkwere greeted the people as follows:

Uvuoma, Nma nma nuoo!

Uvuoma, Nma nma nuoo!

Uvuoma, Nma nma nuoo!

Each time the response was 'Iyaa'. Uvuoma is the special name for Olokoro, a title that precedes the Eze (king) of Olokoro. In the same way as one will say, The 'Isama' of Benin, or 'Amajurugbo' of Opopo. Nma nma is the greeting of the people in the morning, day and night. 'Nuoo' signifies that more than a person was greeted.

All the panelists removed their caps just as every other with a cap in the audience did as the chairman briefly prayed to Almighty God whom he described as all knowing. He promised God that Oḱonḱo on that day and all the time would say the truth, and would fear nobody.

Five issues were discussed on this day, minor and major. The first person called was the man who defied their *omu* and went and erected a fence. He pleaded to be given more time to pay the ₦18,000 fine. He said he had two burials to execute and promised to pay unflinchingly on 30th August, 2015. The panel, on basis of pity gave him 12th August, 2015 to pay the fine or face the wrath of the Oḱonḱo Society. This date was given after the man had been publicly called a 'beggar' by the Oḱonḱo chairman. He, the chairman was humorous, stating that their debtor who was a 'powerful law-breaker' had now become sober and now pleading.

* * *

The second case was between a pastor and his elder brother over land in Umuahia township. The older man's brother was the accused. He brought a letter which was read to all from his lawyer. According to the letter, the accused would not honour or submit himself to Ọkọnkọ's arbitration panel because the said land was under the state capital in Umuahia.

In his response, the chairman condemned the letter and announced that the said lawyer, an Olokoro man had once brought his personal land dispute to Olokoro Ọkọnkọ panel and wondered why he was now seeing the same society as incapable. He faulted the lawyer's assertion that because the land in question was in the town, the Olokoro Society could not discuss it. The verdict was that the *omu* should be removed by Ọkọnkọ for the pastor was the plaintiff or appellant. On the other hand, the chairman advised the accused to sue his pastor brother if he so wished – promising that Ọkọnkọ would testify at the court. The pastor paid the statutory ₦1,000.00 for *ito omu* (removing of palm frond).

* * *

The third case was a border problem. A man appealed to Ọkọnkọ Society complaining that two men had by-passed the borders between them. One of the accused was present and said he had done nothing of such. The Ọkọnkọ ruling was that on the absence of the second accused, they would still go and inspect the borders between the plaintiff and the accused physically present. Their reason was that in the course of doing so, the second accused could come out to answer for his own case. The plaintiff had pleaded that the society should come for the inspection of the borders when all the two accused were present. The chairman rejected that plea. The two parties were told to leave immediately and wait for them as they, Ọkọnkọ would inspect the borders immediately after the day's session. Before the two parties left, they were advised to clear the borders or be fined should the panel inspect it in a bushy state.

* * *

The fifth case was a full land case session. The two families in conflict came from two different hamlets in Itu Olokoro – Umuahia hamlet and Ngbeda-ala hamlet. The procedures were as follows:

- The two families were called out. Each party was asked to name their chief speaker.
- The chairman asked them to name their witnesses. The names were mentioned.
- The chairman told all the mentioned witnesses to leave the hall immediately because it was unethical for them to hear the statements.
- The plaintiff chief speaker first gave his statement. No interruptions. The speaker must be slow enough for the secretary to record his statement.
- The accused asked some questions, relevant ones. Any irrelevant questions were stopped by the table.
- The panelists asked eight questions. Four from each of the two sides – left and right. The questions must be garmen. The respondent must not tell stories. Yes or no answers.

* * *

The accused chief speaker made her statement. Originally, it was the partner's elder mother that the children picked. She was too emotional. The chairman of the panel had earlier shown concern over the choice. But he could not oppose their choice. On the way, the mother was changed and the first son took over the statement. The mother stopped after asking the vital questions to the plaintiff. The chairman commended the change of leadership with a proverb, *Nwoko anaghi ano na ulo, nwanyi avoo ishi*. Which translates to, a man cannot be at home and leave a woman to unearth a buried charm.

The chairman encouraged the parties to put heads together before asking questions or answering questions. That their speakers should only speak their collective voices. In his words, he used a proverb to buttress his point. *Anwuta si na oka nma ina ata aru na abu* (The mosquito said it is better to bite in twos).

When the accused speaker finished, the first procedures were followed,

- questions from the plaintiff
- questions from the panelists

During the session, a man was fined ₦500.00 for going to the accused party to confide something to them. The chairman warned him severely and told him not to disrespect the Ọkọnkọ anymore.

Because the speaker for the plaintiffs was very old, panel allowed him throughout to speak sitting down. The accused party's elderly mother, was allowed to sit down too when she asked her questions. But for their old age, nobody was allowed to speak sitting, except those at the table.

The chairman and his panelists had a brief discussion and he announced the day of the land inspection to be 27th July, 2015 by 10.00 am. According to him all the statements and questions made and raised on this day would be put to test on the inspection day. He also said that the witnesses would testify on the inspection of land date.

* * *

A report on the land inspection and verdict on the third case of the day on a border conflict between the plaintiff and two his kinsmen.

The panel at the end of the session proceeded to the lands where the borders, normally called *oke* were the bones of contention. They did not go to the lands on the same day 23rd July, 2015 as promised due to a heavy rain. They went there the next day, 24th July, 2015 in the afternoon. The lands were situated at Ihie, Olokoru. They were *oru elu elu*, meaning, farms farm from the houses. Farms situated near the houses are *oru uhu*.

As predicted by the chairman of the panel, the second accused who did not appear at the session the previous day was around to welcome the panel. He apologized for not coming and his reason was clear to the panel. He was ill and looked pale. The panel did not sanction him, rather said sorry to him. He managed to be at the lands for Ọkọnkọ's inspection. This researcher witnessed everything having disguised as one of the ama ala people there to witness the inspections.

4.4.3 The Process of Land Inspection

The plaintiff showed the panel his own portion of the land, lying at the middle of the three lands. The man who was physically at the panel session was at the left border.

On the other hand, the man that was ill was at the right border. The panel scrutinized the borders first from the right border and then to the left. The culture of the people is that sharing of lands starts from the right. From what the panel saw and observed, the truth was so clear to them. They were sure of their findings and subsequent verdict that they did not even have the need to call on the witnesses that were meant to testify for each of the parties.

The verdict was as follows:

- that the man at the right border was actually the person who lost some space – about eight feet; meaning that the plaintiff was even the benefactor of the faulty borders;
- that the man at the left border did not in any way, encroach into the plaintiff's land and therefore not guilty of what he was accused of;
- the plaintiff was categorically told he was not encroached upon, but a benefactor, and therefore had no reason to complain.

Each of the three men accepted the Ọkọkọ Panel verdict and thanked them for their quick intervention. Each of the three parties paid some amount of legal fee to the Ọkọkọ panel.

4.4.4 Non-Participant Observation of the land settlement by Ọkọkọ Society at Itu Olokoro on 27th July, 2015 between the appellants, the Umezurumbas from the Amaubakiriba and the defendants, the Nnuukwus of Ngbedeala – two and kindsmen from Itu

This report is a follow up of the judgment which was first called up and statements made with cross examinations by the two parties at Olokoro Hall before the Ọkọkọ panelists on 24th July, 2015. The present observation was for land inspection, findings and verdict.

The meeting at Itu Hall began at 11.00 am, an hour behind schedule because of the day's early showers of rain. Fifteen panelists were present, of which four were those at the table. The others were at the two sides of the hall. Before the panelists were the umunna of the two hamlets. This researcher sat in the midst of the umunna.

The chairman, Mazi Uche Onyekwere began with a loud greetings:

Ezechi, nma nma nuo!
Uvuoma, nnm, nma nuo!

The first greeting was meant for the umu nna of Itu. The Itu people are known and referred as 'Ezechi'. On the other hand, 'Uvuoma' is the appellation for Olokoru people. The chairman called on an elder man from Itu to pray and commit everything in God's hand. Everything was in Igbo, in fact, in Olokoru dialect. The old man used a popular Igbo proverb while praying:

'Egbe beru ugo beru, nke si ibe ya eberu, nku kwaya'
(Let the hawk and the eagle perch, may the wings of whichever of them that prevents the other from perching break)

Prayers done with, the panelists inspected the things that two parties put before them as cola and drinks. The chairman questioned the inclusion of meat by the two parties. He argued that the list given to the two parties did not include meat. The chairman maintained that his tenure since 2010 cancelled meat and cooking of food for security reasons. According to him, when you eat much meat and food, there were as tendency you might forget your senses and not focus on people and justice. The two parties apologized and said they had no ulterior motives. Each party said they would join in eating the meat with all. The chairman accepted their apologies, their explanations and promised to eat with all.

Each of the parties provided the following:

- A good quantity of palm wine
- Two bottles of Seaman Gin
- *Oji Igbo* (Igbo kola nuts)
- *Anara* (garden eggs)
- Legal fee of ₦10,000.00.

Before the sharing of the drinks, the chairman passionately and vehemently warned that whoever, no matter his or her status who would not eat or drink in that hall must leave the hall immediately. He warned Christians fasting to break it or leave. He told those to share the *anara*, meat and drinks to report whoever did not put something in his or her mouth, and warned that anybody who saw a person refusing to join in eating or

drinking was doing so to his detriment. This researcher had to eat meat, anara and drank some palmwine to comply and be in the hall. The exercise that all must eat or drink was a covenant and unity to say the truth and live in peace.

The chairman at 11.45 a.m, ordered that the hall be shut and everybody headed to the ten-kilometer distant *Ọba Ogugu* farmland. The farms took their name from the stream, *Ọba Ogugu* which was crossed before the farms. Some went to the farm on motorcycle, tricycles, and buses. All stopped at the stream, *Ọba Ogugu* and then crossed on foot.

The Land Inspection

The Uwazurumbas, the plaintiffs showed the Ọkọnkọ panelists the large land in dispute. Inside the land, there was prayer to God and everybody removed his cap – the panelists inclusive. After this, the chairman knelt on the land, pressed the land with his right hand and made pronouncement known as *igọ ọfọ*. He called on the land to

- kill the appellant, the defendant, the witness/es or even the panelist/s who would see the truth and refuse to say it;
- kill whoever would come later to plant any *nshi* (poison) against the eventual winners;
- kill any umu nna who would later wish to mislead any of the conflicting parties.

The loud response was ‘Amen’. He made sure the appellants said ‘Amen’. Nobody was allowed to come to the farmland with machete. A certain man who came with a machete was reminded of such instruction and a panelist (the provost politely took it and went very far to keep it with those near the stream).

The appellants’ chief speaker, an old man gave authority to a younger man to show the judges round the farm. The chairman said the old man must give an oral authority before them and for it to be recorded. The new spokesman took the judge round the four borders of the land. Questions ranging from the names of their border neighbours to whether or not their kindred people have lands around them were asked. He answered them and the secretary recorded everything. They were asked to go home and stay at the hall. Their witnesses failed to turn up.

The accused or defendants were called. The chairman bodily reminded them off the *ofo* earlier made on the land. He monitored their saying 'Amen' to the pronouncements. The Nnuukwu avoidably had to change their spokesmen as well. The *opara*, who had to replace their mother at 24th July session, gave an oral authority before the panelists that his younger brother would show the panelists round the four borders of the vast land. The same questions asked the plaintiffs were repeated to him and he answered them and they were recorded. One unique question of the panelists asked him was if his father told them the amount they received for the partial sales of the land, and he said out *njemma* (one pound). *Ikpa ibe* in the culture of Umuahia is a situation whereby the owner of a land takes some money from the other party for him to farm on the land for a period of time, after which the real owner returns the money so that he reclaims his land.

They Nnuukwus were sent out and their two witnesses were called. The chairman reminded them of the standing *ofo* on the land. The two said 'Amen'; one of the two witnesses stood for both and took the panelists round the land borders. All his testimonies were recorded. The witnesses were told to leave for the hall.

The *Okoŋko* panel chairman under the heavy rains addressed all. He said he and his members would not want any of the two kindred to speak or testify. This was to forestall enmities. He said within the kindred, there were Judases. If any one spoke, his testimony might be used against him by the family that would lose. He said the judgment would be entirely theirs – the *Okoŋko* panelists based on what the land itself has revealed to them. With this pronouncement, everybody departed the farmland for the Itu Hall for the verdict.

The Return to the Itu Hall

When everybody was seated at about 2.10 p.m, the chairman thanked all and said that the rains made them not have their brainstorming (*izuzu*) at the farm site. He pleaded that all but the panelists should go out from the hall for them to put heads together. The *izuzu* lasted for an hour and everybody was called again.

The Verdict

The chairman before making their findings known and their verdict, he thanked all for the cooperation given to them so far. He particularly saluted the parties in conflict for keeping peace so far and advised that same peace be maintained after the final verdict.

Before itemizing the findings, he made a proverb which brought silence to every corner of the hall.

Ugo eberule na ngbagbu. The literal translation is ‘the eagle has finally perched to be shot dead’.

The findings were as follows according to the chairman:

1. that they discovered that the land in question was hanging in the midst of lands being owned by the Nnukwus kindred;
2. that they discovered that the land in question had actually been held in trust of *ikpa ibe* because the kindred of Nwaubakiriba do not have lands from the *Oba Ogugu* stream to the other stream in front.

Verdict

- The panel asked the Nnukwus, the defendants to give the plaintiffs the sum of ₦50,000 after the plaintiffs, the Umezurumbas, would have finished harvesting all the things in the farm;
- that the Umezurumbas should hand off from the farm after the present farming season, 2015;
- that the Nnukwus are the real owners of the land.

On the last statement, the chairman asked his fellow panelists if what he said was what they all agreed. All of them said, ‘Eeeee’, (an affirmation of ‘yes’) and as they responded, they stood in unison and left the *ulo ezumezu* (the hall) without talking or looking at anybody.

.....

In the above non-participant observations this researcher undertook, it became clear to understand what the interviewees and the discussants of the focus group discussions were saying concerning brainstorming (*izuzu*) during conflict management. This exercise was

repeatedly observed by the researcher. It is encouraged for collective responsibility both by the Ọkọnkọ panelists and the members of the conflicting parties.

The following summary or table summarizes the outcome of the cases witnessed.

29 June, 2015

Case 1

A woman who had previously reported her debtor to Ọkọnkọ was advised to sue her debtor if she so wished but that they, Ọkọnkọ could not pursue the case even though they verified that the debt was real because Ọkọnkọ does not entertain financial crimes or crimes.

Case 2

A man contesting the will of a late brother who willed his land to a second brother other than the plaintiff who argued that it was he who took care of the dead man in his sickbed and deserved the land. The judgment was to stick to the will which the aggrieved rejected. Ọkọnkọ agreed to retry the case when the plaintiff vehemently maintained his stand.

Case 3

A case which Ọkọnkọ accepted to study the document of land settlement which took place a long time ago and which the plaintiff was demanding a retrial claiming he was an observer when the matter was resolved but at present a party. Ọkọnkọ told them to give it (Ọkọnkọ) ample time to understudy the document before it before taking a decision.

Case 4

A village Ọkọnkọ verdict was being contested against by the plaintiff. The defendant refused to appear, instead sent a letter through his lawyer to argue that he stood on the

earlier verdict. The Ọkọnkọ panel felt insulted by the letter, claiming the defendant should have appeared in person.

Case 5

A complaint from from a plaintiff against a relation who by-passed a border determined by *ama ala* and built a fence. Ọkọnkọ promised to investigate it.

23 July, 2015

Case 1

A brought forward from 29 June, 2015 last case. The man who by-pasaed a border to build a fence appeared before Ọkọnkọ. He was fined N18,000 for not appearing in the last sitting.

Case 2

A land dispute between a pastor (plaintiff) and his elder brother. The disputed land is in Umuahia city, not in the village. The defendant refused to submit to Ọkọnkọ's invitation because to him, the land is outside Ọkọnkọ Olokoro jurisdiction. Ọkọnkọ advised the plaintiff to sue his brother if he wished after showing displeasure for non-appearance of the defendant.

Case 3

Dispute over land borders involving three men. Ọkọnkọ promised to visit the site. It was later done and it resolved to the satisfaction of the three men.

Case 4

A plaintiff consulted Ọkọnkọ on behalf of his brother while the accused was the brother of the defendant. Ọkọnkọ dismissed the case with the proverb, *Onye ozi anaghi atu ilu* (A messenger does not speak in proverbs.)

Case 5

A full land case session between the Umezurumbas (plaintiffs) and the Nnukwus (defendants) The two parties gave testimonies. After the testimonies, Ọkọnkọ slated a date for the land inspection and verdict.

27 July, 2015

A Land Inspection and Final verdict of the land dispute which began on 23 July, 2015. At the end of the inspections, Ọkọnkọ's verdict was as follows;

- The Umezurumbas, the plaintiffs lost the case
- The Nnukwuus, the defendants won the case.

.....

Conclusion:

What makes Ọkọnkọ unique is the fact that it is accepted even by non members over its role in investigating land disputes as recorded in all the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observations. On the high cost of hosting Ọkọnkọ, it depends on the panelists' regime. For instance, in Olokoro, the regime studied frowned at cooking for them. But this is not so in Ibeku and Ubakala where respondents clearly said that food and drinks were needed to host Ọkọnkọ. There was uniformity that *Ọmu* is the most important symbol of Ọkọnkọ because it is the unique symbol that announces the presence of Ọkọnkọ. There was also a unanimous voice on the role of proverbs in Ọkọnkọ's conflict management in particular and in Igbo peace studies in general. All respondents agreed that proverbs make conflict management more colourful due to their brevity and deep philosophical meaning.

However, for sustainable peace in today's modern world, it is important Ọkọnkọ reforms. The most important aspect that needs reformation is the issue of iri olu. It is tyrannical for a group to visit a perceived offender and begin to destroy such persons property and

eating such a fellow's food for a number of days as recounted by two respondents. One who has stepped on *Ọkọnkọ* can be fined but not to be humiliated and impoverished.

From the non-participant data of the proceedings of *Ọkọnkọ* in the researcher's observations, it is clear that what matters to *Ọkọnkọ* is not actually who wins but how discipline is maintained in the community. *Ọkọnkọ*'s verdict can as well be win-win situation as observed in the case of three men whose border conflict was amicably resolved. And of course, *Ọkọnkọ*'s verdict can as well be win-lose situation as in the last last land dispute verdict.

4.5 Research Findings

1. *Ọkọnkọ* serves as Appellant Court when conflict management fails at ama ala level.
2. *Ọkọnkọ* serves as a watchdog.
3. For easy conflict management, the Umuahia people depend on their language and culture.
4. Igbo language and culture dictates the people's thought and reality.
5. *Ọmụ* and *Uhie* are the emblem and language of *Ọkọnkọ* Society.
6. Proverbs are the people's instrument for passing complex messages and giving final verdict.

4.6 Summary of the Findings

On questions one, the major findings showed that the conflict management in most parts of Umuahia are handled with the involvement of the *Ọkọnkọ* society. Even though the ama ala people have the primary role of managing conflicts, especially land disputes, more often than not, the disputants appeal to *Ọkọnkọ* to step in due to their impartiality and thoroughness. *Ọkọnkọ* society basically serves as watchdog. They normally wade in when peace and order are in doubt. In other words, they police the communities and have

the authority to discipline anybody found wanting. Ọkọnkọ society also administers *idunshi* (oathtaking) as a last resort to determine the truth and peace.

On language and culture of the people, the findings highlighted one unique thing – that the people are at home with Igbo language and their numerous cultures and traditions. The reasons include the fact that the people of Umuahia communicate with ease using asusu Igbo. On their culture, they also feel at home because the culture is part and parcel of them. Their language and culture makes them what they are, leads them to think as a people, and have a focus as a peculiar people different from others with different languages and cultural backgrounds.

For the finding of questions three, the meaning and symbolisms of *ọmu* (palm frond) and *uhie* (musical instrument) are so sacrosanct that these two symbolisms form the emblem of the Ọkọnkọ society. The *ọmu* stands for peace and authority. On *uhie* its numerous bearding sounds and tones, tell different information – good and bad ones.

Question four which centres on the role of proverbs in the people's conflict management dispensation has a major finding. The use of proverbs by the conflict managers, witnesses *et al* is an instrument that leads to a faster verdict. The use of proverbs measures one's level of oratory, wisdom and precision. Verbosity is not a good 'commodity' in Igbo conflict management sessions. Because Igbo proverbs highlight ancestral and cultural facts of the Igbo people, proverbs are indispensable to the people. Achebe's assertion that proverb are the oil with which an Igboman eats with is most correct in the present context.

The entire drawn findings in this work have shown that the Ọkọnkọ society is essential in the social and legal lives of the people of Umuahia. They are relevant because they respect the language and culture of the people. All their practices and utterances and symbolisms are built on asusu Igbo and *ome n'ala* Igbo (Igbo language and culture).

The finding that Ọkọnkọ serves as Court of Appeal when the *ama ala* cannot manage a conflict between members of a kindred is very obvious. An appeal is made when one of the parties in conflict is not convinced that he has been fairly judged. An appeal court is normally a higher court. Whenever Ọkọnkọ gives a verdict against the previous one by the *ama ala*, it cannot be questioned. It stands.

It is also evident in the question of the second finding that the Ọkọnkọ society from history has been a kind of government that controls the land. Even before the advent of the colonial regime, Ọkọnkọ had acted as a watchdog. And from what the researcher saw during his non-participant observations, the society is highly respected and they are fearless. Even the modern police respect and cooperate with them for order to prevail in the communities.

On the finding that the Umuahia people depend on their language and culture for easy conflict management, the following are proofs. One, they speak Igbo language during conflict in management sessions. They use appropriate proverbs to suit the cultural beliefs that peace is much better than conflict. They also depend in *igọ ọfọ* and administration of oath to instill fear in the people to say the truth. All this put together, tells a lot on how the people depend on their language, asusu Igbo and culture for peace and justice.

The fourth finding which states that the people's language and culture dictates their thought pattern and worldview is derived from the third finding. This fourth finding is like a practical illustration of how dependence on one's language and culture could shape the individual's life. For instance, a palm front when hung anywhere instils fear and reference. The people's reality about the hung palm front is very different from any other people's view of the palm front, the Yoruba and Hausa for instance. The proverbs, the *ọfọ* prayer and *idu nshi* (oath taking) are cultural instruments that make a man from the Igbo nation different from say, an American or a Jew.

The fifth finding which says that *ọmu* and *uhie* are the emblem and language of Ọkọnkọ society cannot be overemphasized. Semiotically, the *ọmu* is the symbolism that Ọkọnkọ is around, Ọkọnkọ is in session, and that Ọkọnkọ's 'flag' has been hoisted. In itself, *ọmu* is powerful. However, the language portrayed by *ọmu* is musically spread by *uhie*. From the data gathered, *uhie* has many sounds. Each sound signifies one language of communication from the other. The two symbols, *ọmu* and *uhie* stand for authority (for *ọmu*) and action (for *uhie*).

The last finding, the sixth says that the people studied in this research, the Igbo nation pass complex messages with the use of proverbs. This is true because being literal

at times is not enough to pass across complex messages. The use of proverbs creates some imagery that are cultural for better interpretation of what is being conveyed. Giving final verdict is tasking. To reduce tension, proverbs are used so that it serves as a euphemism. In other words, the proverbs are a bridge between the simple and complex messages. That is, a simple way of conveying a complex message.

The above six findings derived from the four objectives and questions of the research have given one a clear meaning of language and cultural dynamics in the context of Okonko society in the conflict management in Umuahia, Abia State of Nigeria.

CHAPTER FIVE

Analysis of Semiotic Symbols and Proverbs

This segment of the research tries to address two issues. One, a suggested semiotic interpretations of basic symbols and instruments by the Ọkọnkọ society with the view to determining their real cultural and linguistic relevance. Two, the researcher gives a hermeneutical interpretation of the proverbs the respondents raised and partially (in some) during the interviews, FGD and even in the non-participant observation. The study in the second issue tries to interpret the proverbs (all in Umuahia dialects) from socio-cultural and linguistic perspectives of the people of Umuahia.`

5.1 The Semiotic Symbols of Ọkọnkọ

1. *Ọmụ*

Ọmụ to the man on the street is a palm frond. But to the Ọkọnkọ society, *ọmụ* is a physical, legal, and spiritual symbolism. *Ọmụ* is the flag of the Ọkọnkọ society. It is respected, honoured and revered as done to national flags of countries. *Ọmụ* is the first language of the Ọkọnkọ society. Its physical outlook differs from its ancestral and spiritual significance.

2. *Uhie/Ikpo/Abia*

Each of these instruments is a medium of communication. The three instruments form the Ọkọnkọ media. *Uhie* (wooden) is arguably the most popular. It forms the emblem of Ọkọnkọ society with *ọmụ*. *Ikpo* is a metal gong while *Abia* is a special drum whose sound is intimidating and instills fear. It seems the *Ikpo* is for in-house use for initiations of new members during *idi iyi* (baptism) and *ikpu-ulo* (confirmation) which confirms a person as *ezumezu* (a full fledged Ọkọnkọ man).

3. *Ọfọ*

Ọfọ is both a concept and an action. For the former, *ọfọ* is a wooden instrument which symbolises authority and spirituality. Holding the *ọfọ* is like holding a covenant box. It stands for truth, integrity and impartiality. The latter meaning of *ọfọ* is an *action*

where utterances are made using strong words that depict swearing, prayer, and even a curse for whoever errs or misleads the others.

4. *Ọba*

The elders prefer to drink with *oba*, a special deep local cup made from *oba* tuber. In Ọkọnkọ, they drink using one *oba* during meetings and occasions. The *oba* stands for naturality, oneness, and trust. When it falls, it hardly breaks.

5. *Okpu Ekwurugwu*

This cap depicts completeness, an identity. No Ọkọnkọ member attends an occasion without it. During conflict managements, land inspections, funeral services, it is the unique thing that marks an Ọkọnkọ man out.

6. *Nzu* (white chalk)

Though *nzu* is relatively alien to Ọkọnkọ Society, it is a common symbolism for peace. A visitor picks it from his host's table and uses it to make a mark on himself. The sign made and the chalk itself speak one thing: 'I came for peace and with peace'. The chalk or *nzu* is a unique language of peace.

7. *Abuba Ugo* (Eagle's feather)

The Igbo culture sees the eagle as a unique bird, the king of all birds. *Abuba ugo* is a synecdoche being seen as the whole or entirety of the eagle. Sticking *abuba ugo* in one's cap creates the imagery of honour, greatness, integrity and attainment to the apex.

8. *Ọji Igbo* (Igbo kola nut)

Ọji Igbo is like a covenant. *Ọji Igbo* is the centre of Igbo culture. Kola generally in Igbo culture is held in high esteem and it is believed coal understands Igbo language alone. *Ọji Igbo* in particular is the Igbo culture. It is used for traditional marriages, sacrifices and ọfọ practice.

One can break ordinary kola with knife. This is not so for *Ọji Igbo*. It is broken with the bare hands and it could comprise four, six or more parts or lobes (*ibé*). The more the

lobes, a piece of Igbo kola nut has, the better the symbolism it represents for a given occasion.

9. *Uha* tree

Many homes have *uha* tree. Some merely see it as a mere tree that produces the *uha* leaf which is used in cooking *ofe uha* (*uha* soup). Beyond this is the fact that the *uha* tree has a spiritual significance. The tree hardly dies. After years, its leaves wither and it reproduces again. The tree of *uha* is also seen in shrines. It symbolises long life.

10. *Ekpete* (drum)

In *Ọkọnkọ* in particular, the six drums are voices. They have different voices. They speak one language. They communicate with themselves. They produce a rhythm that move people to dance. They produce a rhythm that pushes the masquerades to act and entertain. *Ekpete*, small or big is a symbolism for music. They entertain.

11. *Atang* (a big bell)

The *atang* is spiritual. One can see it as the forerunner as one swings it front and back while walking. Its clinging sound announces that the masquerades will soon be coming out. The traditional bard or poet swinging it with excitement speaks in proverbs, praising and apostrophising the ancestors. Using the modern language, the *atang* can be seen as the pilot, the siren.

12. *Nkpara*

The *nkpara* are sticks used in demarcating the boundaries of one farmland from the other. They are both symbols and signs. Whoever adjusts them is seen as a criminal. In fact, touching the *nkpara* with the intention of falsifying the boundary can cause death. The *nkpara* are seen as sacred because they are collectively created. *Nkpara* can also be seen as covenant. They can only be shifted collectively by the *umu nna* or *Ọkọnkọ*.

13. Masquerades

In Igbo culture, the masquerades are symbolisms and intermediaries between the living and the ancestors. The disguise is symbolic of the spirits of the dead. In *Ọkọnkọ*

society, the members have a special language they use to greet the masquerades. Only them understand.

14. *Ji* (Yam)

Yam is a symbolism for Igbo culture and tradition. It is not seen as a mere food but a culture. In many Igbo communities, New Yam Festival is celebrated yearly to celebrate the harvesting of yam. There is even a title '*Eze ji*' (king of yam) for some people who wish to identify with the world of yam. In Oḱonḱo, their *Oḱwukwu* main food is yam pepper soup, *miri oḱu ji*.

When a woman's dowry is paid and food eaten by the two parties, the father of the new bride presents a big yam to his daughter to carry it as a baby. What this implies is that yam symbolizes fertility. The new bride cooks the food when she gets to her husband's home. Eating the yam facilitates fertility.

15. Gun shots/Cannon

The booming of gun cannons, *ntu ala* and the flames they produce mean a lot. The booming of the gun or cannon in itself is a message that an important thing has begun or concluded. The flames or smokes stand for power that consumes. During *Oḱwukwu* (funeral service), the *ntu ala* are filled with some dry leaves and sand and buried in the ground. Gun powders are spread to each of the *ntu ala* and they boom noisily when fire is placed on the gun powder which moves to trigger the *ntu ala*.

16. *Mmanyi ngwo* (Palm wine)

Palm wine is synonymous with the Igbo culture. Some parts of Igbo also use *mmanyi nkwu* (palm tree wine). The latter is very expensive and not as popular and significant as *mmanyi ngwo*, the palm wine proper. Palm wine symbolises happiness. People drink it and be merry. Again palm wine is an instrument with which ancestors are spoken with. It is used in libations.

17. Crossing of legs

Crossing of legs is seen as a mark of insult in Ọkọnkọ gatherings. In conflict management sessions involving Ọkọnkọ members or panelists, Ọkọnkọ frowns at leg crossing. Whoever crosses his leg is cautioned or fined outright. They see it as a sign depicting act of disrespect, intimidation and arrogance.

18. Standing akimbo

Elders can stand akimbo before their children. It depicts affluence, authority and self-confidence. However, for a child to stand akimbo before his parents or elders is despised. Such posture is a sign of rudeness, being proud and insensitive. Standing akimbo is therefore a type of horizontal communication (elders against elders) and vertical (superior against a junior).

19. Supporting the jaw with hand

This posture depicts despondency, confusion and a sign of loss. This posture attracts people to begin to ask questions whether one has suffered some misfortune. It therefore, translates sorrowfulness, hopelessness, regret, despondency and loss.

20. Holding the head with one's two hands

This posture depicts hopelessness. It is akin to supporting the jaw with hand.

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In the foregoing, we have discussed both physical and mental symbolisms in the Igbo cultural worldview with the intention to underlining the fact that the Igbo have peculiar semiotics that are unique to them and which aid in defining their spiritual, social, political, and even economic ways of life. Semiotics being one of the three theoretical frameworks of the study outlined in the literature has as in the twenty analysed examples above conformed with the definitions and analyses of renown semioticians that include Aristotle, St Augustine and John Locke were among early exponents of semiotics (Sebeok 2001:4).

The Igbo signs and symbols and their representations in the cultural perspective of the people go a long way to justifying what was studied in literature that ‘Semioticians only agree on one thing – signs and their meaning. They are like philosophers. Philosophers believe in knowledge but understand knowledge from various perspectives. For semioticians, they see signs and their meaning from scientific, cultural, linguistic, medical, biological and even zoological angle of which Thomas Sebeok (1920 – 2001) is known for.’ In our situation, the Igbo cum Ọkọnkọ signs and symbols are cultural and linguistically based. One imagines how a palm frond becomes a source of authority for the Ọkọnkọ. One imagines how a local cup, *oba* stands for oneness and trust, one begins to understand how Igbo kola nut is seen as a covenant without which no event in Igboworld can begin. In the same vein, the *uha* tree the *nkpara* (the stick for demarcating borders), the masquerades, the yam tuber, the sound of gun shots and cannon, and of course, the palm wine all have a unique meaning based on Igbo semiotic cultural interpretations to conform with their worldview socially and spiritually. No two cultures may view the symbols in the same manner as the Igbo. This supports de Moretin (2011:148) position that interpretation or act of interpreting is an operation which involves observation. Observation in the sense that a culture would have socially and spiritually observed certain signs and symbols as in the Igbo ones discussed above before coming up with what meanings they portray semiotically. This position justifies another literature on the difference between signs and interpretation where Danesi (2004:16) posits that ‘The brain’s capacity to produce and understand signs is called semiosis, while the knowledge-making activity that capacity allows all human beings to carry out is known as representation.’

The studied semiotics generated in this study, twenty of them have shown that the cultural and linguistic view of the Igbo are meant for the unique meaning of themselves and their environment socially, politically and spiritually. In other words, a symbol may have a dual meaning depending from the angle being view. For instance, the *uha* tree is physically a tree that produces the leave used in preparing *uha* soup. However, the

spiritual angle of what uha tree stands for takes a complete interpretation and representation – longevity or life itself, hence it is found in shrines where spiritual deliberations are discussed.

5.2 The Hermeneutics of the Proverbs Collected

For the thirty interpreted proverbs (all generated from the interviews, focus group discussions and non-participant observations), below are all of them with their suggested literal and connotative meaning. The table is followed by cases studies using some of the generated proverbs so as to critique them with the view to linking them to the body of literature. Most of the proverbs were generated during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Just very few were generated during Oḳonkọ conflict management sessions during the non-participant observations during the sessions in the town halls and farmland.

Igbo Proverbs	Literal meaning	Connotative meaning
1. <i>Otile nlemere onwenye anya, ya lo nkpuru udara</i>	Let the anus which has looked at itself very well, go and swallow <i>udara</i> 's seed.	This proverb instills fear and encourages one to be ethical for his good and goodwill. The belief is that <i>udara</i> seed will damage the anus when being excreted. In other words, why swallow or eat what will cause you harm or even death? The <i>udara</i> seed in this context may be engaging in all kinds of social vices. Every vice – stealing, backbiting, <i>et al</i> is capable of exposing one to shame and 'Had I known'. <i>Udara</i> seed when swallowed does not digest. So <i>udara</i> seed symbolises vice which does not benefit the one that swallowed it and the community he lives in. <i>Udara</i> seed ends up tearing one's anus. The pain when one's anus is torn by <i>udara</i> seed is borne not by the community, but by the fellow alone. It is therefore unethical to engage in what will harm one.

<p>2. <i>Ana eru eru na anu nmanyi Ori</i></p>	<p>One has to come to age before drinking <i>Orie</i> drink.</p>	<p><i>Orie</i> is one of the Igbo days. For instance, the people of Ibeku and Ubakala hold <i>Orie</i> in a high esteem. They observe their New Yam Festival on <i>Orie</i> day. The people of Olokoro main day is Afo. The people of Olokoro hold Afoukwu in a high esteem (all their conflict management sessions by their panelists normally hold on Afoukwu. That one must be of age to drink <i>nmanyi Ori</i> implies that one must show enough integrity and commitment before being allowed to partake in a serious business or discussion. For example, an <i>okpo</i> (an uninitiated) is not good enough and will not be allowed to sit and discuss with <i>Okonko</i> members in sessions involving the group. A boy of twenty could sit with elders in a place fenced by <i>omu</i> (palm frond) as far as the boy is an <i>Okonko</i> member just as the elders. However, a hundred year-old man not part of <i>Okonko</i> need not be reminded he should not get near the <i>omu</i> guarded enclave, let alone sitting with or drinking with those found there.</p>
<p>3. <i>Okuko nno nuhu anaghi aha mara, ya buo ne ezi, ya ha mara</i></p>	<p>A home chicken does not produce fats at home, but does so when it is outside.</p>	<p>This proverb has a universal undertone, that a king is not respected in his kingdom. The meaning here is culturally based – that when some</p>

		<p>decisions are made internally by siblings, they may not be binding for a long time. But when outsiders help in the decision making or agreement, there is better tendency that the decision(s) reached will be respected.</p>
4. <i>Nkpisi nwe eze, ma eze ya</i>	A toothpick knows the teeth that fit it.	This proverb preaches doing something right. It encourages appropriateness. When a child, for instance, uses a big toothpick meant for an adult, he will surely hurt himself so that the teeth would bleed. The proverb reminds one of the English popular idiom, 'A square peg in a square hole'.
5. <i>Ogu anaghi avo anu</i>	The hoe does not dissect a dead animal.	This proverb encourages that things be done properly. A knife is appropriate for easy dissection of a dead animal by butchers. No matter how good a butcher is, it is impossible to use it to cut a dead animal into pieces. The proverb focuses on ethics of the culture being maintained for positive results.
6. <i>Onwegi nwa Aru na amaghi ibeya</i>	There is no Aru child that does not know the other.	<i>Aru</i> here is an utopian world which does not exist in reality. It does not mean <i>Aru</i> , the abridged form of

		<p>Aruchukwu in Abia State and with many descendants in Imo State. The Igbo are these imagined <i>Aru</i>. The proverb implies that nobody is an island. What one knows is extended to the other so that all the people become knowledgeable. The proverb fosters unity. Put another way, the proverb means that nobody can play tricks with the rest of the community. The reason being that they live together, drink the same water, speak the same language and guided by the same culture. So the proverb reminds everybody to be mindful of what he does since the community knows better an individual than the individual knows a single individual.</p>
<p>7. <i>Nku nno na mba neherewe ji</i></p>	<p>A people use their local firewood to roast their yam.</p>	<p><i>Ji</i> (yam), is the most cultural food in the Igboworld. Yam is used for sacrifices, yam is the centre of New Yam festivals, the worth of a man was in the olden days known by the amount of yams he had in his <i>oba</i> (barn). <i>Ji</i> in this context could mean a metaphor depicting a people's problems and challenges. <i>Nku</i> (firewood) is also a metaphor for instrument that is used to achieve one's goal. <i>Nku</i> here may represent the people's culture and tradition. For instance, the Umuahia people use <i>Okonko</i> as their (<i>nku</i>: culture) to roast their <i>ji</i> (to deal</p>

		with their problems and to check bad behaviours). So, no matter how primitive a culture looks and sounds, as far as it helps the people solve their problems and foster togetherness, this proverb is sensible and sensitive.
8. <i>Onye ozi anaghi atu ilu</i>	A messenger does not speak in proverbs.	Since proverbs are complex expressions, this present proverb preaches simplicity. A messenger in this context could mean a subject or a worker. In other words, the proverb means that those who should not take decisions should keep quiet; and let those meant for such decision making act. The proverb could also be seen as saying, 'It is wrong for one to arrogate to himself what he is not'.
9. <i>Ọnụ ogaru olee uka shiri laruiwiri?</i>	Where did the mouth go that a matter or case has gone sour?	<i>Ọnụ</i> (mouth) is used to speak, to praise, to complain, to condemn and to reconcile. The rhetorical question wonders where the mouth had gone to for a conflict to go so bad. This proverb encourages outspokenness, dialogue, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation. The proverb implies that when people refuse or fail to speak out or discuss conflicts, such conflicts escalate and threaten peace.
10. <i>Ngbe ogu ruru, nwashigwa ika onye nyuruya</i>	When time comes, an excrement will reveal who excreted it.	This proverb celebrates personification as <i>shi</i> (excrement is being personified). The proverb is also sarcastic. The proverb implies that truth will come out with time. The

		<p>proverb celebrates optimism that no matter the time it might take, the guilty one will confess so that truth will prevail. This optimism is based on apparent evidence(s) before the user of the proverb. For one to even talk about <i>Nwashi</i>, it means that an action is unethical and questionable. <i>Shi</i> should be in latrine or toilet. But the <i>shi</i> in question has been conspicuously exposed to the detriment of the public.</p>
<p>11. <i>Uka anaghi ano na afoo jonjo</i></p>	<p>A matter or case does not stay in the stomach and go bad/sour.</p>	<p>This proverb implies that a hidden conflict cannot be solved. It is therefore to make a conflict known instead of keeping it to oneself where with time it might generate to more grievous conflict. This proverb is a kind of a euphemism. This is because in actual sense, a conflict turns bad in the ‘stomach’ if not ‘vomited’ for dialogue, negotiation or mediation. An Euphemism apart, it can also be considered in irony. A case that is hidden in the ‘stomach’ (not made public) actually could be more devastating than when actually made public. It amounts to time bomb not to discuss a hidden conflict.</p>
<p>12. <i>Ashi ka aburu, ka aburuchaa</i></p>	<p>If they/we must be, let it be to the fullest.</p>	<p>The proverb preaches total reconciliation, positive peace without conditions. Standing on the fence is not a party to this proverb. Total commitment is the message of this proverb. Deeper meaning of this proverb is that it is better to be at war</p>

		than pretending to be at peace; yet, it is best to be at real peace and unity instead of being in isolation from one another.
13. <i>Ndi nwe ala, ne eji ala</i>	Those that own the land, control the land.	The proverb says that the best or ideal people to govern and control the community are the owners of the community. In other words, there will be conflicts when external influence and powers begin to intervene in the internal affairs of a given people. The proverb can also be interpreted as meaning that the peaceful coexistence of a people is best achieved by employing the people's cultural practices and traditions. The language of the people falls into this supposition.
14. <i>Mbiarabia amaghi nga ala ruru</i>	A stranger does not know where an abomination occurred.	This proverb is in support of the immediate proverb mentioned. Because a stranger is alien to the people's culture and tradition, he, the <i>mbiarabia</i> (stranger) is incapable of the rules and regulations guiding his hosts. Due to this lack of knowledge, he is susceptible to making grievous mistakes which could put him in jeopardy.
15. <i>Onye ajuju anaghi efu uzo</i>	He that asks questions does not miss the way.	This common proverb encourages positive inquisitiveness. For one to avoid mistakes, this proverb encourages him or her to ask questions. The <i>uzo</i> (way or path) is deeper in meaning. The path includes

		<p>cultural knowledge. The proverb means that whoever seeks for knowledge hardly finds himself in unavoidable problems. The proverb is not merely for a question like, where is the way to Umuahia? Where is the road to the X stream? etc. If children ask their fathers vital questions while alive, they will not make certain mistakes like fighting for lands that do not belong to them when their parents have ceased to live.</p>
<p>16. <i>Miri atala, azu anwula</i></p>	<p>Let water dry not, and let fish die not.</p>	<p>The symbolism of water is clear in this proverb. Water is the source of life for the fish. If the water dries then the fish, the metaphor for humanity cannot survive. The proverb is a supplication, a prayer. The proverb exhibits the indispensability of water to the survival of the fish. Water in this proverb could also represent peace. Humanity survives when peace prevails, and suffers when peace turns to conflict.</p>
<p>17. <i>Na obughi oria, igafughiri ifu oto nneghi na obu nnaghi</i></p>	<p>If not bad health (sickness) one would not have seen his father or mother's nakedness.</p>	<p>This is a proverb that underscores a regret that but for sickness, one ought not to have seen the nakedness of his parents. It is an abomination for a child to seek to see his parents' nakedness for the fond of it. But in old age, sickness could render parents incapacitated that their children now bathe and clean them up. This is unavoidable at this circumstance. <i>Oria</i> (sickness) can be a symbolism here for</p>

		<p>conflict. It is conflict that causes terrible thing to happen. For instance, a child can even conspire and defraud or even murder his parents which is abomination but possible due to strife.</p>
<p>18. <i>Amadi, mezie ibegi, maka ohe nkegi</i></p>	<p>Man, treat others well because of your own day.</p>	<p><i>Amadi</i> is a fun name meaning ‘Gentleman’. When an Igbo refers to someone as <i>Nwa Amadi</i> he implies ‘A distinguished gentleman’. This particular proverb is concerned with the principles of ‘One good turn deserves another’ and ‘The way you treat others, so also will others treat you’. A good example is a situation where one does not attend other people’s functions, including funerals. On ‘Amadi’s’ turn he will be alone, and in death, many will not attend. It is an honour for a good number of the community to attend one’s funeral. The large turnout suggests that the departed lived a good life and was social.</p>
<p>19. <i>Nwata aturu ilu; kowaya, ego eji luo nneya furu efu</i></p>	<p>When a child is told a proverb, and the proverb is explained to him, the child’s mother’s dowry is worthless.</p>	<p>Like other proverbs, this very one is not literal. There is nothing wrong for one to be explained to what a particular proverb really implies. Even the masters in the act of proverbs cannot claim to understand every proverb. This proverb means that a child who does not understand basic principles of his culture and people is a shame to humanity. The dowry in Igbo is very important and spiritual. When a wife divorces her husband or simply</p>

		<p>runs away from her husband, her parents or family must first return the dowry to her estranged husband for her to be free. For a child's action or inaction to render his or her mother's dowry useless means that such a child is shameless, a disgrace and hopeless. This proverb is used to warn whoever tries to be unmindful of the ethics of the community, to turn a new leaf.</p>
<p>20. Nwata tuliri nnaya oto, ogodoya ga awuchiya ihu</p>	<p>The wrapper of a father will cover the face of a child who dared throw him (father) up.</p>	<p>The proverb is didactic. It means that a child who is fearless to the extent of manhandling his father will face a serious consequence of his action. Throwing a father up is an abomination. Exposing his nakedness in the air is a greater abomination. <i>Ogodo</i> (wrapper) falling and covering the face of the audacious child means a lot. It symbolises a curse. When one's face is covered by the wrapper that is meant to cover one's father's private part, it portends great calamity and bleak future for the child. No matter how strong a child is, he must not disgrace his father. If he does, it will boomerang on him.</p>
<p>21. <i>Onye garu ugu gbute nkita, gbuteru nmadu</i></p>	<p>Whoever goes to war and kills a dog, has also killed a person.</p>	<p>Of all the animals for sacrifices, the most difficult to slaughter or kill is the dog. The dog fights back. The figure of a dog in a given war could mean wisdom of a normal man, sensitivity and resistance. Even in the western world, and to an extent here in Africa, the dog is closest to man of all</p>

		the animals. The police use dogs to achieve arduous tasks. The hunter in this part of the world relies heavily on the intelligence of the dog to kill other animals.
22. <i>Eweru ife aneji egwu anunu gwuo anunu, ihu efuo</i>	If you use the right instrument/ implement to harvest anunu (a special type of yam), it will bring the beauty in it.	The implements used in harvesting cassava, yam, cocoa yam are different from the one used for <i>anunu</i> . If one uses one for the other, there will be some problems. This Igbo proverb preaches appropriateness as a way of life. One avoids shame and doom when things are properly done right from the beginning to the end. <i>Ihu</i> , face is a <i>synecdoche</i> . The face stands for the whole being. The face shows when a person is happy, sad, hungry, excited, hopeful and agitated.
23. <i>Ekwela ife gburu nnaghi gbuo gu</i>	Do not let what killed your father; kill you.	Cautiousness is the centre of this proverb. It advises against vindictiveness, anger and rashness. Rather, it encourages thoughtfulness before taking a dangerous action. For instance, for a son to continue struggling for the land that supposedly caused his father's death is ethically wrong. This proverb indirectly tells one to stop engaging in what he is pursuing at present because it will result to doom!
24. <i>Onye asi weru miri huo ahu, odughi ife ojoo emeruye</i>	Whoever that has been told to bathe with water, has not been ill advised.	Many people in the community are enemies of progress. They are pessimists. They are lazy and selfish. <i>Miri</i> (water) is a metaphor for

		conscience. It is one's conscience that makes a change in him. Naturally, one should not be reminded to bathe with water because doing so is for his good and indirectly for those around him (the community). The proverb carries a message for sensitivity of the people and for a collective social change drive.
25. <i>Nte otu ukwu ne site na otutu na aatu onu</i>	A one-legged cricket begins to make earlier move to make its hole for inhabitation.	This proverb celebrates the wisdom in anyone starting on time to plan. This admonition is especially for anyone who is handicapped physically, financially and emotionally. This proverb is synonymous with an Igbo popular proverb, ' <i>oge mmadu teteru na ora bu otutu ya</i> ' (whenever one wakes from night sleep is his morning). The cricket focused proverb encourages good planning, self-confidence and optimism for success, irrespective of one's deficiencies.
26. <i>Nberede nyiri dike, nberede ka eji maru dike</i>	Suddenness is inimical to a warrior, the same suddenness is what you use in knowing a warrior.	This proverb encourages being security conscious. It also encourages valour should one find himself in unforeseen circumstances. A coward always complains and in the words of Shakespeare, 'A coward dies several times before his death'. On the other hand, ' <i>dike</i> ' a warrior even when caught unawares does not just go down. He thinks fast and shows courage, patriotism and the enthusiasm to defeat his enemies and bring honour to the community. The proverb

		is replete with hidden cultural connotations.
27. <i>Ekpe beru ugo beru, nke is ibe ya ebele, nku kwaya</i>	Let the wing of the hawk or eagle break to whichever one that prevents one from perching on a tree.	This proverb is one of the most popular Igbo proverbs. It is a supplication to the ancestors and to the Almighty God. It is a typical <i>ofọ</i> . The proverb preaches integrity, equity and peaceful co-existence. And whoever wishes to eat and live alone (perching) should have a misfortune (having his wings) broken. This means that a greedy and proud person should die to give way for people that are just and selfless.
28. <i>Nwa nmaru asu, ya suo ne ikwo, nke na amaghi asu, ya suo na apata</i>	A child that knows how to pound, let him pound in the mortar, but he who does not know how to pound, should pound on his lap.	It is sensible to pound into the mortar. That is the norm. (People pound a lot of things, palm-fruit, fufu, melon (egusi) and other ingredients. The pounding may bring about some cacophonous sound, or sometimes, a pleasant one, depending on the mindset of those listening. But for a child to leave the mortar and pound his lap (apata) is the most unthinkable thing. He suffers the pain, not the community, he cries alone and causes unnecessary noise for the community.
29. <i>Ugo eberule na ngbagbu</i>	The eagle has perched to be shot dead.	The feather of the eagle in Igbo culture is very precious and expensive. A hunter who shoots an eagle dead becomes rich and famous because noble people will visit him to buy the feathers and identify with him as a great hunter. An eagle hardly perches to give a hunter a chance to shoot it.

		An eagle is always on the move and as elusive as peace. This proverb brings the image of a work about to be concluded after series of trials. The shooting of the eagle is believed to be a symbol of positive mission accomplished in the midst of challenges.
30 Anokata na ashi buru, ato ngwugwu udele	While like minds come together, they collectively unwrap a vulture's parcel.	Anything that pertains to the vulture is spiritual and must not be taken for granted but demands mature minds Who believe in a unique stand to decide on what to do irrespective of the consequences.

The dynamics of Igbo language and culture can be better appreciated with the understanding that the Igbo have a lot in common with non-verbal language; and that through proverbs the Igbo communicate much better what they really wish to say. Chinua Achebe's novels are a good example of how the Igbo use proverbs to communicate with one another daily.

In a reference to the literature, a question was raised thus, 'One Igbo proverb asks: *'Onye si na ofe nneya siri adighi uto?'* which translates to, 'Who dare say that his mother's soup is not sweet?' The above proverbs have tried to answer the rhetorical question concerning the desirability of proverbs. Igbo proverbs like most other nations' proverbs are short and witty. Yes, proverbs create sometimes some figurative statement, rather, in the above generated proverbs, more emphasis are on the inferences drawn as rightly advised in Nwogu (1975:194) when he opines that 'It is necessary; I believe, to make a distinction between the figurative statement in a given proverb and the inference that can be drawn from the proverb, with regards to the worldview of the Igbo.'

The following case studies are to help interpret contextually the inferences of cultural meaning and values inherent in Igbo proverbs.

Case Studies

The following case studies from the field are to measure some of the thirty proverbs generated. The proverbs were interpreted in the context of the Okonko's language and cultural view.

Case Study 1

Anwuta si na oka nma ina ata ahu na abuo.

(The mosquito said it is better to bite in twos)

The case study is based on a non-participant observation at Ahiaukwu Civil Hall, Okokoro. The two families in conflict came from two different hamlets in Itu Olokoro – Amaubakiriba hamlet and Ngbeda-ala hamlet. The procedures were as follows:

- The two families were called out. Each party was asked to name their chief speaker.
- The Okonko Panel Chairman asked them to name their witnesses. The names were mentioned.
- The Okonko Panel Chairman told all the mentioned witnesses to leave the hall immediately because it was unethical for them to hear the statements.
- The plaintiff chief speaker first gave his statement. No interruptions. The speaker must be slow enough for the secretary to record his statement.
- The accused asked some questions, relevant ones. Any irrelevant questions were stopped by the table.
- The panelists asked eight questions. Four from each of the two sides – left and right. The questions must be germane. The respondent must not tell stories. Yes or no answers.

The accused chief speaker made her statement. Originally, it was the partner's elder mother that the children picked. She was too emotional. The chairman of the panel had earlier shown concern over the choice. But he could not oppose their choice. On the way, the mother was changed and the first son took over the statement. The mother

stopped after asking the vital questions to the plaintiff. The chairman commended the change of leadership with a proverb, *Nwoko anaghi ano na ulo, nwanyi avoo ishi*. Which translates to, a man cannot be at home and leave a woman to unearth a buried charm.

The chairman encouraged the parties to put heads together before asking questions or answering questions. That their speakers should only speak their collective voices. In his words, he used a proverb to buttress his point. *Anwuta si na oka nma ina ata ahu na ahu* (The mosquito said it is better to bite in twos).

The proverb encourages brainstorming and collective consultations as such would lead to uniformity of purpose.

When the accused speaker finished, the first procedures were followed:

- questions from the plaintiff
- questions from the panelists

Because the speaker for the plaintiffs was very old, panel allowed him throughout to speak sitting down. The accused party's elderly mother, was allowed to sit down too when she asked her questions. But for their old age, nobody was allowed to speak sitting, except those at the table.

The chairman and his panelists had a brief discussion (a kind of brainstorming) and he announced the day of the land inspection to be 27th July, 2015 by 10.00 am. By this gesture the proverb being discussed is put to test, i.e. people should act in groups. According to him all the statements and questions made and raised on this day would be put to test on the inspection day. He also said that the witnesses would testify on the inspection of land date.

Case Study 2

Egbe beru, ugo beru, nke si ibe ye eberu, nku kwaya.

(Let the hawk and the eagle perch, may the wings of whichever of them that prevents the other from perching break).

A Land Inspection Between the Uwazurumbas and The Nnuukwus

An old man used this proverb when asked by Okonko to pray before a land inspection. What the old man implied in the prayer using this proverb was asking for a divine and quick justice. A kind of justice that would be apparent for all to see. In other words, he prayed for truth and fairness to prevail on that day.

The Uwazurumbas, the plaintiffs showed the Okonko panelists the large land in dispute. Inside the land, there was a prayer to God and everybody removed his cap – the panelists inclusive. After this, the chairman knelt on the land, pressed the land with his right hand and made pronouncement known as Igo ofo. He called on the land to:

- kill the appellant, the defendant, the witness/es or even the panelist/s who would see the truth and refuse to say it;
- kill whoever would come later to plant any *nshi* (poison) against the eventual winners;
- kill any *umu nna* who would later wish to mislead any of the conflicting parties.

The appellants' chief speaker, an old man gave authority to a younger man to show the judges round the farm. The chairman said the old man must give an oral authority before them and for it to be recorded. The new spokesman took the judges round the four borders of the land. Questions ranging from the names of their border neighbours to whether or not their kindred people had lands around them were asked. He answered them and the secretary recorded everything. They were asked to go home and stay at the hall. Their witnesses failed to turn up.

The accused or defendants were called. The chairman boldly reminded them off the Ofo earlier made on the land. He monitored their saying 'Amen' to the pronouncements.

The Nnuukwus unavoidably had to change their spokesmen as well. The *opara*, who had to replace their mother at 24th July session, gave an oral authority before the panelists that his younger brother would show the panelists round the four borders of the vast land. The same questions asked the plaintiffs were repeated to him and he answered them and they were recorded. One unique question of the panelists asked him was if his father told them the amount they received for the partial sales of the land, and he said *otu ejemma* (one pound). *Ikpa ibe* in the culture of Umuahia is a situation whereby the owner of a land takes some money from the other party for him to farm on the land for a period of time, after which the real owner returns the money so that he reclaims his land.

They Nnuukwus were sent out and their two witnesses were called. The chairman reminded them of the standing ofo on the land. The two said 'Amen'; one of the two witnesses stood for both and took the panelists round the land borders. All his testimonies were recorded. The witnesses were told to leave for the hall.

The Ọkọnkọ panel chairman under the heavy rains addressed all. He said he and his members would not want any of the two kindred to speak or testify. This was to forestall enmity. He said within the kindred, there were Judases. If anyone spoke, his testimony might be used against him by the family that would lose. He said the judgment would be entirely theirs – the Ọkọnkọ panelists based on what the land itself has revealed to them. With this pronouncement, everybody departed the farmland for the Itu Hall for the verdict.

The proverb made by the old man was effective because as recorded, the Uwazurumbas' witnesses did not come to testify, probably because they were mindful of the implication of the effect of the proverb's efficacy. They did not even appear at the land inspection.

Case Study 3

Onye ozi anaghi atu ilu

(A messenger does not speak in proverbs).

Two parties were not the real owners of the land in dispute. The appellant consulted Okonko on behalf of his brother, while the accused was the younger brother of the real accused. The Chairman of Okonko Panel frowned at the act and asked the two men to pay ₦500.00 each which when combined would offset the Ito omu (removing of palm frond) fee. He advised them to let the real people talk about the disputed land. According to the chairman, 'onye ozi anaghi atu ilu'. The proverb meaning that a messenger does not speak in proverbs. The second proverb he used to strike out the case was, 'ogu anaghi, avo anu', meaning that he hoe cannot dissect a dead animal. Again, he said that the *omu* must be removed because *omu* could not be hung for more than twenty-one days.

In the context of the proverbs made by the Okonko chairman, the first proverb connotes illegality, In other words, it amounts to illegality for the brothers of the land disputants to be in Okonko Panel without the approval of the principal parties.

On the second proverb. The contextual meaning is that Okonko would err in mediating or adjudicating on a piece of land whereby the real two parties in conflict were not in consent of the case.

Case Study 4

Ndi nwe ala, ne eji ala

(Those that own the land control the land)

This case study is based on the interviews with Mazi David Okebaram Onuegbu from Ndume Ibeku and Mazi Ogbonna Ifeanacho from Okwu Olokoro. According to each of them, the Okonko society is capable to mediate and adjudicate on land disputes in the community as well as ensuring that order and decorum is maintained in the community.

Mazi Onuegbu said:

In Igbo culture, Ọkọnkọ controls the society. In fact, it is like the traditional and cultural government. For instance, when brothers fight or quarrel, when the Ọkọnkọ intervene or come in, they stop. For land dispute, when Ọkọnkọ is consulted, Ọmụ Ọkọnkọ is hung on the land to show that there should be a judgment to determine who actually owns the land. When an ọmụ is hung, the defendant is informed and warned not to enter the land. The two conflicting parties will see the Ọkọnkọ head together and a date is slated when the case will be looked into. They are told what and what they are to provide for the inspectors cum judges of Ọkọnkọ. Table fee for the inspection of the land could be from ₦5,000.00 depending on the size of the village and number of people coming for the inspection. Others include for each of the two parties, kola nuts, palm wine, schnapps, sizeable meat and food. All these will be provided for morning session and afternoon session. The parties are advised to call on their friends, relations to observe the proceedings. The parties are also advised to mention their witnesses on the day of the judgment. On the day of judgment, for the Ọmụ Ọkọnkọ to be lowered for non okonkonites, each must pay a specific fee else such will not be allowed in. Some take ₦500, some ₦200. This affects women and all okpos (non Okonko's men). After the itọtu ọmụ (removing of palm frond), the witnesses are called in and later told to go, that they would be called later. Before these witnesses leave, the Okonko officials, chairman, vice chairman, secretary, vice secretary, provost, and the PRO will take their seats and the conflicting parties are told to take their seats. Lest I forget, attendance is taken before the judgment starts. Even while the judgment is on, whoever

comes in most write down his or her name under the eagle eyes of the secretary. Not just the names but from where one comes from. The attendance is important for security reasons. We go with it to the court, to the police, and even to the shrine when the need arises.

There are fines paid for every offence in the course of the proceedings. For example, it is forbidden for anybody to cross his or her legs. Okonko see it as a “shut up” to the group. Executives can cross their legs if they so wish. No interruptions are tolerated. Any interruption attracts a fine. For instance, when a plaintiff is speaking, the defendant should not interrupt, vice versa.

When any of the parties asks questions, the secretary records everything and may decide to stop a question seen as irrelevant. In the course of this, any floor member that interrupts is fined. If he or she does not have the money there, he is owing *okonko*. If the person proves stubborn, such is walked out by the house – no matter who such is. *Okonko* does not know or have a brother or sister during sessions.

Few floor members are asked to ask questions. Such may come from different villages. After which, executives may now comment.

Given what what Mazi Onuegbu said, the proverb is justified that those that own the land, in this context, the *Okonko* society which acts as the custodian of the culture and tradition of the people of Umuahia is indeed saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that sustainable peace is maintained in the community. It was really Mazi Ifeanacho who suggested the proverb being analysed in respect to what Mazi Onuegbu opined. In supporting his suggested proverb, Mazi Ifeanacho also suggested another proverb, *mbiarabia amagbi nga ala ruru*, i.e. a strange does not know where abomination took place. Putting the two proverbs side by side means that it is those who know and understand the culture a people that can maintain discipline - *Okonko*.

Case Study 5

Ugo eberule na nkpagbu.

(The eagle has finally perched to be short dead).

The verdict of the earlier inspected land

The chairman before making their findings known and their verdict, thanked all for the cooperation given to them so far. He particularly saluted the parties in conflict for keeping peace and advised that same peace be maintained after the final verdict.

Before itemizing the findings, he made a proverb which brought silence to every corner of the hall.

'Ugo eberule na nkpagbu.' The literal translation is 'the eagle has finally perched to be shot dead.

What this proverb signifies in this context was that the much awaited time for the verdict had eventually come for all to know the hidden truth.

The findings were as follows according to the chairman:

1. that they discovered that the land in question was hanging in the midst of lands being owned by the Nnuukwus' kindred;
2. that they discovered that the land in question had actually been held in trust of ikpa ibe because the kindred of Amaubakiriba do not have lands from the Oba Ogugu stream to the other stream in front.

Verdict

- The panel asked the Nnuukwus, the defendants to give the plaintiffs the sum of ₦50,000 after the plaintiffs, the Uwazurumbas, would have finished harvesting all the things in the farm;
- that the Uwazurumbas should hand off from the farm after the present farming season, 2015;
- that the Nnuukwus are the real owners of the land.

On the last statement, the chairman asked his fellow panelists if what he said was what they all agreed. All of them said, 'Eeeee', (an affirmation of 'yes') and as they

responded, they stood in unison and left the *ulo ezumezu* (the hall) without talking or looking at anybody.

The above case studies which are on the use and efficacy of proverbs in the course of conflict management about the Igbo are reasonably in agreement with the consulted literature where Madu (1996:189) defines a proverb as a ‘... condensed wisdom drawn from experience...’ Madu goes ahead to quote the following definitions of proverbs by Kjar, who said that proverbs are ‘... anonymous traditional sayings about human life’, and for Barley, he opined that proverbs are ‘... a standard statement of moral or categorical imperatives in fixed metaphorical paradigmatic form...’ and lastly for Mulyumba wa Mamba, ‘... a proposition or group of propositions deriving from the experiences of the wise men of the society affirming either clearly or metaphorically popular indisputable truths.’

With the case studies, it affirms the consulted literature (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994:165) which says that Igbo language is replete with proverbs. However, the literature does not link the proverbs to aiding conflict management in Igbo land as this present thesis has. The role of proverbs can as well be linked to Hymes (1972:277) which opines that language and culture aid conflict management. Proverbs in this context stands for what Hymes has posited.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Preamble

The most prevalent conflict in Igbo nation is land disputes. This trend is not an exception in Umuahia, Abia State. In Igbo culture, when a man dies, his lands are distributed among his male children. The first son however, normally gets the lion share of the sharing. The kindred normally known as *umu nna* are responsible for the land sharing. The *umu nna* demarcate each of the portions with *nkpara*, a set of sticks that portrays borders. In Umuahia, every adult male kindred member is entitled to participate in the land sharing. The *Ọkọnkọ* question does count. Everybody is equal and everybody is allowed to contribute. After the sharing of the land/lands, each of the male sons will bring out a certain quantity of food and drinks to thank the *umu nna*.

Ọkọnkọ is only consulted when the distributed lands become a source of conflict either because one of the sons felt he had been heated. *Ọkọnkọ* is in strata. It has a hamlet level with a head. It also has a village level and then the clan level. *Ọkọnkọ* therefore acts as a watchdog and a mediator when the *umu nna* have failed to keep brothers and families in check.

On the spiritual angle, *Ọkọnkọ* in Umuahia serves as an intermediary between the living and the ancestors. They do this by administering the *Ọkwụkwụ* (after burial service) which combines *Ọkọnkọ* music and dance with masquerades at the market square. Children and women and non-*Ọkọnkọ* members are free to watch and get entertained. But, it is the *Ọkọnkọ* members who are entitled to eat the food and drinks. They cook and serve themselves. Women do not cook for them. All the animals to be slaughtered are bought and cooked by them. The number of animals to be slaughtered depends on the age of the departed member. A man of seventy and above is entitled to a dog. A dog is also slaughtered for a man who did not get to seventy years but fought a war or was a force man like the police or army.

Ọkwụkwụ ceremony is a special kind of conflict management. The ancestors may kill the children of the dead man if they refuse to do the *Ọkwụkwụ*. Such persons dare not eat in a place where *Ọkwụkwụ* is going on because they are oweing the ancestors.

6.2 Discussion of the Findings

Discussion of the Findings

Ọkọnkọ serves as Appellant Court when conflict management fails at *ama ala* level.

The *ama ala* (the adult males of the kindred) constitute the hamlet of a village. A village can constitute numerous hamlets. In turn, villages constitute a clan. In effect, a clan constitutes several hamlets depending on how many each of the villages has. Conflict management in a given hamlet is the responsibility of the *ama ala* people. They are called upon culturally to share the lands of families among the male children. If the children headed by the *opara* (first son) share the lands themselves, it might cause conflict. So culturally from generations past, the *ama ala* are consulted by the *opara* on behalf of himself and his younger brothers to come and administer the sharing of the lands. They cook and entertain the *ama ala* for their service. The food must be the local soup, *okazi* and *fufu* and *iba*.

Ama ala are influential in the goings on of the hamlets and villages. They are responsible for the sanitation of the community. They ensure that paths to the farms and streams are constantly cleared by the adult males. The married women have the duty of sweeping the *ama* (the open ground where they meet and play on weekly basis. They also weed the *ama*'s surroundings for burials, during New Yam Festival, Christmas, and on the day when a traditional wedding is to take place.

The *ama ala* are the institution or authority primarily responsible for conflict management and observance of social norms and practice.

For land dispute, especially, it is the *ama ala* that mediates or investigates on a land dispute between two or more brothers. It is when they cannot resolve the problem, or when they share lands and one of the brothers cries foul that Ọkọnkọ society might come in. All the interviewees interviewed and the participants of all the four Focus Group Discussions conducted, agreed and attested that Ọkọnkọ Society is normally consulted when the *ama ala* are no more capable to manage the conflict. Ọkọnkọ however relies on the *ama ala* for evidences and collaborates with them in finding the solution to the land dispute.

Mazi David Okebaram Onuegbu said:

For land dispute, when Ọkọnkọ is consulted, *omu* Ọkọnkọ (palm frond) is used to hang on the land – showing that there should be a judgment to determine who actually owns the land. When an *omu* is hung, the defendant is informed and warned not to enter the land. The two conflicting parties will see the Ọkọnkọ head together and a date is slated when the case will be looked into. They are told what and what they are to provide for the inspectors cum judges of Ọkọnkọ.

Mazi Alozie Ukaegbu said:

Ọkọnkọ only comes in into family conflicts when one of the family members consults them when *umu nna* have failed to settle the conflict.

Contributing on how *ama ala* (also referred as *umu nna*) and Ọkọnkọ work, Mazi Ndubuisi Nwosu had this to say:

Please note, the sharing is in ratio of seniority. The *nkpara* are used to show the *oke* (borders/boundaries). With this done, the sons are called to come and get their shares. They are asked if they accept the sharing ratio. If all say yes, good, but if any of them says, no, conflict has began. *Ama ala* asks the person or persons that say ‘No’ to give reasons.

They may be asked to go out again for them (the *ama ala* or *umu nna*) to adjust the borders to appease the one or ones that are not contented. If on return, the “No’ response continues, a Mazi in their midst is asked to hang *omu* on the land. This means that Ọkọnkọ has come in.

The *omu* and *nkpara* are representations semiotically in line with Danesi (2004:4) and Sebiok (2001:1). These representations signals are signals are culturally significant to the Ọkọnkọ Society and the Igbo as a people.

In three sentences, Mazi Nnabuike Orji described the synergy between the *ama ala* and Ọkọnkọ:

We do not have much conflicts because things are organised here (Olokoro). Of course though, land disputes are common here. The *ama ala* and the Ọkọnkọ take adequate care of them.

Mazi Ntigezuweuka gave his own version on how the *ama ala* manage conflict before Ọkọnkọ ‘wades’ in:

For land sharing, the eldest, the *opara* will call the *ama ala*, give them drinks and kola and things that follow them. And then tell them the reason he called them. He will call them the second time, giving them the same drinks and kola as in the first one. Then they will then schedule the day the sharing. Ọkọnkọ only wades in when the sharing of the land is faulted by one of the brothers. Such brother is usually the one who goes to consult the Ọkọnkọ.

From what Mazi Emeka Nwosu said, Ọkọnkọ as a Court of Appeal takes some money:

An appeal to Ọkọnkọ costs just a thousand naira (₦1,000). On the day of the land inspection, each of the parties in conflict gives us two jars of palm wine, two bottles of Schnapps and ₦10,000 which serves as a legal fee.

In a Focus Group Discussion held in Okwu Olokoro, one of the members, Ugochukwu Okorie did not specify on sharing of land but commented on the relationship between the *ama ala* and Ọkọnkọ in a broader way:

If it involves land dispute, the *umu nna*, the kindred will first look into the matter. One of the conflicting parties must have called on them (*umunna*) for intervention. The *umu nna* hear the two parties and come up with a verdict after series of discussions which will include the inspection of the land in question. If the settlement is not accepted by one of the parties, he can consult the Ọkọnkọ. When the Ọkọnkọ Society comes in, they first hand *ọmụ*, the palm front to warn against anybody going into the land. When they finish investigating the land, or lands, they tell whoever that does not own the land or lands to hands off.

It is clear that the *ama ala* and Ọkọnkọ are partners in progress. Culture demands that one should not bypass *ama ala* or the *umu nna* when it entails land settlement. Of course, land sharing is the duty of the *ama ala*. But it sometimes results to conflict, necessitating that Ọkọnkọ people should step in. To prove that *ama ala* and Ọkọnkọ are partners in progress, the Ọkọnkọ liaise with the Ọkọnkọ when they come in. In the non-participant observation this researcher undertook, it was the *ama ala* or the *umu nna* of

the parties in conflict that hosted Ọkọnkọ panelists when they came first to the Itu Village Hall, from where they headed to the land in dispute for inspection and subsequent verdict at the Itu Hall. All the drinks used to entertain the panelists were presented to them through the umu nna. In fact, from the first sitting when the case was discussed at Olokoro Hall, the chairman of the panel made it obvious that if the two umu nna of the two families (from two hamlets of Itu) were not available to accompany them to the land, that Ọkọnkọ would not proceed.

From the first finding discussed so far, it becomes certain that Ọkọnkọ serves as Court of Appeal in Umuhia in all the four clans it still exists. The Society does not exist in Umuopara in the Umuahia South Local Government Area as this researcher found out.

The voices of the interviews were indicative of this present finding. One wonders why over the years, the people prefer to take their appeal to the Ọkọnkọ Society instead of the civil court despite the fact that the society seems apparently too authoritative. The reason is that first, land is a cultural heritage that even civil courts do not have enough grounds to pass judgment on. In other words, the people have confidence in their own traditional institution to do justice for them. On many occasions, land cases taken to the civil courts eventually get back to the Ọkọnkọ Society for effective investigations, which on some occasions, though rare, get to Idu nshi (oath taking level) which is spiritual.

Ọkọnkọ Society Serves as a Watchdog

A watchdog polices and must be vigilant. The interviewees all said directly or indirectly that Ọkọnkọ serves as the watchdog of the people of Umuahia. A good example of this metaphor, 'watchdog' in the contemporary world is the police force. The policemen are consulted to come and intervene in a conflict so that such a conflict will not escalate. On the other hand, the police do not wait till they are invited. They, as a matter of duty, have the authority to make arrests and prosecute. This analogy fits the Ọkọnkọ's role in Umuahia.

Here are some voice from the interviews and Focus Group Discussions:

In Igbo culture, Igbo uses Ọkọnkọ to control the society. In fact, it is like the traditional and cultural government.

– Mazi David Okebaram Unuegbu

Ọkọnkọ had been in existence even before our great grandfathers were born. It was a kind of Government before the coming of the colonial masters. When the whitemen came they did all they could to be taught the secrets of Ọkọnkọ. They were only taught the secrets of Ọkọnkọ and not the Ọkọnkọ itself.

– Mazi Harrison Onyeama

Ọkọnkọ is like a militant group. Ọkọnkọ makes a child dependable. Ọkọnkọ bases on personal development. It creates in you, the man in you, knew existed in you.

As a militant group, Mazi Ukaegbu was suggesting that the group was a vanguard for protecting the community in which they live. The implication of the assumptions that Ọkọnkọ controls the society and acts as government goes a long way in proving that the finding that they act as watchdog is very valid.

Mazi Ndubuisi Nwosu gave a piece on how Ọkọnkọ can be a watchdog of the people's culture:

In 2012, at St John's Anglican Church, Itaja Olokoro, a pastor who happened to know the Ọkọnkọ's forbidden secrets for the 'outsiders' was flippant on the pulpit. He began to discuss these secrets. That was indiscipline on his part. The news filtered to the ears of the Ọkọnkọnites and action was immediately taken.

The Church was badly damaged. The pastor's car tyres were deflated. The pastor fled. The Ọkọnkọ Society does not deal with state police ... they are themselves the police.

As above, Mazi Eze John gave an instance where another Anglican priest in Itu Olokoro was dealt with by Ọkọnkọnites for being disobedient. That was in 1993.

The said Anglican priest refused to turn off his outside light when he ought to have done so. Everybody did because the Abu nkwu as about passing, on Ọkọnkọ music was sounding warning people to switch off their lights. The pastor's stay in that parish was

abruptly ended. He was forced to flee. As the watchdog, Ọkọnkọ ensured the pastor must respect the culture of the land:

Things were damaged that night (in the vicarage) resulting that the parishioners petitioned the priest for transfer so that he would not bring them further troubles. So Ọkọnkọ upholds our age long culture. The priest left the parish within a week.

The church gives respect to the Ọkọnkọ Society. They do not step on Ọkọnkọ's toes. For instance, during *ikpu ulo* (the final initiation ceremony), the church makes sure they avoid going to the scene.

For Mazi Nnabuike Orji, the Ọkọnkọ Society could discipline anybody causing nuisance in the community, 'even a married woman ... she will be sent home, to her parents' place with an Ọkọnkọ masquerade after several warnings.' Mazi Nnabuike also said that Ọkọnkọ needed not to be invited to manage conflict. In other words, Ọkọnkọ can step in into a conflict for the sake of the community, peace, and security. He said:

When there is a threatening issue or an uproar, Ọkọnkọ can come in to make peace without being invited. In this kind of situation, they come with Abia, a special drum, with a unique sound.

An example of a threatening issue could result in Ọkọnkọ engaging in *iri olu* (a special angry protest where the Ọkọnkọ men could spend as much as a week destroying and eating anything around or found in the home and vicinity of a man or woman that stepped on their toes).

Contributing in a Focus Group Discussion in Ibeku, Mazi Sunday Ọfọmadu assessment of Ọkọnkọ Society was that the group was fearless, and a match for oppressors of the underprivileged. The implication of his submission displayed in his words below is a proof that Ọkọnkọ is a watchdog:

Ọkọnkọ is important. Some people, due to their money and status intimidate others. Church is good, but it cannot protect a widow. But for Ọkọnkọ, a widow or an underprivileged can consult Ọkọnkọ and it will act and address their situations in the hands of their oppressors. Ọkọnkọ is fearless.

In support that even the church is not as influential on the community as Ọkọnkọ Society, Mazi Obioha Iruke in the same Focus Group Discussion in Ibeku said that ‘When two people quarrel and the Church cannot stop them from quarrelling; when Ọkọnkọ wades in, the fight stops. This goes to say that even though Ọkọnkọ is a traditional cult, the Christians listen to their legal advice. Some good instances were during the non-participant observations this researcher had in the Ọkọnkọ panelists sessions in Olokoro. Even pastors came to seek advice from the Ọkọnkọ, or where given advice leading to the amicable resolutions of their conflicts.

Mazi Ezenwa Ozurumba in another Focus Group Discussion in Olokoro went ahead to assert that Ọkọnkọ was the Supreme Court till date:

Ọkọnkọ is like the Supreme Court. Whether you are a traditionalist or Christian, everybody respects Ọkọnkọ. It does not discriminate. It is therefore very relevant till date.

Mazi Obi Mbiwi gave a good example of what *ori olu* looks like:

Years back at Isi Ama a poultry owner offended Ọkọnkọ. We visited him with *iri ọlu*. He called the police. The police refused to come. We slaughtered his chickens, roasted them with logs of firewood spotted around and ate them. It lasted for a week. Even people from Ụbakala and Olokoro and wider places joined us. You must however be part of Ọkọnkọ to eat during *iri ọlu*.

In the same Focus Group Discussion in Olokoro two other participants were of the opinion that Ọkọnkọ’s laws were superior to everybody in the community, and that Ọkọnkọ were the police without guns:

The palm frond is a symbol that the music has changed. It does not have papa and mama. Anybody can be fined in Ọkọnkọ and your father cannot talk. No discrimination as Ezenwa said. If my twin offends Ọkọnkọ and I am the head of Ọkọnkọ, I must shut up for the laws of Ọkọnkọ to prevail. Ọkọnkọ is superior to any of the members and non-members in the community.

Said Mazi Eze Johnbull. Mazi Nwabunze Enyidedeye was the participant who reasoned that Ọkọnkọ was the police without gun:

Ọkọnkọ is the police. It polices the community. It does not use guns. Its gun is the *ọmu*. Ọkọnkọ is more effective than the police. Because, the people believe and respect them.

The non-participant observations this researcher undertook attested to the veracity of what the above quotations have claimed. A good number of cases brought to the Ọkọnkọ panelists were from people who did not belong to Ọkọnkọ. Some were part of Ọkọnkọ but had to denounce it because of church. Ọkọnkọ does not begin to ask, are you a member of Ọkọnkọ? Their main priority from all that was observed was justice.

Does the government discipline the Ọkọnkọ Society when they go beyond their bounds? The government can discipline them if they go beyond their bounds. But studies have shown that the society is of mature and cultural minded people. A good number of educated people are still in Ọkọnkọ. Some are lawyers, engineers, medical doctors, professors, and law makers both in the state and federal levels. The Society knows their bounds and does not step over it. That they are a militant group does not mean that they carry arms and begin to fight the government as in the case of Niger Delta's Avengers or MASSOB.

Ọkọnkọ Society does not for instance involve itself in civil matters like murder. The police as it were take full charge of such. The watchdog Ọkọnkọ Society is purely for the cultural growth of the people socially and spiritually. In other words, the society tries as much as possible to promote the sanctity of their language and culture. It is probably the only group which frowns at the people not using the Igbo language when they interact. They make sure that all they do is Igbo oriented sociolinguistically.

For every conflict management the Umuahia people depend on their language and culture

This particular finding was primarily informed by the series of non-participant observations this researcher undertook in Olokoro. It was evident that the Igbo language helped in the smooth communication between the Ọkọnkọ panelists and the people who came for one conflict to another. From the start to the end of each of the sessions observed at Olokoro Civic Hall, the culture of the people was exhibited clearly using Igbo

language. For instance, the chairman never spoke a word in English. He greeted the people in their Olokoro dialect, and when any of the panelists or the conflicting parties, or the witnesses asked a question or made an utterance in English, he, the chairman would politely but firmly said, '*Okonko anaghi anu okwu bekeyi*', which literarily means 'Okonko does not understand the English language'.

When witnesses gave their statements, when the defendants and plaintiffs spoke, Okonko panelists addressed some of them that were elderly with the Umuahia's cultural prefix of *De* (for a man), and *Da* (for a woman).

At the land inspection at Itu Olokoro, the *igo ofo* exercise followed the cultural norm. The Okonko chairman placing his right hand on the piece of land uttered 'powerful' words in Igbo language. No single English word was heard. The passion with which he personified the land was only indicative of the respect the Igbo have for the land. He called:

'*Ala*', (O land)

'*Ala*', (O land)

'*Ala*', (O land)

(As he called on the land, he looked so serious, shaking his head while every other looked on, silent.)

'*Kugbuo*' (kill, land he mentioned the defendant)

'*Kugbuo*' (kill, land he mentioned the plaintiff)

'*Kugbuo*' (kill, land he mentioned the witnesses)

He urged *Ala* to kill even any Okonko member that would compromise. *Ala* is both physical and spiritual in Igbo worldview. Physically, it is the land in which the people build and farm. However, *Ala* is also a spiritual being, the earth goddess which Achebe (2009:109) describes as 'mother and judge'. In other words, the *Ala* is capable of protecting the people and at the same time punish as a judge does.

When giving the final verdict, he started with common Igbo proverb, '*Ugo eberule na ngbagbu.*' With the proverb, which means that 'the eagle has perched for the hunter to kill it,' the single proverb spoke much better language than one hundred sentences either

in Igbo or English language. All their findings were clearly stated in Igbo. No single English word.

It was discovered that when the final verdict was given, both the winners and the losers kept silent. Before the chairman said the final verdict proverb, he smiled, and smiled again after the proverb, swinging his head from left to right and vice versa. But while giving their findings amidst the silent hall, he was as sober as the judge he was.

The last words he the Ọkọnkọ chairman made was a rhetorical question:

Ndi Ọkọnkọ, ife nkwuru, obukwa ife anyi kweketeru ooo?
Ọkọnkọ people, what I said, was it what we agreed?

The response from the fellow panelists was:

Eeee!

As they responded in unison, they all filed out of the hall, and straight to their respective homes.

One unique culture exhibited by the Ọkọnkọ chairman throughout the sessions this observer observed him and his fellow panelists is the fact that he never addressed the people sitting down. He usually stood. The other panelists did the same as well.

On the present findings, a lot of proofs were got from the Focus Group Discussions. The breaking of the kola nuts was strictly in Igbo language. None of the participants rushed the eating of the kola nut. They kept on eating it, or rather, biting it little by little as if it was helping them to think. The body language of the respondents in the interviews and the FGD was indicative of boldness, pride and contentment. All felt the Igbo language was the best medium for the Igboman to communicate most effectively. Mazi Harrison Onyema in the FGD at Afuguri, Ọhụhụ used a timely proverb to explain what language meant to the Igbo world:

A dialect or language is easier to control and hit the nail on the head. A foreign language does not fit in like Igbo language fits with our culture. *Nkpisi nwe eze, ma eze ya.* (A toothpick knows the teeth that fit it.)

Mkpisi (toothpick), is a metaphor which stands for language and culture. Mazi Onyeama's argument was that Igbo language and culture could only best fit in the daily activities of the Igbo; of course when compared to other languages.

What Mazi Onyeama meant was that one could communicate with foreign languages, yet it would not be as appropriate as Igbo language in the discourse of Igbo culture and tradition.

In another FGD at Ipupe, Ubakala, two of the participants were of the view that Igbo language is the pride of the people.

Mazi Engr Chibuikwe Enwereekoe said, 'It is inbuilt. We drink it from the water.' Meaning that the language to them is natural and should flow naturally. Mazi Ibeegbulam Okpuroko said:

It is our identity. If a Whiteman is in our midst, we use our language to confuse him. We speak Igbo language for confidentiality and better understanding of one another.

An Olokoro participant in the FGD was very analytical in his picture of the usefulness and effectiveness of the Igbo language. Mazi Nwabunze Enyidede said:

Igbo language is our cultural heritage. The Igbo language and culture are more or less our clothes. Without them, we are stark naked. When you are naked, people laugh at you.

From the above metaphorical link of language with clothes, Mazi Godwin Nzeadibe, a participant at Ndume Ibeku FGD linked Igbo language with *Okonko* itself:

Okonko has its special language – greetings and responses. A language is a unique and peculiar identity of a given people or organisation. *Ojeyi, ojeyi, akaghi oo*. This is our greeting, it is our culture. You cannot respond to it if you do not understand it... Igbo language and culture is indispensable to the Igbo world. Without a people's language, that society is dead!

One of the interviewees Mazi Obinna Orji married the two concepts of identity and pride in Igbo language by the Igbo this way:

Asusu Igbo is our identity. It is what we use to manage our culture. Igbo language and culture help in conflict management because the parties in conflict are Igbo and mediators speak Igbo. It is easier to communicate one's thoughts between the parties and those resolving the matter.

There is no doubt that with the above voices' views, conflict management is made easier when Igbo language is the medium of communication as it is when Ọkọnkọ manages conflicts in the communities in Umuahia.

The voices have supported extant literature. For instance, Even-Zohar (1986: 126-136) which says that language is a vehicle of communication when used by various groups. Egbokhare (2004: 4) sees language as a huge resource and a reservoir of knowledge and also a vehicle of culture.

In support of Even-Zohar and Egbokhare, no society survives without recourse to its language. For Igbo language and culture, Ọkọnkọ Society has been able over the years to promote it by encouraging the people to speak it and believe in it. This was evident in the fieldwork when anybody that spoke in English was frowned at. They claim that Ọkọnkọ does not understand English. But for Ọkọnkọ social practices, the Igbo language and culture by now may have got worse owing to the fact that majority of the people think that speaking English means elitism. In the case of the Ọkọnkọ Society, they make Igbo language and culture appear relevant by using it in their mediation cum adjudication sessions, in their music and dance in the market square, in their meetings, and not forgetting that they also use Igbo symbols for cultural benefits. The popular crèche that Ọji Igbo (kola nut) does not understand English is true of the Ọkọnkọ Society. They treat Ọji Igbo with reverence aware that it is a medium between the living and the ancestors.

Thought and Reality Dictates a People's Language and Culture

The responses this researcher got from the respondents during the interviews and the Focus Group Discussions about Igbo language tend to align with the position of Hudson (1980: 103-5), Yule (1996: 247), (1996: 1) and Alston (1988: 60) in the literature review argue that the language and culture determines the way a people think and see reality.

In discussing this finding which is a bit abstract in nature, three phenomena will be looked into namely, *Ọkọnkọ* generally as a society whose presence is a guideline to the people, *Ekpe* dance, normally staged during the people's New Yam Festival and lastly, the *Ọkwụkwụ* phenomenon viewed as a spiritual means of preventing conflicts between the living and their ancestors.

Ọkọnkọ Society is seen as a culture and religion in itself. It represents the people's language and culture. Because they speak the language of the people and protect their culture inbuilt in the Igbo language, the people naturally trust them in discharging justice for the community. If the people did not trust *Ọkọnkọ* as a cultural institution, they would not be sticking to their social values and norms.

Based on these attributes of the *Ọkọnkọ* society, they were on several occasions described by their members as 'a religion', 'a society's watchdog', 'a government', a defender of the oppressed' and so forth. Some indigenes who were *Ọkọnkọ* members, but denounced the cult due to their churches' pressure still did not see anything wrong with *Ọkọnkọ*. They saw *Ọkọnkọ* as a watchdog. They would not want to be mentioned.

The non-participant observations undertaken by this researcher revealed that those who did not belong to *Ọkọnkọ* for reasons best known to them do not say evil against them. If they do, why did they take their cases to them? The people's thinking and reality of the existence and acceptance of *Ọkọnkọ*'s social duties, especially that of conflict management could be pinned on the fact that the society is a metaphor of Igbo language and culture.

On *Ekpe* Masquerade dance which is synonymous with New Yam Festivals in Umuahian villages, it will not be out of place to say that *Ekpe* dance is a crowd puller. As one of the respondents, Mazi Obi from Afaraukwu Ibeku put it:

Ekpe dance during our New Yam Festival is a good instance of our culture. This dance keeps us together, happy and all we do is in Igbo language of course. Women dance with us. With the dance, enemies become friends. You cannot hear our beatings and rhythms and not get attracted ... Just come and see our *Ekpe*.

The researcher accepted Mazi Mbiwi's invitation on Sunday, the 24th of August, 2015. True to Mazi Mbiwi's boasts, it was a crowd puller. Christians, traditionalist and non-Igbo were there to enjoy the first sounding rhythm. The men and women, boys and girls were happy and cracked jokes, laughed boisterously and looked relaxed and excited. The climax of the dance was the cutting of the goat's head by the Ekpe masquerade.

On *Okwukwu* (a special kind of memorial service for a dead man), it is a strong culture that entails slaughtering of animals and exhibiting some masquerades in the village's or clan's market square. This phenomenon is essential for families that historically engage in *Okwukwu*. The people can see *Okwu* as a special spiritual conflict management. If one fails to do it for his dead father, such a person may be struck dead by the ancestors when he advertently or inadvertently tastes, drink or food from *Okwukwu* service.

Mazi Obi Mbiwi gave a description of how *Okwukwu* could be a culture of conflict management:

This special ceremony is very important to protect people from spiritual untimely death. It is part of the conflict management. Recently a man who had not done the *Okwukwu* of his late father went to a place where the ceremony was going on. He ate something there. He hardly got home before he slumped and died. This type of story is common due to negligence.

Mazi Ndubuisi Nwosu while speaking on sharing of property by a late man's sons made an allusion to *Okwukwu*. He said with a very concerned tone:

Less I forget, it is advisable to do *Okwukwu*, an after burial ceremonies for the departed father of the sons sharing the property. This is to avert spiritual attack from the ancestors. It is another deep aspect of conflict management which we shall not discuss now.

Mazi Ogbonna Ifeancha described *Okwukwu* as the right of the deceased man:

Okwukwu is like giving one his rights. It is only for men. It is vital to do *Okwukwu* to avert ancestral conflicts.

Ọkwụkwụ is for security reasons. The children who fail to do it when their father dies are exposing themselves to danger.

Mazi Kanu Joel Stormy hit the nail on the head by saying that Ọkwụkwụ ‘... is a big conflict management between the living and the dead.’ The Ọkwụkwụ phenomenon is a serious business for Ọkọnkọ. It is the spiritual aspect of the physical conflict management duties they perform for the people.

Liebman (1996) believes that conflicts can be managed in heterogeneous means using: drama, visual arts, music, movement psychotherapy, storytelling and combined Arts that comprise, drama-painting-sculpture. What this implies is the fact that arts play a sole in effective conflict management. In other words, through arts, peace can be achieved without litigations and unnecessary wars.

Ọkọnkọ’s music be it of Ekpe or Ọkwụkwụ is an art that soothes tension. People enjoy the dance and the dance is symbolically therapeutic and a kind of ‘mediation’ between traditionalists and Christians. Ọkọnkọ dance or music can be likened to Fela’s music based in the description of the latter by Olorunyomi (2005:157) where he wrote that the Afrobeat dance exhibits a variety of physical, expressive styles, ranging from gentle, graceful motion to rigorous athleticism.’ The masquerade on parade however determine the rhythm and the body movements.

In conclusion, the existence of Ọkọnkọ, the Ekpe dance and the Ọkwụkwụ phenomenon are three abstract cultures which dictate the way people think and see life. For outsiders, all that has been discussed so far, is a ‘nonsense’. But in respect to this research, it is valid on the minds of the people of Umuahia.

In view of this finding, it is imperative to reflect on the sensibility and otherwise of these literatures on the meaning and significance of culture. In the beliefs of Benedict (1971) and Harris (1983), culture is consistent pattern of thought and action, on one hand, and a set of peoples’ thinking, feeling and acting, on the other hand. In recourse to this, the researcher agrees with Rosaldo (1989) that says that culture makes the human experience look significant because it refers to means through which people make sense of their lives.

Ọmụ and Uhie are the emblem and language of Ọkọnkọ Society

Ọmụ, the palm frond is synonymous with Ọkọnkọ Society. It announces the presence or the involvement of Ọkọnkọ wherever it is hung – at a hall, market square and farmland. The ọmụ tied to uhie form the emblem of Ọkọnkọ. Uhie is an Ọkọnkọ's wooden musical instrument used in alerting the society's members that something has happened.

Ọmụ is semiotic. It is a symbol of Ọkọnkọ. Semiotically, ọmụ is a signal that Ọkọnkọ is in session or involved in a property it is hung. Ọmụ is also a sign for peace, a sign for authority, a sign for injunction.

Ọmụ being the central focus of Ọkọnkọ was the most mentioned instrument of Ọkọnkọ by the interviewees and members of the FGD. Let us see the different ways the respondents spoke of ọmụ.

- Mazi David Okebaram Onuegbu
... ọmụ Ọkọnkọ is hung on the land to show that there should be a judgment to determine who actually owns the land.
- Mazi Obinna Orji
Ọkọnkọ's symbol is ọmụ, the palm frond. When it is hung, nobody can enter the property again till the ọmụ is removed by Ọkọnkọ.
- Mazi Harrison Onyeama
When ọmụ is hung on a land, it means peace. To avoid fight, the ọmụ stands for an impending mediation from the third party.
- Mazi Alozie Ukaegbu
In Igbo culture, and Ọkọnkọ semiotics in particular, ọmụ stands for peace and authority.
- Mazi Ndubuisi Nwosu
When a piece of ọmụ is dropped during any disagreement, it symbolises 'stop, and be careful'. When an Ọkọnkọ member gives a fellow Ọkọnkọ member a piece of ọmụ, the warned must keep quiet, else the group has been disobeyed.
- Mazi Emeka Nwosu
... an ọmụ is hung on the land in dispute to avert incursion. Nobody sees the ọmụ and goes into the land.
- Mazi Ogbonna Ifeancha

Ọkọnkọ's emblem is ọmụ which stands for peace.

– Mazi Nnabuike Orji

... when people are in conflict, relatives, brothers, and communities, Ọkọnkọ are invited to hang their ọmụ which symbolises injunction and, 'Let there be peace'.

– Mazi Ntigenza Okebuugo

When conflicts occur, for instance dispute over land, palm fruit and palm wine trees and Ọkọnkọ are called upon, they simply hang ọmụ on the site. It means 'stop'. It means, 'caution'. When the ọmụ is hung, an Ọkọnkọ messenger, ọsụ Ọkọnkọ will go and inform the accused of the ọmụ.

In juxtaposition with the above voices of the interviewees, the following voices are from the FGD members conducted in four of the five clans of Umuahia.

– Mazi Obinna Iruke (Ibeku)

People think ọmụ signifies danger. No. When ọmụ is hung, it means peace and that all should get ready for peace.

– Mazi Uchechi Ichite (Ọhụhụ)

Ọkọnkọ Society is appealed to especially for land dispute. They hang ọmụ to avert troubles. The accused will be served. A day is fixed.

– Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwerekwe

The presence of Ọkọnkọ is ọmụ, which means peace. It is a powerful instrument of Ọkọnkọ.

--- Mazi Ugochukwu Okorie (Olokoro)

When the Ọkọnkọ Society comes in, they first hang ọmụ, the palm frond to warn against anybody going into the land.

What the above voices imply correspond with the interviewees'. The Ọkọnkọ Society's symbol, identity and language is based on the ọmụ. To buttress this, ọmụ to Ọkọnkọ Society is what the Bible and the Qur'an symbolise in Christianity and Islam respectively. *Ọmụ*, from what has so far been studied is a culture of Ọkọnkọ Society and the Igbo world in general. Tomasello (2003) sees culture as being capable of having psychological impact on things people communicate about. As ọmụ, the palm frond does not have the same significance to other peoples of the world, it then supports Kovcsess (2002) that says that no two cultures may view things the same because the mental

imagery experiment varies from one culture to another. So far, Hoijer's (1964:457) position that time and technology can alter the established ancestral cultural beliefs and values of a view of *Ọmu*, people has not yet been the case in Ọkọnkọ's view of ọmu.

During the 27th August non-participant observation at the land inspection of Itu, something significant concerning ọmu happened. The Ọkọnkọ society did not remember to bring down the ọmu hung at the middle of the vast farmland being inspected. The ọmu could be left if everybody in the farmland was an *ezumezu* (full fledged Ọkọnkọ member). It happened that after some twenty minutes the inspection had begun, the chairman of the inspection group suddenly stopped and asked the *ama ala* people if there was an Okpo (uninitiated person) within them (or rather us, because I mixed up as one of the *ama ala* people from Itu). A voice said 'No'. But I became afraid and had to say 'Yes'. He politely asked me to go out. As I was doing so, he changed his mind and asked me to stay. He however instructed one of his members to bring down the ọmu.

Ordinarily, I should not have entered the farmland initially because the language of the ọmu was not intelligible to me. They should have asked ab initio, if there was an 'Okpo' so that such would have paid some money for the ọmu to be brought down; to enable the 'Okpo', referring to this researcher to move round the farm with them. No money was taken from me from *the ntotu ọmu* (bringing down of the palm frond).

The symbols of ọmu and uhie from the above finding conforms with the literature earlier cited about 'sign' being anything that stands for something other than itself (Danesi 2004:4); of 'sign' having a perceived interpretation known as 'representation' (Danesi 2004:16); and that gongs, bells, and drums are examples of 'signs' that can be the examples of 'signals' (Sebeok 2001:11). Ọkọnkọ Society apart from the use of ọmu and uhie drum, also uses the gong and the bell in their social practice of funeral service of Ọkwụkwụ at the market square to herald the masquerades that dance and entertain the people.

Proverbs are the people's instrument for passing complex messages and giving final verdict.

Barley's (1972) definition suits the finding being discussed about proverbs. Barley said that a proverb is '... a standard statement of moral or categorical imperatives in fixed metaphorical paradigmatic form...'. This single finding also goes a long way in supporting Madu (1996: 189) belief that a proverb is 'condensed wisdom drawn from experience'. Drawing from the analyses given to the proverbs the respondents alluded to, it is obvious that proverbs are the people's preferred language for passing complex messages or information. On the other hand, proverbs are employed for final verdicts after conflict management sessions.

Proverbs are not going to be quoted in this discussion (as those have been done with some attempted culturally based interpretations). The discussion is being focused on the respondents' appraisals of what proverbs meant to the people. Mazi Obinna Orji's remark was very instructive for the finding:

People today do not appreciate proverbs. Those of yesterdays appreciated proverbs. I wish proverbs will be taught in our schools here in the southeast. With proverbs, one hides information and at the same time passes vital information.

Usage of proverbs demands wisdom. Because of this, Mazi Obi Mbiwi cautioned people about the usage of proverbs in order not to escalate a conflict instead of the desired de-escalation:

Proverbs are essential but must not be used loosely. If they are used wrongly, they could trigger conflicts rather than causing peace. Some are talented in proverbs. Those who are not should not engage in it.

Mazi Nnabuke Orji alluded the popular definition of Chinua Achebe in respect to proverbs in Igbo world:

I agree with Chinua Achebe that proverbs are the oil we use
I eating words in Igboland. Ndi Igbo cannot do with

proverbs. They portray and explain deep and complex thoughts ... Some proverbs are though ambiguous. It is like speaking in tongue. When wrongly understood or interpreted, proverbs can be destructive. We use proverbs to hide information. Proverbs are for mature minds. Speaking literarily could cause problems sometimes in serious conflict management sessions.

Proverbs are poetic. Proverbs are for minds who see from poetic eyes. The proverbs are for wise men as Mazi Kanu Joel Stormy remarked:

Proverbs for part of Igbo language and culture. Proverbs are used to identify a wise person. It is used to converse deeply. After judgments, the verdicts are given in proverbs.

Mazi Ntigenza Okebuugo stated that many people did not like proverbs. This is probably because of its poetic language and laconism. The octogenarian said:

Proverbs are for mature minds. Proverbs are to cut down the length of statements. There is a way a proverb will be used, it will give an immediate signal that one should be careful and vigilant. Some people do not like the use of proverbs, yet, it is indispensable in peace management in the community.

In the FGD held at Ndume Ibeku, Mazi Okebaram Onuegbu to an extent agreed with Mazi Okebuugo on the opinion of laconic nature of proverbs. He said:

Proverbs are used to solve conflicts much faster. Proverbs summarize volumes of thought in a few words.

In another FGD at Afugiri Oḡuḡu, the following three members of the group defined proverbs in few words. For Mazi Harrison Onyema, he said, 'The final verdict is normally in proverbs'. On the opinion of Mazi Uchechi Ichite, he said, 'There is a way a proverb can be used to correct a person. It is didactic.' Mazi Young Ukauwa supported Mazi Onyema and went a bit further retrospectively as par the relevance of proverbs in the olden days:

The Igbo people use proverbs to give verdicts. Ancient Ọkọnkọ people used proverbs to teach younger ones how to judge. The use of proverbs implies wisdom and brevity.

The third FGD in Ipupe Ụbakala also had members saying that proverbs are invaluable, as well as good for brevity. ‘Proverbs in Igbo are invaluable’ was Mazi Engr Chibuike Enwerekwe’s assessment while Mazi Ukairu Irokwe said, ‘We use proverbs to conceal secrets.’ The third contributor added, ‘The use of proverbs is for economy of words.’

In FGD at Okwu Olokoro, the members focused more on interpretations of proverbs they themselves raised than engaging in definitions. However, Mazi Ajomiwe Ekelemes, in the course of arguing with his colleagues defined proverbs in two short sentences in his argument that a proverb could have more than a single meaning or interpretation. He said, ‘Proverbs are ambivalent. They are two sided sharpened sword.’

Agreed, a proverb is a metaphor whose meaning could differ depending on the situations on ground. This implies that a user of a particular proverb must be mindful of the situation before using it. This is because using a proverb wrongly as it was argued above could cause more harm than good in peace situations. The proverbs highlighted in this study are peace-prone proverbs, i.e., proverbs used to foster peace and justice. Some proverbs trigger conflicts and crises, some create enmity while some encourage rebellion.

A major finding not discussed above has to do with the non-existence of Ọkọnkọ society at Umuopara in Umuahia South Local Government Area. From literature, what an Ọkọnkọ priest said in 1972 could be responsible for this extinction. Below is a full interview by Uwaga Okeanya, 90 in Ogbodiuwu. It was a kind of a lament and pessimism of the future (as of then) of Ọkọnkọ society in his clan, Umuopara:

You people now talk of the white man’s government as if we had no government in the past. The *Ọkọnkọ* was a secret society which served as a traditional system of government before the advent of the white man. The *Ọkọnkọ* enforced the verdicts of the *ama àlà* (village assembly). In the past, if the *Ọkọnkọ* music was played near the house of anybody, anxiety was created as to the reason for the beating of the

drum and if a palm leaf was left behind in the man's house, it meant that the person was to appear before the *Ôkônkô* court of appeal. As at present, there was then no age-limit for whoever wanted to be a member of the society. But then, only men of proven character and without a shameful past were accepted into the *Ôkônkô* society. When you people talk of a better government today, we laugh, because any thief can today be in government because he has the money.

Whenever there was a stalemate in any *Ôkônkô* decisions, the *Ôkônkô* society would consult other recognised *Ôkônkô* societies in other areas mediation. Non-members of the *Ôkônkô* society were known as *òkpòð* and they were forbidden to go near or greet *Ôkônkô* members when they were in full session. To be recognised as a full member of the *Ôkônkô* society, one must go through the *ida iyi* ceremony which is as follows.

The rite is performed at midnight, when the atmosphere is charged. The man to be initiated is surrounded by the old members, and a palm frond is placed between his lips to enforce silence. The members taunt and molest him. The priests now reveal about seven secrets to him, which he is not to reveal to any person. I shall not tell you these secrets either, since you are an *òkpòð*.

The new member is paraded round the village, after which he comes back to the *Ôkônkô* base. Later they move towards the stream. As they near it, the new member is exposed to the *ida iyi* ceremony. Thereafter, the new initiate remains for about fourteen days in hiding before he comes out. Non-members, *òkpòð*, are warned not to come near the roads leading to all the streams in the area. Market-places are blocked with palm leaves. Before the *ida iyi* ceremony, the novice is expected to offer a goat, seven eggs, four bottles of home-made gin, a white cock, ten large yams and one alligator pepper. These things, including a he-goat and a clay pot, are to be presented on the following *Oriè* market day. The chief priest prepares yam in a hot pepper soup, *mmiri oku ji*, which every *Ôkônkô* member partakes of.

During this *ida iyi* ceremony, women are not supposed to see the members of the society. The traditional belief is that any woman who sees a member of the society will surely die unless she brings a ram and an alligator pepper – this is to facilitate her reincarnation – and stays one month in hiding. The *Ôkônkô* society is highly

respected, and during the *ida iyi*, which lasts for seven days, members from far and wide, dressed in different *Ôkônkô* attires, attend. Even compared with white man's rule, *Ôkônkô* as an instrument of government has no, rival. The most important objective of every government is to enjoy the loyalty of the governed, and this the *Ôkônkô* enjoyed before the white man brought his own government.

The arrival of the white man changed the traditional pattern in Umuopara society. The *Ôkônkô* society was condemned, polygamy was said to be an uncivilised practice, *Ôjam Umuopara* which united all of us in the past, was destroyed, the religion we used to know – all our *Njoku, àfô, iyi afo* – were all discarded with the advent of the Christian churches and schools. One thing I must tell you is that most of those things which the white man came to destroy are still with us, and shame on us if we abandon the religion and practices of our fathers.

With the above extract from Isichei (1977:92-93), it is no surprising that this researcher could not see a trace of the *Ọkọnkọ* society in Umuopara forty-three years after the interview was granted. The irony of the present situation is that Umuopara is the cultural 'first son' which in Igbo means 'opara' of the people of Umuahia. In the absence of *Ọkọnkọ* Society in this clan, the few that were spoken to said they resort to Magistrate courts when the *ama ala* fail to control order on the community.

6.3 Conclusion

The thesis has addressed the misconception that *Ọkọnkọ* Society is dreaded and only a secret cult. There is no doubt that the society has its cultic aspect with its esoteric language. However, being dreaded is arguable based on the fact that the society's social practices do contribute immensely in the people of Umuahia's conflict management, land disputes, especially. The hermeneutical interpretations of the society's engagements in the communities have helped to address the fact that not only does *Ọkọnkọ* protect the language and culture of the people, it has also been able to act as an appellant court for the people when the *umu nna* fail to manage a conflict between brothers or villages. The society's adoption of Igbo proverbs and culturally significant semiotics like the palm front and other plants

for effective conflict management even in an era where Christianity and traditionalism have some conflicts in their beliefs is commendable.

The thesis has also established that a traditional way of managing peace is effective and that the people even those who are not traditionalists have belief in the efficacious style of the traditional mediation and adjudication. What this implies is that with Igbo language and cultural practices, conflicts are better managed when compared to modern court proceedings.

The thesis therefore has established that with one's language and culture, especially the Igbo language and culture for the people of Umuahia in Abia State in Nigeria, it is easier to live together and when conflicts arise, also earlier to manage because one's language and culture is devoid of ambiguities which a *lingua franca* like English could pose in the course of conflict management.

In Nigeria and Africa at large at the moment, local languages are being abandoned and so in the danger of going extinct. In the case of Igbo language, Ọkọnkọ Society with its social practices is keeping the language and helping to protect the cultural traits and practices from the language.

Lastly, it is advisable that Ọkọnkọ reforms on some of its activities in order to fit in in the contemporary world. For instance, it should review its excessive use of force to discipline those that have stepped on it as recorded in its embarking on iri olu, a military kind of venting anger on an assumed offender's property and even extending such to the community where the perceived offender hails from. Such exercise is inimical to growth and sustainable peace.

6.5. Recommendations

In correspondence with each of the four objectives in this work, the researcher has the following four recommendations:

1. Ọkọnkọ's unique ways of resolving conflicts should be imbibed by the government; the thoroughness in investigating cases by Ọkọnkọ society is worthy of emulation;
2. Igbo language should be the medium of teaching the children in primary school on one hand, and on the other hand, should compulsorily be used by the States of

House of Assemblies in the southeast while legislating. This will strengthen the Igbo language and culture;

3. Igbo semiotics should be taught at the primary and secondary schools in the southeast. This will aid the people in understanding their worldview and values;
4. The Igbo proverbs should be discussed on the radio and television by the elders. This will help to sensitise the youth on the uniqueness of their proverbs towards Igbo's management of conflicts.

6.6. Contribution to Scholarship

This research has brought to bear the fact that even before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria, *Ọkọnkọ* had been a source of social and political mechanism in the Igbo world of Umuahia. It was a police force whose primary duty was to maintain order and peace. In other words, *Ọkọnkọ* was a watchdog, a court of appeal and an institution for the protection of the people's language – culture dynamics.

This work will be a source of reference, primarily, to peace scholars, and also historians, political scientists, sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, lawyers and the media. Before now, *Ọkọnkọ* had only been known as a dreaded secret society. But today in the 21st century scholarship, *Ọkọnkọ* will now be viewed as a positive mechanism for sustainable peace, security and justice. Peace and conflict managers can derive a lot of attributes from the *Ọkọnkọ* peace practices towards enhancing how conflict can be managed and sustainable peace sustained.

Besides its relevance as applied scholarship as stated above, the study has contributed to basic research in relation to the methodology of cultural manifestations in the context of conflict management.

The main contribution to scholarship of this research is that the Igbo language and culture is the effective medium in managing the Igbo people conflict.

6.7. Limitations

One of the challenges of this researcher was inability to fully interpret the musical rhythms and effectively discuss the masquerades of the Ọkọnkọ society. The core reason for this limitation was the scope and significance of this work, although there was no such promise to dwell on the musical manifestations of culture. Giving the needed attention to the music and masquerades would have affected the objectives of this research.

Another limitation is the fact that non-members of Okonko were not interviewed to know how they feel about the society's ways of managing crises.

6.8. Suggestion for Further Research

This researcher believes that further research can be focused on the music and masquerades of Ọkọnkọ society. The researcher has to discuss the tones, the rhythms, the language and the dynamics of the music instruments and their communicative significance and what implications they might have for conflict management. There are numerous masquerades that are displayed during Ọkọnkọ Ọkwụkwụ (Funeral ceremony) at the market square. The suggested research should highlight the symbolisms of the masquerades and their responses to the six music instruments of the Ọkọnkọ music.

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APPENDIX

Semiotic symbols used by Ọkọ̀nko Society



*Figure 1. Omu Okonko symbolising peace and authority



Figure 2. Okonko's *Uhie* (tied with palm frond) and the other six musical instruments



Figure 3. The Uha tree symbolising longevity



Figure 4. Ugirisi (or Okoronko) symbolising sacredness and protection; always found in shrines and borders between lands



Figure 5. Avoshi symbolising relics

Pictures with some of the Interviewees



Figure 6. With Mazi Alozie Ukaegbu from Okwu Olokoru



Figure 7. With Mazi Obi Mbiwi from Akata Afaraukwu Ibeku



Figure 8. With Mazi Dr David Okenarum Onuegbu from Ndume Ibeku



Figure 9. With Mazi Obinna Orji from Okwulaka Afaraukwu Ibeku



Figure 10. With Mazi Hon. Kanu Joel Stormy from Ipupe Ubakala



Figure 11. With Mazi Nnabuike Orji from Itu Olokoro



Figure 11. With Mazi Ntigenza Okebuugo from Ipupe Ubakala

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS



Figure 12. Ndume Ibeku Focus Group



Figure 13. Okwu Olokoro Focus Group



Figure 14. Ipupe Ubakala Focus Group



Figure 15. Afugiri Ohuhu Focus Group

LAND INSPECTION BETWEEN THE UMEZURUMBAS AND NNUUKWUS



Figure 16. The road leading to the land in dispute



Figure 17. The river from which the farmland derives its name



Figure 18. Land inspection in progress



Figure 19. Land inspection in progress under the rain