

**AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE IN PEACE
KEEPING AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: THE IGBO SYSTEM**

Ifeyinwa Cordelia Isidienu

Department of Igbo, African and Communication Studies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

ifyisidienu@gmail.com or ic.isidienu@unizik.edu.ng

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Abstract

The Igbo people of south-east Nigeria have a unique system of governance that marks them out from other African societies. The Igbo system of governance starts from the family and stretches to the larger society. This system of governance, which is fast eroding in modern Igbo society created an enabling environment for unity, peace and tranquility. Conflicts are easily and amicably resolved through a laid down system involving various institutions by which the Igbo govern themselves. Amicable resolution of conflict gives room for peace, progress and development in the society. Recently, the Igbo traditional system of governance has experienced a major setback, because of that, most people experience chaotic situations in political, social, economic and religious lives. It is, therefore, necessary to reawaken the Igbo system of governance which held the society together; and enabled them to experience growth and development. Data for the study was got mainly through oral interview. Fifteen Igbo elders knowledgeable in the Igbo system of governance were randomly selected from some Igbo communities and interviewed. Three research questions guided the study, which are: (1) What do we mean by Igbo traditional system of governance? (2) In what ways did the Igbo people govern themselves in the past? (3) How did the Igbo traditional system of governance serve as a means for peace keeping and conflict resolution? It was found out that, the Igbo system of governance was based on quasi-democratic republican system of government. The above system bound the traditional Igbo communities together and guaranteed egalitarianism through the appropriate deployment of organized institutions. By this system of governance that ensures equity for the Igbo citizenry, the Igbo society experienced peace and societal advancement. The paper, therefore, advocates the return of the Igbo traditional system of governance for the modern Igbo society to reap the gains of the system.

Keywords: Igbo, south-east Nigeria, Traditional System, Governance, Peace and Conflict Resolution

Introduction

Human beings are political animal. Right from creation man has a way of controlling his activities and creating rules and regulations that guide human actions. These codes of conduct are respected and there are sanctions and punishment for offenders.

Most African nations were under a monarchical system of governance. The monarchs exert great power despite the role of the members of the cabinet who also help in governance. There was hardly ever a time the Igbo nation was united under one political authority or sovereign nation like the Edo, Hausa, Yoruba, Igala of Nigeria and some other African societies. However, few towns in Igbo land like Onitsha, Oguta, Agbor, Nri and Arochukwu have a history of kingship which dates into history long before their contact with the Europeans.

Igbo traditional political structure starts from the family *ezinau lo* to the kindred *umunna* to the village *ogbe* and to the town level *obodo*. There are other political bodies like the age grade *otu o gbọ*, the *ozọ* titled men *ndi chiri echichi*, the daughters' union *umuada* or *umuokpu*, the wives' union *inyom di* and the secret institution *otu mmanwu*. These groups, with general consensus, exert political authorities within their areas of jurisdiction. For instance, if the case concerns a particular age grade, the entire members of that particular age grade or its executives must be consulted before any valid decision or enforcement of an earlier decision is taken. Certainly, as far as the Igbo traditional society is concerned, it had full complement of government organs which performed full political functions including maintenance of law and order, defense of the territorial integrity of the community and social and economic development; (Amucheazi, 2012:243). Every Igbo person contributes, in one way or the other, in the administration of his community. Amucheazi (2012) also insists that the Igbo person was fully participant in the various political processes within the Igbo society. He identified himself within the goals and aspirations of the community and was prepared to fulfill his responsibilities to his community. And when he defaulted, there were regulations and institutions to enforce compliance.

Recently, the Igbo system of governance has changed drastically; and same is the case with most African societies. Several decades after independence, many African postcolonial states continue to experience widespread ethnic and civil conflicts, poverty, corruption, civil disobedience, frequent electoral and post-electoral strife and fragmentation of various aspects of their institutions of governance. The contemporary African state is not able to guarantee its citizens

adequate security while basic necessities of life have eluded its people (Oni & Segun, 2010). African traditional systems of governance, especially, that of the Igbo of Nigeria, have been disarrayed. It is obvious that the colonial masters' system of governance, which the African state has adopted, could not totally solve the problems of African societies. In most cases, this new system of governance is not able to resolve conflicts as expected and so robs communities the peace needed for growth and development. Based on this, it is necessary to review the Igbo traditional system of governance in order to bring to limelight those areas in the present dispensation that need to be adjusted for peaceful resolution of conflicts and peace keeping amongst the people.

The Igbo Traditional System of Governance

The Igbo nation was organized into several interdependent societies before the arrival and contact with the British colonial masters. This could partly explain why many people referred to Igbo people as *Igbo enwe eze*, meaning literally that Igbo have no king. The *Igbo enwe eze* notion is because of the misconceptions of Igbo traditional polity. Onunwa (2005), cited in Isidienu (2016), explains, that the evolutionary development of Igbo political system is very intriguing and has consequently been grossly misunderstood, misinterpreted and misrepresented by both the colonial administrators and some educated Igbo scholars themselves. Part of the reason for the misrepresentation is that the Europeans expected to see the type of monarchy they have in their countries and the type which they met in some other parts of Nigeria, which made colonization easy for them. However, in few places in Igbo land where the kingship existed, the Europeans refused to refer to them as kings rather they call them chief(s). Amadi (2005:99) affirms that the Yoruba have a splendid array of famous and powerful kings. There were the great Alafin of Oyo, the Oni of Ife, the Alake of Abeokuta, the Awujale of Ijebu, the Owa of Ijesha. They all wielded considerable power. Amadi (2005) also states that Reverend Samuel Johnson referred to the government of Yoruba land as an absolute monarchy, and that kings are more dreaded than even the gods. On the governance in northern Nigeria, Amadi (2005:100) asserts that, "The Emirs are powerful lords. There were the Emirs of Kano, the Emirs of Zaria, the Shehu of Bornu, Etus Nupe, Sultan of Sokoto, and many more."

The Igbo traditional political system was characterized by lineages and clans in which there are political tolerance, compromise and a deep sense of unity to individual and communal rights and duties. In the past there was an Igbo nation only in the sense that they are people who speak the same language, had the

same custom, tradition, religious belief, economic system and who inhabit a geographical area probably not precisely defined. There was nothing like an Igbo state for there had never been any central government, institution or authority running throughout the whole land. No wonder Ojumu (2016) describes the Igbo nation as a chief less society which was segmentary and egalitarian in nature....Be that as it may, there existed many institutions in the pre-colonial Igbo society, charged with the responsibility of judicial, legislative and executive functions. Each town *obodo* regarded itself as *mba* (state or nation) autonomous in every respect (Ogbalu, 2006:20-21). Igbo political organization was, therefore, based on autonomous units. Each of such autonomous units could declare war or make peace, depending on the circumstances. Every grown-up male was recruited as a soldier when the need arose, since there was no standing army. The units could, as well, enter into diplomatic relations with their neighbours. Igbo people also made laws and tried peoples' cases with justice and fair-play. Ogbalu (1981:940-95) states that each community in Igbo land was autonomous; none pays allegiance to the other. Even during or after a war, no community lorded it over others. This is true because even the Arochukwu people, with their fearful long juju *Ibiniukpabi* had no political authorities over other communities in Igbo land. Oni and Segun (2010), discussing on non-centralized and centralized states in African societies, cite Tallensi of Northern Ghana, Baito of Eritrea, the Sukuma of Tanzania, Oroma of Ethiopia, the Igbo of Nigeria, the Kgotla in Botswana, the Nuer of Southern Sudan, and the Kikuyu of Kenya as non-centralized states. They also state that, "the centralized states had a more structured and sophisticated political system. Examples are the Asante and Mole-Dabgani of Ghana, Yoruba land of Nigeria, Zulu of South Africa, Barotse of Zambia and Baganda of Uganda." African societies were governed through structures that ranged from those that were highly hierarchical to those that were highly decentralized (Economic Commission for Africa, South Africa Office, 2007).

The Igbo traditional system of governance was fragmented, although the parts are not significant on their own but characterized by consensus and republican in nature. According to Afigbo (1981:96), "Any local Igbo community... consisted of a federation of equivalent segments whose leaders met together in a council which was said to consist of the senior age grade in the community and was referred to collectively as elders." Speaking on this, Okodo (2006) points out that, there were pockets of administrative area that were ruled by the consensus of the people at meetings at different levels of operations. There were no kings. This

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was informed by the Igbo man's mentality of egalitarianism. He so much believes in equality of rights. Igbo people work hard to earn a living, and so do not depend on any one for their needs. Even the physically challenged persons resort to engaging in things that can enable them earn a living; in such situation therefore, everyone feels equal with each other. Orji (1999:10) addresses the Igbo traditional political system as "Government by consensus." He states:

The government of the Igbo people before the advent of the white man was by consensus organized in communities, families, ... All the communities in Igbo land were severally independent of one another. They owe no allegiance to any person or organization. And nobody had the power to question a community for any action which its people might have decided to take, with regards any matter, whether good or bad.

In case of war, there could be loss of land if a town was defeated; but there was nothing like amnesty. Each community was responsible for their actions. Isichei (1974) was of the opinion that it was how the Igbo political system was organized that made the Igbo polity not to be autocratic. Ekwealor (1998:63) supporting the assertion states that it is because Igbo communities were autonomous and their leadership decentralized that made the Europeans to declare Igbo land as people who do not have any leadership style. But in reality, the leadership style of the Igbo was egalitarian in nature. Igbo people have respect for elders and high regard for wisdom and experience which such elders had acquired over the years.

The Igbo traditional political structure was segmented. An Igbo town was made up of interrelated village communities and they have minimal and tenuous relationships with each other; although some of them may cooperate with each other in order to face external threats. Nwosu (1977:17-21) conclusively states that political power and authority were not concentrated at one level of Igbo society; rather, they were dispersed and diffused into several organs and bodies. Accordingly, the Igbo system of governance in pre-colonial era is vividly captured thus:

Traditional Igbo political organization was based on quasi-democratic republican system of government. ...This system guaranteed its citizens equality... This government system was witnessed by the Portuguese who first arrived and met with the Igbo people in the 15th century. With the exception of a few notable Igbo towns like Onitsha, which had kings called Obi, and places like Nri Kingdom and Arochukwu, which had priest

kings; Igbo communities... were overwhelmingly ruled solely by a republican consultative assembly of the common people... there was no centralization of power among the Igbo. ...everyone in the village has the authority to contribute in decision making. ...This way of governing was immensely different from most other communities of Western Africa, and only shared by the Ewe of Ghana (<https://nigerianscholars.com>tutorials>)

Traditional Political Institutions in Igbo Society

Among the Igbo, family is the basic unit of Igbo political institution. Mbiti (1970:106) opines that; the family, for Africans, has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe and North America. Among African societies, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives. And so, the oldest member of the family is the head of the family. Ekwealor (1998:63) states that the eldest male is in possession of the family *Ofo*. His duty includes political, social and religious functions and the maintenance of good human relations. The head of the family is in-charge of the family wealth such as land, economic trees etc, and this family wealth must be equitably shared. The family head also co-ordinates, directs and advices in such matters as marriage and in certain occupations requiring specialized skills such as carving, healing etc. He also reconciles conflicting issues. According to Nwosu (2002:235), "The amount of legitimacy and loyalty he generated depended on his political sagacity, his administrative skill, his moral probity ... The *ofo* did not only signify the symbol of authority but serves as an emblem of linkage with the ancestors". A child born into a family is socialized into the norms of the Igbo society through the family. He is a full-fledged member of the society as an active and articulate member of the family; this explains the importance of family to the Igbo.

Ogbalu (2006: 12) points out that the kindred *umunna* was the next unit of administration after the family. It is a group of families which have a common descent. The kindred played a very important role both in political and religious matters. They discipline their members whose behaviour and conduct were either anti-social or were likely to bring collective trouble or shame to the community. It is an organization whose decision is sought before an external organization or, in modern times, before court of law decides on a case that involves two members of one particular kindred. The leaders always table matters before the general house of the kindred for deliberations at the end of which the members take decisions (Okodo, 2006).

The next level of administration after the kindred is the village assembly which is made up of different kindreds that had common decent. Members of cabinet are usually drawn from different kindred that made up the village. Okodo (2006:43) opines that “the administration [at the village level] is by suggestions, and the decisions are summed up by the chairman, who rules in favour of the majority.” People’s opinion must be sought for, before any final decision is taken. Matters billed for settlement cannot be tabled elsewhere without first and foremost submitting it to the village assembly. Isidienu, (2016) citing Ogbalu (2006:12) confirms that, “the village assembly settles disputes which the kindred could not settle and is responsible for the defense of the village against thieves, intruders or wild animals.”

Another level of administration in Igbo governance is the town assembly, made up of the council of elders. It is a place in which wide-ranging decisions are taken e.g conflict, war and peace, negotiation between towns and guiding principle. The highest political authority was invested on the council of elders. This council, which operated as the highest legislative, administrative and judicial body, was made up of titled men, outstanding and influential family heads and community leaders, war lords, heads of societies and age grades; men of wealth and unusual talents (Nwosu 2002:235). Decisions were arrived at, through a general consensus, and must represent the will of the people.

There are other bodies in Igbo traditional society who also exert political authorities within their powers and areas of jurisdiction. These groups include daughters’ union *umụ ada* or *umụ ọkpụ*, age grade *otu ọgbọ*, *ọzọ* titled institution *ndị chiri echichi* and secret institution *otu nzuzo*.

Daughters’ Union *Umụ ada/Umụ ọkpụ*

Daughters’ Union, called *Umụ ada/Umụ ọkpụ*, is a gathering of women born in a family, in the same kindred, the same village, in a particular town. They are the daughters of the soil, the native daughters of the same male ancestry. These women, by virtue of their union and authority as daughters, are very powerful. No Igbo person would want to make a case with *umụ ada/umụ ọkpụ*. Much respect is accorded to them at all levels of the Igbo political system – family, kindred, village and town levels. The *umụ ada/umụ ọkpụ* of a family, kindred, village and town, as an instrument of governance helped in settling disputes in their father’s house, in their kindred, in their village and in their town respectively. In some cases they were able to settle cases which the males were not able to settle. It is *umụ ada/umụ ọkpụ* of various families that form

u mu ada/u mu o kpu of the kindred; those from different kindreds form the village level *u mu ada/u mu o kpu* while all the *u mu ada/u mu o kpu* of different villages forms the union at the town level. They correct ill behaviours of the members of their fathers' house, including those of their brothers and their brothers' wives. *U mu ada/U mu o kpu* also performs very important role at the burial of a relation. At their meetings, which are on specific or special occasions, issues are deliberated upon, and decisions accepted by the majority before any action is taken. Olisa (2002) confirm that,

U mu ada/U mu o kpu hardly hold scheduled meetings. They meet during specific events such as the death of their relatives or title taking of one of their members of the kindred. It is in this type of occasion that they render their customary services as well as settle problems and disputes in the kindred. They also talk about the welfare of the kindred generally.

Wives' Union *Inyom Di*

These are women that are married to a particular town, same village, same kindred or particular family. Their levels of organization are like those of *u mu ada/u mu o kpu*, where they are organized at the family, kindred, village and town levels. The various levels of *inyom di* are powerful. Their duty is to bringing peace among themselves and in the community. The union, through fines and other punishments, check the excesses of their recalcitrant members who engage in such vices as harlotry, adultery, disobedience to their husbands and his parents and family members, use of abusive words and fighting at, for instance, market place and stream, or quarrels or fights involving two of their members (Okodo,2006:42). Every married woman in the community works hard not to be found wanting by *inyom di*, because the union also protects their members from being maltreated. During their meetings, decisions are adopted before their implementation.

Age Grade *Otu Ogbọ/Ebiri/Uke*

Age grade is called *otu Ogbọ*, *otu Ebiri*, or *otu Uke*, depending on the speech variety. It is an organization of people who are born at approximately the same period. In some cases, many of the members of one age grade are born the same year, while some members may be up to five years older than others. The various *otu Ogbọ* of a community are known by names which they adopt or are given by their elder age grade. Often times, the name of an age grade is got through what is invoked or what is happening or has happened at its time of formation. For

instance, *Ánataḡgù* Age Grade indicates that members of the age grade were born after a war or that their age grade was formed after a war. *Ọsónḡdù* Age Grade could indicate that the members were born during a war, or that the community is battling with some life-threatening challenges. Other names which age grades go by include *Ọfúóbì*, *Ìgwèbùíké*, *Ífùnáányá*, *Óbìnwánnē*, *Èkwuémé*, *Údókámma*, *Mgbadabuenyi*, etc. Age grades form their executive committee by choosing their leaders on kindred, village and town levels. Among the Igbo, age grade leadership is egalitarian in nature, because their members feel equal to each other. Each decision is adopted by all the members, sometimes through vote.

There are adult and youthful age grade in every community; assigned based on the age of the members. The youthful age grades are assigned to tasks requiring physical strength like the building and maintenance of roads and bridges, going to war and using force to collect debts from defaulters who were adamant in paying their debt. In the traditional Igbo society there was no standby army. In the case of inter town wars, soldiers are recruited by each community from the youthful age grades. In the performance of these duties, therefore, the youthful age grades serve as police and defense institution of their various communities. It is through the younger age grades that laws and customs of the society are enforced and orders maintained. They see to it that their members' behaviours are regulated; and that individuals and groups maintain public order. Nwanunobi (2001:113) asserts that, "In political system in which the affairs of the society are handled through age grade, the settlement of disputes and decisions on the upkeep of norms of the society are responsibilities of the age grade." Apart from the above functions, they help each other, for instance, they may agree to work for each other in turn, and they help their weak and sick members. They can give loan/capital for a start off of business to their members. They also help in the development of the town.

Ọzọ Titled Institution

Ọzọ titled institution wielded the most powerful political influence in Igbo society. It is an institution that is open to all free born of the community but achieved only by the wealthy. It is known by different names in various Igbo communities and they are the people that attained the highest chieftaincy title in the society.

Any member of the *ọzọ* titled institution must be one who is honest and free from any vice. It is their achieved status in the society, as well as their wealth,

that raises them to a place of honour and respect, and therefore, they are the law makers of the society. They regulate the behaviour of all other interests in the society. They are like the chief judge and custodians of traditions of the society. They sever as a reference point in matters that concerns the rules, practices and belief system of the society. Nwosu, (2002) affirms that, the *o zo* title holders are the custodians of the people's conscience, custom and tradition. It is also their administrative responsibility to ensure that individuals and groups conform to norms, ethos and customs. They also exercise the most political and administrative influence in Igbo society. It is also the duty of *o zo* title holders to punish offenders and as such any decisions they made were regarded as the final.

Secret Institution

There are various secret societies in Igbo land, but masquerade or *mmanwu* society cuts across all Igbo communities, though it could bear different dialectal names. It is only males that are initiated into masquerade institution, except in a few places where very old influential women were initiated as *nne mmanwu* (masquerade's mother). *Mmanwu* society members are not to reveal the secrets of the organization to non-initiates. Masquerades serve as a linkage between the past and the present, for they represent the spirits of the ancestors. They are, therefore, revered and obeyed.

There were different grades of masquerade. The adult masquerade served as part of the arm of government. They announced laws which must have been approved by elders and titled men. Their pronouncements made people to be aware of those laws so that enacted laws would be kept. Almost all the difficult cases that defied settlement by other institutions, such as land and murder cases, were settled by the masquerade institution. Masquerades helped in the collection of debts, and so, assisted in bringing and maintaining peace and order in the society. However, with the coming of the Europeans, arms of the judicial role of the masquerade began to dwindle. The masquerades, no longer have an absolute control of the political institutions as before. Masquerades' control over the executive, legislative and judicial of Igbo traditional governance has been dominated by modern judicial system (Isidienu and Onyekelu, 2020).

Furthermore, in Igbo traditional society, masquerades were also used for corrective measures, in cases such as women who usually cooked very late in the night, women who were misbehaving by maltreating their husbands or mothers-in-law, and men who disrespected their parents or beat their wives. The

masquerades handled such cases by paying such people surprise visit or by echoing their names late in the night, sometimes using songs, to satirize or embarrass them.

Findings and Further Discussions

The Igbo traditional system of governance is the established traditional and cultural dimensions of governance in Igbo society, geared towards the maintenance of order and harmony among the people. It is the political management of the people, or the political administration of the society. In Igbo traditional system of governance, people have freedom of expression and participation in matters that affect the community. Consultations and consensus are very important before any decision will be arrived at. General opinion always prevails. The political administration of the modern Igbo society is the monarchical administration of the people. It involves the traditional rulers called *Igwe* or *Eze*, who has a cabinet made up of titled people who are representatives of different areas of jurisdiction of the community, such as kindred or village. They help the traditional ruler in the political administration of the community. The monarchical system now replaces the traditional political system which was republican administration, whereby it is the total decision of the people that is the machinery of the government. In those pre-colonial days, every Igbo person had a say in governance and roles were often clearly defined. For instance, issues of spiritual concern were handled by the chief priests or *ezemmuo* of the deities while the *okpara* or the *aka ji ofo* handled any issue that pertained to oath-taking. Today, people elect the *Igwe* or *Eze*, as well as the President General. The President General, with his body of executives comprising the Vice President General, Secretary General, Assistant Secretary General, Financial Secretary, and the Treasurer as principal officers; and the other positions that are not principle officers, like Publicity Secretary, and Provost, play a significant role in the day to day political administration of their community to ensure that there is peace and security. There is a position reserved for a woman in some communities. It is known as Women Leader. The Women Leader, with the assistance of some select women working with her, has it as her responsibility to mobilize and sensitize the women of her community for their active participation in the political affairs of their kindred, village or town.

Our research found out that today's monarchical system differs from that practiced by a few Igbo communities which were monarchical during the pre-colonial era. The few communities included Nri Kingdom, Onitsha, Oguta,

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Arochukwu, and Agbor. The monarchs of today do not have ultimate powers because there are checks and balances for curtailing their excess powers. However, the pre-colonial monarchs exercised near absolute authority. Except for the monarchs of Nri Kingdom and Arochukwu who were also the spiritual heads of their communities, the excessive powers of the pre-colonial monarchs were checked by the spiritual leaders of their communities, who wielded the authority of the gods of the land. From this, we can infer the supreme authority exercised by the monarchs of Nri Kingdom and Arochukwu community. Apart from these communities that had monarchs, other Igbo communities had no traditional rulers, prompting the colonialists to appoint warrant chiefs that would help them in governance. This is because the colonialists wanted a leader they could relate with in each community, since they could not key into the existing republican administration, which is made up of segments of administration at different levels of the communities and through different institutions family, kindred, village, council of elders, daughters' union, wives' union, titled men, chief priests of deities, age grade, and masquerade. We gathered from our informants that the Igbo traditional republican system was not shaped as the republican system of modern society. There could be a leader in each level of administration of the communities, with few hands helping him. There were no secretaries or financial secretaries because there were no literate ones to read or write. But people of proven integrity were selected for keeping their families, kindred's, institution's or community's money for use in satisfying public needs and for the execution of projects of communal interest like building of community gathering places, shrines and markets

The three arms of government -executive, legislative and judicial arms, were incorporated in Igbo traditional administration. For instance, judicial services could be rendered by converting the general house of the meeting of an administrative unit into a judicial session; hence the popular saying: *A ga-anọ na nzukọ e bute ikpe, a nọ rọ ebe ahụ, kpebe ikpe*. The chairman or leader at that meeting would become the judge, with the executive members and the entire house as the members of the jury. The session would listen to cases, such as land case, theft, violence, and denial of rights; and adjudicate on the issues of dispute. The disputants could be asked to leave the venue at some point, to enable the session to confer or *gbaa izu* and take decisions. The disputants were called in after decisions were taken, and the decisions announced to them by the leader. It was usual for those in dispute to accept the decision. However, where one or both parties did not agree with the decisions, the aggrieved party could take the

case to a higher body different levels of Igbo administration; for instance, from family level to the kindred level, up to the village and town levels. In some cases, each time there was a dispute, the people would assemble at the home of the traditional head, who would adjudicate on the contending matter. Appropriate sanctions, which could be a fine, were meted to recalcitrant individual. Through this means the rights of individuals are maintained, as cases were settled at each level of administration - families, kindred, village, and town levels by the appropriate institution like *aka ji ofo*, and council of elders.

Some of the informants from whom we collected our data for this study were of the opinion that the Igbo system of governance has not changed drastically but has been sharpened. According to them, in the olden days there were no secretaries since the people could neither read nor write, but recently, a lot of people have become literate so there are now family, kindred, village, town and community administrative institution's secretaries. They also argued that in the past there were no banks or secure means of keeping huge sums of money for future use; but today, things have changed, as there are now treasurers who keep large sums of money safely in banks, while financial secretaries keeps accurate financial records. They also point out that the traditional institutions are not totally in charge of all disputes now, as some litigants could decide not to approach, or wait for, the traditional judicial process to handle their cases. For instance, those who have criminal cases like murder cases often prefer to go to court. Even in cases of theft some people now decide not to wait for settlement through the traditional judicial system. Thus, such litigants would normally come to their kindred and ask, *unu a na-ekpeikpe ohi? Unu nwere ike ikpe ikpe ohi?, a si ya mba, mana o bu ghi na ha enweghi ike ikpe ikpe ohi. Unu kweta ka ha kpee, ha ekpee*. In such instances, they could go to court.

One of the many interesting findings of this research is that the processes in traditional judicial system are very much cheaper than the modern law system. Whereas the traditional system requires disputants to pay a token fee and bring some kola nut and a few kegs of palm wine, anybody that approaches a lawyer for a case must pay chunks of money to the lawyer from time to time. Moreover, having a court case deprives people of their steady job activities; as they must appear in court during work hours whenever their case is to be called up. There is hardly a quick dispensation of justice in the courts because courts adjourn from time to time; and each time a case would be tried, those in dispute do not go to their work places, and they must part with huge sums of money for payment to their lawyer(s). The Igbo traditional system abhors adjournments

and tries to fix their meetings on days and times convenient to the stake holders so that people would continue with their economic activities while attending the judicial meetings. This is why, in the traditional judicial system, judicial session could hold on Saturday or Sunday, and could stretch deep into the night until the dispute is amicably settled. This research found out that as people approach the law courts for settlement of their cases rather than refer the cases to the traditional judicial system, they are depriving the traditional system of money, kola, and wine which they ordinarily would have paid for their cases to be handled.

The governance of Igbo political system calls for convening of meetings; it provides a social point of meeting for people. They pray with kola nut at the commencement of meetings, and could eat and drink when food and drinks were available. These activities of eating or drinking together increase the brotherly bonding among the members of a community. The system involved in the presentation, distribution, praying with, breaking and eating of kola nut, collectively referred to as kola nut ritual, enables people to know their relationship with others, the way they have authorities and issues that pertain to seniorities.

In the current system of Igbo political administration, the Igwe or traditional ruler is at the helm of affairs, followed by the President General. Both of them, together with their statutory assistants, are ruling the community. However, the traditional ruler is the overall head that projects and protects the community, and is the chief security officer of his community. The President General is there to assist the traditional ruler. The Igwe and President General are supposed to be working together in harmony for the progress of the community; especially as each of them has his duties. However, in some communities, the Presidents General and the traditional rulers do not work in harmony; thereby breeding problems in their communities. Every community where the traditional ruler and the President General are at logger heads does not achieve any meaningful development. Some traditional rulers, rather than be peace makers cause trouble for their people. In some cases, the traditional rulers use their position to amass wealth by conferring chieftaincy titles on people whose sources of wealth are questionable, after they had paid him huge sums of money. By receiving the titles, they are automatically incorporated in the traditional ruler's cabinet, to become role models for, especially the youth. These are the manner of people that deliberate on issues that concern peace in the community, and are meant to resolve conflicts in their towns. Recently, there were, and still are, killings,

kidnapping for ransom, human trafficking, and sell of human parts in different parts of Igbo land. Most of the bushes where the hoodlums occupy were communities manned by traditional rulers and their cabinet members, and Presidents General and the members of their executive. It is clear from this that the Igbo traditional republican system of governance gave way to the present monarchical system introduced by the colonial masters, which has failed to serve the peace and security needs of the people. The British colonial administration has, therefore left behind several destabilizing policies that affected not only the nature of governance but some strange political relationships (Ajeli, 2020:133). The British rule of indirect rule, the French policy of assimilation and the Belgian policy and patterns of exploitation were all colonial legacies that affected the processes of democratization and sowed seeds for conflicts production in Africa (Bodi, Tanko and Uniga, 2021).

It may be argued that community policing and vigilante help the regular police to identify the thieves and all the bad people in the community, and that when these people are caught, they go straight to court from there. So good it may sound, but the fact remains that bandits have taken most of the bushes in the recent times making life difficult for people, especially the farmers and travelers who are often maimed and sometimes killed.

The recent change in Igbo traditional system of governance has some negative effects on the people's religious life. Core moral values such as honesty, respect for sacredness of life, patience, perseverance, kindness are relegated to the background. Economically, the modern system of governance has made way to fraud and cheating as acceptable ways of doing business. Hard work is relegated to the background, as Igbo people's means of economic advancement through agriculture and manufacturing industries are neglected; this has prompted some Igbo youth to opt for ways to make quick money through killings, armed robbery, kidnapping and other fraudulent means; all to the detriment of the entire Igbo society. This insecurity situation is the reason people are restricting their movements, some businesses are grounding, and cost of every item has skyrocketed. The challenges bedeviling the Igbo nation are pointers that when governance is in jeopardy, especially in the areas of peace, security and conflict resolution, every other aspect of the society is negatively affected drastically.

Suggestions on the Way Forward

The Igbo traditional republican system of governance should support the modern monarchical system. The role the traditional institutions such as council

of elders, age grade, and daughters' union can play in the process of good governance cannot be denied. They can take up the role of advisory body to the government and also participate in the administration of their communities. They could be made to take up developmental roles, by complementing government efforts through organizing and mobilizing their people for the execution of projects in their various communities. The institutions can also inspire and encourage their members to respect the laws of the land, as well as participate actively in elections, either as candidates or as electorates.

The traditional system of governance should be integrated with the modern system in a way to effectively serve the citizenry in the area of good representation. Accessing justice should be easy, and affordable; and dispensation of justice prompts.

There should be a return to core Igbo traditional values of hard work, honesty, kindness, and the attitude of being their brothers' keepers. Fraudulent and dishonest people should be relegated to the background and should not be allowed in the positions of authority. Fraudulent traditional rulers and Presidents General and their cohorts should not be allowed to continue in office if their communities would experience the much needed growth and development.

Conclusion

Man is a political animal. Actually, politics is a spice of life which man, naturally, cannot do without. If the actions of man are not continuously put in check, there must be a state of lawlessness or anarchy. Maintenance of law and order in Igbo traditional republican society, defense, enforcement of political decisions and authority, as well as social, religious and economic development rest on different groups of people who apply their authority in the different appropriate occasions. However, the structure and functions were not as elaborate as those of other modern republican societies because the Igbo traditional society was not as complex as its modern counterparts.

We identified two patterns of political organization in Igbo traditional society before the advent of the Europeans. They are the monarchical institution which was found in only a few communities in Igbo land and the leadership by general consensus which is republican in nature. It is clear that the basic republican unit in traditional Igbo society was the town which was subdivided into villages. The village is made up of lineage groups called the kindred. The kindred are a

collection of families who have a common descent. This system enables full and active participation of each group in political matters and decision making.

We submit that it is necessary to maintain and sustain, in this modern era, the units through which Igbo traditionally ensured a harmonious egalitarian and just community. Such units include age grades, council of elders, daughters' union, and the wives' union among others. The system of governance in the Igbo traditional political society is the bedrock of modern political system; it should be allowed and encouraged to continue to exist with the system in this modern era, albeit with certain influences and modifications.

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