

A Historical Juridical Survey Of Igbo Traditional Religion: Implications For Aladinma

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Abstract

Igbo traditional religion has implications on the adherents namely people of African descent and any other social group that has sympathy for it. The above statement is grounded on the Africans belief and practice in the religion and tradition of their forebears. The establishment of a worldview saturated with religious doctrines permeated the constitution and function of social and cultural groups like Aladinma and other related groups. To this end cultural bodies assumed a moralistic and juridical bent in the discharged of its cultural, traditional and social roles in African communities. Cultural associations and institutions like masquerade cult, Eze in council traditional shrines, men groups and women groups assumed moralistic postures or characteristics. Traditional and cultural groups were therefore made to protect in the first instance, the laws of the land (Omenani) as constructed by the ancestors and deities of the land. The second aspect of their existence point to the protection of civil rights of people of the individual communities. To this end, the constitution of Aladinma Uvuru Mbaise subculture area by its ancestors and deities did not depart from the aforementioned rationale for its establishment. This works therefore seeks to unravel the relevance of Aladinma juridical institution in Uvuru Mbaise through a historical survey. Historical method of inquiry of this paper is expected to excavate deposits of African jurisprudence which helped African people in past civilizations. Results from this research can be harvested to address some social issues confronting African people at present. Analytic method is used here to explain the process and opinions expressed by the author. Oral communication was used as authentic information or explanation of issues where there was lack of written document.

Introduction

Igbo worldview is constructed in such a way to give explanation, meanings, guidance and direction to Igbo people. As a totality of her assumptions about human existence in the physical world, Igbo worldview has a religious background to give credence to belief in divinities and consequential relationships between men and the gods. African Igbo worldview is organized around interpreting

events in the African cosmos ranging from religion, cultural practices to connections and other important engagements of the Igbo. Formation of ethical conduct and the applications thereof has its roots in our worldview which is basically religious. Madu (2004:74) explains this opinion more vividly,

One's thinking, decisions, definitions of events around him are only to be understood in accordance with his worldview. Thus on the basis of Igbo worldview, certain characteristics features can be predicted of the Igbo. The Igbo social structure embraces a network of relationships.

Judging from Madu's explanations, it becomes a wise decision for Uvuru Mbaise community to institute a socio-cum. Religious organization which orders and protects her esteemed traditional values and norms. Without such a social and religious mechanism put in place, the survival of any society may be difficult. In absence of this, there may be emergence of anarchy, chaos and confusion within a society. Uvuru Mbaise people have been affected by the principles of African Traditional Religion like any other Igbo community. And as such its social, cultural, philosophical moral behaviours are coloured by the religion of the Igbo.

In the Igbo community of which Uvuru Mbaise is one, the community's existence is of paramount importance. The Uvuru Mbaise social; cultural and political structure embodies a network of relationships and collaborations. One aspect of a peoples life diffuses into another aspect due primarily to the fluidity of African (Igbo) concept of reality. A person's success in politics for instance can be judged from his handwork, morality, cultural and social connections within his community. In all, the success primarily is ascribed to God as a blessing.

The establishment of Aladinmain Uvuru community serves as a watch dog for the protection of the religious institutions of the community as well as a gadfly for the propagation of the entire social, political and cultural lives of the people. The Aladinma, a carefully select group of sons of Uvuru community is bestowed with the juridical power of organizing, protecting and judging of cases ranging from land cases, insults, profanations of cultural practices, maintenance and restoration of order among the people of the society.

The juridical function of Aladinma convinces the people and outsiders alike that the community is serious about her corporate existence. As a culturally and religiously based group, and given the understanding that their proceedings are for the common good, the community accepts its verdicts and sanctions as the case may be. Aladinma juridical group had been with the people of Uvuru Mbaise for a very long time. No one could actually say when it was begun and who started it. Aladinma has existed from generation to generation dispensing justice to the people and maintaining religious, cultural, social and political balance of the community. The inquiry into the meaning, purpose and significance of Aladinma to Uvuru people especially in this present times is necessary and timely. There has been noticeable neglect of the traditional life of the people due to influence of science and technology and socialization due to rural-urban migration. There is also

the presence and influence of government courts of jurisdiction such as; magistrate courts, high courts, courts of appeal and Supreme Court. The work attempts to justify Igbo system of justice through village council or Aladinma. Aladinma juridical system is a native application of justice to all. Its actions are guided by ancestral laws. A negation to laid down proceeding may spell down for the judges.

Theoretical Orientation of the Paper

Theoretical direction to any academic endeavour is meant to give direction and mindset of the statement of the problem. Thus, the paper adopts historical approach to this paper. This reliance is drawn from the fact that history has close relationship with human experience of life struggles, choices made and successes gained made and failure recorded. It is for this that Shafer (1973:1) noted that historical approach appeals to our feeling for the relationship of events in time, both for the continuity of human society and its immense variety. To Shafer, (1973) history refers to the events of the past, to the actual happenings. In our present time, history has transited from old understanding of written account of events in human physical existence to a field of study in the opinion of Wolman (1973) historical method is largely a method of evaluating the authenticity and reliability of written records of the past. (p.5) Historical research method is a qualitative approach which studies the connection between past events and explores its relevance in the present dispensation. To achieve this feat, it applies two main sources; primary and secondary. Primary sources of historical data is used for evidence such as diaries, personal communications, court records, burial record, birth records etc. Secondary source of historical method include use of primary data of history to advance human knowledge in article writing, book publication, book reviews and essays. Shafer (1973:4) argues that secondary historical source is hinged on what the society has and the historians interpretation of what is given society wise.

He elaborates further that;

History shares with social and behavioural sciences the problems of grappling with highly intractable subject matter. Large scale human activity involves huge number of interlocking variables. The evidences available to the historian usually are not “facts” but testimony of the facts.

Madu (2008) observes that historical method of learning is reconstruction of events. To him, history is reconstructed, remade or worked again especially when it contends with present realities. He explains further that, historical theory is an excursus, a voyage to the past with the age of the present, to see whether we can use the present to arrive at the root that gave impetus to the present reality or situation (pp. 6-7).

Aladinmainstitution in Uvuru sub culture area is supported by the evidences of Shafer 1973 and Madu2008 respectively. It relies on the provisions of the customary laws of Uvuru ancestors to administer justice and equity to its people. Historical theory used in this paper, digs out the

historical foundation of Aladinmaand its relevance to the present heirs. It is a case for continuity of tradition as established in the lives of the people as they recognize the authority of Aladinma jury. There is however, a possibility that there have been some sort of reconstruction of processes as observed by Madu (2008). This notwithstanding, the physical testimony of continuity and reliance on its rulings make it an example of practical administration of justice and equity within Uvuru sub culture area.

Moral Foundation of Igbo Tradition and Culture

Any meaningful discussion on Igbo tradition must necessarily transit from her worldview which centres on God and man. Moral consciousness is at the base of Igbo religion and culture. This stand points to a standard of living or activity based on rightness of action, behaviour or relationship with another person. Moral laws are drawn from laws of the land and invisible laws of the mind called conscience. Moral laws therefore concern our relationship with the divinities, ancestors and fellow human beings. The unforeseen actions of retribution from the deities, authorities and people around us act as watch dogs of our actions as it were. Religious practices of good conduct rely on the approval and recompense from the gods and people we deal with on daily activities.

Cultural practices take cue from moral rectitude of religious practices. For instance, marriage ceremonies must be done in sincerity and trust not by force. Farming work must be done with patience and dexterity. Governance must be done with prudence and wisdom from God or gods as the case implies. When human activities are done with religious ethics, human culture assumes a religious mindset. The moral foundation of Igbo man's culture and tradition is not divorced from what Metuh (1981:150) said of the Igbo: "God is in traditional Igbo life". He explains that the above expression can be witnessed in daily activities of the Igbo. To this end, the consciousness of the Supreme Being's presence explains His name being uttered on everyday speech of an average Igbo person. The vocal expressions of gratitude of the Igbo in every circumstance underlie the in depth faith and disposition towards God and his authority on earth.

Nwigwe (2004:1-23) notes tha Igbo metaphysics assigns certain functions to personalities to carry out effectively for the good of man. To him, in Igbo worldview, there are several levels of beings: Chukwu (chi) the great creator of all things: the earth deity (ala) which serves as the custodian of moral conscience and as protector and provider of human society, the Alusi are invisible supernatural forces that serve all forms of function some good and some bad. From the exposition of Nwigwe, elements in Igbo metaphysics have moral obligations to human society function wise. This understanding gives African/Igbo Tradition a moral bent. Moral characterization ascribed to beings in African cosmology is responsible for moral trait of Igbo religion and culture. Every being is expected to perform moral actions for the continuation of African universe. By implication, human beings and their actions are teleguided to perform acts based on justice, and equity for the good of all. To this stand point, Aladinmajury responds to Igbo concept of justice which exhibits moral righteousness in the discharge of justice to Uvuru people at the local tribunal. In a similar

vein, Asogwa 2008:805-818) explains the cultural and traditional formation of “ozookobu” society among men folk in Nsukka sub-culture area. Ozo Okobu is men’s exclusive semi-secret society connected with the ancestors and occupies a central place in the life of the people. It is intricably associated with such major facets of the people’s cultures as ownership, occupancy and control of land in Nsukka ethno-cultural area.

Asogwa explained that the idea of forming Ozo Okobu society is based on the Igbo ideation of the land belonging to the ancestors who owned the land. They are highly revered and regarded as the guardians of morality and owners of the soil. The people believe in their existence, and influence on all the affairs of the community and their property. Aladinma Uvuru Mbaise and Ozo Okobu society of Nsukka have things in common. The connection is in the area of maintaining the laws of individual areas as promulgated by their distinct ancestors. Both represent ancestral power to legislate over ownership of land in their various domains. For any religious cultural or traditional sect to adjudicate on inheritance especially on land implies imbue ment of morality. Ozo Okobu’s connection with Nsukka ancestors is anchored on sound tradition of transference of power from the ancestors to the present elders of Nsukka land. Moral stability of men of Ozo Okobu society becomes therefore the sustaining principle of its existence. African morality therefore has its force and sustenance from African religion which unites the invisible world of the spirits and ancestors with the mundane world of humans.

Origin of Aladinma Uvuru Mbaise

It is cumbersome to track the historical beginning of a culture that has stayed a long time with a people especially before the advent of formal education. It is pertinent here to recline on oral tradition for solution. While tracing its origin, we shall adopt two traditions namely, the religious and the communative or sociological traditions.

According to Onwuzurike (1991:23) “The elders of Uvuru subculture area meet in council with oracle priests who were often in consultation with the local deities and spirits and a body capable of performing the functions of government was thus formed”. This signals the emergence of village administration in Uvuru. Something of great significance is the connection with the gods of Uvuru who indirectly influence the decisions of the council of elders as tradition demands. Religious tradition gave the gods of Uvuru community great control over the affairs of the people. According to Afigbo (1973:34) as cited in Onwuzurike 1991, the deities are traditionally invited to human affairs because they are part and parcel of any Igbo community. Accordingly he says; the community means the livings members, the dead ancestors and the convocation of local deities and spirits.

On the sociological base, Aladinmagrew out of Mai Oriephenomenon. This implies that it began as community members commune weekly to drink palm wine at the ‘Ovu’ or reception hall of the eldest in the kindred at Orienta. While consumption of the sweet and fresh tapped wine is in progress, issues confronting the community in general is discussed and treated. There was

transition from Mai Orié tradition to Aladinmaor Amala council. This ideological evolution or development of Mai Orié to Aladinmaor village administration is an affirmation of the intellectual and developmental instinct of the Igbo. The human natural desire to organize his **society** played a prominent role in the advancement of Mai Orié as a social setting group to a level looking deeper at issues confronting the community.

The philosophy of communal spirit Vis-à-vis Aladinma phenomenon calls to mind what prompted its existence and the necessity for such legal cum cultural institution. Madu (1996:44) noted that “An examination of any kind brings to the fore the excesses and deficiencies in enterprise thereby opening up the gateways for rethinking, correction and future plans. Unity of brethren and by extension community is a value generally accepted among the Igbo. Common sharing of goods especially freshly tapped palm wine exhibit a good degree of trust, sharing and reciprocity among Uvuruindigenes. Mbefo (1996:60) argues convincingly that “Values accepted by any community are used by the same people as yardstick for judging human conducts as it relates to the life of the community or society. Important values in Igbo society especially in individual communities are institutionalized for prosperity. It is for this reason that Aladinmaor village government began at Uvuru Mbaise community.

Aladinma Uvuru: A Microcosm of Igbo Traditional Juridical System

Aladinma Uvuru Mbaise is an Igbo miniature juridical body established by ancestors of Uvuru before the present era. Its juridical procedures has no equation or comparison with modern juridical system in the Nigerian state. The standard of application of justice however is primarily based on the culture and tradition of Uvurupeople as promulgated by the ancestors of the land. It is termed a “microcosm of larger Igbo judicial system because it reflects what is obtainable elsewhere and in larger Igbo juridical system.

A microcosm in the articulation of Advance Learners Dictionary (2006) six edition; is a thing, place or a group that has all the features and qualities of something much larger (p. 741). Aladinma therefore represents Igbo concept and practice of justice in Uvurusub-cultural and political enclave. Obiefuna and Izuegbu (2016:141-153) identified the Igbo of Nigeria as a tribe whose notion of justice as a value exemplifies how Africa places premium on justices especially as it concerns the community in which the people live together. Nzomiwu (1999) opines that the idea or notion of justice among the Igbo is more readily practical in examples and instances than its definition.

The essence of instituting Aladinma juridical system in Uvuru Mbaise, points to the necessity for good governance in its totality. As Ogueji for (2012) holds, good administration to people, has to do with the management of the common good. He sees responsible governance as where everybody is given his due without any bias or prejudice. Aladinmaas a legal institution in Uvuru sub-culture area, presupposes in the words of Onwuliri (2016:30-43), that a just action is one that is not crooked, is performed as it should be, is done in a disinterested manner or has followed due

process. According to history of Uvuru Mbaise, Aladinma Uvuru has existed as a legal body before the advent of colonial masters in Igboland. Hence Odemena (personal communication, August, 2, 2008) said

Aladinmais older than any kingship in Igbo land. Aladinmais as old as Igbo race. A community can exist without anEzenot Aladinma. Aladinmawas and still the village government before the institution of warrant chiefs in Igbo Land by British colonial masters.

Aladinma therefore was made by the ancient and wise ancestors of Uvuru community to organize her society's religious, social, political and cultural lives by presiding over certain matters that may arise from social interactions between her children in due time. From this background therefore, a select group of the community was selected from the six kindreds that make up the community to form a village council or government. Its main function was to maintain, promote and protect the cultural, religious and social values of Uvuru people from its cradle to eternity. It should be understood at this point that the juridical function of Aladinma or village council is not in any way the same both in function or methodology and comparison to others. Its procedure for judging of cases is quite different from British, American or Nigerian legal systems. It is rather a process of adjudication issuing from tradition and culture of the people.

Aladinma juridical process treats traditional/culturally related cases which are in line with the laws, customs, norms, values and aspirations of the village as a socio cum cultural entity. The beauty of it all is that both the judges, litigants and the litigated (defendants) know the common proceedings, the integrity of the judges and what tradition demands in case one loses a suit or wins a suit.

The legal status of Aladinma Uvuru means that its operations within the geographical and political confines of Uvuru are legal, obeyed, trusted and cherished by the people. This is so because, the administration of justice which is the determination of what is right and what is wrong is the principle of order in any political society. What is generally accepted and practiced in a group becomes therefore a convention. Laws are therefore made from common agreements of consent where a deviation can bring it to naught. Regulations are therefore made to control excesses of people in certain senses with regard to certain norms and values held by a people. For Njuko (2002) "therefore, the temporal axis of co-ordination within which the common good is realized is called the legal order or law. Law is an order of purposeful activity and relation between peoples in society".

The establishment of law, order or institutions in the African traditional jurisprudence is for the purpose of proper co-ordination, of the common good. The common good is that which benefits the whole community both individually and collectively. These can come in as common structure like large acres of land, roads, halls, houses, markets, religious houses, schools, hospitals, and so on. It can be immaterial structures/goods such as customs, laws, beliefs, religion, philosophy and governance. Because the temporal and meta-temporal goods of a given community have to be kept

and protected, carrying out of laws regarding their safety and continuity become as it were in the words of Njoku, a purposeful activity. The subsistence of the common good in its dual nature, temporal and meta-temporal seems to be the hub and life of any organized African community or society. The religious, social, cultural, political lives of a community as it were proceed from these pillars for its sustenance. The people's identity and culture are embedded in the maintenance and protection of sacred traditions. It seems from close observation and interpretation that this is the substance of its propagation.

Okwueze (2003) gave more reasons why an African community or village should mount an institution for maintenance of law and order in its vicinity, He says:

As is the case with extended family, it is the responsibility of the village to control the behaviour of its members in order to maintain morality and orderliness in the society. The control methods employed by each village are similar to the ones employed by the family except that they carry more weight due to the fact that not only wider range of persons are evolved in the employment of sanctions but are employed by a higher level of authority. (pp. 84-85)

In the Igbo cultural and social belief therefore, one of the aims and purposes of making laws or setting institutions like Aladinma, Masquerade cult, Amala is to make rules of conduct, enforcing already existing common rules as well as enacting fresh ones where the need arises.

Going by this general trend of operation of Igbo village assemblies, the juridical function allocated to members of Aladinma Uvuru by the people is legal. They are to reward, correct and punish offenders accordingly. Aladinma panel of traditional judges consists of three persons from the six kindreds in the community. It has a chairman, this means the jury is a nineteen (19) man panel. These are men of integrity, tested, vocal, upright, fearless and yet are loved and respected by those who elected them. There is high confidence and acceptability in their rulings. There is due process both in litigation and judgment. What may be lacking here is the service of a well trained lawyer to defend an accused or prosecutor as is the case in the orthodox juridical fashion. This, notwithstanding, both the plaintiff and the accused are given ample opportunity to say their own sides of the case during judgments.

At the end of presentations by opposing factions or persons, the traditionally learned jurists decide on any case brought to it without fear or favour. In the dispensation of her legal and social-cultural functions to her people, Aladinma looks at or entertains the following cases – land, disrespect for elders, fighting and rancour, division of ancestral land, marriage cases and so on. Women can come only when invited by the council.

Aladinmain Other Igbo Towns and Villages: A Brief Survey

This subsection tries to support or prove the historical evidence of the existence of Aladinma or community government in other neighbouring place around Uvuru Mbaise culture area and by

progrenim Igbo society. The reasonableness of doing justice to one's neighbour in particular and others in general has made the dispensation of justice and fairness a sinequanon in any social group, be it village or society. Absence of justice is really absence of law, order and progress anywhere in the world. Because of the vital importance this cardinal virtue is in the life of any community of people, its presence in any village, town or society is counted as divine blessing and a sign that the very society is peaceful, intellectually developed, just and progressive.

Aladinmasystem of government therefore is at home Igbo civilization, philosophy and culture. What is seen in Uvuru Mbaise is also seen and practiced in Umunama Mbaise, Umuolulu Obiangwu Ngor-Okpalaand Umunono Nsokpo Ogbaku all in Imo State of Nigeria. The persons interviewed in the course of writing this work represent their communities as it were. By way of cultural similarity, affiliation, diffusion and world view, what is said of few Igbo towns and villages is replicable in neighbouring communities.

Aladinmain Umunama Mbaise

The Aladinmain Umunama Mbaise not quite different from the one done in neighbouring Uvuru community. The only visible difference is that of those in attendance. While Aladinma Uvuru is restricted to the male folk alone, that of Umunama is open to both sexes, men and selected female. Amadi (personal communication, August 2015) has this to say;

The orgAnigram of Aladinma Umunama includes the old menand women who attend to hear cases. Any male child who has attained eighteen years cab attend Aladinma. What they do is to improve on the living condition of the people by looking at issues presenting at this sittings and ruling them.

According to the dictates of our culture and tradition. Amadi (2008) said; the following functions are done by Umunama Aladinma for her people.

- a. Discussion of individual kindred cases as presented by their leaders.
- b. Village security.
- c. Settlement of cases among the kindred.
- d. Issues bordering on families and persons, community development fostered by "IwuNkwu" and other community developmental initiatives.
- e. Settlement of land cases.
- f. Environment sanitation and protection of natural resources like rivers and economic tress.

Amadi (2008) however insisted that all these functions are done and supervised with traditional/cultural lens. His reason is that the young have to be guided and schooled in our tradition, culture and religion before they undermine sacred traditions with their juvenile mentality and behaviour.

Aladinmain Umunomo Nsokpo Ogbaku Mbaitolu Local Government Area

Oral interview as explained in the introduction of this work is one of the means of ascertaining cogent information regarding the central theme of this thesis. Our inquiry so far has been aided to a great deal by the interviews painstakingly administered on the respondents. Using the Mechanism of fact finding, this researcher consulted elders of Ogbaku in Mbaitolu L.G.A. of Imo state to find out if Aladinmais operative there also. Igbozuruike (personal communication to this author (August 20, 2015) responded as to whether there is Aladinmain his domain or not

Aladinmaor village council has always been there for the maintenance of peace, tradition, culture and progress of the land. Membership include kindred heads, and a general chairman. These form the village council which discusses matter affecting the entire village. There may be in certain cases or circum stances general Aladinmain which men, boys and woman may be called.

Community, family or personal matters are brought for the adjudication of Aladinmaor village council. These, according to Igbozuruike (2015) include, land cases, and mistreatment of Nwa Mgboto, a woman married to another village or town in her matrimonial home. Aladinma will send a powerful delegate to the matrimonial family of their daughter. Other cases looked into include, fighting and stealing. Any offender to any law of the community is fined one goat or any other item deemed fit by the council.

The treatment of cases in the explanation of Igbozuruike (2008) begins from the Umunna or kindred court. Any case not properly treated is moved to Aladinmaas an Appeal Court. This has more legal powers of determination of cases than the kindred council. Any case can reach the Supreme Court. In this case, should the Aladinmafail to treat a case so well, it is then moved to Eze's cabinet for final judgment. We can see from Igbozuruike's exposition that the traditional legal system is graded and stratified in Igbo political/juridical thought. Similarities exist very much with what is applicable in Umunama Mbaise and Ogbaku Mbaitolu, the recurring difference however remains methodology. The reason and functions remain a constant factor.

Aladinmain Obiangwu Ngor-Okpala

Our next port of call was Umuolulu Obiangwu located in Ngor-okpalalocal council of Imo state. Aladinma Obiangwu is also called Obiwuruotu (one heart). Oparaocha (personal communication (August 16, 2015) confirmed the existence and domineering role of Aladinmaor Obinwuruotu Obiangwu. He says;

Aladinma Obiangwu is as old as Obiangwu herself. It precedes many generations of Obiangwu people. All of us grew up to meet Obiwuruotu Obiangwu. We learnt from our forefathers that Aladinma was set up by the people. It was set up to make sure the customs, traditional right and privileges of men, women and children are kept, respected and transferred from one generation to another just as our ancestors intended from day one.

Aladinma Obiangwu (Obiwuruotu) consists of three representatives each from the four kindred making a twelve (12) man judicial panel. It has a central chairman with a two years tenure. Obiwuruotu Obiangwu has as its statutory function the following.

- maintenance of peace in the village.
- settlement of land disputes.
- settlement of fights/quarrels among groups, families and individuals.
- provision of security.
- promotion of economic development.
- penalizing offenders of community law.
- enforcement of restitution of stolen land.

A raw treatment of ostracism is however meted out on any offender of land cases. This is from the backdrop of people's conception of the sacredness of land as a deity.

Depending on the judgment of the village council, Obiangwu women can attend only on invitation. The researcher's brief investigation on the existence, practice and procedures of an Aladinma outside of Uvuru Mbaise has confirmed the belief that this village government is generally practiced among Igbo people of Nigeria though may be given different names. There is a strong conviction then that this type of village government is homogenous with many African villages, communities and societies. Let us at this point look as the juridical process of Aladinma Uvuru Mbaise.

Reception of Cases by Aladinma

Aladinma Uvuru receives various cases for its consideration. The mere fact that cases are brought to her attention speaks volumes about the trust, confidence and legality the people ascribe to her. The general procedure of case filling must include the litigant and respondent. In Uvuru traditional society, act of litigation is called "ITU-OMU". In accordance with the culture, a litigant must register his or her case with the following items: eight pieces of Kola-nuts, a jar of palm wine, and cash of N500. After this initial ritual, a date is then fixed for hearing. A day set aside for hearing may be deferred to another day to favour both parties in the case. The litigant is accompanied to the court room by his close relatives or friends, who may be stand in as witnesses. The same preparation is done by the defendant. Cross examination of claims are entertained during the trials.

Settlement of Cases

Cases are settled with the aim of bringing peace and order to the community. For Okwueze (2003) therefore;

Disputes are settled by senior elders at any level. At the end of settlement, the individual, group or family member that is found guilty is usually fined. Such fines

are sometimes paid to the victim or victims directly or indirectly through the medium by which the dispute was settled. In all, fines are usually regarded as severe punishment since they involve economic loss (p. 84).

To avoid sentiments of prejudice or bias, people of integrity are appointed to deliver justice. During judgment of cases, witnesses are called to testify for or against. The traditionally learned jury of Aladinma will question both the applicant and defendant and through this process and aided by their knowledge of such cases earlier treated can deliver sound judgment. The question and answer session is very intriguing. No matter how a person is clever in hiding facts, the jury will certainly find out the truth behind the matter. By nature, certain persons cannot stand being questioned in the public for a long time. This natural disability as it were helps Aladinma panel of traditional judges to clear ambiguous cases. In settling cases, especially difficult ones, Aladinma jury may take some time going behind the scene to find out the truth. This can happen in land cases, quarrels over economic trees and long time disputes between kindred or families.

Land Cases

The great importance attached to agriculture as means of sustenance of life is not only restricted to Mbaise people alone. It has a universal appeal to the rest of the Igbo and other African communities. Because of the aforesaid, the importance of land as the most important factor or means of production is ever challenged anywhere. To control any quarrel or contention emanating from land ownership therefore, an agricultural community must evolve an acceptable land tenure system. Land is a free gift from nature. People came into this world and met their places of abode by chance. Because no one could actually say he made or formed land it was taken as community property. Onwuzuruike (1991) aptly noted the communal ownership of land in these words: "Initially, land was owned by the entire community. In course of time, the communal land was shared among various kindred or lineages" (p. 39).

Land cases therefore emerge from contentions arising from improper apportioning of kindred land by kindred leader or where he decides to take a lion share that is considered by others as outrageous. In the olden days, people were given land according to the size of their families. A man with more than two wives for instance can receive more plots of land. In those days when yam was the main stay of the village economy, a person who has more yams in his barn is expected to be given more land for cultivation by his kindred. This was done to encourage his zeal and industry. Within time, some families became greater in number and therefore possess greater percentage of community land. This state of affairs can naturally attract unnecessary criticism, jealousy and struggled for land within members of the same kindred or village.

Land cases that beg the attention of Aladinma Uvuru may not be completely divorced from the analysis given above. Nonetheless, let us look at methods of ascertaining correct land owners as employed by Aladinma. After the initial juridical ritual of case registration, the panel of judges now invite those in the land case for interrogation. Witnesses are called in to testify to the correct

ownership of the land in question. Another way of ascertaining right ownership of a piece of land under tussle is a visit by the Aladinmajury to the disputed site. Because members of Aladinma are also members of the village, the visit to disputed land will prove a lot of things right or wrong. It will reveal hidden truths. After the visitation of the land in dispute, the judgment is now easy.

If, for instance, one is struggling for his rightful possession, tradition demands that the case must be decided in his favour. If on the contrary, one is found to be in possession of a land not belonging to him, Aladinma will ask him to hand it off and this will be obeyed.

In a situation where, say, a first born takes more land than he should and his brothers petition Aladinma or Amala, the Amala can wade into the sharing of the land. More serious cases about land ownership can be done through oath taking in a recognized shrine of a divinity. This time around, the Aladinma has no hand in it. It will be the agreement between two contestants of the land in question. It can also be that the case can move to Eze's cabinet for settlement. Cases not resolved at Aladinma court may be resolved at Eze's court. Inversely, Eze's court may the Aladinma to try a case brought to him or up-hold the earlier one done by her. Both levels of community government complement one another in the principle of checks and balances.

Disrespect for Elders

In the olden days, respect for elders was one of the virtues any growing child must learn. This was conceived as a matter of necessity and enhancement of peaceful co-existence of members of the same kindred. As respect begets respect, so does good beget good. A person must respect someone older in age than himself. No one feels happy when insulted by his younger ones at home or junior in public offices. What is expected to happen however is, mutual tolerance, love and peace among people from the same ancestor and by extension others. To show how important respect for elders is taken in Uvuru Mbaise, endearing names are called people to show respect and age. Dede is called a male or someone senior in age in the same kindred or outside. If someone is older than you for two years upwards you should address him as dee or dede. For example, these expressions are said Dee Sam, Dee Peter and so on. In the feminine gender, it is Daa or Dada. The expression of dede or dada by anybody younger to you exhibits some measure of respect, regard, or recognition. This recognition brings good relationship in the neighbourhood.

In the present day however, younger boys and girls seem determined to sing a different song in disregard to the status quo. Apart from calling you your names, it has been observed that the younger generation of Uvuru sons and daughters can easily pick up quarrels and even fight with their elders mindlessly. The saying in Igbo land that "okrois not greater than its owners" still prevails here. By this we mean, despite the prevailing circumstance of what is understood as "cultural bias" of the young against certain cultural behaviours, norms and practices of Uvuru people, the elders have developed ways of curtailing certain juvenile delinquencies. Young people are discouraged from disrespecting cultural values and norms because of the penalty and caution Aladinma will impose on them. The psychological trauma that some youths have undergone before

Aladinmajury is able to teach moral lesson to any person known to have observable disrespect for his or her seniors.

The main reason for any young man or woman to appear before Aladinmais strictly for morals and ethical re-orientation or correction. Cases of this nature can come from the parents, kindred or one's family. The culprit must have been warned many times before the last resort. So, in many cases, the parents even support such appearance. Ajaiyi (1981) agrees that African community helps in the moral discipline, formation and control of her sons and daughters as he says:

Man lives in a moral community and his behaviour is prescribed by relationship. Society and individuals are involved in each other. It has always been clear to man that left to himself, his life would disintegrate. Hence, a kind of cohesive force is needed to maintain order and save him from destroying himself. Human beings want wholeness, solidarity and tenacity of purpose (p.27).

Aladinma function of treating morally derailed members of the community is proper because the Africans see one as belonging to his community. Oneness is an integral trait of the Igbo. This supports the popular saying among the Igbo that a child belongs the community (all) not only the parents. It is on this background, therefore, that, the community can legislate certain rules for behaviour among its members and no one may work against the peace and safety of others by way of deviation from common rules. Keeping it is like a divine decree so to speak. Morality or rules of conduct for member of a community is nothing but, the mores, and customs of the society. Good morality according to Ajaiyi is living in appropriate relationship with others.

Man as an integral being, needs a good balance of spiritual and physical fitness. These moral and cultural qualities expected from any member of a community are collectively thought the child while at tender age. Nwabude (2001) harps on the importance of child education by both the immediate family and the extended family of a child. He says.

The Igbo believe in the communal education of the young. However, this does not imply that the children are gathered in a place for this exercise as is common in western style of education. What this means is that everybody is concerned and involved in the proper education of the young. This is so because the Igbo believe that a proper training breeds a healthy community and ensures peace, harmony and progress of the race (p.85).

The fact that others aid the parents of the young in his or her education and other forms of socialization, does not imply parents have no duties to do as well. The father in any Igbo family as it is in Uvuru occupies the prime place in the training of his children and wards. Due to the fact that Igbo family structure is patrilineal, authority or decision making is placed on the shoulders of the father. So, the success of his family is his headache. Igbo culture especially place male children under direct control and supervision of their fathers. We can understand this cultural degree given the stubborn nature of every male. The same culture places the girls in their mothers

guide and control. The parents however complement the other in the honourous task of child up-bringing. The child/youth education include, respect for God, elders duties for the community and so on.

Fighting and Rancour

Rancour begets feelings of hatred and the desire to hurt or inflict pain emotional or physically on someone else believed to have done one kind of injustice or bad thing or another. Fighting then arises in a situation where someone feels his rights have been taken or honour soiled by other people. The inability on the part of the aggressor to control his emotional impulses can trigger off fighting. Fighting express hidden feelings one had haboured against his neighbor for some time and reason. To truly show off the stored Animosity in the mind, dangerous words are freely uttered and material things are freely used to inflict calculated injury on the target person. Unrestrained emotional outburst of anger and resentment can cause inflicting serious injury or even manslaughter. The founding fathers of Uvuru in establishing Aladinmajury, gave it as one of its social functions to maintain peace among members of the community. Peaceful co-existence of members of the same community remain one of the cardinal virtues all must imbibe. A cantankerous person if uncontrolled by laws or regulations can cause serious enmity between kinsmen and thereby rendering the community disunited and suspicious of one another.

Cases in the nature of fighting and quarrelling are treated first by the kindred council. The Umunna will look into problems that originated such quarrels and advice accordingly. If both parties accept ruling at this level, the case is closed and means to restore peace between the conflicting group encouraged. Should any party refuse, the case is then taken to Aladinma which is the village council for settlement. Before this stage, that is, the level of Umunna, fines which are minor in nature are imposed on the offender. This ranges from rebukes, provision of certain things like a cock, he goat and money. At the kindred level still, certain cases which are better settled by women are left in the hands of women leaders to settle. The women, as part and parcel of the culture and tradition impose fines on eering members who for instance fight and naked themselves, or quarrel in the market or any public place. Penalties like suspension from women groups and village meetings are meted out to the offenders. The men cannot intervene in so far as it is within the provision of the law of the land. Serious cases of fighting or rancour between persons from different kindreds are however taken to Aladinma for technical reasons. Another reason for this transfer of case from the lower customary court to the higher customary court in Uvuru community is unity. The community's unity is of paramount importance to its continued existence. For this and other reasons therefore, the elders think it is wiser to treat cases involving kindreds in a central council where kindred heads hear the ruling and pass it's judgment to those concerned.

Village council decisions on matters of fighting or quarrelling are generally more demanding, strict and more powerful. Fines are equally greater and judgments more thorough and technical. This may have been the case when Okonkwo broke the sacred week of peace in his village out of anger. For many years in Umuofia, Okonkwo's community, it was unheard of to beat somebody during

the sacred week. Having broken the tradition of his forefathers due to uncontrolled passion, Okonkwo was penalized by the priest of Ani for beating his wife. News of this abomination went round the entire village. Achebe (1958) narrated this encounter between Okonkwo and the priest thus;

Before it was dusk Ezeaniwho was the priest of the earth goddess Ani called on Okonkwo in his Obi. Take away your kola nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors. He held a short staff in his hand which he brought down on the floor to emphasize his points. Listen to me, 'he said when Okonkwo has spoken. You are not a stranger in Umuofia, you know as well as I do that our fore fathers ordained that before we plant any crop in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a hash word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow (pp. 23-24).

The interesting encounter as written by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* shows the necessity of and sacredness of peace in the wellbeing and harmony of entities dwelling in this cosmos.

For the people of Umuofia, therefore, peace between one another produces blessings and favours from the earth goddess, Ani. The deity's blessing is expected mainly to increase in farm yield which is the main economic stay of the agrarian society. This also exposes the metaphysical cum religious mindset of the Igbo where everything should be done to maintain peace with human beings and the deities. Anything contrary may cause chaos and members of the community may suffer from the fault of one man.

In the pre-missionary Igbo society, sacrifices were done to appease gods and goddesses. This it believed would bring peace and harmony among neighbours and spirit forces. The priest of Ani listed materials items for the purification of Ani polluted by Okonkwo "You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries". Achebe (1958) used Okonkwo's society to show-case Igbo sense of justice and rule of law. The might of the land was unleashed on him as an offender of sacred peace time. His wealth and prominence could not save him. Instead, he hurried to carry out what was demanded of him with regard to the return of peace to the abominated place as it were.

Nwabude (2001) justifies Igbo system of justice and punishment; in these words:

The Igbo praise and reward good acts. On the other hand, they chastise and punish wrong doing. Igbo justice is strict. No one is condemned unless he has had the opportunity to defend himself. Titles, which are institutions of honour in Igbo society are conferred on illustrious and deserving sons and daughters of the land as a sign of praise and gratitude for their service to the community (p. 202).

Uvuru community through Aladinma orders the moral, juridical and cultures lives of her citizens. Just as the priest of the earth goddess Ani, in Umuofia confronted Okonkwo for outright disregard for customs and traditions of the people, it also recognized cultural institution through whom evil in the land could be removed or abolished. Praise, blame, reward and punishment therefore are necessary tools or control mechanisms used by Uvuru people via Aladinmato encourage good cultural life and good citizenship. Punishments are given members of the village to among other things dissuade them from evil deeds. Both praise and punishment of any manner form Igbo concept of justice.

Division of Family Land for the Members

The reason behind the division of family hand by Aladinmais to bring peace, mutual respect and brotherly communion among children of the same grandfather or ancestor. All land matters are not brought to the adjudication of Aladinmajury, those brought before it are normally those ones by interested persons, families or kindreds. This means that some families can always settle their own cases if they so desired. Kindred groups using the traditional lens of land sharing, settle families' land cases. Aladinma steps in only when necessary, that is, when there is litigation by one of the family members.

The division of family land for members according to culture and tradition however, happens after "Okwukwu" the second and most important burial rite in Uvuru and environs. According to tradition, family land is held temporally by any members of the family until the "Okwukwu" for the grandfather is begun and concluded. After the ceremonies surrounding "Okwukwu" rite of ancestorship, members can now settle down to be given their own share of their father's land/poverty by the Aladinma. Land sharing is normally done where the late grandfather married wives and therefore had many male children. The presence of Aladinmawill bring order, justice and succor to the late man's sons beginning from the oldest to the youngest.

A possibility that someone might loose his right is there. The reason is that if any of the sons refused to contribute money or material things demanded by tradition and culture during Okwukwu celebrations. The aftermath of refusal is this; he loses the land inheritance right. During the allocation of land by the community council that is, Aladinmahe is left out. The land is portioned out according to seniority, the most elderly takes the first slot according to tradition. Others are given according to hierarchy. After this sharing, everyone can now claim a perpetual ownership of the land. He can do with it whatever he likes. A portion by this arrangement becomes the land ones sons and grandsons will have as inheritance.

Conclusion

Tradition and culture of Igbo people of Southern Nigeria boasts of exceptional institutions that impact on the lives of the Igbo. This is possible because Igbo worldview incorporates tradition and culture which provide for sustenance of their world through the institution of hierarchies of beings it also contains cultural organs are responsible for running the communities in line with dictates of

the deities and ancestors of the land. This author therefore, attempted to examine the function of Aladinmain dispensing justice to the people of Uvuru Mbaise community. Aladinma Uvuru juridical institution is a microcosm of Igbo jurisprudence that exhibits and acts out Igbo regard for justice at all levels. The work discovers that Igbo people are at home with village government because on the one hand, it issues from our traditions and culture, and on the other hand, it is meant for public good.

The enactment of social cum cultural groups in Igbo society to say the least, represent a propagation of culture of the people to the next generation. The culture that is transmitted includes the physical culture and the metaphysical culture. Historical theory of investigation used in this piece was able to lead the researcher to the origins and foundation of Aladinma village councils existing in Igbo society from the time of our ancestors till date. The practice show years of existence, trust and administration of justice to members of a community who approached the local jury for address. The work was able to establish propagation of Aladinma activities through oral communication and some written works by Uvuru historian Onwuzuruike (1991) and living elders consulted. In the end, historical approach to this paper was able to establish to some extent the link between Uvuru ancestors and their present heirs.

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