

PRE-COLONIAL JUDICIAL SYSTEM IN AKURE NIGERIA

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by Ufuoma Anne PATRICK of the Department of History and International studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Bachelor Degree (BA) in History, University of Benin, Benin City.

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Date

Date

DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to Almighty God and my wonderful family

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My heart felt gratitude goes to God almighty for his unfailing love throughout my academic sojourn in the great UNIBEN.

I am particularly grateful to Dr. Orobator Daniel who not only supervised this work but showed a great deal of concern and tolerance which re-enforced my attitude towards this work. Thank you Sir for your guidance and constructive corrections without which this work would not have been a success.

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Special thanks goes to my wonderful parents Mr & Mrs Patrick Odinisu, without you guys there would be no me. And also to my amazing siblings; Jessica and Tega, thanks for your love and support.

I would also like to acknowledge the ones that made my stay in UNIBEN memorable; Aunty Merit, Blessing, Rachael, Faith, Treasure, Nonye and Osehi, thanks for everything. And to my lovely course mates who added colours to my stay in UNIBEN and aided my studying process especially Becky, Anthonia and Ejoy, I love you all.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Conflict is as old as man itself, this is because two people cannot be the same and there is bound to be individual differences and peculiarities: the cause of conflict is thus underlined by these and other factors which influence human society from time to time.¹ One of the fundamental challenges that have confronted man in social history is that of the inevitability of conflict and disagreement in human relations. The reality posed by the challenge of conflict has more often than not, resulted into social problems, especially when such conflict are not well and properly managed before degenerating into violent confrontations. Conflict is part of human life, every society can be engulfed in one form of conflict or the other since it characterize human interaction at the level of the individual, group, community and nation.²

Expectedly the Akure society is no exception particularly, considering the social organization and attitude of the Akure society: it should be expected that they would experience conflicts at interpersonal and inter-group levels after all, it's often said that social relations generate conflict when people of distinguishing characteristics and differences live together, they are bound to have differences in their perceptions and understanding of one another.

Akure is a city in south-western Nigeria³ and is the largest city and capital of Ondo State. The city had a population of 484, 798 as at the 2006 population census. Akure lies about 7° 25' north of the equator and 5°19' east of the Meridian. It is about 700 km south west of Abuja and 311 km north of Lagos State. Residential districts are of varying density, some area such as Arakale, Ayedun Quarters, Ijoka and Oja-Oba consist of over 200 persons per hectare, while areas such as Ijapo Estate, Alagbaka Estate, Avenue and Idofin have between 60 – 100 people per hectare⁴. The town is situated in the tropic rainforest zone in Nigeria.

In the pre-colonial days, there were many principles guiding conflict resolution in the tradition African societies. Those who want their conflicts resolved must have confidence in the tribunal that would resolve the dispute. These include elders, chiefs, priests, priestesses, secret cult etc. the disputants must be ready to submit themselves to the constituted authorities. These conflicts could be interpersonal conflicts and inter-communal conflicts. These may range from person to person, community, nation⁵.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this project work is to expose us to the traditional technique and method of conflict resolution in Akure, Ondo State during the pre-colonial era.

The objectives of this work include:

- To examine the history of conflict resolution in Akure.
- To examine the various methods of settling conflict traditionally in Akure.

- To examine the impact of conflict resolution in the Akure society.
- To proffer solution of the existing problem challenging conflict resolution in pre-colonial times

Scope of study

This project topic, “Traditional Techniques and Methods of Conflict Resolution in Akure, Ondo State During the Pre-Colonial Times” is centered within the time frame of the pre-colonial era to enable us ascertain a basic knowledge about this work.

Research Methodology

This project work is going to be analytical and historical in approach. We will be making use of the primary sources of data and the secondary sources of data.

Primary Source

In the primary source, I would be going to Akure in Ondo State to meet with one or two Chiefs to conduct an oral interview on the various methods, the ways and processes of settling dispute, conflict resolution during the pre-colonial times.

Secondary Sources

In the secondary sources, I would be making use of Newspapers, Online Materials and Textbooks from the John Harris library and the Akure library to search and sort for books available on the resolution of conflict in Akure, Ondo State during the pre-colonial times.

Literature Review

Generally, literature review means the view of the works of several authors, thinkers, philosophers, writers, commentators who have written books on the same problem area. The purpose of literature review is to provide a theoretical perspective for the research work.

According to Moore and Tillet, conflict occurs at various level of consciousness. These commentators distinguish between latent conflict characterized by underlying and sometimes unacknowledged tensions and emerging conflict where the dispute is acknowledge and the parties are identified but a process for resolving the dispute have reached an impasse despite attempts at resolution. At this stage, the conflict is over and individuals can pursue resolution through legal action, mediation, negotiation or physical verbal violence.⁴

Also, Tillet the differences between conflict and disputes by drawing attention to the contrasting sources of tension. He argues that its origins in fundamental differences in human values and needs. An interesting consideration arising from the hearings and trials usually enters the public record. Lawyers typically dominate litigation, which often ends in a negotiated settlement during the pretrial period.⁵

S.E. Orobator, in political conflict and crises in African origin, development and management trace the origin of conflict in Africa, from ethnic disharmony, to political crises in Nigeria and Africa as a whole to foreign intervention and

imperialism as most structure and amalgamation alone in 1914 by the colonist Britain and the forced merging of people of different cultures into one geographical entity called Nigeria had later snapped into series of crises such as the Nigerian crisis of 1966 – 1970.⁶

In general, less formal conflict resolution issue is whether solutions in the form of resolution or settlement represent the desired outcome for both conflicts and disputes. If the cause of the problem differs between conflicts and disputes as it does in some cases, so may the preferred outcome and approach to managing or solving the problem. For instance, an estranged couple arguing over the distribution of property may simply require a settlement to this problem. However, a couple who seek relationship counseling because of marital difficulties may benefit from conflict resolution strategies aimed at identifying the underlying sources of tension in the relationship such a strategy “deals with the total human being”.⁷

Similarly to Boule conflict resolution processes are many and varied and can be seen on a continuum ranging from collaborative, participatory, informal, non binding processes (such as mediation conciliation, third party mediation) to adversarial, fact oriented, legally binding and imposed decision that arise from institutions such as the courts and tribunal.⁸

Also, to Werthein et al and Fisher and Ury believe that the key to resolving conflict is to focus on interests rather than positions, which is the solution one party seeks to impose on another.⁹

Furthermore, Burton argued that resolution between two parties in conflict can only occur when “relationships have been re-examined and realigned”.

In the same vein Laue argued that conflict can only be considered resolved if the following conditions are met (reached):

- The solution jointly satisfies the interests and needs of the parties via joint agreement.
- The solution does not compromise the values of either party.
- The parties do not repudiate the solution even if they have the power to do so following the settlement.
- The solution is fair and just and became self-supporting and self enforcing.

Therefore, this form of resolution seems ideal because it aims to achieve an enduring outcome. It is not always practicable in situations where the relationship between two parties is severely strained or when there is no ongoing relationship to be maintained.¹⁰ In such situation, parties in conflict will often attempt to maximize their gains at the expense of the other through the negotiation or bargaining process.

Similarly, Bloomfield and Reilly conflict management is the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict, it addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practical, achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of difference.¹¹

In the same vein, to Burton when parties to disputes are brought together in a face to face analytical dialogue, facilitated by a third party, inevitably they soon discover that they have the same ultimate goals.¹² Once it is discovered that goals are held in common, the stage is set for a search for means that satisfy all parties to dispute.

According to Airuch and Black “it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background in conflict resolution”. Although, culture is a marker of social differences, it should be regarded as an obstacle to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic/multi-cultural societies. Conflict resolution performs a healing function in African societies. It provides opportunity for the examinations of alternative position decision to resolve differences, failure to resolve conflict over access to commonly valued scarce resources and over divergent perceptions of socio-political situations, has the high potential of degenerating into genocide or fratricide as it occurred among Ife-Modakeke in Yoruba land and Tis-Jumen of Nigeria and Hutu-Tutsi of Burundi and Rwanda.¹³

Chapterisation

Chapter One: Background to the Study.

This chapter comprises of an introduction, aim and objectives of the study, the scope of the study, methodology, literature review, chapterization and Endnotes.

Chapter Two: The Historical Overview of Akure during the Pre-Colonial Times.

This chapter exposes us to the history of Akure during the pre-colonial time.

Chapter Three: Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution during the Pre-Colonial Era

This chapter exposes the method, style of conflict resolution. Also we explore the method of conflict in Akure during the pre-colonial era.

Chapter Four: The Impact of Conflict Resolution in the Development of Akure During the Pre-Colonial Times and its Hindrances.

This chapter discusses about the impact: that is what the settling of conflict in that region has brought about to the people from the pre-colonial times till this present time.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion.

This chapter deals on the recommendation of the writer of this work and also gives a summary of all the chapters on this project topic, “Traditional Method Technique and Method of Conflict Resolution in Akure, Ondo State in Pre-colonial Times (Era)”.

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CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF AKURE

Introduction

This chapter gives an explanation of the geographical location of Akure, its political, economic and social structures during the pre colonial times.

Geographical Location

Akure is a city in south-western Nigeria,¹ and is the largest city and capital of Ondo State.² The city had a population of 484,798 as at the 2006 population census. Akure lies about 7°25' north of the equator and 5°19' east of the Meridian. It is about 700 km Southwest of Abuja and 311 km north of Lagos State. Residential districts are of varying density, some area such as Arakale, Ayedun Quarters, Ijoka, and Oja-Oba consist of over 200 persons per hectare, while areas such as Ijapo Estate, Alagbaka Estate, Avenue and Idofin have between 60-100 people per hectare.³ The town is situated in the tropic rainforest zone in Nigeria.

Political Structure

A monarchical system of government was operated in pre-colonial Akure, under the leadership of the Deji. The Deji was selected like any other king in Yorubaland.⁴ The office of the Deji was hereditary, but not necessarily from father to son or daughter. The Deji was regarded as a divine king and in practice believed to have absolute powers, he could sentence offenders to death or banishment, etc. he could take over anybody's wife, his attribute was "Oba, Alaseekeji Orisa" (King,

the ruler and Companion of the gods), he was known as “Alayeluwa” (The Lord of the Earth and Life).⁵ He was addressed as “Kabiesi”, an expression which is the contraction of the sentence, “Kabin yin Kosi” (there is no questioning of your authority). In theory, the Oba had the power of life and death over his subjects and was not accountable to them for any of his actions. However, in practice, the Deji was not an absolute ruler. It is true that as the executive head of the government, he exercised considerable powers particularly over the common people. For instance, he could arrest, punish and even behead a person without trial but he exercised this power sparingly and with justification. He did not rule alone, he was assisted by a council of chiefs, the most important among them being the “lare”, the “ikomo”, the “ejua”, the “ogbe” and the “owose”.⁶

The Deji’s court tried and settled all cases, be it civil or criminal. In tis court, capital punishment in form of sentences could be imposed. The traditional police, which was responsible for the executions of all the decisions made by the authorities, was headed by one of the Deji’s chiefs, “Omolaare”.⁷ The appointment and removal of chiefs and village heads was done by the Deji based on the advice of the relevant authorities (elders, chiefs, etc.)⁸

The Lare chiefs were the elder statesmen and used to act as the chief advisers to the Deji. The first six of these chiefs: Olisa, Odopetu, Elemo Aro, Ojomu and Asae, populaely known as the “larafamefa”, were the representatives of their different quarters making up Akure.⁹ The chiefs in general owed their

positions not to the favour of the king but to their noble birth. They had powers to declare war and make peace and were generally responsible for civil administration of their subjects. This administration responsibility covered a wide range of activities such as collection of taxes or tributes, supervision of public works and administration of justice.¹⁰

Villages under the political suzerainty of Akure in the 19th century were about one hundred and thirty. These villages varied in size, they were not allowed to approach the Deji directly because of the discrimination that existed between the metropolitan citizens and the citizens of the satellites¹¹ whom they usually referred to as ‘asira-oko’ (rural people). Nevertheless, all the village heads under the political jurisdiction of the Deji carried him along in the administration of their different villages. The chiefs and village heads made laws not only for the maintenance of order in their domains but also for the regulation of economic activities of the villages or their quarters.¹² Since the Deji and the “Iare” constituted the supreme court of the kingdom, major cases were dealt with centrally in the Deji’s court. Cases of theft, adultery or rape were matters reported directly to the head of the village without them going through the head of the family.¹³

Furthermore, women also took active part in the pre-colonial administration of the kingdom. There were three important groups of women chiefs, apart from Olori (Royal Wives) who participated in the administration of the kingdom. One of these groups was the “apate” headed by the “Eyelobinrin” (women leader). They were

the only group of women who were permitted the special privilege to carry “are” (board or tray) upon which the flesh of wild animals was cut for sale in the market place. They were not butchers, members of this group had to keep the King and Chiefs well informed about the happenings in the market.¹⁴ They had to enforce the closure of the market place as required by tradition from time to time.

The second group of female chiefs was “Ukoju” (the meeting of eyes) which constituted of the daughters of Akure traditional chiefs, while the third group of female chiefs was the “Esare” group (the selected) which constituted of all the daughters of the past kings and their daughters.¹⁵

Also, for the purpose of security of lives and property, Akure had some groups of people that performed the role of security agents and their main duty was apprehension of criminals. One of these groups was “Erinse” headed by “Chief Ologbosere”. This set of people acted as policemen, soldiers and prison officers, the head of the police wing was “Chief Omolaare”. If anybody erred in the village, the case must be reported to the Deji who would then order the “Erinse” to go and arrest the culprit. The Erinse only had to present the Deji’s staff of office as the arrest warrant on being detained, the offender would face a preliminary investigation by the “Ikomo” who would treat the matter summarily or refer the decision to the village heads and the “Iare”.¹⁶

The people also executed the judgment of the Deji. Akure also had an army that was also responsible for maintaining and enforcing law and order. This group

was fully engaged in the inter-state wars which ravaged Yoruba land during the 19th century. “Odo” was the commander in chief of the Akure army before Sao supplanted him during the reign of Deji Gbogi (1648 to 1674).¹⁷ The hunters also performed the role of security agents and prosecuted lawbreakers at the quarter levels and hand them over to the quarter chiefs. Age groups which were made up of youths among others, also constituted themselves into formidable security units through which they maintained law and order.

In pre-colonial Akure, there were prison yards called “Igbon” (the house of wisdom). There were three types: the first one, “Igbon Akure” was under the supervision of “Ologbosere”, the second also known as “Igbon Akure”, was under the supervision of “Olosogan” while the third, “Igbon Deji” was under the watch of “Chief Saraku”. Accused persons were to be remanded until their cases were heard or decided upon.

Religion also played a crucial role in the political administration of pre-colonial Akure.¹⁸ Akure indigenous traditional religion was and is still based on the belief in the supreme deity. The people also believed in divinities, ancestral spirits, moral, orders and life hereafter. The divinities that were common among Akure and her neighbours were “Ogun” (god of iron) and “egungun” (masquerades). Ogun as one of the traditional gods was believed to have been charged with matters relating to war or other exploits demanding the use of iron. “Ogun” could hence be said to be the blacksmithing god. Dogs were usually used as sequence to Ogun.¹⁹

As stated above, “Egungun” was also a common element of religion among the pre-colonial Akure people. The Egungun was of different shapes and colours, it was and still the belief that masquerades represented the spirits of the departed ancestors and relatives, the worshippers could pray through them and their prayer would be answered. However, it is important to know that the number of adherents of traditional religion in Akure has reduced drastically due to the advent of foreign religions like Christianity and Islam coupled with Western Civilization and Modernization.²⁰

Thus, it can be deduced that though pre-colonial administration of Akure revolved largely around the personality and leadership quality of the Deji. However, the success of the King largely depended on his ability to relate well and coordinate his assisting chiefs, the professional bodies like the hunters. His role was more or less that of a co-ordinator. He was not absolute as he was guided by a body of taboos, a violation of any that could lead to dethronement or a more grievous penalty.²¹

Economic Structure

Akure is a trade center; it is an agricultural trade centre for cassava, corn (maize), bananas, rice, palm oil and kernels, okra, rubber, coffee, and pumpkins. Although cocoa is by far the most important local commercial crop, cotton, teak, and palm produce are also cultivated for export. The town’s industries include electronics manufacturing, soft drink bottling, weaving, and pottery making from

pre-colonial times to the early 21st century, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved. However, the image of a helpless, oppressed, and marginalized group has undermined their proper study, and little recognition has been granted to the various integral functions that Nigerian women have performed throughout history.²²

In the pre-colonial period, women played a major role in social and economic activities. Division of labor was along gender lines, and women controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making, and cooking. Moreover, land was communally owned, and women had access to it through their husbands or parents. Although a man was the head of the household in a patrilineal system, older women had control of the labour of younger family members.

Women were also central to trade. Among the Akure people, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquirement

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, and the chief products are cotton and tobacco from the north, cacao from the central part, and rubber and timber (teak and hardwoods) from the south and east; palm oil and kernels are cultivated for export throughout the state²³ Ondo is Nigeria's chief cocoa-producing state. Other crops include rice, yams, corn (maize), coffee, taro, cassava (manioc), vegetables, and fruits. Traditional industries include pottery making, cloth weaving, tailoring,

carpentry, and blacksmithing. Mineral deposits include kaolin, pyrites, iron ore, petroleum, and coal.

Social Structure

The control of crimes in any society has been an uphill task from time immemorial. Therefore, different people in an attempt to curtail them have adopted different strategies to contend with crimes depending on their nature and extent. One thing is certain: a community, state or nation with a high incidence of crime cannot grow or develop. Hence, traditional taboos formed one of the mechanisms used to achieve peace and tranquillity among the people of the Old Ondo Province and other African societies. Before the advent of modern civilisation, the norms of the people encouraged a need to fight crime using taboo. This was one major instrument of keeping peace between leadership and their subjects and between societies and their neighbours.²⁴

Taboos represented the main source of guiding principles regulating and directing the behavior of individuals and the community ultimately towards the Supreme Being and especially the gods and ancestors in Akure traditional societies. The motivation for abiding by the normative principles was provided and reinforced by the religious sanctions from the gods and ancestors.²⁵ Their cultic code of ethics, written or verbal served as a point of reference in determining traditional lawbreakers, and in the adjudicating of ensuing cases at the traditional courts and shrines. Those found guilty of serious moral or legal violations were

made to undergo ritual cleansing as a means of moral purification and transformation.²⁶

It is equally important to mention while considering taboos, that covenant comes into focus when one enters into agreement with a divinity; such covenants usually have their sanctions and demands. One has to obey all the regulations of the cult and observe its taboos. Each divinity usually has certain things, which are taboo to it. Among the Akure people all the worshippers of Orisa Nla, the arch divinity, must not drink palm wine because Orisa Nla, the arch divinity, forbids it.²⁷

In Akure, taboo still forms one of the veritable instruments used in combating corruption within the society or in unveiling indecency in office. Therefore, actions of people are prevented, if they are unacceptable ones that are against societal norms and values. For instance, in Owo women were prevented from entering into the market without covering their head to avoid calamity in the community.²⁸

Taboo was the only measure of social restriction and obligation in the pre-colonial period. Then, taboo was the cornerstone of the whole social order and there was no part of the social system that was not regulated and governed by taboo such as relationship between rulers and subjects, political life, sexual life, family life as well as the economic life of the society. For instance, it was an offence in pre-colonial times against time Oba for a male citizen to touch, sit or discuss with an Olori either publicly or privately.²⁹

The word taboo is called “eewo” in Akure that is, that which is forbidden. The action or conduct of one man/woman within the community can affect other members for good or evil. This is more so because of the imperatives of socialization processes. In order to prevent humans from becoming rebellious and promote the welfare of the society, there are set patterns or codes of behavior which individuals must adhere to for the tone of the community as a whole. There are standards or norms to be observed. These norms or code of conduct can be seen as moral values and such things which are forbidden must not be done. In other words, taboo is a prohibited action and breaking the ban is followed by supernatural penalty.³⁰ Taboo is a sacred term for a set of cultural or religious prohibitions instituted by traditional religious authorities as instruments of social control for protecting the sanctity of their shrines, worship of the gods and the wellbeing of their communities. The term is also applicable to any sort of social prohibition imposed by the leadership of a community regarding certain times, places, actions, events, people, etc, especially, but not exclusively for religious reasons, for the wellbeing of the society. Taboo is a common feature in most African societies. They are usually of divine or genetic origin.³¹ Taboos either had their origin from the gods, the ancestors or those derived from the birth of some particular members of a society. Such taboos are not moral laws applicable to all members except in rare cases. There are individuals deliberately exempted from such because of the advantageous position they occupied.³²

Taboos, during the pre-colonial times were observed in every community in Yoruba land has its peculiar taboos. Breachers of taboos bring disaster not only on the particular person or community, but also to the persons around. Thus, the Yoruba say “*bi ara ile eni ba nje kokoro buruku, bia koba kilo fun aherehuru re ko ni je ki a sun loru*” that is, “if our neighbour eats the inedible and we do not warn him/her, his/her difficulty in breathing at night will not allow us to sleep”.³³

The Akure believe in the reality of the taboo and do not consider it as superstition. They also believe that the keeping of the taboos gives joy, happiness, wealth, comfort and long life. The Akure people also believe that violation of the taboos bring about misfortune and misery on the person who violates it. Taboo is what is forbidden in the religious context. The Yoruba say “o je eewo”, when a person does what is forbidden. They also hold the belief that taboo embraces everything, which can be conceived as sin, unethical or something that contravenes the norms and values of the traditional institution and the society. They convey the message that in a breach of any of them, one has personally offended someone in the course of violating it. Thus, “eewo orisa” means: “what the divinity abhors or abomination”.³⁴ It is perversion or abomination to the deity or divinity. Akure communities particularly had certain beliefs that guided their behaviour. They were forbidden to do certain things or were taught to accept certain happenings as normal. There was the belief that if such taboos were not respected, certain gods would be displeased. In turn, they would visit the defaulters with hardship and

suffering including loss of blessings. Thus, the people respected the taboos as breaches which incurred the wrath of the gods and courted danger for himself and the community. Taboo may, therefore, be used in two ways: the spiritual usage and social-political usage. Both terms were evident among the people of Akure.³⁵

Most taboos were taken seriously since they were believed to have been imposed by traditional rulers or priests on their behalf and in the general interest of the people.

They might be promulgated and transmitted in the form of religious ordinances, creeds or vows. Hence, unlike ordinary wrongs, taboo might require blood sacrifices to propitiate for forgiveness from the gods and ancestors to avoid their wrath on the living in form of epidemics, draughts and infertility. For instance, in Owo, an Omolowo (Owo indigene) must not eat monkey. Also, it is a taboo for twins to eat monkey.³⁶

Taboo sanctions were believed to be instantaneous and automatic unlike sanctions in other religions that have to wait till a particular time or stand to be mitigated by God's mercy and forgiveness. For example, it was generally held that when people swore with gods like Ogun or Sango, any breach would attract instant repercussion. Yet, people out of prudence would not deliberately violate them even if they were skeptical of their potency. Hence, the value of taboos as instruments of social control cannot be underestimated.³⁷

Chieftaincy and Taboos was conducted due to the king's royal and regal position which was symbolic and linked with divinity, the king Deji of Akure observed many taboos. In pre-colonial times, he hardly travelled outside his domain. At his installation, the Deji would prostrate himself, for the last time, for the king-makers in public during his installation. He was, therefore, forbidden to do obeisance to anybody. The Deji must not see a dead body, also he must not eat outside or in public. There were repercussions to be faced if he went against any of these taboos; it might bring about strange diseases to the Oba, his household or the community at large and peace and tranquility might elude the community.³⁸

It was forbidden to say directly that a king ate, drank, slept, washed, fell ill or died. All things must be said euphemistically. When the Deji died, the traditional way of announcing it is Oba woaja (he has gone up the ceiling), Erin wo (the elephant has fallen), or Opo ye (the pillar has given way). The king, like a father, was closely linked with the idea of the preservation of law, peace and order within the kingdom. Whenever the death of the Oba was announced, there was breakdown of law and order.³⁹

The Dejis of Akure were expected in one way or another to ensure the prosperity and well being of their kingdoms. Thus, the scarcity of food, the failure of the rains, poor harvest, sudden deaths and the outbreak of epidemics were occurrences from which the king could not absolve himself. They were expected to establish a direct communication or link with relevant powers, either by magical

means or by means of religious rites or by both. All these constituted their religious duties; failure to adhere strictly to them was a taboo.⁴⁰

Akure was a sacred place; this was demonstrated in various restrictions and taboo with which it was treated. An act of immorality in or around the palace was regarded as taboo. For example, no man except the Oba could have an affair with a woman on the palace ground. Births and deaths were completely taboo in the palace. The king must not set eyes on anything which was unclean. The main reason is that the king as a royal person being an important and first citizen should not deal with anything that is dead or stinking except the living. Either touching the walls of or pointing towards the palace was also forbidden. For all practical purposes, the palace was treated as a holy of holiest Any violation of the taboo was met with a sanction.⁴¹

It was a taboo for anybody to wear the king's paraphernalia. In particular, his Ade (crown), Opa Ase (scepter) and Bata Ileke (royal beaded shoe) were objects of veneration and must not be worn by anyone other than the king himself. It was considered improper for the king to mix freely with his subjects, being ordinary mortals. It was a taboo for people of the same family to marry each other. Certainly, it has repercussions. It was an abomination to have sexual dealings with any Deji's wife; any person caught in this act was punished by death. The repercussion for that, if not punishable by death, was that such a person would live a miserable life. It was a taboo for a child to beat his parents; severe calamity would be the

repercussion of such. In other words, incest was a serious taboo among various communities during the pre-colonial times.⁴²

This is still the situation in modern times. Sexual act within the family was an abomination. This offends the ancestors and the gods; it could breed conflicts that can break up families but also breed inexplicable abnormal births, birth defects and diseases.

In Akure, it was a taboo to allow twins to ascend the throne, women were not allowed to be king; the highest they could aspire to was to be chiefs. Slaves and disabled people were not allowed to be king. Spiritually, it was believed that anybody that would occupy that sacred position must be an able bodied person, because gods could only relate with complete persons. Any attempt to do contrary would attract calamities to the community). On the socio-political aspect, this taboo was aimed at bringing about good and quality leadership to the traditional communities, and prune down the qualified people to this exalted position.⁴³

Among the Akure people, for instance, it was a taboo for *olori* (king's wives) to wear *buba* (blouse) and *gele* (head tie). It was believed that this was aimed at distinguishing the *Olori* from other women spiritually. It was believed that if any of the wives contravened this taboo, this might bring calamities including untimely death of the Deji or of the palace and the community as a whole. ⁴⁴

The highest oath which anybody in the Province could take was to swear by the head of the king. For instance, if a housewife quarrelling with her husband in

Akure, could shout “*Deji mo sa ya oo*” (Deji, I run to you for safety) she could be taken to the palace. If the king fancied the woman, he could take her as one of his wives. If not, the king would try to settle the quarrel and release the woman to her husband when a ransom of *ookanla* (55kobo) had been paid. If two suitors quarreled over a lady, the king could settle the matter by taking her himself. The Deji was seen as a god and second in rank only to the gods. The Deji of Akure in this area of study must not see the inner part of his crown; and the crown must not be worn by another person.⁴⁵

Masquerade Festival

The Egungun Festival in Yorubaland is an important part of the different religious practices of the people of Akure most Yoruba religious traditions are based on oral traditions. Practices and beliefs are preserved by customs, passing history, and traditions from generation to generation. Authority for interpreting occasions and also establishing needed conduct of morals and ethics rests with a bureaucratic structure of some rulers that function in both the political and religious realms.

- Date of Observation: it is conducted in June
- Type of Holiday: it is a Religious Yoruba holiday
- Countries it is celebrated in: Nigeria and also Brazil
- Symbols and Customs of this holiday: Yam, Masks

Egungun, (egúngún with proper Yorùbá language tone marks) in the broadest sense of the word, refers to all types of Yoruba masquerades or masked, costumed figures.⁴⁶ More specifically, "Egungun" refers to the Yoruba masquerades connected with ancestor reverence, or to the ancestors themselves as a collective force. The belief that Egun or Eegun (eégún with correct Yorùbá tone marks) is the singular form or that it represents the ancestors while egúngún is the masquerade and / or the plural form is a misconception in the Americas by Orisa devotees that do not speak Yorùbá language as a vernacular. In actuality, eégún is only the reduced form / abbreviation assimilation of the word egúngún; There is absolutely no difference in meaning between the full and reduced forms of the word.

The classification of Egun or Egungun types, might appear to be a fairly straightforward task, but in fact it is extremely complex deciphering the comprehension of indigenous taxonomies. The difficulties include: the problem of distinguishing between personal Egun names and generic terms for types; the problem of determining "sets" where one masquerader may be regarded as within several type categories simultaneously; the practice of "layering," in which a masquerader wears one costume type over another and changes these during performance; and the variety of criteria used to classify Egungun as well as the range of variations within type categories. Such factors demonstrate the complexity

of the analysis of indigenous taxonomies and the classification of masquerade types. These same difficulties arise in the definition and use of the term Egungun itself.⁴⁷

Family Role in Egungun includes the Yoruba religion, the annual ceremonies in honor of the dead serve as a means of assuring their ancestors a place among the living. They believe the ancestors have the responsibility to compel the living to uphold the ethical standards of the past generations of their clan, town or family. The Egungun are celebrated in festivals, known as Odun Egungun, and in family ritual through the masquerade custom. In family situations, a family elder known either formally or informally as "Alagba" presides over ancestral rites. He may or may not be initiated into the local Egungun society. In matters that deal with whole communities, Egungun priests and initiates who are trained in ancestral communication, ancestral elevation and funerary rites are assigned to invoke and bring out the ancestors. They wear elaborate costumes in masquerade. Through drumming and dance, the Egungun robed performers are believed to become possessed by the spirits of the ancestors, as manifested as a single entity. The Egungun spiritually cleans the community; through the dramatic acting and miming of the robed priests, they demonstrate both ethical and amoral behaviors that have occurred since their last visit. In this way, they expose the strengths and weaknesses of the community to encourage behavior more befitting of their descendants. When this performance is completed, the performers as Egungun give messages, warnings and blessings to the assembled spectators.

Cloth plays an important role in the world of the Yoruba. Their beliefs equate nakedness with infancy, insanity, or the lack of social responsibility.⁴⁸ More elaborate dressing reflects social power and prestige. In performances honoring ancestors, exquisite cloth is the major medium for the masker's transformation. An Egungun costume is composed of multiple layers of cloth lappets made from expensive and prestigious textiles, expressing the wealth and status of a family as well as the power of the ancestor.

The composition of an Egungun ensemble has several distinctive features. The layer worn closest to the masker's skin, the under sack, must be made of Aso-Oke, the indigo and white strip-cloth. It closely resembles the shroud in which the dead are wrapped.⁴⁹ This sack, along with the netting for the face and hands, must completely seal the masker's body. The netting effectively disguises facial and hand features that might disclose his identity.

On top of this base are placed the layers of lappets. As the masker whirls, the lappets are sent flying, creating a "breeze of blessing." The design of the costume is therefore closely related to the choreography of the performance. To make the costume beautiful, and thus powerful, the lappets are decorated with patchwork patterns, braids, sequins, tassels, and amulets. The amulets hold medicinal preparations which have performative power (*ase*), providing protection against enemies at a time when the transformed person is vulnerable. The main protective amulets, however, are on the inside of the costume, not the outside.

Metallic objects are also sewn onto the garment. These catch the light as the wearer moves, creating flashes that suggest connection to the spirit world, orun.⁵⁰

The multiple hidden and visible layers of fabric used to create an Egungun costume signify the sacred and the worldly, respectively.⁵¹ The layers, used in combination, suggest the reunion of the departed and the living.⁵²

An ensemble is repaired and refurbished for use year after year, with layers of new lappets and amulets added to express remembrance and honour. Through divination, however, an ancestor might request a new costume altogether. The owner and the patron, the priest of divination, the tailor, the herbalist who prepares the packets of medicines, and the entire lineage collaborate in creating the ensemble. Depending upon its wealth, a family may own several types of Egungun costumes, which may represent specific or collective ancestors of the lineage.

The Egungun ensemble acts as the medium for the masker's transformation into his ancestors. An Egungun society is composed of men and women whose lineages have the right to present the masquerade. Men do the masking. Women never wear the costume, although they participate in the chorus that sings the oriki; praise poems and histories of the families. Elder women of high title also perform invocations, prayers, and offerings. At annual festivals, each of the numerous lineages is given a separate day to perform. The masker is kept at a distance from the surrounding crowd with the help of attendants dressed in masquerade costumes

of different types. After all the Egungun have danced, the ensembles are stored until the next performance.⁵³

Egungun masquerades are male dominated within the performance aspect and women play an integral role in the ritual. Only males are allowed to connect with the spirits in Egungun by transforming into the masked figure. However, women are not powerless in the ritual of Egungun. Women are important to the creation of the materials, dramatizing the performance, singing, dancing and serving as an audience member. Elders say separation is necessary because of the dangers of women power.⁵⁴

According to the Ifa corpus, women were once in control of Egungun and the ritual originates from women's religious experience in Yoruba.⁵⁵ It is also argued that women were the sustainers of Egungun and according to the Odu Irantegbe chapter of the Ifa corpus, they were tricked by men and their powers over the Egungun cult were taken away.⁵⁶

Marriage

During the pre-colonial time, marriage was conducted between the people of Akure and their neighbors, traditional marriage ceremony even though a serious affair is full of playful banter, rich contemporary Nigerian music, graceful colours and sumptuous meals. Marriage in Yoruba land is an occasion to show your best outfits, handbags, jewelry and even dancing styles. The families of the bride and groom meet long before any engagement ceremony takes place. The groom visits

the family of the bride in company of his father and some family members. The occasion is an informal introduction without fanfare but a cordial atmosphere to know each other. The informal introduction does not require much except some tubers of yam and a few bottles of wine; the family of the bride hosts the visitors with a simple meal of their choice. Apart from all round introductions, they might discuss when the event would take place, this is not a hard and fast rule and such discussions might take place.⁵⁷

The traditional engagement is carried out by a contracted professional called the *Alaga ijoko* which translated, means the traditional master of ceremony. The professional could be a member of the bride's family or a complete stranger. The *Alaga Ijoko* is usually a woman and her duty is to properly officiate and coordinate the proceeding so each provision of tradition is strictly adhered too. There are different stages she coordinates and each stage might elicit a collection of cash which the Alaga keeps, various fines are paid and formal introduction of the groom accompanied by his age mates and friends which also involves prostrating to the family of the bride to formally request their daughter's hand in marriage. The groom's family also hires a professional called the *Alaga iduro* which means the standing master of ceremony, who follows the groom and family to ask for the hand of their daughter. The *Alaga iduro* is also a professional custodian of Yoruba wedding tradition. She could be a family member or hired for the occasion.⁵⁸

Other festivities include the letter reading which is read by a young lady from the groom's family also asking for the hand of the bride in marriage. The bride's family also responds with a letter of their own. The engagement is an integral part of the traditional marriage and as the ceremony proceeds, items listed for the engagement that was given to the groom's family is presented. The items vary slightly in each Yoruba traditional wedding but the general articles are the same. Some of the items demanded by the bride's family are; bag of sugar, bag of rice, alligator pepper, large number of bitter kola, bag of salt, kola nuts. If they are Christians, a bible, keg of honey and about forty large tubers of yam are included in the items. Non edible items could include expensive materials like lace, several pairs of shoes, wristwatch, a gold engagement ring and head tie.⁵⁹

There is no fixed amount of money for the bride price, as it is usually dictated by the bride's family and is subject to negotiation. However, there are other fees to be paid by the groom/his family (which are also negotiable); *Owo Isigba* - N500. This is used to open the packaged gift items brought by the bridegroom, *Owo Ikanlekun* (entrance fee) - N500, *Owo Ijoko Iyawo* - N1,000. This is the money given to elders in the groom's family, *Owo Isiju Iyawo* (fees paid to unveil the bride) - N500, *Owo Baba Gbo* - N500. This amount is paid to ask for the bride's father consent, *Owo Iya Gbo* - N1,000. This is the amount of money paid to ask for the bride's mother consent, *Owo Omo Ile Okunrin* - N500. This is the money given to all male children in the bride's family, *Owo Omo Ile Obinrin* - N500. This is the

money given to all female children in the bride's family, *Owo Iyawo Ile* - N500. This is the money given to all wives in the bride's family, *Owo Ijoko Agba* - N1,000. This is the amount of money reserved for elders of the bride's family, *Owo Alaga Ijoko* (amount of money reserved for the MC) - N500.⁶⁰

Some of the engagement protocols officiated by the *Alaga ijoko* are carried out in the absence of the groom, the professionals go through a question and answer format where the bride's moderator puts the representatives of the groom through some hoops. At one point the groom's presence is needed and he comes forward and goes through the introduction process to the bride's family and parents. When all requirements are met the groom is led and allowed to seat on one of the two large chairs conspicuously placed in front of the guests. The chairs are artfully decorated in the chosen ceremonial colors by the wedding planner.⁶¹

The bride is then heralded into the venue of the ceremony followed by her friends, all dressed in traditional attires like *buba* and *iro*, as they join her in a boisterous dance down the hall. The bride also goes through a few protocols but money is only given to her and not taken from her as in the case of the groom. She is introduced to the groom's family before she takes her place beside the groom. At this stage, they may consider themselves married. The wife displays some wifely traits by feeding the groom some cake and wine, even a kiss to the amusement of the guests.⁶²

On the day of the marriage, the bride's outfit is a reflection of what the female guests will wear, she might choose damask, lace, Nigerian wax fabric or any fabric that appeals to her. The outfit consists of *gele* which is the head tie, the *buba* (the blouse) and an *iro* which is a large material tied round her waist and is usually ankle length. The colours she chooses reflects the colour theme her family has chosen but should also complement the groom's outfit and look identical. She can wear accessories like gold necklace, beads, bangles, gold earrings and shoes to match.⁶³

On the other hand, the groom could decide to wear an *Agbada* which is a two layered material of heavy dimensions like the *Aso - Oke* (traditional hand-woven material). It might be cotton, and damask or he might wear lace or even wax fabric (*Ankara*). His colour combination should complement the bride's and reflect the colour his family has chosen. Akure traditional marriage is seen as an occasion for family members to reunite and catch-up on current happenings. They also see find old friends and acquaintances. It is a fun filled and meticulously planned period that announces to the world the union of their loved ones. The couple can choose to include a civil union through a court wedding and also go through a church wedding and a separate wedding reception.⁶⁴ Muslims who also form a large number of Yoruba people have a more simplified wedding protocol which involves Islamic scholars and religious leaders who offer prayers to the union followed by merriment in form of a party.⁶⁵

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CHAPTER THREE

CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN AKURE COMMUNITY DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

Introduction

This chapter gives an insight into the major political units involved in dispute resolution in pre-colonial Akure. These units include the Baale, the Mogaji and the Deji of Akure. Conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned with the hope of at reducing the scope, intensity and effects of the conflicts. During formal and informal meetings conflict resolution exercises permit a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding option to crisis and to divergent point of view.

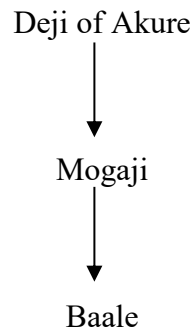
Before the advent of slave trade and colonialism, African societies had well established mechanisms for conflict resolution, peacemaking, peace education, peace building, conflict monitoring, conflict management and conflict prevention. In Africa, one of the major functions of traditional political institutions in Akure is to resolve conflicts.

The traditional Yoruba judicial processes are more evident in the indigenous quarters of Akure, where people still live in family compounds and have strong networks of interactions with one another in the extended family along the lines of age, status and occupation. There were levels or phases of conflict resolution in Africa, where dispute resolution includes the inter-personal or family

level, the extended family level and village or town level. (Chief in Council). These tiers represent the political units making up the community.

Furthermore, the smallest political unit within Akure is the Idile which roughly corresponds to the nuclear family; the next unit is the Ebi, which is the extended family. Headed by the Mogaji who is the most influential or usually the oldest male member of the family.¹ Extended family includes all people who have blood ties. The last tier of the units is the quarter which comprises of several family compounds is headed by a Baale (the chief of ward) he is accorded much respect because of his wisdom, age and experience.²

The Political Structure of Pre-Colonial Akure



The Baale

The Baale settles all disputes within his households and represents his family on the council of the quarter's chiefs. A responsible Baale in Akure, as in many other parts of Yoruba land is one whose opinions and decisions are respected by those within his household. He keeps peace and order in his household and as

Fadipe noted, he is "...the chief law-giver and magistrate of the compound.³ He also controls the relationships between members of his family and outsiders.

Cases brought before the bale usually include conflicts among co-wives, brothers and sisters, truants and street fights involving his children and his foster children. Minor conflicts are usually resolved immediately by scolding the troublemakers and appeasing whoever was offended. When a member of another family claims to be unjustly offended, the bale is required by Omoluabi philosophy to visit the home of the offended person to formally apologise, even after the dispute has been resolved and to thank him for accepting a peaceful resolution to the conflict. As soon as the Baale returns from such a peace-keeping mission, he calls his people together and warns them to stop making any trouble.⁴

Serious matters considered to infringe on the proper upbringing of children within households are usually reserved for final settlement within the home. Such matters would include truancy, sexual harassment of females in school, consistent failure in school examinations, lying often are interpreted as the first signs that the child might later become a thief, petty theft and the use of other indecorous language against an elderly person, which is a very serious offense if that person is older than the child's parents. Most problems which involve children can be resolved by the family head or by anyone who recognizes the child who is omitting the offence. The people of Akure believe that the upbringing of the children is not the responsibility of the parents alone but of everybody in the community.

observed by Gowin Williams, the authority of these lineage heads has been usurped by modern courts and bureaucrats and therefore, local influence is often exercised by men of wealth rather than by men of noble lineage.⁵ Today, many Mogaji call upon the influential men and women in their families, both old and young to assist in the conflict resolution process, so that such decisions will have a meaningful impact where a member of the family threatens to take his case to the formal court, the Mogaji carefully withdraws from such a case.

Land dispute matters rank among the most prominent of the many conflicts that occur in Akure largely because of the administrative and commercial importance of the city. Some landowners and speculators capitalized on their desire for land and began to exploit or dupe land buyers. Hence, the magnitude of land disputes in the city can be gauged from the number of cases brought by members of the public to such informal arbitration radio programmes as So Da Bee of the Broadcasting Corporation of Akure State.⁶ Almost every week, people appear on these programmes to seek resolution of their land disputes.

Land in the city is owned by families and lineages although by the land use decree of 1978, land is vested in the government, the authority to distribute land among the town's lineage was handled by the Deji of Akure. The person most knowledgeable about land issues in the city are therefore the Mogaji as the custodians of family traditions. Conflicts related to land often result when a recalcitrant member of a family chooses to sell family land without consulting

other members of the lineage. Hence, trouble starts as soon as the news of the illegal sale becomes common knowledge.⁷ When this happens or a more serious issue of land dispute, it is taken to the Deji of Akure, he is the highest institution of conflict resolution in Akure, he handles advanced cases on land disputes.

The Deji of Akure

The Deji of Akure is in charge of more advanced cases. He handled issues that are beyond the Baale and the Mogaji. When a case is taken to the Deji of Akure, who (has or is assisted by a council of chiefs who are referred to as the Deji's court) summons the both parties involved in the conflict to appear in the palace on a particular date. The Deji's court adjudicates on the cases after both parties have been heard. Thereafter, the Deji of Akure gives his final verdict as regards to the proportion of the conflict brought before him.⁸ The Deji might ask the family members if they want compensation or demand that the “squatter” (i.e. the buyer of the piece of land) returns it and then stop trespassing on family land. Usually, a sign post stating that the land belongs to a particular family is quickly erected with the warning that trespassers will be prosecuted in the Deji’s court. Anyone who builds on the land faces a greater risk of having his building knocked down by bulldozers than receiving any court summons.

As evidenced by many past editions of So Da Bee radio,⁹ people sometimes sell land that does not belong to them. Dubious people who notice that a piece of

land has been vacant for a number of years may take this opportunity to sell it even when the land is not theirs.

In some cases, the multiple sale of land results from a seeming or assumed ambiguity about the real ownership of the land. A case of this nature was brought to the Deji of Akure where a blind woman gave a piece of land to a man for farming, the blind woman subsequently died and the man who was given the land also died. Thereafter, the son of the blind woman immediately took possession of his mother's land and sold it without informing the children of the man who had farmed on it. The children of the farmer also sold the land to a different buyer. When one of the buyers tried to develop it, he was confronted by the other buyer. The case had to be brought before the Deji of Akure where it was established that the son of the farmer should have contacted the son of the blind woman before attempting to sell the land. He would only have been entitled to sell the land if there was proof that the land was given to his father for more than farming, Hence, he was told to return the money back in order to recover the land and give it (the land) back to the original owner (the old woman's son).

In some cases, land dispute (conflicts) result from people encroaching on another person's land. The encroachment is often deliberate. In some other cases, it is accidental. A person who has completed the construction of his own building might use the neighboring undeveloped land as a refuse dump. A man with an empty plot adjacent to his own might use the whole of his own land and then

appropriate a little from the adjoining plot to construct his sewage tank or garage. This might lead to the removal of the authentic survey pillars or boundary markers from one point to another. An unsuspecting landowner might not detect that his plot has been abridged; when he does, far reaching conflicts usually occur.

Furthermore, on disputes in the family, occasionally, conflicts may occur between co-wives within a household or the compound. The husband might favor one woman more than the other(s), causing jealousy among them.¹⁰ These women might abuse each other verbally while in some cases, they may physically assault one another, with the husband taking sides as he considers fit. Some women go to the extent of employing magic to resolve conflicts related to their matrimonial homes. On the seriousness attached to this, one should remember that magic includes the pragmatic use of poisons as well as more esoteric and spiritual forces.

Cases involving co-wives should be settled by the husband or Baale of the quarreling women. However, as husbands tend to be more partial in matters affecting their wives, such cases are usually taken to the Mogaji. The women in dispute and their husbands will be summoned to the Mogaji's apartment, while all the elders in the household constitute the jury. The junior wife in the dispute, on her knees is invited to state her case followed by the senior wife. The opinions of the other wives in the compound are solicited to enquire about the causes of the dispute and how it should be resolved. In most cases, the other women will be unwilling to reveal what they know but will only appeal to the Mogaji and the other elders to

settle the dispute amicably. Men are usually more forthcoming than women in stating what they feel about a particular case and how it should be resolved. Stiff penalties can be imposed on a wife known to have been making trouble because her husband married another wife. In one case observed by researchers, a relative of the man stood up to tell the story of how his father married twenty wives without having any problems. He wondered why the women in dispute should be giving his brother (with only four wives) so many problems. He recommended that whichever of the women was not comfortable with such polygamy should be encouraged (by the mediators) to seek divorce and allow new wives to be married into the family. As this kind of recommendation tends to worsen rather than resolve the dispute, the Mogaji rebuked the man for holding such an uncompromising view.¹¹

To resolve the dispute, the Mogaji as some Baale would also have done, and then asked the elders to express their opinions. After some discussions, the final verdict was given. The guilty woman and the husband were reproached but none of the disputants was left completely without blame. The Mogaji, at the end of the case, implored the disputants to co-operate since there was nothing strange about human conflict. “Even the tongue and the teeth despite their closeness often come into conflict”.

In some families, supernatural means are used to resolve conflicts. Mogaji Lekan Oladeji, one of the informants; noted for example that where two co-wives went to the extent of assaulting each other, the Mogaji would give the order that the

clothes worn by the women be seized and affixed to the regalia of the family masquerade (Egungun). If the women did not come from families that revered Egungun, the clothes might be burnt. However, if any of the women were still stubborn in her behavior thereafter, the Mogaji could order that she should move out of the family compound until she could comport herself better.

Thus, issues often leading to conflicts between spouses in Akure include; lack of care for women and children by the husband, the decision of the man to take a new wife and the infidelity by the woman. As a result of conflicts arising from any of these factors, a woman might be beaten and choose to leave her husband's house. Usually Yoruba parents do not welcome home daughters who have unilaterally chosen to leave their matrimonial homes. As soon as such a woman returns to her parent's house and narrates her story, her parents would simply send her back to her husband. This is done to make the woman appreciate the need for reconciliation. The mother of the woman or one of her female relatives might however, go back with her to prevent the husband from retaliating by sending her out. Such conflicts usually demand immediate resolution and a day is set aside for resolving it. The settlement may involve an Alarina (middleman) and the parents of both spouses.

The woman is asked to state her case first, and then the husband is permitted to state his. According to high chief Durosaro, when the wife starts to narrate her case, the elders would warn her by means of proverbs not to wash all

the dirty linen of her family in the open. In this manner, the evidence supplied by the woman would be confined to what was relevant to the case and not irrelevant family secrets. If the husband was at fault, the wife would be appeased but otherwise the man would be implored to forgive her. However, the parents of the woman would be asked to warn their daughter to ensure that such acts would not be repeated.

The Akure people like other Nigerian ethnic groups approve of wife beating as this is considered an honorable way of helping a woman to keep her marriage.¹² A man who is tired of keeping a particular woman under his roof might simply fling out her belongings and expect the woman to pick up the pieces and go. However, when a man decides to beat the woman, this is just to correct her. A similar situation to the Akure people was obtained in Malaysia where men beat their wives to win arguments, to express dissatisfaction, to deter future undesirable behavior and to demonstrate dominance.¹³ Some incidents that could lead to wife beating are; late or poor preparation of meals, lack of respect for the man, a wife's rebuke of her husband for some shortcoming, etc. as a result of the widespread belief amongst the Akure people that a man has the right to correct his wife by beating her, neighbors do not respond immediately a woman begins to shout for help. Some neighbors would feign ignorance of what was happening if the woman was known for always annoying the man (husband) or if the man and the wife were known to be habitually quarreling. The husband might refuse to welcome any

mediator if he was prevented by neighbors from beating the woman to his satisfaction He might insist that the woman leave his house. Once he has beaten her to his satisfaction, he would probably welcome anybody who offered to mediate in the conflict.

A matrimonial conflict caused by the infidelity of the woman is almost impossible for the neighbours, the Mogaji or the Baale to resolve in Akure. Appeals by neighbours to men whose wives are caught in extra-marital affairs usually fall on deaf ears. Most men would insist on divorcing the woman. A woman who engages in extra-marital sex, according to Akure belief, is a threat to the life of her husband. It is widely believed that the secret lover could charm the woman so that when the husband comes in sexual contact with her, he is killed. As a result, the Yoruba usually do not take cases of women's marital infidelity lightly.

Another area where conflicts often occur is on disputes over inheritance. According to the Akure tradition, the property of a deceased person is shared among his or her heirs shortly after his or her death. Writing a will is an alien concept to the Akure people. In fact, the legal fees are likely to deter the ordinary person from writing a will. The act of writing a will is more common amongst the educated and the rich.

Akure indigenes, like other Yoruba people have an established cultural process by which properties are inherited. The most dominant principles followed in sharing the property of a dead person are Oriojori and Idi-Igi. The Oriojori

principle requires the person sharing the property to give some part of the inheritable property to every child of the deceased irrespective of age or sex. The Idi-Igi principle on the other hand makes it mandatory for the property to be shared according to the number of wives the deceased had, irrespective of the number of children each woman delivered. Deciding which principle should be used can lead to conflict. A woman with many children will favor the Oriojori principle which enables each of her children to have his or her own inheritance. On the other hand, a woman with two children will favour the Idi-Igi system which will enable her to have enough for her children and by implication enough for herself. It is the responsibility of the elders and the Mogaji in the family to convince the wives of the deceased to adopt the most appropriate system for sharing the property.

Occasionally, disputes arise on how particular assets of the deceased, such as land and houses are to be shared. This kind of dispute is often found in polygamous homes for example, “where the man had secret wives unknown to his ‘legitimate’ wives before his demise, some of the secret wives will make trouble over how the property is shared, not because what is to be shared is of any importance but to reinforce their claim to the paternity of the children after the man’s death. When any major conflict is about to occur among the women, the Mogaji will summon eminent adult members of the paternal and maternal families of the deceased person resident in Akure and its villages to a meeting.¹⁴ Elders in the compound are also invited. Attempts will be made to establish the authenticity

of any women who claim to have delivered children of the dead man. Usually, some people in the family will know about the secret love affairs the deceased had. Once the claims of the women are established as genuine, they have the right to share in some part of the man's property for their children. The buildings left behind by the deceased are shared among the children. If the man had only one building, the rooms are shared out according to the number of children.¹⁵

If the inheritance includes farmland, the family team will go to the site of the land to demarcate the boundary of each person's inheritance. Natural symbols such as streams, rocks, trees, etc. are often used to demarcate the boundaries. Women in Akure are shared out as part of the property of the dead man, particularly younger women who do not have adult children to take over the inheritance for themselves. If the controversy is about who will inherit the woman or women, the Mogaji will pass a simple verdict. If another person contests the judgment by claiming that he was to inherit the woman, the woman will be allowed to choose the claimant she wants. In the families of Elegun (masqueraders) the conflict is finally referred to the Egungun cult and whatever is decided at this level is final, since no one is expected to reject the decree of the ancestors or even accept it grudgingly.¹⁶

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CHAPTER FOUR
THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF AKURE DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL TIMES AND ITS
HINDRANCE

Introduction

This chapter deals with the impact of conflict resolution how the settling of conflict during the pre-colonial times brought about an increase in growth and development to the people of Akure. It also deals with its challenges; that is the factors that has hindrance, militated and was a shortcoming to the impact of the resolution of the conflict in the development of the conflict on Akure during the pre-colonial times.

During the pre-colonial times conflict resolution brought about unity which helped to foster stronger relationship between the people within the community as well as neighboring communities. Conflict resolution has been used to promote relations between the people of Akure. When the community culture naturally settle (resolves) a conflict, the people are unified and it brings about a long development of the economy of both Communities, for example the land dispute between the people of Akure and Oke-Aro people brought unity and long lasting relationships tie between the both parties also in the issue of boundary dispute between the people of Akure and the Ekiti people.¹

Trust

In Akure during the pre-colonial times conflict resolution brought increase in trust.² The pre colonial Akure people began to see (view) a situation from the point of view of the other party due to the fact that during the course of resolving the conflict the both parties were asked to speak and as a result of this, the Akure people began to know and trust each other.³

Establishment of Industries

The resolution of conflict in Akure during the pre-colonial times led to the establishment of industries by the indigenes and visitors from other states. This was due to the fact that Akure was a commercial land area and as a result of this, production increased and there was a boost in agricultural products.⁴ It created a form of employment for the youths within the region, for instance the creation/establishment of **Tisco Supermarket and Pharmaceutical Company**.

The resolution of conflict by the traditional health created a peaceful atmosphere on Akure, thereby removing any form of lawless nature from the system, where traditional moral sanctioning and beliefs had judicious means for conflict resolution or more correctly the prevention of breaking of laws and orders in Akure during the pre-colonial times.

Conflict resolution performed a healing function in Akure society during the pre-colonial times. It provides opportunity for the examination of alternative positive decisions to resolve differences. It promotes consensus building, social

bridge reconstruction and the re-enactment of ordering society.⁵ A wider look is taken than one which just includes the disputing parties, possible consequences for others in their families and social network are also taken into consideration.

In Akure, during the pre-colonial times resolution brought about unity, It help to foster a stronger relationship between the people within the community. Conflict resolution has been used to prevent homelessness, tackle neighborhood and dispute, address family conflict, facilitate community involvement, address discrimination and reduce anti-social behavior. The promise of conflict resolution is that confidential and informal processes of justice from below might better reconcile community interests, improve relationships and promote social changes.

Hindrances

Hindrances refers to the factors that affected the impact of conflict resolution in Akure during the pre-colonial times, they include

- Corruption
- Favoritism
- Tribalism
- Lack of proper dispute resolving

Corruption

Corruption was an hindrance to conflict resolution in Akure during the pre-colonial times, the traditional heads who were in charge of resolving the disputes, were corrupt in their ways by collecting bribes in order to show more favor to one

party at the expense of the other, thereby causing a great effect towards the development of conflict resolution in the society.⁶ In a situation where an individual from a royal line is involved in a dispute over a land dispute with an individual who is not a royal blood, judgement would be given in favor of the party who is from the royal line.

Favoritism

Favoritism was a major factor that hindered the growth and development of conflict resolution in Akure, when an issue is brought before the traditional head and the person involved in the dispute is a friend or kindred, judgment will tend to be in favor of this person and this has really affected the effectiveness of conflict resolution in Akure.⁷

Tribalism

When a case of Land dispute arises between two individuals and one of the party involved isn't an indigenes of Akure, there might be a twist of judgement from the law executional.⁸ These issues of tribal discrimination posed as a major barrier to the development of conflict resolution in Akure during the pre-colonial times.

Lack of Proper Settlement of Dispute

When a conflict is not properly resolved, the issue may come up again and even in a more destructive and deadly way.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The final chapter of this research work will focus on the conclusion of all that this research work is all about. The title of this research work is “Traditional Techniques and Methods of Conflict Resolution in Akure, Ondo State in Pre-Colonial Times”.

The research work was divided into five chapters of which four of the chapters have been discussed previously. This chapter will focus on the summary of each of the chapters discussed above, and also give recommendations on how the pre-colonial conflict resolution methods can be used in the modern day society.

Chapter one which is a general introduction to the topic describes the concept of conflict and also gives a solid background to the main research problem. This chapter further expatiates on the scope, aim and objectives of the study and also provides an insight into the methodology used in the work, the sources of data and some previous studies done on the subject matter or similar essays.

Chapter two gives us a historical overview of Akure from pre-colonial times. The chapter also talks about the political structure of Akure during the pre - colonial period. Akure operated a monarchical system of government which was under the leadership of the Deji. The Deji was regarded as a divine king and was seen to have absolute power and was assisted by a council of chiefs known as the “Iare”. The Deji had a court who settled both civil and criminal cases, he appointed

and removed chiefs and village heads based on the advice of the elders and chiefs. This chapter also gave an insight into the various groups in operation within pre-colonial Akure's polity. These included; the baales and the mogajis; who along with the Deji were responsible for the day to day running of society and were key components of the conflict resolution process, the apate, the ukoju and the Oloris who made up the elite among the female population of Akure. The security arrangement was also touched on and it was made known that the native police in pre-colonial Akure was known as the "Erinse" headed by Chief Ologbosere. The economic structure of pre-colonial Akure was also contained in this chapter; it was stated that the pre-colonial Akure society was a trade centre for cash and food crops like; cassava, bananas, rice, palm oil and kernels, okra, rubber, coffee and pumpkins. Although, the most important trade commodity was cocoa. The trade activities in pre-colonial Akure were mainly driven by women in that they played major roles at both ends of the distribution and manufacturing chain for commodities. In this chapter, the social structure of pre-colonial Akure was also recognized. The social organization was explained as well as the mode of crime prevention. The people of Akure believe in the reality of the taboo and do not consider it as superstition, they also believed that the keeping of the taboos gives joy, happiness, wealth, comfort and long life it was also believed that violation of the taboos bring about misfortune and misery on the person who violates it. Chieftaincy and taboos was conducted due to the king's Royal and regal position

which was symbolic and Linked with divinity, the Deji of Akure observed many taboos. It was forbidden to say directly that a king ate, drank, slept, washed, fell ill or died, there was a traditional way of saying or putting these words. It was expected that the king ensure the prosperity of their kingdoms for instance the scarcity of food, failure of rain, poor harvest, even the outbreak of disease were occurrences from which the king could not absolve himself.

In this case, we find out that taboos were mainly used as a form of preventing crime, the various festivals, masquerade and religious events indulged in by the Akure people were also discussed.

Chapter Three of this work dwelled on the means of resolving conflicts in pre-colonial Akure kingdom. As earlier stated, pre-colonial Akure was monarchical in nature and absolute power resided in the Deji and he made the ultimate decisions in cases that fell under his purview. During pre – colonial times, conflict resolution in Akure were under three major unit of authority which includes the Deji of Akure, the mogaji and the baale (the chief of ward). The Deji was the highest unit of authority; he was in charge of handling the most advanced cases which were beyond the mogaji and the baale. He gives the final verdict as regards to the proportion of the conflict brought before him. For instance cases as regards to Land issue were mainly handled by the Deji's court after hearing from both parties.

The Mogaji was in charge of advanced situation which could not be resolved at the inter personal or family level, they are usually taken to the head of

the Ebi, such cases really are usually given immediate attention to prevent any escalation into violence which could threaten the survival of the entire lineage or ward. Some land dispute matter could also be handled by the mogaji due to the fact that land dispute matter rank among the most prominent of the many conflict that occurs in Akure largely because of the administrative and commercial important of the city.

The Baale settles all disputes within his households and represents his family on the council of the quarters chiefs. He kept peace and order in his household he controls the relationships between members of his family and outsiders, for instance cases brought before the Baale usually includes conflicts among co - wives, brothers and sisters, truants and street fight involving his children and his foster children. Having received a report of an offence committed by one of his children, the Baale would take immediate necessary steps to deal with the matter.

Chapter four of this project simply talks about the impact of the conflict resolution strategies employed by the pre-colonial government machinery in Akure. Conflict resolution brought about the development of Akure with the establishment of industries which led to the employment of youths within the region. It also promoted unity among the people, it fostered a long lasting relationship between the people of Akure and her neighbours. Conflict resolution also led to a growth in the trust value of the people.

However, it has been said that anything that has advantages also has disadvantages with the development that conflict resolution brought about, there were also factors like tribalism, lack of proper dispute settlement, favoritism, etc.

In Summary, this work dealt with the various methods and agents of conflict resolution in Akure in pre-colonial times. Although, the means of conflict resolution were archaic and hardly made for a fair or impartial hearing of cases, the preventive strategy which involved the use of taboos was largely successful in forestalling any breakdown in law and order. The native authority wielded mostly by the Deji and in small part by the Mogaji and the Baales was highly respected as it was seen to be divinely granted and very involved in the day to day coordination of activities within the kingdom to ensure smooth operations.

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Dupe Adetoyinbo	Businesswoman	61	Akure	August 18 th 2023
Mrs. Bisi Oladunmoye	Businesswoman	63	Akure	September 12 th 2023
Mr. Kayode Owoeye	Businessman	69	Akure	September 10 th 2023

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