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Socio-Cultural and Juridical Policing Of Okonko Society In Southern Igbo, Nigeria

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Abstract
Okonko Society is an age long Secret Society preserved for adult men among the Southern Igbo of Imo and Abia States of Nigeria. The Society as a Secret Cult has its esoteric language shared by initiated members alone. The members engage in nocturnal exercises for their initiations and spiritual engagements for spiritual policing of the communities. It also has its social practices from where non-initiated men and even women and children benefit. For instance, in Okonko Society's Funeral Service at the Market Square, it is an avenue for social entertainment where anybody can go and see the masquerades and dancers entertain all. The paper however is concerned with the social and cultural aspect of the Society which involve the communities' policing and arbitration for the maintenance of order and justice. Okonko Society's main instrument is *Omu* (the palm frond). Wherever the palm frond is hung, it symbolises the presence of the Okonko Society and its Authority for juridical exercise towards finding peace. Okonko Society is proactive. The paper seeks to explicate how the Society is consulted, how it announces its presence, and how it undertakes its juridical exercises in town halls or in farmlands. The Society comes up with verdicts which are respected by government apparati like the civil police and courts.
Keywords: Okonko Society, Policing, Southern Igbo, Palm frond

Introduction

Isichei (1977:91) says that Okonko secret society filled a number of important executive and judiciary functions among the southern Igbo. This is still the norm till date; in fact, Okonko Society is practically the government in whose authority the people are governed. Policing in this paper does not entail the conventional meaning of a police force engaging in the policing of the state. Rather, it connotes the traditional system of ensuring that peace reigns in a given

society in the Igbo nation, southern Igbo *per se.* The novelist, Chinua Achebe, in his trilogy, *Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* highlights the role of age groups in managing community conflicts. In these three novels, Achebe made use of two hundred and thirty-four proverbs (see Lindfords, 2009:97-114). The proverb is a branch of language and culture Achebe uses to create imagery, humour, cultural beliefs and realities of the Igbo nation. Achebe (2008:6) writes that 'proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.' The implication being that the Igbo language is replete with proverbs (Akporobaro and Emovon 1994:165). Proverbs are Igbo people's instrument for passing complex messages and giving final verdict. This is because with proverbs one economises words and in a way, policing effectively entails judicial use of words. Proverbs convey the inner mind of the user. It encapsulates the linguistic and cultural realities of a given society.

Barley's (1972) says that a proverb is '… a standard statement of moral or categorical imperatives in fixed metaphorical paradigmatic form…' Barley (1972) supports Madu (1996: 189) belief that a proverb is 'condensed wisdom drawn from experience'.

Okonko Society being discussed in this paper uses proverbs and semiotic symbols in policing the community. How? Without recourse to ammunition, the society can use force to discipline an erring man or woman employing *iri olu,* an extreme practice of the society when the members destroy an erring person's property and descend on his barn and livestock and by extension, step into the erring man's kinsmen's property (all to portray that when a finger dips into palm-oil, it spreads to the other fingers, a popular Igbo proverbs that suggests that the sin of a person in a community affects his kinsmen directly or indirectly.

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

Okonko secret cult plays a crucial role in the traditional conflict management of the people of Umuahia. Okonko secret cult exists in Umuahia judicial system. In an interview conducted in 1972, Isichei (1977:92) interviewed Uwaga Okeanya, an Okonko priest from Ogbodi Ukwu, Umuopara. Among other things the about 90-year old priest said was the admission that Okonko enforced the verdicts of the *ama ala* (the village assembly) and was a kind of a court of appeal. Part of the interview is as follows:

> In the past, if the Okonko music was played near the house of anybody, anxiety was created as to the reason of the beating of the drum and if a palm leaf was left

> behind in the man's house, it meant that the person was to appear before the Okonko court of appeal … wherever there was a stalement in any Okonko decisions, the Okonko society would consult other recognized Okonko societies in other areas for mediation… One thing I must tell you is that most of these things which the white men came to destroy are still with us and shame to us if we abandon the religion and practices of our father.

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

Okonko Structure

An Interview with Mazi Dr David Okebaram Onuegbu, a Trado-Medicine Practitioner and Vice Chairman, Ndume Ibeku Ọkọnkọ Society in Umuahia North, Abia State, should guide us on how Okonko is consulted and how it announces its presence and authority in the policing of the people especially when it pertains to land disputes which are the main conflicts in Igboland:

> In Igbo culture, we use Ọkọnkọ to control the society. In fact, it is like the traditional and cultural government. For instance, when brothers fight or quarrel, when Ọkọnkọ intervenes or comes in, they stop. For land dispute, when Ọkọnkọ is consulted, Ọmụ Ọkọnkọ is hung on the land to show that there should be a judgment to determine who actually owns the land. When an*ọmụ* is hung, the defendant is informed and warned not to enter the land. The two conflicting parties will see the Ọkọnkọ head together and a date is slated when the case will be looked into. They are told what and what they are to provide for the inspectors cum judges of Ọkọnkọ…

In another interview in 2015 with Mazi Nnabuike Orji of Umuota Itu Olokoro in Umuahia South of Abia State, the Okonko adherent sees Okonko Society as a religion capable of holding a people's virtues in a way policing the people's actions should be. Below is part of his opinion about Okonko and its ability to hold together a people:

> One of the religions in our land is Ọkọnkọ. I do not see it as a society. It is a medium of keeping order. It is the most effective way of keeping discipline. It is not meant for all. It is for the righteous disciplined minds. Others borrow from the culture of Ọkọnkọ. The baptism in Ọkọnkọ is *ida iyi*. To become a full-fledged Ọkọnkọ man, one undergoes *ikpu ulo* which is tantamount to

> confirmation. The whites came to borrow from Ọkọnkọ. Before one is admitted, he must be scrutinized. He must not be a criminal and a flippant. There is no sin in being in Ọkọnkọ. If you are a member, you talk less. You must be progressive. You must have a means of livelihood. One is expelled when found wanting. If one is found to be *onye nshi* (one that buries medicine for people to step on and die or be physically or spiritually maimed; or poisons people's drinks), he is expelled. If you are old enough to marry and you still remain single, Ọkọnkọ may expel you. Ọkọnkọ stands and makes peace.

The above claim supports the earlier literature referred to according to Anyanwu (1989) and Uwalaka (1996) which link policing of the people to ancestral involvement. In other words, that the ancestors help in ensuring that order is maintained. They do this by punishing whoever does not live to the tenets of the moral standard of the society. The instrument of the palm-front is very significant in Okonko's policing. First, it is the symbol of authority that Okonko has been involved in a dispute. In other words, the symbol of the palm-frond is language which warns that whoever trespasses without Okonko's permission henceforth will be dealt with in accordance with the laws of the land. On the significance of symbols like the flag, the snake for the hospitals, the cross for the church and now palm-frond for the Okonko Society, let us learn from experts on the matter of semiotics in order to fully appreciate the meaning and the consequences of going against instituted symbols be it governmental or traditional.

Historically, it was Hippocrates, a Greek medical doctor (460-377 BC) who established semiotics as a branch of medicine for the study of symptoms (Sebeok, 2001:4). Semiotics being a study of signs also attracted philosophers liked Aristotle (384-322) who defined the study of sign in the categories of physical part, the referred and thirdly its evocation of a meaning. St Augustine (354-430 AD) a philosopher and a religious thinker and John Locke (1632-1704) an English philosopher were among early exponents of semiotics (Sebeok, 2001:4). Okonko may have used the palm-front and many other semiotic symbols for centuries. Danesi (2004:4) describes a sign as anything that stands for something other than itself and gives examples like colour, a gesture, a wink, and an object. Danesi (2004:16) says that there exists between a sign and a perceived interpretation what he calls representation. In other words, it is the representation of a sign or utterance in a given culture that leads to interpretation. Gongs, bells and drums according to Sebeok (2001:11) are example of signals. These signals are some of the instruments of the Ọkọnkọ in the business of policing the community. The sounds of these instruments alerts the people and normally gather them together in the market squares or village or clan halls for important conflict management.

Non-Participant Observations in 2015 on Okonko Society's Management of Disputes

The four factors that cause conflict, competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value system,

psychological needs of groups and individuals, and manipulation of information (Albert 2001:4-5) have faced the Okonko Society for the centuries it has operated. Albert (2001:6-8) outlines four conflict handling styles: avoidance, confrontation, third party, and Joint Problem Solving (JPS). The first and second are negative handling styles because they tend to escalate a conflict. The third and the fourth handling styles tend to be positive and they help in de-escalating a conflict that has got to a violent stage.

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

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

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

Mediation, on the other hand, is the intervention in a negotiation or conflict of an acceptable third party who has limited or no authority or decision making power but assists the parties involved in voluntarily reaching a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in dispute (Moore 1996:15).

Albert (2001:86) outlines three types of mediation, as follows: (1) social network mediators who are individuals that are invited to intervene because of their closeness to the disputants; (2) authoritative mediators, based on their position of authority, i.e. because they are respected and recognised; and (3) independent mediators, who, as the name implies, are neutral mediators whose impartiality since they do not know any of the disputants is expected to be much more professional. Generally, negotiation and mediation are related. Mediators do help in the negotiation process when there is a deadlock. Irrespective of the type of mediators mentioned above, they all virtually aim at one goal: to help disputants find a solution to their disagreement (Albert 2001:91). As mediators, the Okonko Society from what Albert (2001:91) outlines logically falls into the second group,

'authoritative mediators, based on their position of authority, i.e. because they are respected and recognised;' (in view of the society's achievements and pedigree.)

On Monday, 29th June, 2015, an Afoukwu Day, at Olokoro Ahiakwu Civil Hall, the Olokoro Ọkọnkọ Panel sat and received complaints on one hand, and gave verdicts on cases earlier begun on the other hand. The session began at 11.00 am and ended -0;P-0;Pat 1.15 pm. The Panel, as Ọkọnkọ usually calls its judges comprised on this day, nineteen members. On the table were four principal officers including the chairman, the secretary by his left who wrote down every proceeding. These two were flanked by two other principal officers. The other members were in two roles in the two sides of the hall.

The day's sitting began with calling of the people with one case or complaint or the other. All of them with their witnesses as well as their relations and friends sat at the hall. With everybody seated, the chairman of the Panel who can be referred to as the chief judge stood and addressed all. He told them that Ọkọnkọ stood for peace and they were there to make peace. He gave a short prayer calling on Almighty God to oversee their deliberations. He ended in the Christian way of 'In Jesus Name'. In other words, Okonko in its open social activities prays in Christian way and believing that Jesus is the son of the Almighty God, whom they acknowledge as the creator of heaven and earth. Okonko does not apply its esoteric language when in the midst of non-members.

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

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

who took care of the dead brother when he was ill.

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

The third proceeding was between two men from Umuajata in Olokoro. It was a land case. The plaintiff questioned the verdict on the land dispute whose verdict was in favour of the defendant. The defendant presented the verdict document to the Panel. The Panel studied it briefly, asked the two men some vital questions. The defendant maintained that the plaintiff was on ground when the verdict was given many years ago. The plaintiff said he was actually on ground but at present the plaintiff, not an observer he was then. The chairman told them that from their responses, almost all the actors and witnesses mentioned in the verdict document had died. His decision backed by his colleagues was that the two parties should go and return in a eight days' time – *Afoukwu* market day. This according to him was to give the Panel enough time to study the verdict document. He categorically told them that the eight-day's sitting could only hold if the verdict document was conveniently studied by them. In other words, the sitting might not hold if they were not yet through by then. The two parties paid their appearance fees of N1,000.00 and left.

The fourth case was an appeal. The plaintiff to Ọkọnkọ hailed from Agbaama, another village in Olokoro. He appealed a land dispute verdict by his village's Ọkọnkọ branch. The defendant refused to appear for the day's sitting. Instead, he wrote a letter of refusal to the Ọkọnkọ, Olokoro branch through his lawyer. The letter was fully read to all by the Panel's secretary. According to the lawyer, his client refused to come because he believed in the earlier verdict which gave him the ownership of the piece of land. The decision of the chairman was not accepted by the fellow panellist. For the chairman, Olokoro Ọkọnkọ would not remove the *omu* they put on the said land. He advised the appellant to stay away from the land for now, pending when the defendant took him to court. The majority of the panellists vehemently disagreed. According to them, for refusing to appear before them was an insult to them by the defendant who chose to write them through his lawyer. They agreed to go and remove the *omu* from the land. For them, the defendant could then go ahead to sue the appellant if he so wished. The majority voice prevailed over the chairman's position. To this, the plaintiff cum appellant was told to pay N1,000.00 a fee for removing the *omu* so that he could enter the land.

The fifth case was very short. A man from Amuzu Olokoro appealed to Olokoro Ọkọnkọ over a land issue. His relation, by-passed the boundary of his land to begin a fence of a house. The boundary had earlier been determined by the *ama ala* people of the conflicting people. The defendant failed to appear. To this, the panellists asked the appellant to go and leave the rest to them to investigate.

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

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

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

The chairman, Mazi Uche Onyekwere began with a loud greeting.

The chairman called on an elder man from Itu to pray and commit everything in God's hand. The old man used a popular Igbo proverb while praying:

'*Egbe beru ugo beru, nke si ibe ya eberu, nku kwaya'*

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

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

Before the sharing of the drinks, the chairman passionately and vehemently warned that whoever, no matter his/her status who would not eat or drink in that hall must leave the hall immediately. He warned Christians fasting to break it or leave. He told those to share the *anara oji*, meat and drinks to report whoever did not put something in his or her mouth, and warned that anybody who saw a person refusing to join in eating or drinking was doing so to his detriment. This researcher had to eat meat, anara and drank some palm wine to comply and be in the hall. The exercise that all must eat or drink was a covenant and unity to say the truth and live in peace.

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

The Land Inspection

The Uwazurumbas, the plaintiffs showed the Ọkọnkọ panellists the large land in dispute. Inside the land, there was prayer to God and everybody removed his cap – the panellists inclusive. After this, the chairman knelt on the land, pressed the land with his

right hand and made pronouncement known as *Igọ ọfọ.* He called on the land to

–kill the appellant, the defendant, the witness/es or even the panellist/s who would see the truth and refuse to say it;

–kill whoever would come later to plant any *nshi* (poison) against the eventual winners;

–kill any *umu nna* who would later wish to mislead any of the conflicting parties.

The loud response was 'Amen'. He made sure the appellants said 'Amen'.

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

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

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

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

The Return to the Itu Hall

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

The chairman before making their findings known and their verdict, he thanked all for the cooperation given to

them so far. He particularly saluted the parties in conflict for keeping peace so far and advised that same peace be maintained after the final verdict.

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

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

The findings were as follows according to the chairman:

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

The Verdict

-The panel asked the Nnukwus, the defendants to give the plaintiffs the sum of N50,000 after the plaintiffs, the Umezurumbas, would have finished harvesting all the things in the farm;

–that the Umezurumbas should hand off from the farm after the present farming season, 2015;

–that the Nnuukwus are the real owners of the land.

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

An 'Extreme' Measure by Okonko to instil disciple

The research also found out that Okonko Society could invade a village in order to show anger against a person who has stepped on them. This time around, it is not the panellists as we have been reading about engaging in interventions, rather every member who has the time to converge for the free for all food and drinks. This exercise is called *iri olu,* a show of anger that is tantamount to invasion of an erring person to the detriment of the village or community the person hails from. Messrs Harrison Onyema from Afugiri Ohuhu in Umuahia North and Obi Mbiwi from Afaraukwu Ibeku also in Umuahia North two gave instances. First, Mazi Onyema:

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

Mazi Mbiwi's account:

> Cultures are different. Ọkọnkọ is a unique culture. In Ọkọnkọ, if one goes against the laws of the land, Ọkọnkọ will go for *iri olu*.
> Years back at Isi Ama a poultry owner offended Ọkọnkọ. We visited him with *iri ọlụ.* He called the police. The police refused to come. We slaughtered his chickens, roasted them with logs of firewood spotted around and ate them. It lasted for about a week. Even people from Ụbakala and Olokoro and even wider places joined us. You must however be part of Ọkọnkọ to eat during *iri ọlụ*. Again, it is not permitted for anybody to take anything home. Just come, eat and leave.
> People fear to offend Ọkọnkọ. When an *Okpo* (an uninitiated man) or woman by even accident sees the *Ikpu ulo* ceremony which is normally at night, if a man, such must be initiated soonest else *iri olu* will be visited on the person. Apart from *ori olu* on the woman, such woman must be told what to bring to appease the society.'

Despite how mean *iri olu* sounds, the fact remains that the exercise though ancient and punitive has been a successful way of policing the people to keep to norms which stipulate that customs and traditions must be respected and kept. As explained by Mazi Mbiwi, the members of Okonko do not go to *iri olu* to take food home, rather to discipline an erring fellow and to warn others of the consequences of stepping on the custom and traditions.

Conclusion:

It is important to note that people can live together and in peace without recourse to arm conflicts. In this paper, it is clear that a people's language and culture could be an effective means of policing the community. However, a language and culture cannot in itself ensure effective policing without an agent which in this paper, Okonko Society stands for. With a palm frond, proverbs and cultural beliefs, Okonko for centuries has succeeded in policing the people much better than the Police force and the entire armed forces have. In other words, the paper believes that with a people's belief in their language and culture, peace and justice will reign so that sustainable development could be achieved.

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