



Journal Homepage: - www.journalijar.com

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/9881

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/9881>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

FLUCTUATING CO-OPERATION AND TENSIONS IN AKAM – OLULUMO (OKUNI) BOUNDARY RELATIONS.

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 12 August 2019

Final Accepted: 14 September 2019

Published: October 2019

Key words:-

Boundary, Conflict, Co-operation,
Resources, Territory, Economic
development.

Abstract

This study examines the Akam-Olulumo (Okuni) boundary conflict in historical perspective with the aim of determining the causes of the conflict as well as its impact on the socio-economic development of the area. Using the resource-need theory of conflict, the study argues that the struggle for territorial space is inherent in man and hence a necessary consequence of human survival instinct. It further argues that in spite of the inter-dependent nature of the world, individuals, groups and communities continue to struggle for identity, purpose and power, negating the idealist philosophy which is primarily concerned with minimizing conflicts and promoting co-operation among peoples and giving credence to moral and human rights. The study submits that both communities should develop peaceful resolution strategies and promote co-operation between them to engender socio-economic development.

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Introduction:-

As a recurrent issue in the management of the increasing complex global system, territorial boundaries or borders constitute the central problematique in the paradigm of security co-operation. In a recent study that seeks to explain the intractability of territorial conflicts, Celestine Bassey noted, “territorial issues are one of the most frequent sources of war between states and competing governments are less likely to resolve disagreements over territory than any other issue” (xiii). Similarly, Paul Hansel found that “territorial disputes between states are more likely to escalate, to produce a greater number of fatalities, and to be more conflictual than non-territorial confrontations” (1996:25-51). In the same vein, Herbert Spencer, one of the earliest sociologists, had earlier written that all societies in the world would progress along one path where political restraints, peace and lack of internal conflict would be the order of the day (1982:12). But, available evidence does not support Spencer’s predictions; almost at all levels of social life, social disharmony and conflict seem to be more pronounced in all spheres of human interactions.

In recent times, however, the scope and magnitude of boundary conflicts have increased and intensified so much that these conflicts constitute a common feature in the history of communities in Cross River State. These conflicts are concerned with the struggle for territories and identification of previous boundaries which provides a shorthand account of stages in the progressive patterns of communities from their past to the present. Often too, the events which establish new boundaries are sufficiently important to mark the differences between important periods in the politico-diplomatic, economic and military development of any society (Prescott, 1987:1-2).

Boundary problems in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular have always been addressed as a factor of colonial consequence of administrative divisions by subsequent governments. Undoubtedly, colonial administration simply

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divided Nigeria in areas that were not only convenient for their administrative purposes but also to ensure that their interest is jealously protected as long as there were derivable gains therein (Anifowose, 1993:28). The boundaries divided ethnic groups and economic zones into different configurations. Thus, the pattern appears confusing in terms of administrative and economic calculations, so much so that, the desire by the people to be grouped in one area and the restrictions placed on economic activities especially, land hunger generated serious boundary conflicts between communities, such as *Akam* and *Olulumo* (Okuni).

According to Mark Anikpo, inter-community conflicts almost invariably involve a struggle for resources; irrespective of the expressive metaphor within which the resource is subsumed. However, such conflicts or struggles may or may not involve violence (Anikpo, 2007:161). Thus, as Otite and Albert (2001:17) put it “an analysis of inter-community relations must account for unequal access to the sources and opportunities for economic survival.” The questions that obviously arise are: under what circumstances do inter-community conflicts give violence and what are the implications of such violence for stability and socio-economic development? The idea here is to elicit whatever patterns that may shed light on the factor of violence in such inter-community relations.

Theoretical Framework

Although various scholars and commentators have argued widely on issues of territories and boundary related conflicts but they tend to define and classify boundaries and frontiers in geographical, strategic and ethnic terms. This approach reflects definitions or descriptions in terms of roles and consequences (Brownlie, 1969:3). This approach refers to boundaries as alignments which are artificial, although they may be so described if they follow natural features such as escarpments, watershed, river hills, valleys or mountains. It is obvious that a boundary may have considerable political, social, economic and strategic significance (Brownlie, 1969:3). However, the essential quality of a boundary as an alignment is a line described in words in a treaty and shown on a map or marked on the ground by physical indicators such as concrete pillars or bulwarks. Within this framework, T. A. Imobighe contends that the impact of boundary conflicts in societal relationship has been with humanity since man moved away from his primitive phase of development into a settled life within defined territorial space (1993:14). Suffice it to say that boundary conflicts came into human relationship as a consequence of the development of exclusive ambition of man. Within this context, we locate the *Akam-Olulumo* (Okuni) boundary conflict.

The territorial space argument is further elaborated by Robert Audrey’s “territorial imperative” which argues that animal instincts and human quest for property and nations are inextricably linked to territories. Audrey defined a territory as an area of space which an animal or group of animals defend as an exclusive preserve. Within such a territory, the basic needs and interests of such animal (s) are gratified, among which are security, food, identity, prestige and sovereignty. For Audrey, all animals including man, have a sense of territoriality and would patrol and defend the title “our land or sovereignty of our country, we do it for reasons not different from lower animals” (Audrey, 1967:115). Therefore, where such situations persist, there is every likelihood for conflict to erupt, especially, when the claims of one party to land and territory becomes incompatible with the claims of the other party to satisfy their own basic needs and interests within the same physical territory.

It is further assumed that all boundaries are artificial creation and owing their existence to man, applies to international boundaries between nation-states as well as internal boundaries. Therefore, the exclusive purpose of boundaries artificiality is the allocation of territories to political units which have sovereign recognition of status, roles including self-governing peoples within defined entities (Momoh, 1989:59). However, these artificial and imaginary lines separate one territory from another.

Contrariwise and employing the new thinking or grassroots perspective, Bonchuk (2005) argues in more functional terms that elicit the integrative values of a boundary as a contact point(s) between two objects or between two political jurisdictions. Bonchuk submits that the state-centric paradigm of boundaries which emphasizes the notion of separation and spheres of administrative competence and the transnational conception which reflects the new thinking as osmotic points of contact between adjacent border communities are employed; while, dealing with nation-states boundaries as well as internal boundaries (Bonchuk, 2005:96). Bonchuk rejects in totality the contention that boundaries are wholly a western creation that is unknown to local African communities. Bonchuk argues:

in pre-colonial Africa, communities noted the extent of their territories by agreeing on landmarks, such as trees of very distinct nature including the iroko, mahogany, a lasting feature such as an ant-hill, other natural landmarks such as rivers, valleys, mountains, hills etc. (Bonchuk, 2005:83).

Conceptually, traditional boundaries have the potential for conflict, but, in spite of that it can be further argued that: the co-operative features were more prominent as these boundaries were not regarded as sacrosanct. Rather, they enabled the questions of geographical definition of kinship groups and marked growth in human social organisations whose utility value in the past was its ability to promote inter-group harmony... (Bonchuk, 2005:89).

Following from the above, it is possible to buttress that internal boundary and communal conflict as well as rural underdevelopment have characterised the *Akam-Olulumo* (Okuni) relations with attendant effects such as threat to security of life and property.

Notwithstanding the boundary conflict however, the boundary lines between *Akam* and *Olulumo* (Okuni) communities are very fluid. Traditions of origin suggest that the former migrated and settled in their present abode courtesy of the latter benevolence in the spirit of 'live and let's live.' Besides, ethnic and linguistic differences, available evidence further indicates that it was the quest for economic prosperity that motivated the former to embark on aggressive acquisition of land and other natural resources after a long stay. Y. H. Goblet corroborates and submits that:

People attracted by land move towards regions of gentle relief and soil.... Often with little resistance and such people would advance until they encounter geographical or human forces which are too powerful to overcome by their own force of expansion. It is in an attempt to overpower another opponent that causes or brings about inter-communal or boundary conflicts... (Goblet, 1995: 504).

Resenau (2005) noted that boundary management encompasses the activities of governments, but it also includes any actor who resorts to communal mechanisms to make demands from goals, issue directives and pursue policies. It is further argued that:

with ever greater interdependence corroding long-established boundaries and enabling the consequences of actions by individuals and groups as well as those launched by government to spread beyond the communities in which they originate... co-operation along territorial margins has come to be marked by density and complexity (Resenau 2005:152)

Traditions of Origins and Migrations

The origin of *Olulumo* (Okuni) like many other pre-literate societies is obscure. It is very difficult as a direct consequence of these factors to place the origins in exact historical setting. However, popular traditions of origin and migration of *Olulumo* can conveniently be reduced to two surviving versions. The first version flexibly posited that the origins of *Olulumo* people is associated with the migration of *Olulumo* and *Umo* (*Yakur*) from an unknown locale to *Onughi* hills. The second and perhaps the most popular, categorically maintained that the *Olulumo* ancestral homeland was at *Onughi* hills with other *Abe Ayi* groups (Okongor, 1982:12).

According to the first version, the *Olulumo* people migrated from with their *Yakur* neighbours from an unknown locale in the Cameroon Mountain to *Onughi* (Interview with Chief Enya Agbor on 07/07/2007). In this version, it must be reiterated that the 'unknown locale' has remained a puzzle to researchers and *Olulumo* people themselves, thereby making this version illusive.

This version however, maintains that it was at *Onughi* that there was a sad discovery by the *Olulumo* peoples that their *Yakur* neighbours were cannibals. The version holds that there was a tacit agreement entered into between the *Olulumo* and *Yakur* to undertake the burial of each other's corpses. This agreement was however breached by the *Yakur* people. My informant narrates thus:

There was a certain widow who lost her only daughter and was interested to see how and where her daughter would be buried. She therefore followed the corpse bearers from a distance to the groove where *Olulumo* citizens were said to be buried. She hid herself in the bush to see how her only child would be decently buried. But, to her surprise, she painfully watched her only daughter's corpse being dismembered and put into a huge pot and placed on fire hob made of stones and cooked. In reaction to the unfortunate experience, the demented widow reported to her kinsmen, the *Yakur* Chiefs were invited by the *Olulumo* Chiefs to ascertain the credibility of the alleged cannibalism. During the meeting, the *Olulumo* people insisted that the *Yakur* should conduct them round the cemetery for an inspection of the graves of all her citizens who had previously passed on. The *Yakur* would afterwards, undertake a similar

exercise of *Yakur* citizens' graves after fourteen days. Thus, it was at the cemetery that the *Olulumo* people saw fire hobs, cooking pots, human skulls and bones (Interview with Chief Akwa Mpama on 07/07/2007).

The evidence of fire hobs, cooking pots, human skulls and bones were indicative of the fact that the *Yakur* were actually cannibals. A near crisis situation was averted by the decision of the *Olulumo* people to migrate away from the *Onughi* hills.

However, before the purported decision to migrate could materialize, a certain slave hunter Nsor Etughi Oba was said to have undertaken a hunting expedition in which he allegedly shot an elephant which escaped but was later found at the bank of the Cross River. The slave hunter went back and reported his novelty to his master Etughi Oba, who decided to move with his family to the bank of the Cross River to found the present *Olulumo* settlement (Okongor, 1982:12).

In other words, the second tradition holds a similar view about the *Olulumo* stay at *Onughi* with their *Yakur* neighbours. The circumstances that compelled movement has already been explained in the first version. What seem a radical departure from the first version is perhaps, two structural differences which concerned their leadership and the route through which they subsequently migrated. On this score, the second tradition places squarely the leadership of *Olulumo* people on Nta Agbor, who, *Olulumo* traditions maintained that he was their chief at *Onughi* (Interview with James Okongor on 08/07/2007). Nta Agbor and *Olulumo* people travelled in a north-eastern direction, before taking a western course, wondering into the unknown and unexploited virgin forest that traversed the *Onughi* area to the Cross River. Nta Agbor was said to have successfully led them to a certain place where he complained of his inability to continue perhaps because of old age or ill-health. Tradition has it that after some days, he died and was buried. As memorial for able leadership, that place which he remained was named *Agbotai* after Nta Agbor (Interview with James Okongor 80/07/2007).

However, searching for a comfortable abode, the *Olulumo* were said to have continued moving for a longtime before pitching camp at *Otimo Rofa* – old compound. This view further maintained that it was at *Otimo Rofa* that the supposed slave hunter shot an elephant which search led to the discovery of *Maya* – Cross River. The slave hunter went back to *Otimo Rofa* where he reported about his game that had collapsed on the bank of *Maya* on some alluvial rock called *Itakpa* (Okongor, 1982:14; Interview with Chief Nsan Abung on 08/07/2010). Etughi Oba went with the slave hunter to see for himself this spectacular scene and two years later, Etughi Oba moved from *Otimo Rofa* to this new settlement. The area was a grassland, vast and open hence, the name *Olulumo*, meaning brightness (interview with Chief Enya Agbor on 08/09/2012).

After a detailed recounting of the outstanding versions on the origins and migration of *Olulumo* people, the issue of analysis comes to bear. The question here is not just the absence of history in the traditional sense of the word but the lack of adequate methodology of reconstructing the past as it really was. However, according to the two versions of traditions of origin, they gave the impression that the *Olulumo* migrated from an 'unknown locale' to *Onughi* with the *Yakur*. This stance is both valid and logical. This is because both traditions had not alluded to the fact that the origins of the *Olulumo* people were inextricably tied to *Onughi*, but rather, they came from an 'unknown locale.'

Inversely, it is unrealistic to concede that the *Olulumo* people originated at *Onughi*, inferring from the second account. This is because no literature or argument has firmly taken this position and the centre of creation may likely not have been around *Onughi*. Most importantly, the *Olulumo* and the *Yakur* were in a time in their histories, lived together at a place called *Onughi*. This fact is buttressed by the intelligence report on the *Yakur*, Agbo and Asiga clans which emphatically stressed that it was fairly certain the *Yakur* first lived at Okuni (*Olulumo*) (Chessman, 1935: 66). Also, Otu Abam Ubi has asserted that the ancestral homeland of the *Yakur* was at *Lekanakpakpa* hills (Ubi, 1987:78). It should be noted that *Olulumo* called *Lekanakpakpa*, *Onughi* and the change in terminology is as a result of language difference. *Yakur* traditions of origin and migration indicate that the *Olulumo* were their neighbours at *Lekanakpakpa*, and that they were compelled by a conflict to migrate away (Ubi, 1987:86). The said conflict was the violation of burial traditions by the *Yakur*; a tradition which both *Olulumo* and the *Yakur* accept as part of their histories. Talbot submits that it was a practice that subsisted amongst the Upper Cross River people, where friends undertook the burial of corpses (Talbot, 1926:220-228).

Following therefore from the first version that the *Olulumo* migrated from *Onughi* straight to their present abode, there seem to be some illogicality and structural weakness in the argument. It is fallacious to assume with certainty

that it was at *Onughi* that the slave hunter shot the elephant, which search eventually led him to discover the Cross River. It might also not have been during the *Olulumo* primary migration that the present settlement was discovered. What probably happened that after migrating from *Onughi*, the *Olulumo* people settled at *Otimo Rofa*. It must obviously have been at *Otimo Rofa* that the supposed slave hunter shot the elephant, which carcass he found on *Itakpa* rock at the bank of the Cross River. The validity this argument also drawn from the fact relating to distance. The distance from *Onughi* to the Cross River is about 495 kilometres, and it is not possible for the slave hunter to complete that distance by foot in one day. Whereas, the distance from *Otimo Rofa* to the present *Olulumo* settlement is just about 58 kilometres. Therefore, it is from *Otimo Rofa* and during the *Olulumo* secondary migration that the Cross River was discovered, hence their present settlement.

Linguistically, the *Olulumo* speak *Olulumo* language, a sub-group of the Ekoi, who incidentally fall within Murdock, Talbot and Sterk's classification as semi-Bantu speaking people (Murdock, 1959:238; Talbot, 1926:13-14 and Sterk, 1979:220). However, it is difficult to categorically point out the difference between what is Bantu and semi-Bantu, since over the centuries of wondering, a process of social interaction had dissolved that difference.

More so, the peopling of the Cross River – Cameroon border region was not in any extent massive or ethnically coherent movement, rather, what seemed to have happened was a piecemeal movement of splinter groups that settled where they felt secured (Talbot, 1926:216). This might have accounted for the settlement of the *Olulumo* and the *Yakur* in the heartland of the Oban hills which are a continuation of the Cameroon Mountain ranges. Therefore, it is possible to accept Talbot's postulation that an Ekoi group, most probably, *Olulumo* obtained a piece of land situated around the Oban hills which the *Olulumo* called *Onughi* and *Yakur*, *Lekanakpakpa*. The land was not vacant. The landlords and host might have been the Ojuk people who having sold their land to these strangers (*Olulumo* and *Yakur*), were understood to have moved further (Talbot, 1912: 262).

It could be argued too that if the homeland of the Bantu and semi-Bantu is somewhere between Nigeria-Cameroon border area in the Upper Cross River Valley, and the *Olulumo* people falls within this classification, then, it is logical to associate this with the 'unknown locale' as indicated in the first version of *Olulumo* traditions of origin and migratory history. It was from here that the *Olulumo* migrated to *Onughi* then, to *Otimo Rofa*, and finally settled on the left bank of the Cross River. Finally, Fellows (1935: 67) has concluded that the *Olulumo* wandering towards the coast apparently occupied a considerable time, probably about thirty years. The *Olulumo* comfortably settled on their present and permanent abode around C. 1730, where they actively participated in the Atlantic Slave Trade which assumed a magnificent dimension in the Upper Cross River area.

Regarding *Akam* origins, this study is limited to her secondary migration and settlement in the present location. Indeed, field investigation reveals that the *Akam* people who are today referred together with *Olulumo* as *Olulumo* ward in Ikom Local Government Area of Cross River State are variant of *Mbe* group whose language is *Mbembe* spoken predominantly in Obubra area and some dotted spots in Ikom Local Government Areas of Cross River State.

Traditions of origin of the *Akam* points to *Olulumo* and the *Ogambang -Isabang-Akam – Ochon* general area. In other words, there are two contending views on the origins and settlement of the *Akam* people captured from oral evidence. While one view speaks of autochthonous origin within their present settlement; the other version traces *Akam* origins from a vague area in *Ochon*. This contrasting perspective paints a blurred origin of a people and agrees with Frank. N. Enor's position that "when a people present two different versions of their origins, a closer examination may reveal earlier and later phase of movement. An earlier group who may not remember their place of origins may claim their present locale as a place of origin" (Enor, 2005:225).

The view claiming autochthonous origins points to land ownership on which stands the community farm at *Obara* in the northern axis of the Cross River forest reserve as well as their involvement in politics in the colonial era. However, informants of this persuasion maintained that their ancestors were *Mbembe* people whose origin and migration are indigenous. This tradition also asserts that their forebears had not moved beyond a distance of eight to twenty kilometres from their present location. Migration only began after several epidemics had broken out. My informant explained thus: "our ancestors who are *Mbembe* people originated from here. An epidemic of small pox broke out which caused our people to migrate to *Ochon* area" (Interview with Chief Francis Egbe on 20/09/2007). Another informant who supports this view affirmed that the *Akam* people have not come from any other land: "it was due to small pox influenza which took many lives of our people and depopulated the area that our brothers

migrated away to *Ochon* area to found other Mbembe villages in Obubra area” (Interview with Chief James Okey on 20/09/2007).

The claim of autochthonous origins has molded variations to traditions within the same group. This may be due to the addition of more recent events to justify a peoples’ claim to ownership of natural resources. On this score, it could be appropriate to postulate that some people have stayed for so long a time in their present locale that they can no longer remember where their ancestors came from (Enor, 2005:226). This succinctly explains the *Akam* situation as it does not tally with other *Mbembe* tradition hold. On the *Isabang* and *Ogambang* origins, popular traditions of many *Mbembe* groups claim ethnic origins from the *Ochon* (Okom) general area of which the *Akam* people are part of that tradition. For instance, Chief Ejukwa Egom of the same *Akam* Community explains:

Our cradle of origin points to *Ogambang* and *Isabang-Akam* near *Ochon* in Obubra. We are a variant of the *Mbe* group which earned us the sobriquet *Mbembe*. My father told me that our people were compelled to move away because of the nature of their forebears who were very troublesome. I mean the nature of the *Akam* man caused other *Mbembe* groups to hate him. We were chased away by other *Mbembe* groups at *Ogambang* and *Isabang-Akam*. Our wandering into the forest took us to *Mfamosing*, but we were not accommodated. It was our search for refuge that took us to meet *Abijang* somewhere near *Obara* where the *Olulumo* people farmed for subsistence... (Interviewed on 30/09/2007).

Corroborating the above submission, Nta Inyang Oguma of *Abijang* village narrates thus:

When we left *Mfamosing*, we were settled with our co-wanderers the *Akam* people by our benevolent *Olulumo* brothers at *Obara*. This was around 1902. This settlement was made piecemeal because the *Akam* people were mostly herbalists and native doctors...and claimed they could treat chicken pox, a plaque that ravaged the *Olulumo* people. Before this period, the *Olulumo* people were already established in their present permanent settlement and were actively participating in the European river trade. The wealth of the trade that came to the *Olulumo* people made us together with the *Akam* people to appeal to the *Olulumo* people to allow us settle with them at the bank of the Cross River with them and to be partakers in the European trade. It was until 1922 that the *Olulumo* resettled the *Akam* people in the present abode on a tenement agreement and we were accommodated by *Agbotai*, another *Olulumo* settlement (interviewed on 05/10/2007).

Chief Akwa Mpama shed more light on the rental subject:

As a young man, my father told me and it was common knowledge that the *Akam* people were tenants. When the *Olulumo* people kept the *Akam* at their *Obara* farmlands as native doctors and later discovered that they could not cure chicken pox epidemic as they claimed, their relocation to the bank of the Cross River was under agreement that the *Akam* people will pay two Shilling annual rent to *Olulumo* (interviewed 08/10/2007).

From the foregoing, there are some elements of illogicality as adduced from the first version of autochthonous origins of the *Akam* people. First, the language they speak does not conform to that of their neighbours on either sides, that is, *Olulumo* and Okangha Mkpansi; but rather, it is in conformity with other *Mbembe* speakers in Obubra. Secondly, if they actually migrated from their present location to found other *Mbembe* groups, how come the nucleus of Mbembe origins is not tied to the *Olulumo* area but *Ochon* area in Obubra as validated by other *Mbembe* traditions and why would secondary settlements which they founded develop more than them. Thirdly and most importantly, if the *Akam* were the original inhabitants of the area, what factors hindered them that took them so long to register their participation in the Cross River trade with the Europeans. Finally, what factors compelled them to become tenants in their own land to the *Olulumo* people. At this juncture, it could be authoritatively submitted that unless the above questions are convincingly answered, the *Akam* claim to indigenous origins largely remains speculative and quite uncertain. But, it is important to note, that, in pre-colonial times, Africans being an agricultural peoples, common farmlands dictated the character of inter-group relations as it was with the *Olulumo* and their migrant settlers (*Akam*).

In spite of the above, the *Akam* people of *Mbembe* extraction pretend in all ramifications not to have any traditional attachment with their motherland at Obubra. Rather, they prefer to live on their own since their forceful ejection from *Ogambang* and *Isabang-Akam* by their kinsmen and their subsequent migration to *Olulumoland*. Their collective nomenclature derived from the desire to preserve their identity and position (Enor, 2005:232). This self-consciousness and purpose was further reinforced in their demand for a separate clan and a native court within *Olulumo* clan after they were politically merged with *Olulumo* as *Olulumo* clan.

In other word, between 1902 and 1922, the chiefs and leaders of *Olulumo* and *Akam* worked out deliberate mechanisms of alliances mutually acceptable and respected by traditions. Within this framework, recall that the *Akam* and their *Abijang* counterparts used farmlands freely with *Olulumo* at *Obara*. It was this healthy relationship that informed the *Olulumo* acceptance to resettle the *Akam* on a tenement agreement to the bank of the Cross River. However, the *Olulumo* – *Akam* relations after the 1922 resettlement were directly opposed to the pre-resettlement era when groups honoured and respected traditional agreements and deliberately built alliances. But, with the emergence of European trade on the Cross River, individualism and competition, especially for farmlands to cultivate yams for export set the *Olulumo-Akam* relations on a collision course.

Olulumo – Akam Boundary Conflict

The nature of the *Akam* man caused all other *Mbembe* groups to hate him. They were chased away from their ancestral home of putative origin. Their search for refuge took them to meet *Abijang* somewhere at *Obara* where the *Olulumo* people farmed for subsistence. They were said to be herbalists and native doctors who claimed they could cure the small pox plague that ravaged the *Olulumo* people at the time. For that reason, the *Olulumo* settled them at *Obara* in 1902 for them to perform their traditional duties of treating the small pox. From 1920, they started appealing to the *Olulumo* to grant them access the Cross River to enable them partake in the river trade with the Europeans.

The *Olulumo* reluctantly permitted them to settle in their present abode on a tenement basis of two shillings annual rent. In times of peace with their nature, they paid the rent to about 1935 before they began to default thereby causing *Olulumo* to take them to court. The case was instituted in the Native Court sitting at *Olulumo* in 1938 and ended in the West African Court of Appeal in Lagos in 1946 with no victor, no vanquish (Memoranda 2). Chief Akwa Mpama narrates the story this way:

The *Olulumo-Akam* problem dates back to 1922 following the resettlement of *Akam* from *Obara* to the bank of the Cross River. Within a space of time they stopped paying their annual rent of two shillings and started demanding for an autonomous Native Court from *Olulumo*. *Olulumo* took them to court sitting at *Olulumo* and judgment was delivered in favour of *Olulumo* in 1936. In 1938, *Olulumo* took *Akam* to court for none payment of annual rent. Judgment was again delivered in favour of *Olulumo*. Being dissatisfied with the verdict, *Akam* appealed to the District Court at Ikom. After judgment was dispensed without a clear verdict, *Olulumo* also, appealed to the Provincial Court at Abakaliki. At Abakaliki, the judgment of the District Court was upheld still without a clear verdict. *Olulumo* further appealed the West African Court of Appeal, Lagos presided over by the Rt. Hon. West Pama. Delivering judgment on 21st November, 1938, West Pama and other judges ruled the case on a neutral ground but asked the *Akam* chiefs to go home and make peace with their benefactors....

Back home after the court ruling, on 3rd March, 1939, Chief Akwa Mpama continued:

The Nkome council chiefs led by Nkang Omeyo had a meeting and deliberated on the *Olulumo-Akam* problem. They resolved in the meeting to invite *Olulumo* and *Akam* as well as other neighbouring chiefs to a peaceful settlement of *Olulumo* and *Akam*. A week later, another meeting was called at the instance of the foregoing at Bokomo Town Hall, Ikom Town. Those in attendance include: Chief Osam Eful (Agbokim Mgbabor), Chief Ogim Ntui (Agbotai), Chief Osim Nsing (Okosora), Chief Akosa Ayang (Okangha Mkpansi), Ovarr Edim Agbor and Ovarr Abukpain Egbung (*Akam*), Okim Agabi Nyambi, Okim Osadim Okarafor, Okim Nsor Odey (*Olulumo*). In the meeting, they all joined *Akam* and pleaded with *Olulumo* not to quit the *Akam* people.

When asked what the reaction of the *Olulumo* contingent was during and after the plea, Chief Akwa Mpama explains further:

Okim Agabi Nyambi who led the *Olulumo* delegation told the Council that they are only messengers and they would neither accept nor reject the Council's plea... but *Akam* chiefs should go and plead with *Olulumo* in their customary way... Two weeks later, *Akam* chiefs namely: Ovarr Egbung, Ovarr Nkom, Ovarr Oyama, Ovarr Edim, Ovarr Njor and Ovarr Okorra came to *Olulumo* at the Palace of Okim Ofem Odey in Emorrow Clan with a life 'He' goat, dry meat, a bottle of palm oil, seven kolanuts, seven jars of palm wine, a metal spear, seven pieces of cowries and a clayed tray. In the presence of other *Olulumo* chiefs – Chief Osadim Okarafor (Iyami clan), Chief Nsor Enighe (Omom clan), Chief Mbeh Ayebe (Effi clan) and Chief Agabi Nyambi (Emorrow clan) as well as Okim Nkang Omeyo and other chief in attendance in penultimate meeting... they entered into an accord. At the end, it was agreed by the *Olulumo* that *Akam* should stop paying the annual rent of two shillings but curtail their aggressive tendencies. The agreement was sealed with traditional sacrifices to the *Olulumo* ancestors at *eyiyi-illukakang*...

In spite of the peace agreement, it was not long that traditional vendetta developed with an uneasy peace. By the early 1950's, the *Olulumo* people had established cocoa farms at *Obara* forest area on individual bases. In 1963, the *Olulumo* established a community farm in the same *Obara* forest. On discovering the feat of the *Olulumo* and envious of their achievements, in 1965, the *Akam* people treacherously decided to interplant their own cocoa seedlings trespassing the boundaries into the already established *Olulumo* community farm. It was on this farm that the *Akam* through their son, late P. I. Ejukwa of the defunct Eastern House of Assembly, applied for cocoa subsidy from the Ministry of Agriculture for expansion. This was the beginning of the second phase of the conflict (Memoranda 3). Speaking on the situation, Chief Agara Egbung opined that:

It was one Abeng Oyama (who was nicknamed Abeng Abakpa) that discovered the 'red soil' at *Obara* and informed us (*Akam*) of *Olulumo* cocoa farms development. This was during the era of cash crop farming and the wealth was enormous... and because of greed and despite what we had gone through in our stay in *Olulumo* land, we were misled to struggle for a stake at *Obara*, even when we know we had none (interviewed 06/10/2007).

That singular act of trespass was said to have resulted into violent clashes for ten days. It was through the instrumentality of Chief Ogaji Orem, Chief Enoch Erm and Chief Ogar Eya, the law enforcement agents intervened and quelled the hostilities which led to the signing of another peace agreement on Saturday 26th June, 1965 (Extract from Minutes 3).

Opinions are divided on the *Olulumo* – *Akam* boundary conflict. While, some analysts argue that the identifiable cause underlying the *Olulumo* – *Akam* boundary conflict is jurisdictional claims over farm lands; others submit that land is a secondary factor, but rather, it is ethnic rivalry and attempts by each group to exclude the other from participating in the use and management of the resources therein. It could be poignantly argued too that the form and intensity of the conflict varies widely. This is consequent upon the fact that overtime within the context of the indigene-settler relationship, events of the conflict have manifested themselves in diverse ways ranging from misunderstanding and lack of information to breaking the rules of engagements, sabotage and violence, though without total war between the adversaries. More so, the conflict had for some times remained latent. Both *Olulumo* and *Akam* have allowed grievances to smolder because of fear, distrust and the humanitarian impact of war and other strategic reasons.

Provocations and Violence

Throughout history, leaders have been faced with the challenges of promoting societal interest and harmony, while at the same time striving for peace and stability in a constantly changing society. The very nature of conflict has evolved overtime from inter-state conflicts arising from aggressive state ambitions to intra-state bloodbaths of ethnic rivalries in the contemporary times (Bonchuk, 2005:4). Between 1990 and 2006, the relationship that subsisted between *Olulumo* and *Akam* could better be described as a 'marriage of inconvenience.' This third phase of the conflict became so vicious to the extent that *Akam* drew the first blood in the boundary contest at *Obara*, systematically attempting to expel *Olulumo* from the *Obara* protected forest. The *Akam*, in their tactical stratagem, adopted an approach of annexing any portion of land cleared by an *Olulumo* man, planted crops would be secretly removed and replaced with a different type of crop (Interview with Ofuka Ogbagu on 23/04/2007). Intimidation, malicious damage, assault, violence and threat to life became the *Akam* strategic approach to the *Obara* land. Perhaps, a few recorded case studies would elucidate the above.

On 25th July, 1995, five migrant labourers – Friday Usang, Diabenson Amba, James Otu and two others working for Mr. Paul Okongor of *Olulumo* were kidnapped by a group of *Akam* youths led by one Nkom Oyongha. Property belonging to the kidnapped workers was ceased, including 10 Porcupine animals, machetes, food and cocoa chemicals. (The kidnap case was registered at the Divisional Police Office, Ikom). On 22nd June, 2006, two *Olulumo* sons – Odey Odidi and Nyambi Odidi were brutalized by a group of *Akam* youths led by Nkom Oyongha (Again the matter was reported to the Police).

On 12th July, 2006, three *Olulumo* sons were feared dead as result beating by Nkom Oyongha, Abriba Egbe and Baba Fryo and several others from *Akam* (The matter was reported to the Police).

On 22nd September, 2006, Nkom Oyongha and others from *Akam* vandalized Mr. Paul Okongor's cocoa farm at fruiting stage. After cutting down numerous fruiting stems of cocoa and piercing several maturing pods, they

pounced on Fred Agim-Ogim and left him tied to a tree stem believing he was dead. He was found by a rescue team which was in turn ambushed by yet another group of *Akam* youths. Five *Akam* youths were arrested and handed over to the police in the presence of the Chairman, Ikom LGA, Hon. Ebaye Akonjom.

Also, security report on the conflict reveals that since the year 2000, the *Akam* invite juju priests to the disputed forest to revamp the power of charms and amulets purportedly designed to make them immune to machetes cuts and gun shots. They also invite a great multitude of idle *Obubra* youths to join them; this is in preparation for war with *Olulumo*. Despite the fact that, all these efforts have not degenerated into an intense hostility, claims and counter-claims have been made on who owns what form the bank of the Cross River to the Cross River protected forest. Hence, the protracted boundary conflict between these two neighbours had in one way or the other impacted on the socio-economic development of the conflicting communities.

Socio-Economic Implications of the *Olulumo* – *Akam* Boundary Conflict

Development can only take place in a calm and peaceful environment, those involve in boundary or territorial claims hardly experience development; but as Otite and Albert aptly submits, the Nigerian social structure is inherently prone to generate conflict. This is because of the ethno-cultural interests, goals and from the political and economic necessities of survival, individuals and as identifiable autonomous social groups struggle for advantages (Otite and Albert, 2001:20). This is very common amongst the rural people especially in their desire to achieve subsistence in the economic order and biophysical realm of nature.

In the light of the above, boundary conflicts hinders the mobilization of both human and material resources for meaningful socio-economic and political development of a people. In most cases, such conflicts have generated spillover effects and instigated refugees' problem, and strained relations between communities. The destructive impact of such conflicts resulted in the burning down of villages in the vicinity, women, children and the aged are killed and captives tortured to death in the most appalling manner (Bonchuk, 1997:1). Inter-community conflicts are sometimes so serious that the dead are not allowed to rest in peace. For instance, in the Cross River and Akwa Ibom boundary conflict at Itu head-bridge popularly called 'the Volvo market', graves were exhumed and corpses of aliens buried in the disputed territories relocated for burial elsewhere (Ekoko, 2004:14).

In spite of the above, the *Olulumo* – *Akam* conflict is devoid of such destructive impact rather, the *Olulumo* – *Akam* boundary conflict is replete with several accusations of trespass, intimidations, harassment, plundering, assault and murder attempts. Often times, the situation had almost degenerated into war but for the timely intervention of security forces and public spirited individuals, these two communities have escaped the cataclysmic impact of war. Nevertheless, there are still some socio-economic implications which can be calibrated in terms of social, economic and political.

Socially, the conflict contributed to the abandonment of the *Olulumo-Akam-Okangha* Mkpansi rural electrification project inaugurated in 1995. It was the patriotism of Donald Duke led administration in 2006 that the project saw the light of the day. Yet, even in its completion, it was only *Olulumo* community, to the utter neglect of *Akam* and *Okangha* Mkpansi communities that were initially included in the master plan. The conflict most negatively impacted on the *Akam* whom since their resettlement in their present abode educated their wards in *Olulumo* schools (primary and secondary schools). For fear of assault and molestation, the conflict forced the *Akam* people to withdraw all their children from *Olulumo* schools in 2002. *Akam* community only managed established a primary school in 2006, through the help of the Roman Catholic Mission.

Economically, *Olulumo* and *Akam* have different market days of Saturday and Thursday, respectively which they trade with each other, but, with the dynamics of the conflict, no individual from either community dared into the others' market to sell or to buy anything. Where anybody had a need for anything even if it is sold in these markets, such a person must travel to Four Corners Ikom, *Okangha* Mkpansi or *Ekukunela* markets. On both sides of the divide, a great deal of resources in terms of finances that would have been used for socio-economic development was lost to funding the conflict. The *Akam* community is most affected, who on yearly basis spent a fortune to revamp the powers of charms and amulets in preparation for war. On the *Olulumo* side, Chief Enya Agbor's two sons survived a murder attempt in 2006. In interview with him, Chief Agbor explained that he spent over one million naira to save the life of his two sons between 2006 and 2008 (Interviewed on 10/11/2013).

Politically, the conflict has led to the disintegration of political alignment. The councillorship seat for *Olulumo* ward in Ikom Local Government Legislature which *Olulumo* and *Akam* share became nonnegotiable. As a result of the conflict, since the 1990s till date, *Akam* community had been deprived of the opportunity of producing a councilor; *Olulumo* youths had vowed never to give political support to *Akam*. This position is strongly emphasized with phobic enthusiasm whenever political discussions are opened. According to *Olulumo* youth leader, “the greatest mistake the *Olulumo* made was in 1965, when they allowed Hon. P. I. Ejukwa, an *Akam* son to be voted into the defunct Eastern House of Assembly. This is because it was Hon Ejukwa who negotiated agricultural subsidy for the *Akam* with which they had the strength to struggle with *Olulumo*” (Effa Okongor, interviewed 10/11/2007).

The conflict also created a tensed security situation that besieged both communities and their environs. The fear of being attacked made both communities to be suspicious of every move of the other. Indeed, the *Olulumo* – *Akam* boundary relations is replete with so many issues that seem difficult to resolve. In fact, between 1963 and 2006, about six peace commissions have been constituted to find a lasting solution to the *Olulumo* – *Akam* boundary problem. Indeed, all the peace commissions have only succeeded in offering palliatives to the problem. It may suffice to present a summary of the report of the 2006 mediation committee which has kept the peace till date.

The report of the mediation committee headed by Ukandi G. A. Ogar was presented to the State Government through the Chairman, Ikom Local Government on February 24th, 2007. The committee received a total of 12 memoranda, oral evidence from 11 persons, with 24 exhibits were tendered before the committee during sittings and verification visits to the disputed area. The committee had 9 town hall meetings with both *Olulumo* and *Akam* communities at different dates and considered the recommendations of the Joint Peace Committee. In order to bring a lasting solution to the conflict, the Mediation Committee concluded thus:

1. Acceptance of the substantive Joint Peace Committee recommendation that the cocoa farms in dispute, left of the *Obara* stream should without consideration of individual farm owners go *Akam* community as part of their co-operative farm to eliminate the difficulty in identifying boundaries.
2. Without prejudice to (a) above, the Committee recommended that the farms to right of *Obara* stream should be owned and maintained by their individual *Olulumo* owners. However, the parcels of land cleared on the left side of the stream by *Olulumo* and later annexed by *Akam* should be considered as undeveloped land and be given to *Akam* with no strings attached.
3. Similarly, *Akam* individual subsistence farms to right of *Obara* were recommended to go to *Olulumo* with all adjoining parcels of land considered as undeveloped. This is intended to avoid accusations of encroachment arising from artificial boundaries alignment.
4. Whereas in (a) above, the *Akam* subsistence farms on the left of the *Obara* stream were to be owned and maintained by their individual owners but must not expand beyond their present sizes. The Committee however, recommended that from the point of intersection between the *Obara* stream and the *Akam* co-operative farm, left of the *Obara* stream, excluding *Akam* co-operative farm and extending into the Cross River protected forest should be under the exclusive control of *Olulumo* without any conditional precedence.
5. The Committee further recommended the establishment of a well-coordinated administrative machinery for both communities. In the proposed administrative system, there shall be the *Olulumo* Traditional Rulers Council at the apex and the *Olulumo* Clan Council. In between the two, there shall also be the *Okwa* Council, Village Council of Chiefs and Development Unions for the four clans of *Olulumo*. There shall be for *Akam*, a Council of Chiefs and *Akam* Development Union. Composition and functions are spelt out in the Joint Peace Committee’s report.
6. The Committee recommended that the Clan Councils both communities should liaise and constitute a Joint Land Management Committee (JLMC) of 7 persons: 4 from *Olulumo* and 3 from *Akam* to handle all land disputes arising between *Olulumo* and *Akam*. The Committee shall have a two-year tenure of office. The JLMC shall monitor and identify land speculators and report to the Clan Councils for further necessary action.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the mediation committee had the objective of finding a lasting solution to the conflict but there were certain shortcomings too that it recorded in the dispatch of its functions. The committee recommendations admittedly suggest *Obara* to be the natural boundary in the disputed territory but it did not point it out clearly. Most importantly, the committee failed to identify remote and immediate cause of the dispute, neither was it able identify the aggressor. Hence, no punitive measures were recommended. The committee also failed to recommend the creation of a buffer-zone in the event of a recurrence, just like it failed to accommodate intervention mechanisms by the police and other security agencies. The committee emphatically avoided recommending an appropriate methodology of land acquisition in the disputed area.

However, even though the committee could not satisfy the expectations of all concerned, the committee should be commended for providing a framework that has kept the peace since 2006. No further hostilities have been recorded since the committee provided that template. Thus, it suggests that both communities are comfortable with the committee's work. The leaders of both communities also deserve some commendation for their display of maturity in managing the conflict.

Conclusion:-

Conflict is said to arise from the pursuit of divergent interest, goals and aspirations of people, at different times and places. This could involve the struggles over values, power and resources within a defined physical or social environment in which the aim of the opponent is to neutralize, injure eliminate the other. In Nigeria, conflict is seen to stem from competition in political, economic and structures of the society. It also arises from competition for scarce resources like land and the resources therein.

There is a general recognition that the basic units which own proprietary rights and control land in our society are those communities which in the pre-colonial period were independent political units having valid claims over a territory; as a people that first establish permanent habitation, exploitation of natural resources or the establishment of settlements. Such communities can accommodate others for co-operative existence based on traditional alliances. But, as it is evidenced from this study, such alliances are often times abused and sometimes degenerate to conflicts.

However, historical experiences must come to bear in the assessment and management of internal boundary conflicts. This is because the dangers inherent in boundary conflicts have become more complex and latent as they continually pose threats to internal security. The need, therefore, to find lasting solutions to internal boundary conflict is more compelling. Thus, the challenges faced by modern leaders can often be compared with the issues faced by statesmen in the past, it is imperative that contemporary conflict diplomacy incorporates the lessons of history into the development of progressive conflict management or even better anticipatory conflict avoidance strategies.

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