

Mechanisms of Crime Control in Olamaboro and its Environs in the Pre-Colonial Period

By

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Abstract

Crime and its associated fatalities have become a major concern in Nigeria. Despite government efforts, crime continues to spread due to inadequate crime control measures. Most studies focus on modern, Western-introduced methods that often conflict with local cultures, while traditional crime control mechanisms receive little attention. This neglect has contributed to rising insecurity, threatening lives and property, particularly in Olamaboro. To effectively curb crime, a combination of traditional and modern methods is necessary. In Olamaboro, traditional practices such as masquerades, river and tree deities, curses, and ancestral spirits played key roles in maintaining order. This paper applies Hirschi's Social Bond Theory and the Re-integrative Shame Theory to examine how traditional societies reintegrated offenders through sacrifices and rituals. The rise in crime in Olamaboro is largely due to unemployment, poverty, and greed. Traditional crime control methods, once effective in fostering social cohesion, should be revived and integrated with modern approaches. By combining these systems, Olamaboro can strengthen security, reduce crime, and promote economic and social development. This paper advocates for a balanced approach that respects cultural values while embracing contemporary crime-fighting strategies to create a safer and more prosperous society.

Keywords: Crime, Control Mechanism, Olamaboro, Pre-colonial Period.

Introduction

Crime is universal to all human races in the world. Among the people of Olamaboro, crimes such as theft, conversion of land, theft of economic fruits such as cola nut, palm, okra, peer regarded as cash crops, murder,

brigandage, assassination as a result of claims and counter-claims to women especially beautiful ones were prevalent in the society. The conventional concepts of crime and criminality differ from the findings of this paper, what was considered criminal under the period of review was not codified as crime in the conventional conception of crime. Tort and crime were hardly distinguished in the area of study. For instance, forbidding insult (*ina ebie*) to a man was and is still considered a crime.

To curb crimes as stated above and forestall further occurrences, the societies formulated Codes of Conduct and means of controlling their violations. Institutions of masquerades or incarnate beings, youth, tree emblems, curses and chiefs were operational in the pre-colonial period. Olamaboro today comprises Ankpa, Olamaboro, Igalamela and Ibaji Local Government Areas of Kogi State. Ola means side; Imaboro is a river that has its root at Ankpa which flows through Ogugu to Igalamela/Odolu and through Ibaji before it empties into River Niger.

Olamaboro is part of Igalaland which had a centralised political system of administration before colonialism. The Olamaboro political administration provided for the institutions for combating crimes and criminalities in her society by engaging *abokolobia* (young men), *abogijo* (elders), *onu-efewo* (chiefs), *Ibegwu* (ancestors), *ebo* (deities), *egwu* (masquerades), *aji* (rivers) such as *ogbano*, *iye-oko* to control crimes in the land.⁸⁶ This paper discusses pre-colonial crime control mechanisms including the Native Authority Police Force, the Prison and Courts by the British.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ T. O. Miachi (1980). "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control among the Igala" Elaeis: *Journal of Igalaland*. Vol 2, No 1. p. 24
⁸⁷ Ibid

Traditionally, Olamaboro employed restorative and transformative principles in combating crime.

Its emphasis is on the process of achieving a peaceful and crime-free society. Collaboration and reintegration as a process of crime control was encouraged, rather than coercion and isolation. Underlying this approach is a belief that all human beings are important and not expendable.⁸⁸ The traditional method of crime control employed in Olamaboro in pre-colonial times is what is today called Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR). This simply means Cases between conflicting individuals were settled without going to court. Arbitrators were used to maintain peace and tranquillity among the two factions. The traditional system of crime control was everlasting because judgments passed were not challenged in any court. The opposite was the case in the colonial legal system where different parties unknown to the accused sat as judges, and lawyers were hired to present cases in a manner that would make them win and not resolve the case.⁸⁹ This paper uses relevant control theory and Braithwaite's shame theory. This theory demonstrates the social disapproval and humiliation that follows an individual offender in society. According to Braithwaite, there are two types of shame. Re-integrative shame is imposed on the offender as a corrective measure and Disintegrative shame has to do with disowning or rejecting the offender.⁹⁰

This paper employed the Control theory propounded by Hirschi called the Social Bond theory⁷. Traditional Olamaboro society was based on strong social and community-knitted solidarity involving the nuclear family and

⁸⁸ Interview with E. John clan Head/Ogijo conducted by the author at Olopu, Emojo Ofante on May 25, 2023

⁸⁹ Interview with E. John Clan Head/Ogijo, May 25, 2023.

⁹⁰ T. O. Miachi (1980). "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control Among the Igala"... p. 24

extended families, as well as the kin group and community lifestyles. This is because the people prided themselves on “being their brothers’ keepers”⁸ in sickness and in health. Also, a part of shame theory is employed because of its relevance to the topic being discussed. The shaming theory is of two types. **Re-integrative Shame Theory** strongly advocates that when crimes are committed in society, offenders are required to make necessary sacrifices to appease the gods of the land and pass through some ritual cleansing and purification through the instrumentality of the chief priest. After this sacrifice, the offender was accepted back into the community, with all his/her rights and privileges restored. This is a restorative justice system practised in Africa long before contact with the Europeans.

The **Disintegrative Shame Theory** does not support appeasement but rather giving due punishment which usually leads to banishment, hanging and killing of the offender to serve as a deterrent to others. Disintegrative shame theory has to do with denouncing or disowning the person who commits the offence. This rejection is done by both his or her family members and the community at large to deter others. Sometimes, the offender’s house was pulled down and this was usually followed by banishment. In some other cases, punishment meted out to an offender was extended to their family members and close relatives, especially in cases of murder, theft, and rape. In suicide, for example, the victim even at death was not accorded customary burial rites. Any family that violated the injunctions was fined and ostracized until necessary reparations and cleansing rituals were carried out. In this way, the family, including the extended family, kept a close watch over the activities of their members to ensure that no individual member was allowed to tarnish the reputation of

the family. Consequently, people tried as much as possible not to shame, and incur the wrath of their families, close relatives and community through criminal and other anti-social behaviours.

Traditional Mechanisms of Crime Control in Olamaboro

Masquerades (*Egwu*)

Among the Olamaboro people, Masquerades played double roles in the society. Some masquerades were used as agents of security for crime control in society.⁹¹ Masquerades were agents of ancestors (*Ibegwu*) any message from masquerades especially Attah's masquerades (*Egwu Attah*) was sacrosanct. Other *egwu* worth mentioning were Agbaka, Adaka and Akpaleche just to mention a few. Principal actors in this group are the youths who formed themselves into camps and presented dancing masquerades at times for competition and at other times for gifts from the people of the community.⁹² *Abule* is another type of masquerade which had mysterious voices that instilled fear into people with criminal tendencies and as such deterred them from committing crimes. They also made criminals own up to crimes committed.

Masquerades used for crime control or as agents of crime control in traditional Olamaboro communities differ in names from one community to another. In some parts of Olamaboro, it is called *Egwu Odu*, others call it *Abule*. *Abule* is important as it belonged to the noise-making masquerades that came out in the night and under the control of the *onuh afewo*.

⁹¹ T. O. Miachi (1980). "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control Among the Igala"... p. 24

⁹² B. Andah (1988). *African Anthropology*. Ibadan: Shaneson C I Limited. p. 207

In Ofante Ogugu for instance, there were powerful and supposedly supernatural masquerades that the people believed to have magic abilities of affecting a criminal demonologically.⁹³ When crimes like, murder, arson, disappearance of children etc. were committed, the masquerade *Ane Nyon* was let out to the community. The day of it outing was announced to the public through the town crier because nobody was expected to go out. Women were not allowed to see the masquerade and any woman who saw the masquerade was cursed by the spirit of dumb or deafness.⁹⁴ The going out of this *Ane Nyon* was meant to make the criminal confess to the crime or else the suggestively believed destructive powers of the masquerade would work on him or her. If before the *ane nyone* any man or woman confessed to the commission of the crime, its destructive powers could be averted or remedied by the *Onuh Afewo* and his council of elders in Ofante Ogugu.

The criminal who confessed was asked to bring the following items, tubers of yam, a goat, a hen, native cola and an amount of money that could serve as a fine.⁹⁵ When all these were presented, the chief priest of the community would appease the gods of the land for desecration and damages paid to the crime victim. But if no one confessed to the crime, the mother masquerade called *Agana* was let out into all the roads and footpaths in the community. The belief was that if the criminal passed through any of the paths, the gods of the land would catch up with him or her. The criminal could be inflicted with sickness like *Imu* (madness) or

⁹³ F. O Edime (2006). *The Legacies of Attah Ayegba Omidoko: a Concise History of Igalaland*. Vol. 1. Ankpa: Cuca Communication. p.75

⁹⁴ P .E. Okwoli (1973). *A Short History of Igala*. Illorin: Matanmi & Sons Printing Works. p. 7

⁹⁵ J. S. Boston (1968). *The Igala Kingdom*. Ibadan: OUP. p. 11

some other terrible sicknesses. Even though the criminal confessed at that stage he or she would still die. The death of the criminal was not the end of the matter but the death was generationally in the lineage. To stop the evil sicknesses and death in the lineage, the heirs of the criminal would have to perform the appeasement rites to be freed but as long as it was not done the repercussion of the crime committed in terms of death would continue.⁹⁶

Speaking masquerades such as Amuda, Ajamalede etc. publicly rebuked erring members of the society by calling their names, cursing and warning them. The community knowing the destruction of these masquerades stayed out of crime because of the negative outcome.

Youth (*Abokolobia*)

Among Olamaboro people, the *Okolobia* group played important law enforcement roles. This group was made up of able-bodied young men who were in their prime. They had the mandate of the elders and *Onuh* of the land to police or control crime in the entire community.

There were three basic groups in Olamaboro; the *Abogijo*, *Abokolobia* and *Abimoto*. The *Okolobia* group was responsible for policing and police activities in the community.⁹⁷ Safeguarding lives and properties in the Olamaboro communities was the specific responsibility of the youths. They were also responsible for the construction of community roads and their maintenance, the building of market stalls, and arrest of criminals and

⁹⁶ P.E Okwoli (1996). *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion*. Anyigba: Pastoral Centre. p.18

⁹⁷ P.E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion...* p.19

confiscation of the properties of defaulters of fines and royalties to the king and chiefs.

When a criminal was caught by *Abokolobia*, the *Onuh* in conjunction with the elders of the land would hear the cases before giving judgment, if the criminal was to be beaten and shown around the entire community, the *Abokolobia* would then be called to execute the judgment of the king. If the judgement passed was that of a death sentence, the *Okolobia* group was also responsible for executing the punishment which was carried out in the evil forest. This group was responsible for the defence of the community in the face of external aggression.

Ebo (Deity)

There is a belief among Olamaboro people that certain trees harbour certain gods and spirits. One such tree is *Orachi* tree (*Erythrophloeum guineense*). This tree harbors *Orachi* spirit. It is believed that *Orachi* spirit kills witches, dishonest and bad people. In some places, the *Orachi* tree is called *Olikpa*. Some people identify two kinds of *Orachi* trees, the good one and the bad one. It is claimed that the bad one (often called *Orachi Akpala*) is poisonous and kills anyone who takes it whether the person is a witch or not.⁹⁸

When one was suspected of being a witch, the *Orachi* spirit was invoked and the sasswood concoction would be prepared by pounding the bark of the *Orachi* tree and adding water. This poison was administered by the head of the clan or the family. On taking it, witches would die while innocent would vomit the poison. Other methods of protection against

⁹⁸ Interview with Ngedu Daniel, conducted by the author at Anyigba on October 26, 2023.

witchcraft have become more important in Olamaboro communities, including *ebo/ode* spirits associated with trees in Olamaboro. The names of these spirits are the same as the names of the trees associated with them. The emblems of these spirits also are the same trees associated with them.

Some of these *ebo* spirits include the following: the *Ebie, Ogede, Apahi, Ikpokpo, Otakpa and Okpaikolo spirits*. According to tradition, these spirits served as protective spirits against any property left on the wayside.⁹⁹ Also very powerful in protecting properties was *elubi/egunubibi* shrouded with *akagwu* leave or root. The two combined have the potency of making the criminal develop a sour throat, seizure of voice and eventual death.

According to Egbunu Ijajaliya, two persons were reportedly killed in the Igah-Ocheba community for stealing yams.¹⁰⁰ The names of some of these spirits, their emblems and the punishments which they inflict on the thieves are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Charm, Emblems and Punishment Associated with Trees In Olamaboro Communities.

S/No	The Spirits	Emblems	Punishments

⁹⁹ Interview with Atojoko Muhammed conducted by the author at Lokoja on October 30, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ P.E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion...* p. 19

1	Ebie	The fruit of Ebie tree	Big boils, which can lead to deformity
2	Ikpokpo	Any part of Ikpokpo tree	Leprosy
3	Otakpa	The seed cover (pods) of Itakpa fruit called Okpakokolo	Attacks the spinal cord of children. Such children can never sit down, stand up or walk
4	Ogede	The banana	The spirit makes the children of thieves die before they are ten years old. Such children quickly grow like banana plants and die
5	Apahi	Apahi (Fungi) any type of mushroom	The spirit makes the wives of thieves to have a prolonged labour and make delivery very difficult for them

Source: P. E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion*. Anyigba: Pastoral Centre Press. p.24

From Table 1, under the influence of the charm and its spirit, any man or woman found to have stolen items would need to confess the crime before the public and appeasement carried out to the spirit of the trees before they could be well again. Most of the time, the relatives of the victim would conjure a diviner to find out the cause and the possible solution to the sickness inflicted on the victim. Having known the source of the problem, the solution would be invoked spiritually and the sickness cured.¹⁰¹

Among Olamaboro people, the concept of *Ebo* is very broad. It covers all-powerful gods, goddesses and spirits. The emphasis is on the word “powerful”. When any gods, goddesses and spirits become powerful, they acquire a new status and become *Ebos*. When gods and spirits begin to kill people who refuse to confess to their wickedness or their witchcraft, they become *Ebos*.

As a result of it becoming powerful, and acquiring a new status, the *ebo* begins to get worshipers from neighbouring villages. The main work of the *ebo* is to protect the worshipers from enemies, witches and sorcerers. The *ebo* is expected to bring success in hunting, trading and fertility among women. It is also expected to bring big crop yields to the farm and protect livestock and tree crops. Another use to which *ebo* can be put is in the form of ordeal. How the *ebo* served as an agent of crime control in Olamaboro society was that an accused person was asked to swear an oath. This is known as *ebo enmo* in Igala. In this case, an accused person is told to invoke the spirit of the *ebo* to kill him if guilty within a specified time which was usually seven (7) days or fourteen (14) days after the oath. If

¹⁰¹Interview with Negedu Daniel, October 26, 2023.

during this period, the person did not die or become sick or confess to the crime he or she is accused of, he is then free and innocent of the offence. But if he dies within the period, he is regarded as being killed by the *ebo*. The result is that he will not be given a good burial ceremony and his property will be confiscated by the *ebo*. His property could be redeemed or used for payment of some specified sum of money to the priest of the *ebo*. In Igala, *ebo* spirits could be classified into these groups: the first group includes those spirits that belong to the nature spirits of the sky and they are: *Akpabana* (the spirit or god of thunder) and *Inyanwu* (the sun god).¹⁰²

Ebo Aji (River Deity)

The second group includes those spirits that belong to the nature spirits of the earth. They are mostly water spirits. Some names of these water spirits and the names of the communities that worship them- they are:

Names of the spirit	The River	The Community
Imabolo Spirit	Anambra River	Egane, Ankpa
Ubele Spirit	Ubele River	Ogugu, Ojuwo, Ubele
Utowo Spirit	Utowo Stream	Ojokwu
Ajigbi Spirit	Ajigbi Stream	Ajobe (Ojokwu)
Iyoko aye Spirit	Iyoko River	Ofante Ogugu

¹⁰² Interview with Atojoko Muhammed, October 30, 2023

Ogbano Spirit	Ogbano river	Eteh
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Table 2: Spirits which Control Crime in some Olamaboro Communities that are Associated with River deities.

Source: P. E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion*. Anyigba: Pastoral Centre Press. p.27

Table 2 shows the spirit associated with rivers and streams in some communities in Olamaboro that had the potency of controlling crime and inflicting criminals with various sicknesses. For instance, *Inachalo* River at Idah protected Igala against the Jukun in the period of war and as a result, the river is being revered in Igala history. In Ofante Ogugu, a community in Olamaboro there is a stream called *aji yoko* that serves as security to the entire land. If an item was stolen, the owner would go to the stream and make a sacrifice telling the spirit in the stream to avenge him or her. If the criminal drank water from the stream, there would be manifestations of strange ailment that would reveal he/she was responsible for the stolen or the missing property.¹⁰³

The third belongs to the nature spirits of the earth also. They are mostly charms (*ogwu*) that had become powerful and as such become *Ebo*. These charms (*Ogwu*) were prepared by medicine men for the founders of some communities in the earliest times. These charms (*Ogwu*) gradually grew to be *Ebos* of the various communities.

¹⁰³ Interview with Ramatu Musa, conducted by the author at Lokoja on January 12, 2023.

The following are some of the *ode* or *ogwu* (charms) that have developed into *Ebo* spirits. Here are also the communities where these spirits are situated.

Table 3: Spirits that Control Crime in Some Olamaboro Communities that are Associated with Land Deities

The Spirits	The Communities
<i>Agana Och'ogugu</i>	<i>Unyi Ogugu</i>
<i>Odochenwu</i>	<i>Ojuwo-Ubele, Amaka</i>
<i>Iye Ogodo</i>	<i>Ofante</i>
<i>Egiri</i>	<i>Ogugu</i>
<i>Abirifi</i>	<i>Onicha-Igo</i>
<i>Agbare</i>	<i>Emomoka (Ogugu)</i>
<i>Emomadewu</i>	<i>Adupi (Ogugu)</i>

Source: P. E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion*. Anyigba: Pastoral Centre Press. p. 34

The *Ebo* spirits have helped a great deal in policing the Olamaboro community as the fear of what may come upon anyone who steals property or commits crimes deters others from further committing such crimes. Table 3 indicates diseases have a timeline for their victims.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ B. Andah (1988). *African Anthropology*. Ibadan: Shaneson C. I. Limited, Pp. 4-8.

The Traditional Political Institutions

Before the British rule, there had been a system of crime control and arbitration in the Olamaboro part of Igalaland. The Olamaboro people had institutional ways of settling their civil and criminal cases.¹⁰⁵

Before the arrival of the British, Igala land had a highly developed three-tier government structure made up of the executive, legislature, and judiciary branches.¹⁰⁶ The *Attah* (King) was an absolute ruler. He was considered the representative of God Almighty (*Ojo Omachala*).¹⁰⁷ But in practice, the *Attah* ruled in conjunction with his lower chiefs without whom there was no government and no executives. *Attah* ruled with *Onuh Ane*, Each *Onuh* represented a community or a town. Collectively, and in collaboration with the *Attah*, they developed laws when necessary.

Each Igala community was divided into hierarchical units, each under the jurisdiction of a chief. The *Attah* and his counsellors were the rulers. Directly under them was the *Onuh Ane* who was either the first settler of that community or an official appointed by the *Attah*. Below this stratum were the *Olopu* (extended family), headed by an *Ogijo olopu* (head of the extended family). The lowest unit was the individual nuclear home, headed by *Baba* (father). The appointment of the *Ogijo olopu* was the sole responsibility of his extended family members because the oldest member of the extended family usually assumed this position. The approval of the *Attah* was never sought in the matter, and every married man was the father in his own home. Because the family is the basic unit of society, it is

¹⁰⁵ P.E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion...* p. 26

¹⁰⁶ P.E. Okwoli (1996), *Introduction to Igala Traditional Religion...* p. 26

¹⁰⁷ O.B Olaoba (1997). "Yoruba Traditional Court Model," *Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 1&2, Issue 1, Pp 76-99.

expedient to recognize it as an important unit of the society's administration as well as a judicial unit. In other words, legal and political control was exercised mainly via the family and extended kin groups.¹⁰⁸ An Igala family was comprised of father, mother, and children. Each position had very carefully defined household duties, and each household member played a significant part in social control by socializing children and motivating them to conform to social order and norms.

The stratified social structure can be illustrated as follows. As the head of the nuclear family, the head's pronouncements were final. He settled quarrels among his family members and maintained discipline. When there was a quarrel, he might settle it or pass it to the *Ogijo olopu*, depending on the nature and seriousness of the offence.

The Igala operated a centralized political system with elaborate legal systems. Their sense of the legal system was not based on Western concepts and standards. There were neither units nor offices that coincided closely with Western judicial systems. Kinship affinity was strong, and it regulated behaviour and allowed individuals to know his/her limits. Internecine fighting was not common, and they recognized rules of conduct. These rules were obeyed by every member of the unit. Therefore, the descent group was a knot of collective legal responsibility, *vis-à-vis* the higher judicial authority of the kingdom. Kinship was the bond of union. The need to provide social security and justice for large families often accounted for the institutional emphasis on the solidarity of a kinship group. It involves the acceptance of responsibility and obligations to the group to the extent that individuals were seen, primarily, as members of

¹⁰⁸ W. Bascom (1965). *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria*. New York, Holt: Rinehart and Winston.

their particular families before they were understood as members of society at large.

The *Ogijo olopu* presided over the settlement of quarrels among his kinsmen. His “court” was an informal one that only dealt with civil cases involving members of his extended family. He settled civil cases such as land cases, adultery, stealing, fighting and quarrelling. He can sanction the guilty either by imposing a fine which was often said in a proverb that a child does not know the severity of war, when he has not lost his arrows (*ofa imoto ma lenyo oko ogwun iya ma enwu kogwu chen*)¹⁰⁹ or simply by making the disputants give a verbal apology, especially if the person was a child or “wife of the family.” The affinal term *oko* (husband) referred to a woman’s husband and all the members of his clan, including female clan members. The term *oya* (wife) referred to a man’s wife and all the wives of his clansmen. No one man, therefore, married a wife to himself only. His wife was theoretically and symbolically considered “a wife of the family.” The man was the husband at night and other members of the clan acted as husbands during the day. But if a quarrel involved a member of the extended family and others outside of it, the case might be transferred to the *Onuh afewo* for arbitration. However, the extended families involved might come together to settle the matter. An appeal from the *Ogijo olopu*’s “court” might also be entertained at the *Onuh Afewo*’s court.

The *Attah* recognized the *Onuh Afewo*’s court and it enjoyed the approval and support of the *Attah*. The *onuh afewo* tried all civil matters within his quarter. He handled preliminary hearings in criminal cases without actually resolving them. Criminal cases were handled at the *Attah*’s court. Criminal

¹⁰⁹ Interview with S. Ujah conducted by the author at Egeh Olamaboro on May 22, 2023.

cases included homicides, treason and felony, and accidental or provoked manslaughter, while civil cases included willful damage of property, quarrels, insult, debt, and other offences. Because the *onuh Afewo*'s court enjoyed the approval of the *Attah*, it could sanction, fine, and even ostracize the guilty from the community after the judgment. The punishment given to a guilty party depended largely on the offence. In Igala traditional crime control, murder, treason and burglary were normally punished by execution.¹¹⁰ Accidental or provoked manslaughter and assault were punished by a fine. For instance, a person guilty of assault could be flogged. Rape, seduction, and adultery were punishable by a fine or sacrifices to the gods of the land.

The main objective of adjudication among the Olamaboro people and some Nigerian tribes was to reach a decision that would be accepted as fair by both parties so that the dispute could be resolved. For example, the Ibibio and Igbo peoples of Eastern Nigeria would expect an accused person to invite one of his/her maternal uncles as a partaker in the adjudication.¹¹¹ But if an acceptable adjudication could not be reached at the *Onuh Ane*'s court, either party could appeal to the *Attah* court, the apex of the administrative and judicial system in Olamaboro communities.

Generally speaking, the method of conducting trials in Olamaboro courts was informal and varied with circumstances. For instance, the marketplace or the *Attah*'s palace was used as the court site. This is why the marketplace was always located in front of the *Attah*'s or *Onuh Afewo* palace. Cases that were normally taken to *Attah* were cases involving two or more

¹¹⁰ D.A. Offiong (1984). "The Functions of the Ekpo Society of the Ibibio of Nigeria" *African Studies Review*, Vol 27, No 3. Pp. 77-92.

¹¹¹ D.A. Offiong (1984). "The Functions of the Ekpo Society of the Ibibio of Nigeria" pp. 77-92.

communities which may have to do with either land or chieftaincy tussle or ascension to a throne by different ruling houses. Cases involving ownership of land and economic trees, by two communities at the Attah palace would be given final judgment as the Attah's court was the Igala supreme court of the land.

Ibegwu (Ancestor)

Ibegwu are the living dead, they were humans who once lived with the people but are now dead and whose memories are still fresh among their people. They were heroes and heroines who could be described as departed spirits but stood in peculiar close relations to the tribe or family. It is believed that there exists communication between the living and the dead where the latter has the power of influence and power to help, bless and inflict. Ibegwu also acted as agents of moral execution in human society because they are believed to have had an accurate knowledge of the moral demands, judgments and pronouncements of the society they have left behind. Gods and ancestors serve as witnesses and guarantors. Many Africans believe that one may swear by a god to convince people of the truth of the matter. If not true, the sanction is punishment by the gods within a stipulated period. If someone's properties are stolen, the person can invoke a curse publicly.

In marriage among Igala people, girls were expected to remain virgins till marriage. After marriage, they were expected to remain faithful to their husbands or else childbirth would be impaired by the gods. The shame of being declared impure often acted as a deterrent to young girls since the girl and family would be lowly rated and the family might take drastic measures. This served as an effective curb of sexual excesses and infidelity.

It restrains ostentation etc. Beliefs also constitute very real methods of social control. Examples are the beliefs that the spirit of a person killed will torment can haunt the killer; and that God or a god oversees everything people are doing and will mete out rewards and punishment accordingly. Belief in the immortality of dead ancestors serves to bind present living members of family and lineage together, especially in times of crisis and difficulties. To ensure their help at such and all times, the Igala people offer sacrifices; take proper care of the wife and children of a deceased relation etc. When they fail to do so, they must sacrifice or else face punishment from the ancestral spirits.¹¹²

Ancestors constitute the basic categories of moral and legal thought in many African religions. This function raises them above the transitory human level and invests them with sacred significance, superior and powerful, beyond all human challenge. The rights and duties sanctioned by the ancestors both define and regulate basic social and political relations. Ancestors and gods punish men to correct immoral behaviour. Unlike Western religions, most African thought does not conceive the source of evil to be a fallen god or spirit like the devil. Instead, the source of evil is located in the human world among the ambitions and jealousy of men. The source of evil is thus demonic humanity: the witch or sorcerer.

The use of *Ibegwu* or ancestors to control crimes in Olamaboro communities was such that anyone suspected to have committed a crime was invited before the ancestral tomb of the clan or lineage. On the tomb traditional kola nuts (*obi Igala*) would be used to invoke the spirits of

¹¹² Interview with S.A Okolo conducted by the author at Anyigba on May 23, 2023.

Ibegwu to action against the accused if he was responsible for the offence accused of in any land matter between two persons having the same ancestor, the *Ibegwu* was the last resort. However, if the land disputants do not have the same *Ibegwu*, the elders of the two disputants and the *Onuh Afewo* decide the true ownership of the land by calling on witnesses for or against the plaintiff or the defendant to the suit.¹¹³

The fear of *Ibegwu* dealing with criminals in Igala society deters people from every wrong that would affect other members of the society thereby obeying the laws and order of the land. *Ibegwu* to a large extent helped the adherents to stay out of trouble with neighbours as everybody behaves according to the rules and regulations guiding the community. In general, belief in the magical efficacy of oath could be pretty well guaranteed. After the oath had been administered, the matter was left to the judgment of the gods of the land whom the people believed would bring misfortune to those who perjured in their testimonies.

Curse (*Ama*)

Curses and their manifestation in the life of the cursed are real. Curse is a strong word spoken by an aggrieved person over an act of others that does not go down well with him or her. Curses are believed to be backed by spiritual powers or the personal gods or goddesses of the curser.¹¹⁴

The major aim of curses was to deter, Levine¹¹⁵ argues that curses were a means of threat to prevent crimes in society. By studying Philip Mayer,¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Interview with E. John Clan Head/Ogijo, May 25, 2023.

¹¹⁴ .B. B. Leveline (1962). "Studying Child Rearing and Personality Development in an East African Community." *Annual New York Academy of Science*. Vol. 96, No. 2, pp. 620-628

¹¹⁵ M. Philip (1950). Privileged Obstruction of Marriage Rites among the Gusil." *Africa*. Vol. 20, No. 2. pp. 113-125

¹¹⁶ M. Philip (1950). "Privileged Obstruction of Marriage Rites among the Gusil." pp. 113-125

the same analogy can be deduced. It was also argued that curses affect human beings and the course of events. But despite that, curses were tools resorted to in the settling of different crimes. The curse provided an opportunity for a formal settlement of serious social crisis. Curse can be deterrent punishment retributive. This is when all efforts to make an offender fail. In such a case, the community or the offended party resorts to cursing. Curses play double roles as a penalty to the offender and could be deterrence to the witness if it is effective.

The effects of curses can be averted. This is a fact that has already been observed by the researcher, the effect of curses does not end with the real offender. Punishment could at times come in wholesome to all members of the family.

Conclusion

The crime control mechanisms in Olamaboro communities were effective and efficient in curbing crimes in the communities in the precolonial period. However, the advent of Islam and Christianity and particularly the imposition of colonial rule and domination relegated the traditional judicial systems to the background. Even the so-called “Native Courts” imposed by the British were never traditional or native in nature, practice and in its entirety. Up to 1921, Hausa men were imposed as president of the “Native Court”. Thus, the “Native Courts” should be seen in the context of a coercive infrastructure for the realization of British economic and political interests. This system of oppression and exploitation forms another epoch in Igala (Olamaboro) history and historiography.

The paper has examined the various types of crime control mechanisms put in place by the traditional Olamaboro community. Traditional methods of crime control were very effective and this resulted in the relative peace experienced by the people. It is clear that those mechanisms for controlling crime in the past, have been taken over by the court of law and government agencies.