



# About The Nigerian Soldiers on Peace Keeping Mission in Okuoma Community: The Issue of State Commemoration Over Their Death

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**Abstract:** The ambushing of the Nigerian soldiers who were on peace keeping mission in Delta State stirred up varying social interpretations. Largely from the security desk to peace and conflict analysts, the debate however was not without a sublimation of facts. Through the medium of language, the study claims that the killing of the soldiers was wrongly accounted for. As Plato puts it, unless language is rightly applied, society most likely can be led astray. Arising from this the study would further argue that the exceeding state commemoration accorded to the soldiers, on the other hand, backgrounds at the communities who also lost their folks to the rumble. While the state never mentioned this side of the story, the researcher avows that this is a case of class externalization. The death of the soldiers, the paper concludes is indeed in connection with the demands and nature of their duty.

**Keywords:** The Nigerian Soldiers, Peace Keeping Mission, Okuoma Community, Delta State

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## 1. Introduction

The ambushing of the Nigerian soldiers on peace keeping mission in Okuoma, Delta State has continued to stoke up varying social interpretations. For the unsound mind, he may be asking what has interpretation got to do with it? The response to this, as Plato Puts it in Lawhead (2008) is that unless language is rightly applied, society can be led astray. In many ways, there are two issues here the study intends to explore. One, that what led to the death of the men is what they are. For one, inherent in the word- "soldiers" as we see it in cross cultural communication is the submission of one's life to one's duty. This explains that cross cultural training is one-way human beings account for their understanding of reality. In other words, cultures reflect their perception about the world from naming. The name soldier is associated with commitment to duty and submission of one's life. For such cultures with this understanding, it is part of the life of armed forces of the state to be ambushed while on peace keeping mission. This varying degree of conceptualizing a social phenomenon is perhaps the best way to account for justice in any social conflict.

The other issue worthy of remarks is the one of permanence and temporaries. As William Ockham argued in Lawhead (2008) matters of this nature – that is soldiers' being cut off guard by a community, citizenship concern or the state should be about the one of "Being", not the status of the entrapped. In many ways, the exceeding felicitation accorded to the soldiers is like saying that all animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others. The appendage "solider" according to Ockham is the one of temporariness. Aside his appendage, he is just like every other man on the street. There in the warring communities' noncombatants also died. Therefore, state commemoration should be on the loss lives. Humanity first, not the class of few men of honour – the sense of soldiers as we have it. This study content wise, therefore claims that the over blown social designation seems to have interfered with our cognition, in many ways, our sense of judgement on conflict.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study explored the following objectives:

1. Issue in state commemoration of the soldiers on their way to Okuoma community in Delta State, Nigeria.
2. To examine the attitude of the Nigerian state as it manifested in the burning down of houses in Okuoma community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The ambushing of the Nigerian soldiers who were on peace keeping mission in Okuoma community, Delta attracted one sided view on the part of the state. perhaps, by reason of state function and class distinction the state commemorated more about their death rather than giving equal concern about the death of Nigerians. It is about humanity first, not class nor material possession of the individual. The study therefore claims that the response of the state on the death of the soldiers could further stoke up crisis in the country as the communities that have been displaced with burning down of houses, would feel unjustly treated. It is worthy of remarks then that what befell the soldiers is part of what they signed for. For one, inherent in our occupation is its own disaster. Such an occupational risk must be accounted for. In all, the study claims, following the words of JP Clark that casualties are not only those who died in the war. The burning down of houses in Okuoma and some persons being displaced also deserves state commemoration.

### **About the Okuoma Crisis**

Within the Ughelli South local government area along the Forcados River is the Okuoma community, coming between the boundary of Akugbere and Okoloba, all of Izon speaking tribes. The major occupation for these communities is farming and fishing and for which many a time land mark and long aged boundaries are usually the major causes of dispute. For one, ancestral cum ethnological evidence have it that many neighboring communities, especially within the aborigines of Africa are usually of the same ethno heritage. Bound by the same beliefs and ancestral fathers, often times it is expected that these communities should be able to live in harmony. But then as time rolls by and each community is fast multiplying, the demand for space, either for agro based reasons or estate often necessitate dispute among them. Especially where the ancestral fathers are long gone, and there are no clear-cut definition of land uses and ownership, often times this poses enduring conflict (Thomas, Jessica and Sean, 2011; UNESCO, 1957).

The case of Okuoma community is one account of land dispute with a neighboring community Okoloba. About communal boundary, both communities, for over years have been divided over actual demarcation of the land. The unresolved dispute and exceeding firing between the communities, required them to invite the JTF. But then, one snag about the peace keeping mission of the soldiers as the Guardian puts it is that many a time, the Okoloba community boys usually go on army camouflage, hence it was difficult to identify the boys themselves. Rather than wait on the arrival of the soldiers, out of vexation and suspicion, the Okuoma community felt that the boys on

uniform were the same Okoloba community hoodlums invading the community under the umbrella of peace keeping mission from the Nigerian soldiers (Naira land).

The consequence of this – the mistaken identity of the boys had led to the killing of 16 military officers. In retaliation to this by the soldiers, many families were displaced and burnt down with children stranded and some running to other neighbouring communities. According to the guardian, the soldiers had stationed their armory in these communities with many of the families on the run.

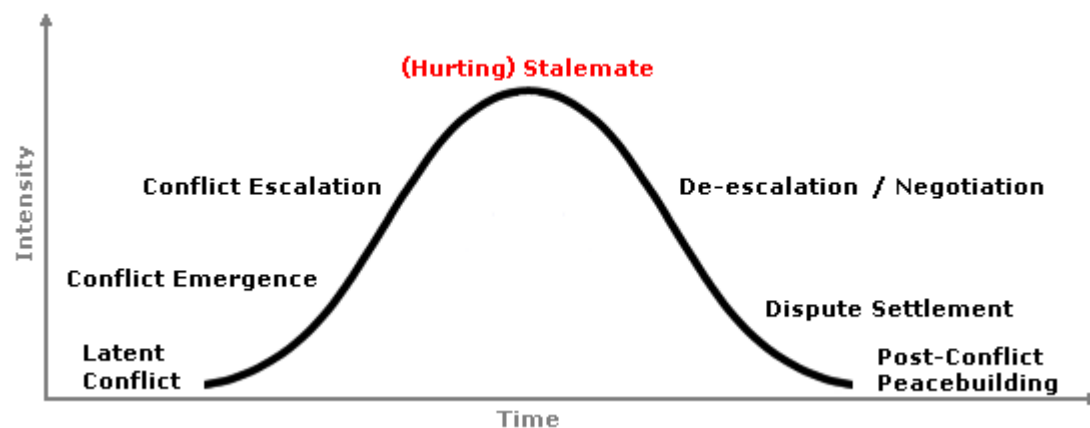
**On the Issue of State Response on the Claimed Soldiers**

While it was largely held that the soldiers were on a peace keeping mission when they were attacked by an angry mob, issues however not well handled were the cases of state commemoration. If at all the angry mob had something to do with the community, it is also worthy of remarks that both warring communities had one way or the other lost their beloved ones. This is a case about conflict as a social phenomenon, not the case of persons involved. The moment conflict in any sphere of human activities stirs up, usually there are casualties. In other words, we cannot define a social conflict without giving recourse to reality. The reality about any social conflict is that when it strikes, the senses barely think; showing therefore that conflict is better prevented by the state or agencies involved rather than the actual negotiation. Considering the inherent nature of conflict more lives would have seen lost before a commission is set up for negotiation or peace keeping. Just the same manner journalists nose for news, so must community heads and the state nose for impending crisis. The absence of this culture – the culture of inherency and perception is the reason for most community crisis in Nigeria. (Biddle and Thomas, 1966; Rodrick, 1996).

It then follows that the death of the soldiers was over hyped with its commemoration from the state. First, it should have been treated as an industrial conflict. For one, the definition of peace keeping is not without its own savagery or exchange of fire or an attack from warring groups. In Collins Dictionary, conflict consists of a number of frames such as: dispute, quarrel, clash, war of words, wrangle, feud, schism, hostility, disputation, passage of arms etc. Of these frames one of which is worthy of remarks is the issue of passage of arms. Inherent in any conflict is the tendency to exchange arms.

Considering this, it will be unprofessional on the part of the soldiers to claim that they do not have this understanding in their years of training. In many ways, considering that loss of lives is an inherent part of any crisis, it will be unjust on the part of the Nigerian state to regard the communities as murderers of the soldiers. The truth, the researcher argues is that it was not the communities who killed the soldiers, their profession did. Considering that it is part of their profession to die for the country and probably die at any time, why then raid the communities?

This then is a case of conflict resolution and not retaliation. Arguing further, death is inevitable in the military career. However, when it is a clash between the soldiers and a warring community, it does not call for retaliation but peace resolution. However, as Lester (1999) explains in his model below, we must not wait for conflict to break out before attempting to quell it. The model below illustrates this.



The above model suggest that conflict is primarily about its causation and sources. Many of the conflict theorists, whether classical or emerging, see conflict matters from their root source. Not much is underscored about its nature.

As well, others see conflict on the basis of its process, thus ranging from that of

1. Latent conflict
2. Emergence
3. Escalation
4. Stalemate
5. De escalation
6. Settlement/resolution
7. Post conflict/peace building
8. Reconciliation. These phases are captured in Eric (2003) as follows

These stages have continually been improved upon. Now it is believed that there are such stage as failed peacemaking and institutionalization. As such conflict stages take the form of: [www.cert and codesria.org](http://www.cert and codesria.org)



**Source:** Rodriguez-Garcia, et al: "How can health serve as a bridge for peace?" <http://www.cert.org.publication.policy>, American journal of Sociology, goggle scholar.

It then follows that the Nigerian state will be faulted on the dimensions of not being able to foresee the conflict (preventive diplomacy) and the dimension of class strangulation of the local communities.

**Conclusion**

The question then worthy of remarks as arising from the study is:

1. Is the Nigerian state the government of the people or the government of its soldiers; the government of few men of power?
2. Are the local communities not also playing essential services to the state, considering their subsistent economic activities? While the soldiers, it may well be said, perform security function for the state, these local communities in their own way though unrealized by the state, that their economic activities at the water bodies are part of the GDP of the state, also make contribution to national

development. Therefore, as the functionalists do view it, all the institutions of the state complement one another, a breakdown of one can affect other members of the system. Hence, the state if at all it practices general interest government, must also see to the welfare of these displaced communities by the soldiers.

### Recommendations

The paper therefore recommends the following approaches to resolving conflict between the state and a community.

1. A neutral body of enquiry should always be set up to investigate such matters.
2. Centre for proactive conflict resolution (CPCR) should be set up by the state. This, from time to time, should nose for inherent conflict in a local area, community or the state.

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