

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION AND MODERNIZATION ON THE UNIFYING ROLE OF UMUNNA IN IGBO LAND

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Abstract

The centrality of the position of Umunna as a socio-cultural group in Igbo land, which unites the Igbo people, cannot be underestimated. It defines the arrangement of every individual in a family structure and describes their social position in the community. The root of every individual family in Igbo land can be traced to the Umunna, a collection of different families who trace their existence to a particular ancestry. So, Umunna simply means sons of the same father. Since time immemorial, the Umunna have served as a unifying force, through its core responsibilities of conflict resolution, instilling a sense of oneness and belonging, and promoting a communitarian spirit. However, with the dawn of globalization and modernization, the effectiveness of the Umunna, as a unifying force in Igbo land, has significantly waned. It has equally become susceptible to misrepresentation. It is on the back of this that this adopts a critical expository method to explore the significant role of Umunna as a symbol of unity in Igbo land through its varied responsibilities and how globalization and modernization have impacted these roles. This is significant in that it helps one to understand the Umunna and its roles beyond the gross misrepresentation of being a group of gluttons. It also shed light on how globalization and modernization have limited the Umunna in carrying out its traditional roles as a harbinger of peace and unity.

Keywords: Umunna, Ancestry, Communitarian Spirit, Globalization, Modernization.

Introduction:

The late Nigerian Literary icon, Chinua Achebe, in his famous debut novel, *Things Fall Apart*, aptly captured the unifying role of Umunna in Igbo land through one of his characters, Anachebe Okoye. In his words:

A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so (Achebe, 45).

The foregoing highlights the centrality of kinship, particularly the role of the Umunna, in fostering unity and social cohesion within Igbo society. The gathering of one's kinsmen is not merely a customary ritual, but a deliberate effort to promote solidarity, mutual support, and convivial communal existence. This reflects the deep sense of belonging that the Umunna confers upon individuals and underscores the communitarian ethos inherent in Igbo cultural life. Asike (2014) affirms this perspective, noting that such portrayals of the Umunna underscore the primacy of community and social bonding in Igbo cosmology. He further emphasizes that such depictions serve to counter the pejorative misrepresentation of the Umunna as a body of opportunistic individuals seeking personal gain or attention. Rather, the Umunna embodies a collective that acts in pursuit of the common good.

Linguistically, the term *Umunna* is self-explanatory in the Igbo language. It is a compound word derived from *Umu* (children) and *Nna* (father), denoting "children of the same father." In this context, Umunna refers to a patrilineal kinship group comprising multiple families who trace their lineage to a common ancestor. As a foundational concept in Igbo philosophy and social organization, Umunna represents more than mere familial bonds—it encompasses one's extended family, ancestral lineage, and clan affiliations. This notion embodies a worldview that prioritizes interconnectedness, mutual responsibility, and the delicate balance required for harmonious social relations (Asike, 2014). Through the Umunna, the Igbo

promote the spirit of kindred solidarity, for every Igbo person belongs to a specific lineage and, by extension, a particular Umunna.

Historically, the Umunna has functioned as the primary mechanism of conflict resolution and social regulation within Igbo society. It serves as the first line of adjudication after the nuclear family, especially when intra-family resolutions fail. The Umunna enforces social norms and safeguards the reputation of the lineage by ensuring adherence to communal laws. Through its authority, it may sanction errant members, thereby maintaining social equilibrium. The average Igbo individual strives to remain in good standing with their Umunna, recognizing it as both a moral compass and a foundational support system. As grassroots institutions of governance, Umunna wield considerable influence and authority in the traditional Igbo sociopolitical framework. Their decision-making power is sacrosanct, and any individual who disregards their authority does so at significant social risk (Okoli, 2012).

Moreover, the Umunna assumes legislative and judicial roles, formulating rules and imposing sanctions to uphold law and order within the community. Membership in the Umunna is universal and compulsory for all, regardless of social status, and its resolutions are binding unless contested in a formal court (Anayo et al., 2002). From birth, beginning with the naming ceremony, individuals are ceremoniously introduced to their Umunna. At significant life events such as marriages, burials, and other communal gatherings, the Umunna plays an indispensable role, offering both logistical and moral support. Their endorsement is crucial in matrimonial negotiations, serving as both witnesses and guarantors of communal legitimacy. This unifying institution has long been bedrock of justice and peaceful coexistence, with each lineage assuming responsibility for maintaining internal discipline and communal harmony.

However, the influence of the Umunna has diminished in recent times due to the pervasive impact of globalization and modernization. Just as these forces have reshaped various dimensions of Igbo cultural life, ranging from religious practices and language use to interpersonal relationships, the traditional authority of the Umunna has not been spared. Odionye (2014) articulates this concern, observing that the transformative reach of globalization and modernity has profoundly altered African social structures, with the Igbo community being no exception.

In the aspect of communication patterns, most African parents hardly communicate with their children in their native languages, all in the name of embracing modern trend. Most Africans now prefer the dishes and eating patterns of Westerners to theirs. Also, the pattern of dressing and hairstyles of Africans and Igbos have been greatly influenced by modern or western styles. The usual native material or wears and native hair styles with which Africans and Igbos are known have been replaced with English suits and flamboyant hairstyles of different colours. More so, the culture of “ino odu ezi” (moonlight talks) by the Igbo race, through which the Igbo culture and tradition are passed down to the younger generation, has all phased out because of the modern pattern of minding one’s business without caring about one’s brother’s welfare. These negative attitudes of cultural negligence are done in the bid to be modern and educated (p.3)

The Umunna has not remained untouched by the sweeping forces of change brought about by globalization, urbanization, and migration. As individuals increasingly relocate to urban centers in search of education, employment, and improved living conditions, the traditional structures of communal life have become strained. Consequently, the authority of the Umunna has been significantly undermined, with many no longer regarding its decisions as binding or worthy of respect. As Asike (2014) aptly notes, the Umunna is now frequently mischaracterized as a mere assembly of idle men engaged in feasting, gossip, and petty conflict—an image far removed from its original essence and purpose. Yet, such a perception grossly diminishes the depth and complexity of the Umunna institution, which, at its core, represents a sophisticated mechanism of communal governance, moral guidance, and social cohesion.

It is against this backdrop that the present paper adopts a critical expository framework to interrogate the enduring significance of the *Umunna* as a unifying force in Igbo society, while also examining the extent to which globalization and modernization have eroded its traditional roles. To achieve this, the paper is structured into two principal sections. The first explores the conceptual foundations of the *Umunna* and analyzes the diverse functions it performs in fostering unity, regulating social conduct, and preserving cultural identity among the Igbo. The second section investigates the transformative impacts of globalization and modernization on the institution, with a focus on how these forces have constrained the *Umunna*'s capacity to serve as an effective agent of social order and harmony.

This inquiry is both timely and critical. It offers a nuanced understanding of the *Umunna* beyond the prevalent misrepresentations that reduce it to a self-serving body of gluttons. More importantly, it illuminates how external cultural and socio-economic forces have disrupted the traditional mechanisms through which the *Umunna* once maintained peace, enforced communal norms, and nurtured a strong sense of kinship among the Igbo. By re-centering the discourse on the *Umunna*'s foundational roles, this paper contributes to broader conversations on cultural preservation, indigenous governance, and the adaptive resilience of African communal institutions in a rapidly changing world.

Towards an Understanding of the Concept of “Umunna”

For any individual of Igbo descent who possesses a functional grasp of the language, the concept of *Umunna* requires little elaboration. It is a compound term derived from two Igbo words: *Umu*, meaning "children," and *Nna*, meaning "father." The confluence of these terms gives rise to *Umunna*, which literally translates as "children of the father," or more broadly, "sons of the same father." In everyday usage, *Umunna* refers to one's kindred or kinsmen—the extended patrilineal family structure rooted in a common ancestry. This traditional unit, central to Igbo social organization, is constituted by descendants of a founding patriarch and typically comprises interconnected compounds led by the eldest male member.

The *Umunna* is a critical pillar of Igbo communal life. As Iwuh (2011) observes, it defines not only an individual's familial placement but also delineates their social standing within the larger community. Composed of male elders and family members bound by ancestral ties, the *Umunna* has historically functioned as a locus of authority, conflict resolution, and cultural transmission. These elders—often including *okparas* (first sons), respected elders, and *Ozo* title holders—have traditionally embodied the role of peace builders, fostering enduring harmony and social cohesion within their communities (Ebisi, 2015).

The terms "village group council" and "village assembly" are frequently used to describe broader Igbo political authority. However, more localized forms of governance are situated within the *Umunna* structure and the *ndiamala*, institutions often led by community elders at the village level (Iwuh, 2011). As Okoli (2012) notes, *Umunna* is not merely a familial or political unit; it connotes *interiority*—an inner structure of harmony, rootedness, and spiritual interconnectedness. In the Igbo worldview, every individual belongs to a family, and those within the same family are known as *Umunne*. This foundational unity, characterized by intimacy and solidarity, scales upward into the broader *Umunna* configuration.

Iroegbu and Asike (2014) reinforce this understanding by defining *Umunna* as "the totality of nuclear families who are descendants of the same grand or great-grandfather" (p. 89). At the level of *Umunne*, there exists a deeply relational ethic akin to the Ubuntu philosophy of oneness and mutual care. A network of these familial units coalesces into what becomes the *Umunna*—a social system built on kinship, reciprocity, and shared heritage (Asike, 2014, p. 3). Expanding upon this, Ufearoh (2010) offers a nuanced reinterpretation of Okoli's position by arguing that *ezi na ulo* (the immediate family) transcends material culture and instead functions as a kin-based collective bound by mutual obligations and shared responsibilities. In this light, the *Umunna* emerges as a concatenation of such nuclear units, each situated within a patrilineal lineage traced to a founding ancestor, after whom the kindred is often named (Ukpokolo, 2010).

Crucially, the *Umunna* is more than just an extension of the immediate family—it constitutes an entire genealogical and social framework. Asike (2014) affirms that *Umunna* encompasses not only one's immediate and extended relations but also ancestral and clan affiliations. It is, in this sense, a conceptual system that underscores the interconnectedness and interdependence of individuals within Igbo cosmology. Harmony, balance, and mutual support are central to its operation. Functionally, the *Umunna* serves as the next hierarchical structure above the family unit, with its assembly presided over by the eldest *Okpara*. Although similar in form to a family meeting, the *Umunna* forum focuses on matters affecting the kindred at large.

In addition to its familial role, the *Umunna* constitutes a foundational unit of Igbo social and political life. It anchors traditional governance structures such as the *Ozo* system and the *Izu Umunna* council, both of which play vital roles in maintaining law, order, and justice within the community. Through these institutions, the *Umunna* acts as a custodian of culture, morality, and communal stability. Understanding the *Umunna* thus offers valuable insights into the Igbo value system, particularly in terms of its emphasis on community, solidarity, and collective well-being. It is in recognition of these deeply rooted values and structures that this paper proceeds to examine the unifying functions and socio-political roles of the *Umunna* in Igbo land.

Towards an Understanding of the Unifying Functions and Roles of Umunna in Igbo Land

A distinctive hallmark of the Igbo people is their communitarian orientation, often referred to as the kindred spirit. This trait aligns with Asike's assertion that the relevance of the *Umunna* in traditional Igbo society cannot be fully appreciated without first understanding the foundational purpose of its existence. The *Umunna* is a social formation that defines the Igbo individual within a communal framework—one that shapes identity and gives structure to life within the society. It is through the *Umunna* that younger members are trained to live morally upright lives and to avoid actions that may bring dishonour to the collective name. Moreover, the *Umunna* plays an active role in both joyful and sorrowful occasions in the lives of its members. It is this continued involvement that sustains communal cohesion and ensures harmonious interaction among members of the society. As Nnamdi and Ifeoma (2015) observe, this mechanism facilitates frictionless coexistence and serves the broader goal of enabling diverse individuals and families to function as a unified whole.

Therefore, the *Umunna* operates as a central force in promoting the Igbo communitarian worldview through its various responsibilities, which include conflict resolution, the maintenance of law and order, and social engagement. Anayo et al. (2010) affirm this by referencing a statement by Chief Jerry Obasi, who described the *Umunna* as a powerful administrative body responsible for the governance of kindreds, clans, villages, and entire communities in Igboland. The *Umunna* not only formulates communal laws but also enforces them and imposes punishments on offenders, thereby maintaining peace and order. According to Chief Obasi, every member of the community, regardless of social status, belongs to an *Umunna* and is expected to comply with its decisions. In instances of disagreement, the aggrieved party retains the right to appeal to a court of law. It is on the strength of these roles and responsibilities that this paper proceeds to examine the unifying functions and significance of the *Umunna* within Igbo society.

An Arbitration Institute: One of the fundamental responsibilities of the *Umunna* in Igbo society is conflict resolution. The *Umunna* serves as a crucial institution for the peaceful settlement of disputes among its members. This is achieved through a participatory process in which all concerned parties are granted the opportunity to present their perspectives before the *Okpara* and other respected elders. These elders, drawing upon their wisdom and communal values, ensure fair and impartial resolutions while also recommending appropriate sanctions where necessary. This inclusive approach fosters unity, reinforces communal bonds, and encourages active participation in the pursuit of justice and reconciliation (Okoli, 2012). Okoli further underscores the significance of this participatory ethos by stating:

When one wants to speak in their meeting, they start with greetings like: *Umunna ekeneem unu! Umunna kwenu!* (Greetings, my kinsmen). This is usually followed by a colloquial response *iyaaaa* in acceptance. What happens in the end, especially when there is a collective decision regarding their affairs, is what was captured in the thoughts of (Nwobia, 2021) that the *Okpara* will come up with questions like: *Umunna okwa uche unu kam kwuru?* – meaning, my people, I hope I conveyed your thoughts? And this is usually met by the response in unison, *O bu ya!* (Yes, it is.) Another example is, *Umunnaaa, okwa etu a ka odi?* (Umunna, I hope it is the true reflection of your views?) Which is usually followed with a unanimous acceptance or rejection like, *eeeh, etua ka odi!*. These questions are very important as it facilitate unity and solidarity amongst them. It is an affirmation of collective responsibility and participation to at least represent the Igbo traditional society, which thrives in egalitarianism and republicanism. The *Umunna* settles disputes between members, especially land matters, which are common. They invite disagreeing members for dialogue (*igba ajuju*) and possible reconciliation. This does not go without punishment to the person found guilty, and he is expected to face the consequences depending on the nature of the offense. Whatever displeasure any has with the verdict of the *Umunna*, he can seek redress at the village or community assembly, but one who neglects the authority of the *umunna* may be ostracized (p.78).

As kinship groups bound by a shared ancestry, the *Umunna* constitutes the political structure immediately above the nuclear family in traditional Igbo society. The affairs of the *Umunna* are managed through a kindred assembly, which is typically presided over by the eldest *Okpara*. While this kindred assembly functions like an immediate family meeting, it is primarily concerned with broader issues that affect the entire kindred. In contrast, matters that concern the larger village community are addressed at the village union level. However, individuals who are dissatisfied with the resolutions reached by the *Umunna*—or whose disputes involve members of different kindreds—may escalate their grievances to the village union. Thus, the *Umunna* serves as a vital mechanism of arbitration within the Igbo traditional system of governance (Iwuh, 2011).

Arbitration has long served as a cornerstone of conflict resolution in traditional Igbo society, fostering trust, mutual understanding, and communal cohesion. This method relies on the integrity and impartiality of arbitrators, typically comprised of elected clan leaders and elders, who are entrusted with interpreting customary laws and social norms in a manner appropriate to the nature of each dispute. These arbiters are respected for their wisdom and are expected to render decisions grounded in established traditions. When negotiation and mediation fail, disputing parties may escalate matters to communal courts, which could take the form of the town hall where *Umunna* members convene weekly, the king's palace, the village square, or, in extreme cases, the shrine. Charles (2015, p. 7) affirms this by noting that “Africa used council of elders, king's court, people's assemblies” as avenues for resolving conflict. In such contexts, elders and traditional rulers preside over proceedings and deliver judgments rooted in the values and customs of the land.

The eldest man in the kindred holds the *ofo* and presides as chairman of the *Umunna* assembly. This village assembly plays a central role in the resolution of disputes between individuals from different families within the same clan or village. Typically, the *Umunna* adjudicates cases involving land boundary conflicts, inheritance disagreements, and minor offenses such as theft and physical altercations. These matters are addressed during *awurawu*, a weekly meeting of all male members of the community, or, in instances involving women, during moonlight gatherings held at the village square. Within this traditional judicial hierarchy, the family functions as the lowest level of arbitration, while the king and his council constitute the highest court of appeal. Their function aligns with what is commonly understood as ‘third-party intervention’ in conflict resolution. In Igbo traditional thought, philosophy, and religion, such

third-party actors are expected to remain impartial, de-escalate tensions, hear all sides, restore peace, and enforce cultural mechanisms for conflict management. Their ultimate role is to reestablish the balance of social energy across individuals, families, and communities, thereby preserving communal harmony (Iwuh, 2011).

In summary, conflict resolution within African societies, particularly through the *Umunna*, was a dynamic process where no parties were merely observers. The resolution process was triangular, involving the conflicting parties, witnesses, and the broader community. The resolution of disputes by the *Umunna* was often accompanied by a celebration of reconciliation, emphasizing that there were no clear losers or winners. The primary focus was on restoring and maintaining ontological balance between the society and the supernatural realm (Iwuh, 2011).

Umunna as a Governing Institute: The *Umunna* is organized in such a way that it has executives who oversee its affairs, ensuring that all members, regardless of their social, educational, or religious status, accord respect to their kinsmen and remain loyal to the collective. Traditionally, the *Okpara* is the leader or head of the *Umunna*, with the exclusive mandate to represent the kindred in the governing council of the community. However, *Okpara's* personal opinions are not binding on all members; instead, his views are shaped and validated through a democratic process in which the decisions of the members guide the direction. Importantly, *Okpara's* position is not hereditary. Upon his passing, the role is passed on to the eldest relative within the kindred. In recent times, however, many Igbo communities have moved away from the hereditary headship process and now elect their leaders through democratic elections, with the chairman serving fixed terms before passing the mantle to the next elected leader (Okoli, 2012).

During *Umunna* meetings, every member is granted the opportunity to voice their opinion on the matter being discussed. However, the final decision rests with the elders, who engage in consultations and private deliberations, known as *Igba izu*, to reach a consensus. The *Umunna* structure extends from the kindred level to the village level, where they manage the affairs of the kindred. Membership spans various socio-political and economic divisions within the community (Okoli, 2012). The *Umunna* functions both legislatively and judicially; they draft laws based on local customs and traditions, ensure their enforcement, and their verdicts are often upheld in formal courts of law (Ngozi, 2011). This reflects that the *Umunna's* authority is not only recognized but also enshrined in the constitutional frameworks that govern the state. Therefore, the power of the *Umunna* to determine the fate of its members is unquestionable (Okoli, 2012).

The *Umunna* is a powerful institution within the Igbo traditional system. While a political, individuals within the *Umunna* may align with political parties. Regardless of one's status, every member must submit to the decisions of the *Umunna*, as it enforces the laws and norms of the kindred, village, or community. For example, even a governor must heed the directives of the *Umunna*. If a governor encounters issues with the *Umunna*, they are required to resolve them through dialogue. The *Umunna's* authority in the decision-making processes of Igbo land is paramount, and no individual, regardless of their position, holds greater power in these matters (Anayo et al., 2002).

Unifying Roles of Umunna in Social Functions: The actions of the *Umunna* are primarily directed towards the growth and development of every family within their jurisdiction. Their decisions are binding on all members, and there are consequences for defying these collective resolutions. In some instances, the *Umunna* may prescribe punishments, and in more extreme cases, they may impose excommunication (*nsupu*) on a member who violates the agreed-upon norms. The concept of excommunication will be explored further in the subsequent section. Within the Igbo context, a *Nwaada* (daughter of the land) cannot marry without fulfilling certain rites performed by the *Umunna* to which her family belongs. The *Umunna* plays a crucial role in traditional marriage ceremonies, including the introductory discussions, negotiations of the bride price, and other aspects of *Omenala* (the customs and traditions of the people). These duties must be carried out by the *Umunna*, not by the father of the bride. Ultimately, any advice, conditions, or tasks set by the *Umunna* for the prospective suitor are binding (Okoli, 2012).

According to Nworah (2011), the involvement of the *Umunna* in marriage rites has often been a source of conflict, as many fathers may object to the extensive list of marriage items that the *Umunna* require from the prospective in-law. However, through cultural diplomacy and subtle negotiations, the *Umunna* typically have their way, as no man can fully complete the customary and legal marriage rites for giving away his daughter or securing a wife for his son without the consent and, to a significant extent, the involvement of the *Umunna*. Anayo et al. further note that the *Umunna* is so vital that if they are absent from marriage proceedings, such a marriage is considered not to have followed the proper process. The *Umunna* conducts most of the traditional rituals involved in marriage, with the parents serving primarily as witnesses. This underscores the belief in the Igbo worldview that a child belongs to the community, which contributes to the child's upbringing. This belief is reflected in names like *Adaora* (Daughter of the community) and *Nwaora* (Child of the community), which are commonly found in Igboland.

In traditional Igbo society, the *Umunna* values prosperity and strictly opposes taboo (*aru*). This is why they gather at their *Obi* or respective meeting places to discuss matters affecting the community. At social functions or gatherings, the *Umunna*, as the head, is symbolically honored by receiving the head of any slaughtered cow, while the waist is given to the women, signifying respect for the head of the community. For the son who presented the cow, the *Umunna* offers prayers for continued prosperity. As Nworah (2011) further explains, the saying "remember the son of the person you are" extends beyond one's father to include the *Umunna*. When a person performs noble deeds, their *Umunna* will proudly claim credit by saying, "*Osi na agbulu anyi, ezigbo agbulu*, he is from our lineage, a noble lineage."

However, if the reverse occurs and shame is brought upon the individual, the *Umunna* will denounce him, punish him, and question his lineage. They might say, "*Omero ka onye agbulu anyi*," meaning "that is not the behavior of people from our lineage." He could even be accused of taking shortcuts, with some referring to him as "*obiajo nwa si Owerri baa nne ya afo*" (*a bad child from Owerri comes to his mother's house*), a derogatory remark implying dishonesty or dishonorable behavior (Ngozi, 2011).

Ngozi (2011) provides a compelling analysis of the social presence of the *Umunna* in the community, highlighting the socio-cultural strength of the *Umunna* as an institution that plays a crucial role in the transfer of cultural heritage, the settlement of inter- and intra-communal disputes, and overseeing marriage ceremonies. At funerals, the younger members of the *Umunna* participate by helping to dig the grave of the deceased at no cost. The *Umunna* serves as the first point of contact whenever any issues arise within the community, before those matters are taken outside. They are courageous in handling the affairs of their people, and before any matter between members of the same *Umunna* is escalated, they must first attempt proper resolution. This reminds me of a case in my community, Neni, where an individual called the law enforcement agency over a dispute with his kinsman regarding an unpaid debt. The *Umunna* decisively intervened because the matter had not been reported to them first, before involving external authorities. This illustrates the Igbo understanding that "no one falls from the sky"—every individual has a kinsman, and the *Umunna* plays an essential role in managing such disputes.

This also aligns with the saying, "*obu Umunna new mmadu*," which translates to "the kindred of a person own him," and is often heard at funerals, where it is said, "*obu umunna na enwe ozu*" ("it is the kindred that owns the corpse"). This reflects the idea that, in Igbo culture, from birth to death, one remains relevant and tied to one's kin. In Igbo cosmology, it could certainly be argued that an individual who is not with their kinsmen is seen as insignificant or worthless, as Igbo cultural heritage places great importance on kinship ties (Okoli, 2012). In conclusion, the *Umunna* unites people to work harmoniously together, gather resources, and achieve collective goals. As Njoku (2015) notes, "*Umunna na-eme ka obi sie mmadu ike*"—meaning that the *Umunna* helps to strengthen an individual's resolve; even under adversity, when society may wish to see a person succumb to misery, the *Umunna* ensures that the individual stands firm again (Nnamdi & Ifeoma, 2015).

Understanding the Concept of Globalization and Modernization

Globalization, as we understand it today, is a product of advancements in technology, particularly in the fields of information and communication. McQuail (2005) asserts that technological and communication revolutions lead to social revolutions. There exists a cause-and-effect relationship between globalization and modernization, driven by the introduction of new technologies, which, in turn, bring about changes in societal ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Solo-Anaeto & Jacobs, 2015).

Globalization represents an emerging "global culture," where people across different countries often consume similar goods and services and share a common language of business—English (Igboeche, 2014, p. 182). According to Okunna and Omenugha (2012), globalization sets the stage for cultural interactions, often resulting in the overwhelming dominance of local cultures. It is the process of integrating the world into a unified system, whether economically or socially. Globalization can be seen as a movement toward modernization, aimed at bridging economic, cultural, and technological divides. McLuhan's (1962) concept of the "global village" suggests that different countries are increasingly identified by a shared set of cultural markers. As a result, ideas, cultural values, norms, and morals are rapidly exchanged between countries, facilitating economic and developmental progress. However, as Odionye (2014) points out, a key concern is that this acculturation is not symmetrical; the Western economy and culture have gradually overshadowed African counterparts. Consequently, there is a growing dependence on Western ideas, information, and innovations, often at the expense of African cultural heritage.

Modernization refers to the introduction of new ideas, systems, or methods that transform traditional ways of doing things. It is a trend driven by the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) and globalization (Odionye, 2014). With the rise of ICT, innovation has flourished, enabling people worldwide to achieve better results with less effort. A prime example of this is the ability for individuals from any part of the world to obtain formal education and certification from Western institutions through online platforms, demonstrating the power of technology in bridging geographical and educational divides.

The Impact of Globalization and Modernization on the Unifying Role of Umunna in Igbo Land

One of the key advantages of globalization is the transformation of the world into a "global village," where content, ideas, and information flow seamlessly across national borders. This interconnectedness facilitates the exchange of daily news, new ideas, and cultural practices, enriching global communication. However, this exchange often comes with unintended consequences, particularly the erosion of values, beliefs, and cultural heritage. As people in developing countries adopt foreign ideas, languages, and communication patterns, they risk endangering and even losing their native cultures. A clear example of this is the impact on the Igbo language and culture, which have been influenced by external forces (Odionye, 2014).

With the rise of globalization, it is increasingly believed that every nation should align with global trends in development. McLuhan's (1962) "global village" concept reflects this notion, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all nations. Since the onset of globalization, Nigeria—particularly the Igbo region—has made significant efforts to advance scientifically, technologically, economically, and culturally, striving to keep pace with global progress. The undeniable advantage of globalization lies in its ability to provide rapid access to information and knowledge (Odionye, 2014). However, concerns have emerged that this interconnectedness may lead to cultural assimilation, posing a threat to the preservation of local languages and traditions, especially in Africa and among the Igbo people.

With the advent of modern civilization and Western education, the Igbo region has gradually embraced many aspects of these new trends, albeit with the risk of neglecting their traditional ways of life (Ahamefule & Okoye, 2014). This cultural exchange, often referred to as cultural globalization or acculturation, has contributed to the erosion of indigenous Igbo culture (Odionye, 2014). It is against this backdrop that this study aims to examine the impact of globalization and modernization on the unifying role of the Umunna in Igbo land.

One of the most significant ways in which globalization and modernization affect the Umunna's role in unifying the community is through the increase in migration and urbanization. These trends tend to stretch family ties as individuals move to new towns or even countries in search of better opportunities. The first consequence of this migration is the creation of a communication gap, as people become consumed with the demands and challenges of their new environments. With little time to maintain regular contact with family members back home, the emotional and familial bond begins to weaken. As a result, the role of the Umunna in providing guidance, arbitration, and peaceful conflict resolution is compromised. When conflicts arise among individuals who are geographically distant from their community, they often escalate due to the lack of elders or Umunna members who would traditionally mediate. Even when these issues are brought back to the home community for resolution, there is a tendency for the decisions of the Umunna to be ignored or disregarded once individuals leave the comfort of their home. As a result, the binding influence of the Umunna becomes limited to the village, and with time, connections with the Umunna may deteriorate, further undermining their unifying role.

Some individuals who migrate and establish families in their new settlements may unintentionally sever their ties to their ancestral roots. While starting a family in a new location is not inherently wrong, there is a growing tendency for their offspring to be unaware of their broader family history, beyond their immediate parents. When such individuals pass away, the risk arises that their children will lose contact with the extended family and the larger ancestral network. With a new orientation shaped by their environments, these children may find it easier to disregard or even challenge the decisions of the Umunna, often viewing their authority as on par with their own. This disconnection is evident in the frequent clashes that arise during important family events, such as burial ceremonies or weddings, where conflicts emerge between the children of the deceased and their kinsmen. Asike (2014) aptly captures this dynamic, noting that:

It is believed that most persons have traveled round the world and in return, considers their Umunna activities as a waste of time where people probably gather to dine and wine, gossip and cause problems for one another. It is imperative to discuss the western incursion and modernity as one of the reasons why there seems like the center does not hold any longer. Religion, science and technology have changed a lot of things in the world, thus making the gatherings of the kinsmen to appear local, obsolete, fetish, not evolving, not meaningful and probably, where those who reside in the village handle their affairs. To some persons who feel they are modern, the idea of Umunna is old and should be forgotten. It is therefore observed that some modern youths are not interested in the affairs of their kinsmen any longer. Aga ahapuzi omenala mebe omen'elu? Meaning should we leave Igbo tradition and culture for another thing altogether? (p. 4).

Another significant impact of globalization on the Umunna is the rise of media and social media platforms. While these tools are essential in the contemporary world and can even serve to amplify the roles of the Umunna, they have also become channels for disinformation and misinformation. These platforms often portray the Umunna in a negative light, casting them as a group of old, weary, and gluttonous men who are bent on exploiting those who make progress in their kindred, through excessive and unnecessary demands during events such as burials or weddings. Moreover, the film industry, particularly Nollywood, has frequently depicted the Umunna as malicious figures who use charms to undermine their kinsmen, dehumanize widows, or force the children of the deceased to relinquish their land or undergo degrading rituals, such as drinking the water used to wash their late husband's corpse to prove they are not responsible for his death. The now-popular "village people" concept, commonly discussed on social media and among younger people, refers to the alleged diabolical powers wielded by the Umunna to distort the progress of their kinsmen. This stereotype has led to a lack of continuity in Umunna meetings, as many individuals avoid them, seeing them as enemies of progress. As a result, it is no longer unusual for a groom at a traditional wedding to be told by the bride's family to discard the drink

handed to him, out of fear that it may have been poisoned by the Umunna. In this way, a significant aspect of Igbo traditional ceremonies is gradually being eroded.

In summary, as Asike (2014) observes, the influence of modernization has undermined the traditional worldview of the Umunna, particularly among the youth, who are expected to eventually take on leadership roles within the community. Many have adopted a mentality that merges Western influences with their existing culture, often without fully understanding that these are distinct cultures with different values, making reconciliation difficult. This has resulted in significant negative impacts on the Umunna institution. The Western approach to mourning and pacifying the dead differs greatly from the Igbo customs, yet many of today's youths choose to disregard the sacred traditions associated with the deceased, acting according to their own wishes and, in some cases, disregarding the authority of the Umunna. This defiance raises questions about

Conclusion

In this study, we have elaborately discussed the concept of Umunna, a conglomeration of nuclear families that trace their origin to a common ancestry. The Umunna as an institution is very important as long as one has Igbo blood, history, and origin. Since time immemorial, the Umunna has formed a formidable force that is very strong for their good. They have served as a unifying force, through their core responsibilities of conflict resolution, instilling a sense of oneness and belonging, and promoting a communitarian spirit. However, with the dawn of globalization and modernization, the effectiveness of the Umunna, as a unifying force in Igbo land, has significantly waned. We have elaborately shown the many ways globalization and modernization impact the unifying roles of the Umunna through means like urbanization, migration, media (and its misinformation and disinformation), among others. The truth remains that Umunna is not immune to criticisms or deficiencies. There are many cases where some of them fail, such as in the issues of marriage and burial rites, where some of them make ridiculous and exorbitant demands that beat common sense. They are often willing to go against families who do not accede to their demands or who try to offer better alternatives. This often results in the decisions of such families to cut all ties with the Umunna immediately after the ceremony. Hence, "a lot of persons do not value their kinsmen any longer because some of the elderly ones turned their back on truth, collect bribes, turn cases upside down, and give bad judgments" (Asike, 2024, p.4). This paper is not focused on generalizing these facts, as it is not a common practice, nor does it exonerate them. The central focus of the paper is to take a critical expository approach to explore the significant role of Umunna as a symbol of unity in Igbo land through the varied responsibilities it performs and how globalization and modernization have impacted these roles. In doing this, this paper is significant as it contributes to knowledge about the Umunna and its roles beyond the gross misrepresentation of being a group of gluttons. It also shed light on how globalization and modernization have limited the Umunna in carrying out its traditional roles as a harbinger of peace and unity.

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