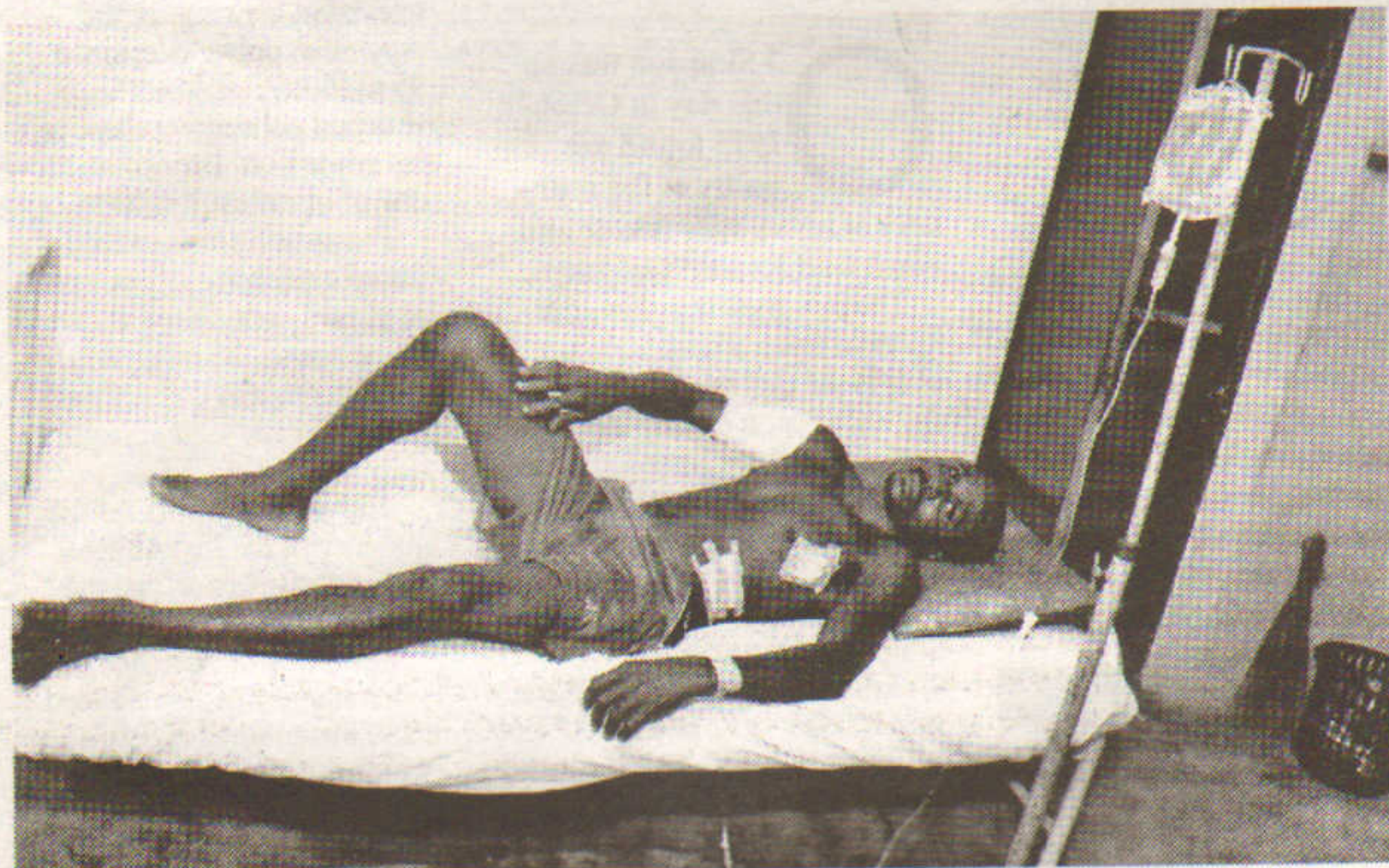


NEWS PLUS

Mayhem in Anambra community

...One killed, 20 houses razed as brothers turn against brothers



• Another victim

FROM EMMANUEL UZOR, ONITSHA

People of Omor in Anyamelum Local Government Area of Anambra State are currently singing a dirge. There is sorrow in the community after a group of youths allegedly attacked the residents, leaving one dead and many groaning with pain and fear.

Before the attack, Omor was a community known for its hospitality and peaceful nature. Located at the inner part of Anyamelum council, the community is also known for its arable land and rich yield of agricultural produce. It is equally well known for its unique "Omor rice," which is produced in very large, commercial quantity.

But our correspondent gathered that the community is in total ruin, having been bruised, following an attack that left one person dead, several others injured and many houses razed.

Residents of the area are living in fear, as the youths in the community are now moving round armed with dangerous weapons. A resident told our correspondent that the unfortunate part of the case was that the community was also reputed for using 'metaphysical powers' to evade police arrest when they committed similar crime. "It is a community where some people are believed to be strong and can use the efficacy of their charm to manipulate others and do whatever they want," a source said.

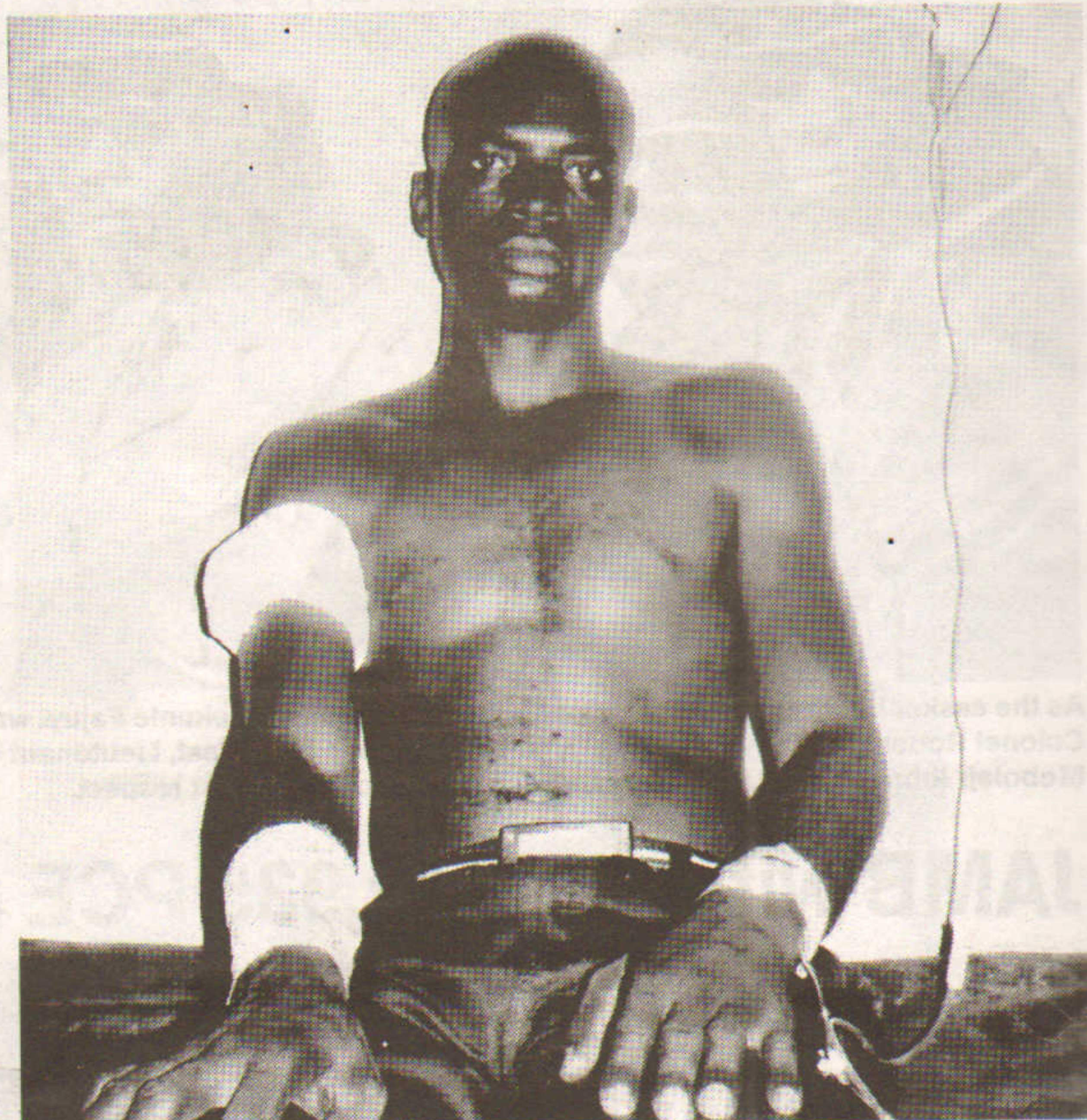
Daily Sun gathered that policemen attached to Nzam Police Station had over time been battling to contain some residents' use of their 'metaphysical powers' to achieve what they wanted. The police might have been left to deal with that when they arrested some suspects, who were being accused of shooting and killing a young man identified, as Sunday Okafor, following a disagreement over land.

It was gathered that before peace took a leave from the community, two kindreds in Omor: Umuogbu-Uwana and another (name withheld) had been enmeshed in intractable land tussle for decades, which, according to Mr. Mac-Ben Amulue, who is currently taking refuge outside the community, had led so many people to their early graves in the past.

However, recently, the crisis took a dangerous dimension when the entire community allegedly ostracised the said kindred, following its land tussle with the Amulue family of Umuogbu-Uwana kindred.

According to Ben, both kindreds had been at daggers drawn over the ownership of a large portion of land at Okpalankwu-Amaji, which later resulted into the elders of the community ostracising the said kindred for allegedly, wrongly laying claim to the land.

It was further gathered that after the said kindred was ostracised by the elders of Omor community, another twist to the land tussle emerged, which led to the killing of Sunday by



• One of the victims

gunmen allegedly sponsored by the embattled, ostracised kindred.

"We have had this land tussle with that kindred for some time now. In Omor, the kindred is the last and youngest but it has been laying claim to the land that belongs to Amulue family of Umuogbu-Uwana kindred at the Okpalankwu-Amaji. On several occasions, oaths were to be administered to determine the real owners of the land but on each occasion, they scuttled everything. The recent one that led to this crisis was after the community had warned them to leave the land. They refused to heed the warning of the community and were then ostracised. Everybody in the community was warned not to have anything in common with them."

Mr. Augonus Omor, one of the victims of the attack, who is currently recuperating in a private hospital as a result of deep machete cuts in his body, disclosed that the idea to ostracise the kindred was a collective decision of the Omor community, adding that it was not a decision taken by the Umuogbu-Uwana kindred alone.

He said: "It was not the first time they have been sanctioned and ostracised by the community. The reason this one was reported was because human life was involved and many of us were attacked and maimed by their rampaging youths for no just cause. One the said day, they came into the compound where we were busy, celebrating and making merry to mark the Amanwulu title in Ananti's house. When they were asked to leave since the community had ostracised them and warned that anybody seen relating with them would pay a fine of N20, 000, they refused. We didn't know that they had prepared for war. And so, before we knew what was happening, they opened fire on us and in the process, Sunday Okafor was gunned down; others used their long cutlasses to inflict machete cuts on some of us."

In his own reaction, Chief Joseph Ananti in whose compound the assailants first launched their attack recalled that the community was in a festive mood before the incident happened. He noted that there was no premonition of such calamity in the town until it happened.

"I had invited people to my compound to join me in celebration of Amanwulu title which I was organised for my sons; people

had gathered and we were eating and drinking when suddenly, a group of young men armed with guns, machetes and clubs stormed in. When I noticed they were the people the entire community had unanimously ostracised, I asked them what they have come to do. I reminded them that I didn't have N20, 000 to pay as fine for receiving them in my house. One of them said they must be part of the festival or blood would flow. As we were still debating the issue, Sunday Okafor dropped his bottle of beer and went over to tell them to leave since they were not invited, reminding them that it was not by force that they would be part of the party. It was at that point that one of the youths ordered him to shut up or he would be shot. When Sunday kept on talking, one of them shot him at a very close range; he fell down and everybody in my compound especially the women ran for safety. The moment the boy shot Sunday, others descended on the youths in my house, injuring and maiming everybody in sight.

"Not satisfied with the death of Sunday, those blood-thirsty boys charged into the community, destroying properties, razing houses they suspect belonged to my kindred. It was at that point that we rushed to the police station at Nzam to report the matter. Unfortunately, by the time the police arrived, the boys had fled. When the policemen left they returned and resumed burning our houses and destroying our properties. Right now, we are living like fugitives.

"They even threatened us in the presence of the police that since we had the effrontery to invite the police, they would make sure we were all wiped out."

A visit to Omor by our reporter showed a community in desolate; every young man in the community was living in grave fear either of the rampaging youths or of police arrest even as buildings and other properties touched by the fleeing youths were scattered all over the community.

Daily Sun gathered that four persons had been arrested by the police and arraigned at the Otuocho Chief Magistrate Court. The suspects were said to be in police custody while the Anambra State Police Public Relations Officer, PPRO, Mr. Uche Eze, said the command had launched serious manhunt to arrest the fleeing suspects.