

**INTRA-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN POST-COLONIAL
IGBOLAND,
THE AGULU CASE, 1990-2002**

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Abstract

Intra-communal conflict remains a major factor that hinders integration at the grassroots level in Igboland. The phenomenon goes a long way to undermine Igbo solidarity and response(s) to Nigerian issues. Nigeria being a multi-ethnic and volatile heterogeneous society where citizens tend to primarily pay allegiance to their respective ethnic groups, recurring intra-communal crisis within communities tends to have an adverse effect, as regards integration and harmonisation of purposes and developmental initiatives. The crisis in Agulu, a community located in Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, provides an insight into the retrogressive implications of intra-communal conflict towards integration and community development. Considering the enormous impact it had on community integration and development and on inter-group relations, the crisis, which rocked the community for more than a decade, has not been properly placed in the existing history of Agulu. In view of the stated problem, this study explicates the nature and disintegrative tendencies of religious-induced intra-communal conflict in Agulu. The study observes that Christianity actively altered the patterns of causal factors of conflict in Agulu as well as elsewhere in Igboland. The strife in Agulu was particularly embedded in Christian denominational differences.

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Therefore, it is suggested that for any Igbo community to sustain its culture and harmonise its developmental initiatives, there is need for communal integration. The community would go a long way to achieve the desired intra-communal integration if situations that have divisive tendencies, such as Christian denominational differences, are played down.

Keywords: conflict, peace, intra-communal, unity, Christian denomination.

Introduction

Conflict is a major component of the natural order of any society regardless of the location of that society. The documentation and analysis of conflict situation between entities in a given environment remains an important aspect of historiography. It is increasingly becoming fashionable as the study of inter-group or inter-communal relations in Igboland grow in relevance. In explicating the dynamics of contact between the Igbo and their neighbours, scholars of Igbo history have provided insights on the nature of conflicts that emanated at one point or the other in inter-group relations. The implication of this is that most literature on Igbo history give more attention to inter-group or inter-communal conflicts. However, it should be noted that inter-communal and intra-communal conflict existed in Igbo communities on almost equal dimension, although the means through which conflicts in both categories were resolved differed. For instance, while women groups appear to play conspicuous role in intra-communal conflict resolution,¹ the *umunwadiana* (those who had their mothers' maiden homes in either of the warring communities) mostly made up the body of arbiters in the case of inter-communal conflict.²

The intra-communal conflict, which stultified positive socio-economic and political development in Agulu, started in 1990 and lasted for twelve years. The conflict basically had both political and religious undertones, in the sense that what appeared like leadership or personality clashes in the town union government soon took a religious dimension when the Christian denominations of the people was called into play. Agulu is a

community in Anambra State, Nigeria. The town is located along Amawbia to Ekwulobia road (a major road that connects Anambra and Imo States), in fact, the road virtually transverses the town. On this road, the community is situated four miles from the north where it shares boundaries with Nise and Mbaukwu communities. At the southern end, it shares boundaries with Nanka and Aguluzigbo communities. Agulu, by area, is one of the largest communities in Anaocha Local Government Area. The size is due to its extensive landmass, which gives it a land area that is well over forty-nine square miles.³ Agulu equally shares boundaries with Nri and Adazi-Nnukwu communities on the west. It parts with Awgbu community and some parts of Mbaukwu on the east. The community is made up of two major parts. They are Ebeteghete, comprising of the following villages: Nwanchi, Nneoha, Okpu, Amaezike, Odidaama, Amoji, Isiamigbo, Ukunu and Uhueme. The other part is Ebemonu or Ezinifite which comprises of the following villages: Obeagu, Obe, Nkitaku, Okpu-Ifite, Umuifite, and Nneogidi. Other villages include Amatutu, Umuowelle, Umunnonwu, Umubiala and Ifiteani, making it twenty villages as a whole in the town.⁴ The enormous geographical area of Agulu gave it the name *Agulu, Ohu Mba*, which could be translated as “Agulu, a town of multitudes”.⁵ An important landmark, which Agulu is popularly known for is the *Ezu* (Agulu Lake). The lake is located at Umuowelle village, with a popular resort, Golden Tulip on its bank.

A glance at the history of Agulu may suggest to a cursory observer a warlike or hawkish people. The history of the town is laced with intra-communal and inter-communal conflicts. In fact, one tradition holds that it was an internal conflict that led to the ousting of the progenitor of a neighbouring town, Aguluzigbo.⁶ Existing traditions also have it that in pre-colonial times, warriors from Agulu engaged in wars of conquest, popular among which was the invasion of a neighbouring community, Akwaeze. Agulu was known to have reached a pact with Aguluzigbo (which it regarded as its brother), to join it in the war of conquest against Akwaeze. The failure of Aguluzigbo to honour the pact caused another war between Agulu and Aguluzigbo.⁷ Agulu also fought

Aguluzigbo in the 1970s over a part of shared meat traditionally known as *nzere*.⁸ These accounts put Agulu in the light of an “aggressive” community. The propensity for aggressive response to conflict situation by an average Agulu person may have triggered and sustained the intra-communal conflict which is discussed in this paper. This paper provides an insight into the dimension of social conflict introduced by Christianity in Igboland. It is basically aimed at a dispassionate reconstruction of the events that led to the Agulu intra-communal conflict, which actively lasted for more than a decade. Efforts are made in this paper to unveil the causes and course of the conflict, which has left an indelible mark on the sands of time of the community.

There is a sufficient literature on conflict and these studies provide insight into the present discourse. Scholars who study conflict have developed divergent definitions for the phenomenon. Etymologically, the word conflict derived from the Latin word *conflictus* which translates in English as “struck together”. Today, it is lexically taken to mean clash, contention, a battle or struggle, controversy or quarrel.⁹ As mentioned elsewhere in this study, conflict is an integral part of existence. Nonetheless, it is important to make it clear that conflict is neither an ever-present fact of life, nor a mere sign of process dysfunction. Rather, conflict is the product of goal and behaviour misalignment between two or more parties. The foregoing view of conflict reflects the Agulu situation in its entirety. C.N.O Ezeogidi observes the changing trends in conflict resolution in Igboland and opines that the major factor of change in nature of conflict resolution is colonialism.¹⁰ Indeed, the European incursion shaped the conflict in Agulu; however, Ezeogidi did not explicate some important details of the nature of change in conflict and its resolution introduced by the Europeans. The present paper delves on the nature of European-induced change in patterns of conflict in Igboland, using the conflict in Agulu as a case in point. O.M. Ikeme analyses the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict, thereby highlighting the underdevelopment it caused the communities.¹¹ There are several studies that examine different aspects of inter and intra-group conflictive relations in Igboland; however, the Agulu case with its peculiarities has not

received scholarly attention. This study is thus for a remediation of the challenge. This article is organised in sections. The first section examines the nature of intra-communal conflict as introduced by Christianity in Igboland. The second section analyses the close tie between Christianity and town unionism in Agulu, while the third section explicates the course of the conflict and its effects on the growth and development of Agulu.

Christianity and the Changing Causes of the Intra-Communal Conflict in Igboland

Causes of inter-communal or intra-communal conflict have tremendously changed in Igboland since Western influence began to play out its effects. Traditional causes of conflict in the pre-colonial Igboland included, among other things, economic factors, which may manifest in failure or refusal of groups or individuals to pay their debts. In this case, the creditors may resort to the use of forceful means to recover the debts. T. Falola *et al* observe that:

...a notable measure in this connection was ‘panyarring’ or the seizure or kidnapping of the relation or relations of the debtors by the creditor. Quite often, the relations of the victims also took quick action by invading the territory of the creditor. In this way, what was originally inter-personal crisis developed into inter-group crisis and ultimately war.¹²

Other causes of conflict in pre-colonial Igbo societies came in form of land disputes, slave raid and religion, among others. However, it is worthy to note that the group prejudice that emanated from religion in the pre-colonial Igboland was sharply different from what started to obtain since the European incursion. In pre-colonial Igbo society, religious conflicts could occur when a deity or its place of worship was violated or desecrated. Each village was associated with a divinity or god which saw to its welfare and security. Thus the divinities were believed to be the “soul” of the respective villages. Consequently, there was a shrine or place of worship for each divinity. Desecration of shrines could come as result of raids from other communities. This could cause

tension or strained relationship between both communities.¹³ The Europeans came with a new religion, which is Christianity. The new religion introduced a new dimension to group prejudice as different Christian missionary societies that made inroads into Igboland went about to solidifying their presence in their areas of operation with remarkable sense of purpose and urgency. The missionary activities may have been buoyed up by the liberal tendencies of the Igbo, which played out in their attitude to the factor of change. An insight to the receptive nature of the Igbo in the face of the new religion could be gleaned from Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God*, where Ezeulu, a highly influential custodian of culture and traditions in an Igbo community, allowed one of his sons to go and learn the ways of the "white man".¹⁴

The disintegrative tendency of conflict in Igbo communities has increased in contemporary times. In pre-colonial times, Igbo communities may fight each other but would most likely come together to fight a common foreign adversary. A relatable instance is the Agulu war of resistance against the British expedition. As the British threat became imminent, different quarters of the community eschewed their differences to fight the common adversary.¹⁵ The disintegrative tendency of conflict in the contemporary times could be partly blamed on the Igbo attitude to Christianity. The early Christian missionary groups from different denominations in Europe appeared to have brought with them to Africa their innate denominational competitions. The presence of such competition was more conspicuous between the Roman Catholic mission and the collection of Protestant missions. The Protestant missions, that came to some areas of the southern part of Nigeria earlier in the 19th century, in fact, agreed to eschew competitions. This was because competition would be needless considering the vast area to be covered by the evangelical enterprise. The mindset of these early missionaries with respect to the foregoing was captured in the words of Ogbu U. Kalu, "...the early missionaries considered competition by the various evangelical bodies to be undignified and wasteful since there were wide areas still unevangelized and missionary outposts were thinly scattered on the Guinea coast."¹⁶ There is an evidence of

cooperation or indifference towards competition among the leaders of the earlier missionary groups in Nigeria. This is shown by the United Presbyterian Mission pioneer in Old Calabar, Hope Waddell. Waddell declared that it is not their wish to disturb any other body of Christians who may be engaged in similar labours. He further stated that they would rather co-operate with them; and for that end, would respect their arrangements for the benefit of the natives and avoid disturbing their operations, even as they would expect the same consideration from them (later missionaries).¹⁷ Further explicating the cooperating spirit of the early missionaries, Kalu notes:

Suffice it to say that the exigencies of the mission field bred cooperation and comity. At first the various field missions hardly met. When they came into greater contact and made counterclaims over boundaries, the fact that they shared common goals and interest helped them to resolve such differences. They informed one another of expansion moves, they accepted one another's advice even when given in blunt terms, and they used conference as a means to discuss, resolve and minimize competition.¹⁸

The Roman Catholic Mission appeared to have joined the fray in Igboland with a mien of urgency and competitiveness that repudiated the accommodative stance of the earlier missionaries. The new state of hostility that appeared in Christianity at the time could be gleaned from the words of the Methodists to Presbyterians and Qua Iboes in the early 1907, "Our problems are similar. Within professed Christianity we have the same enemy, namely the Roman Catholics."¹⁹ Calling out the Roman Catholic Mission as the "enemy" at the time may have exacerbated the fragile situation at the time and engendered further inter-denominational strife that has continued ever since. Unfortunately, the Igbo recipients of the new religion appear to have taken the emerging trend of group prejudice a notch too seriously.

Christianity and Town Unionism in Agulu

By the turn of the 20th century, Christianity had been established at Agulu. In 1914, a team of Church Missionary Society (CMS) workers arrived Agulu from Onitsha to join their earlier colleagues who had been in the community since 1912.²⁰ Settling in Agulu, the CMS workers set out to spread the gospel of Christianity to neighbouring communities. Consequently, Agulu became a base from which Christianity was spread to such communities as Uga, Ufuma, Umunze, Umuchu, Ekwulobia, Igbo-Ukwu, Awkaze, Adazi-Ani, Awgbu, Ajalli, Ndikelionwu, Ezira, Nawfia, Ogbunka, Neni, Ichida among others.²¹ This made Agulu an important centre for the CMS. The Roman Catholic Mission was relatively late to Agulu. The RCM diffused into Agulu from neighbouring Adazi-Nnukwu, where the mission enjoyed unbridled acceptance. The missionary works of Rev. Fr. Bubbendorf and his team hastened the consolidation of the Catholic mission in the entire Agulu area.²² There are two accounts that try to explain the inability of the RCM to make an early inroad into Agulu. One account is popularly held by Anglicans while the other is popularly held by Catholics. The Anglican account has it that for a long time after the RCM was established in Adazi-Nnukwu, the Roman Catholic faithful in Agulu had to journey to Adazi-Nnukwu every Sunday for mass. The Agulu RCM faithful's request for autonomy was said to have been turned down by the priest in Adazi-Nnukwu on the grounds that the faithful in Agulu were too few to have their own church. This necessitated the then Agulu Youth Movement (AYM) under the leadership of Ozoemenam Adi to mobilise both the Agulu youths residing in Onitsha and those residing at home (mostly CMS faithful) to organise an open air church service at Nwagu, a popular village square in Agulu. The Catholic priest in Adazi-Nnukwu was in attendance and was satisfied by the number of Catholic faithful from Agulu who turned up for the service. Consequently, he accepted to grant the Agulu Catholic mission autonomy.²³

The account of Catholic incursion into Agulu popularly held by the Catholic faithful has it that French priests who constituted the Catholic missionaries in the area at the time, attempted to

establish the catholic mission in Agulu but were met with difficulties, as the already settled CMS became an obstacle. The account claims that the CMS missionaries in Agulu tried to sway the minds of the Christian converts in the community by telling them that the RCM missionaries were enemies and that they would start defiling their land by committing adultery and violating their sacred traditions. Consequently, the Agulu people refused to accept the French missionaries and their teachings. The RCM missionaries then proceeded to Adazi-Nnukwu in 1912 and established there. In 1914 the RCM was finally able to penetrate Agulu when a group of boys who were attending the CMS school in a neighbouring community known as Agu-Ukwu Nri abandoned the CMS school for that of the RCM in Adazi-Nnukwu. After initial resistance from the CMS, the boys later became baptised in the Catholic faith and they became the pioneers of the Catholic Church in Agulu.²⁴ As could be seen, both accounts appear self-serving, thereby underscoring the underling friction between both Christian religious bodies in Agulu over the years. While the account held by Anglicans put them in the light of a pious brother that was looking out for his brother (the Agulu Catholics), the Catholic account plays the victim of an unhealthy rivalry between the two groups.

Founded on April 1964, the Agulu Peoples Union (APU) is the apex administrative body of the town. It could be said to be one of the major changes colonialism bequeathed on the community. This is because prior to the European incursion the highest decision-making body in the town was the Council of Elders known as *Isi Nze*.²⁵ With colonial distortions, the highest decision-making body in the community became the town union government in active consultation with the Igwe-in-Council.²⁶ Outstanding among the founders of the town union were Isaac Anyaoke and Mathew Ugweze. The union membership was open to all Agulu indigenes who accepted the obligations contained in its constitution and who were 18 years and above.²⁷ The reason was to ensure broad participation in decision-making process; something that was structured along the patterns of traditional socio-political organisation of the community.²⁸ The traditional

ruler (Igwe) was the patron of the APU. He officially opened each convention with the presentation of his annual address to the Union. Before the conflict, the villages of the town organised their own independent assemblies that addressed their peculiar interests. For instance, at that time, one could talk about Amaezike General Meeting, Nkitaku General Meeting and so on. However, the APU remained the central unifying body. It was the common umbrella body for the socio-economic and political development of the community. The village assemblies only became an integral branch of the APU after the crisis. The integration of the Village General Meetings under the main body of the town union was to foster unity and forestall further conflict.²⁹

The founders of the union obviously had the intention to balance succession to governance in order to avoid conflict of interest or sectionalism. For the purpose of the foregoing, Agulu was divided into four geopolitical zones and the leadership of APU was based on zonal rotation. The Zone A included the following villages: Nwanchi, Nneoha, Odidama, Okpu and Amaezike. The Zone B included Amoji, Isiamigbo, Ukunu, Obe and Uhueme villages. Zone C comprised of Obeagu, Nkitaku, Okpu-Ifite, Umubiala and Amatutu villages, while the Zone D had within it Umuowelle, Umunnowu, Ifite-Ani, Umuifite and Nneogidi villages.³⁰ One zone produces the President General (PG) for a term and the leadership moves to another zone the next term. An important routine to note, which in fact became a major causal factor of the conflict that later ensued, was that if any zone produces the PG without any disagreement among the contestants, the central body of the union accepts the person without further contest or election at the central level. In other words, once a zone unanimously accepted a candidate, he was accepted by the entire community.³¹ The leaders of the APU prior to the crisis included Chief John Etolue from Zone D, Chief Dennis Onyekwelu from Zone B, Chief Emmanuel Ilo-Okoye from Zone A, Chief A.N. Ejeagwu from Zone B, Hon. S. Nwobu-Alor from Zone C and Mr. Anthony Uzokwe from Zone D. Mr. Uzokwe was the last PG of a united APU before the crisis. The election that followed Uzokwe's regime marked the division of the town union.

Constitutionally, the tenure of the leaders of APU was three years before the conflict. However, to be in tandem with the democratic pattern of the time, after the conflict the constitution was amended and the tenure elongated to four years.³² As noted earlier, the election was on zonal bases. There was nowhere in the constitution of the union where religious or denominational considerations were made. But as subsequently shown in this paper, religion seemed to play more role than the constitutional zoning system. Emma Ilo-Okoye, whose administration lasted from 1980 to 1983, was the last member of the Anglican Communion to occupy the position of PG of the town union before the conflict.³³ Many credited the lack of succession by the Anglicans to the presidency on a statement made by a Roman Catholic priest known as Rev. Fr. Uchem. It was said that Fr. Uchem made a statement which most non-Catholics viewed as inciting at the twilight of Ilo-Okoye's administration. On December 28, 1983, during the Roman Catholic Annual General Meeting at Madonna Catholic Parish, Fr. Uchem, who was the Parish Priest of the church at the time, made a remark to the congregation which goes thus, "where are you while a few Anglicans lead you?"³⁴ Interestingly, the town union elections were to hold a few days from the day the statement was made.³⁵ Anthony Ejeagwu, who later won the subsequent election was reported to have stood up and promised the Reverend Father that the few Anglicans would never rule again.³⁶

One may not be surprised by the statement coming from someone who was contesting an election and needed the popular advantage of the Catholic Church in the community to win. However, the trend of relying on a religious group to attain leadership position was entirely alien to the Agulu community prior to the penetration and solidification of the two major Christian denominations in the community. Traditionally, the people placed the burden of leadership on those who had such characteristics as age, honesty, valour and meritorious achievements.³⁷ In other words, Christianity directly or indirectly introduced schism and group prejudice in the Agulu socio-political milieu. Interestingly, from the time Fr. Uchem made the above

statement, subsequent PGs of APU were of the Catholic faith. Therefore, a decade of the leadership of the town union government under PGs from the Roman Catholic congregation stirred suspicion from the non-Catholics. The suppressed distaste which the non-Catholic members of the APU nursed as a result of the alleged statements from Fr. Uchem and Chief Ejeagwu came to the fore with the election of Mr. Uzokwe in 1990. Many people agreed that Uzokwe was a man of questionable character.³⁸ His election, therefore, appeared to confirm the fears of non-Catholics on the assumed planned domination by the Catholics, as the questionable Uzokwe was a Catholic. From indications, it was likely that the man was elected only because of his Christian denomination and not integrity or competence. The decade old Fr. Uchem's statement was then brought to bear. The town union became partially factionalised and the Anglican or non-Catholic faction refused to accept Uzokwe as the new PG. Consequently, they refused to give allegiance to him.³⁹ However, the traditional ruler of the community, H.R.H Igwe E.U. Ejidike, playing a very crucial role of an arbiter, intervened on the matter and the Anglican faction were appeased with the understanding that the town will acknowledge the existence of two major Christian denominations and as such make allowances for fairness in positions in its governing body.⁴⁰

Before, the conflict under study, Agulu town had experienced a traditional leadership tussle. After the death of the first Igwe of Agulu, H.R.H Igwe O. Ofojebe I in 1964, the community was preparing the burial ceremony when the civil upheavals and the concomitant Nigeria-Biafra war stalled events. After the war in 1970, the position of Igwe was tussled between Emmanuel Ejidike and Stephen Ukoh. During this tussle, the town experienced a mild disunity but not along Christian denominational lines.⁴¹ The mild division brought about by the kingship tussle between Ejidike and Ukoh (though took place in a post-Christian era in the town) depicts the nature of conflict causal factors in the town before the Christian incursion. Ejidike was tainted with the brush of the *Osu* caste system, thereby gravely questioning his eligibility to be the traditional ruler (Igwe).

Nonetheless, the claim was not authenticated but a faction in the community vehemently opposed him. On the other hand, Ejidike was a known man of character, and integrity. He was known for his astute diplomatic skills. This endeared him to many. The tussle ended with the death of Ukoh and also with the recognition of Ejidike by the then government of East-Central region.⁴²

In 1992, Igwe Ejidike died and the search for a new Igwe ensued. According to the section 110 of the APU constitution, the institution of Igwe shall rotate between the two divisions of Agulu, in essence, between Agulu Ebeteghete and Agulu Ebemonu.⁴³ This was to ensure fairness in the crown system as it was perceived to be in the town union system. The late Igwe Ejidike came from Agulu Ebemonu. Invariably, the mandate should go to Agulu Ebeteghete but unfortunately, the people of Agulu Ebeteghete could not put their acts together to present a candidate for the crown, because of the crisis that was already brewing in the town union body.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, at the time of the death of Igwe Ejidike the APU was already in a state of disarray. At the end of Mr. Uzokwe's tenure as the town union President General, the position was to come to Zone A, going by the zoning formula. The zone conducted an election and could not reach a consensus. The election was between Prof. S.I. Agajelu and Chief Mike Okoli. According to the result of the election, Chief Okoli won the election. It is important to note that Chief Okoli was a Roman Catholic, while Professor Agajelu belonged to the Anglican faith. Citing the 1990 election and equally building a case with the documented Fr. Uchem's statement based on denominational interests made at the Annual General Meeting in Madonna Catholic Parish almost a decade ago, the Anglican indigenes of Zone A rejected the election result. Failure to produce a consensus candidate by the zone kept the seat of the town union presidency vacant for the meantime, as that of the Igwe throne. The foregoing shows the linkage effect between the town union government and the crown in Agulu, and this may have also informed the decision to minimize the involvement of the Igwe in the affairs of the town union. In furtherance, the majority of the members of APU, who

were Catholics, went on to inaugurate Chief Okoli as the town union President General. This could be said to be the immediate cause of the secession of the Anglican minority members, who went ahead to form a parallel town union, the Agulu Development Union (ADU).⁴⁵

It is a truism that the conflict being examined originated from parochial religious sentiments. However, empirical investigation shows that personality clashes may have exacerbated the situation. According to Sylvester Ifeakor, some illustrious sons of Agulu: Dan Ogbuefi, Chike Ozueh (the sectional Igwe of ADU during the crisis), Mike Okoli (the sectional PG of APU during the crisis), and Frank Obi were scrambling for a share at Ezu (the Agulu Lake environs) after it was declared a tourism zone by the state government. Ifeakor believes that the mentioned influential men of Agulu went on to level allegations and counter-allegations against each other claiming that there was clandestine motive to sell out the *Ezu*.⁴⁶ Some school of thought in Agulu, which Ifeakor obviously belonged to considering the information he gave, believed that when Chief Okoli was accepted by the sectional members of the town union as the PG, Chief Ozue and Chief Obi brought the Ezu case to the town union government in order to spite the new PG.⁴⁷

However, further empirical investigation shows that Chief Ogbuefi published articles accusing twelve men of Agulu, including Chief Ozue and Chief Obi of attempting to confiscate and sell the *Ezu*. This accusation was popularly believed by the members of the ADU to be informed by the fact that the “Agulu twelve” were led by an Anglican, Prof S.I. Agajelu.⁴⁸ The twelve accused went ahead to file a case of libel against Ogbuefi at the High Court in Awka and a prolonged court litigation ensued.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, the accused, who were mostly Anglicans, further called out Chief Ogbuefi (a Catholic), accusing him of attempting to garner popular sympathy by involving the congregation of the Catholic Church in the Ezu case. In essence, Ogbuefi was accused of organising gatherings of the members of the Catholic faith with the purpose of swaying their opinion to his advantage.⁵⁰ This

development complicated the already existing conflict and further elongated it.

The Course of the Conflict

The constitution of the Agulu Development Union (ADU) was drafted in the first quarter of 1993,⁵¹ thereby sealing the formation of a parallel town union in Agulu. As pointed out in the previous section of this paper, the December 1992 election was the trigger that shot off the conflict. However, there were other developments that accelerated the secession of the Anglican members of the town union and the resultant formation of another town union. One of such developments was the financial misconduct of the incumbent PG of the town union before the 1992 election, Mr. Anthony Uzokwe. The Uzoke's administration failed to present the audit report on the financial activities of the administration.⁵² Many members of the town union wrote letters and petitions, but the Anglican elites in the town union seized the situation as an instrument to effect their secession following their opposition of the December 1992 election. A letter written by the National Financial Secretary of APU during Uzokwe's regime, Engr. Lazarus Enemuoh, exposed the financial impropriations of Mr. Uzokwe. The letter was addressed to the National Legal Adviser of the APU. Enemuoh in the letter states *inter alia*:

...first and foremost is the Audit Report which was prepared and sent to N.E.C and the A.P.U general, which both bodies accepted in principle since the past 2 years. Up till today, the National Executive Committee of the union had never debated the Audit Report and this had happened about 20 times...⁵³

According to S.I. Agajelu, "we asked questions, how the government of a town can rule for three years without presenting a clear financial account of their stewardship."⁵⁴ The failure to provide answers to the questions hastened the disintegration and division of the town union. What is more, the general speculation, especially among the already aggrieved Anglican members of the

town union was that a top player in the conflict, Chief Dan Ogbuefi, who had already accused some people of attempting to sell a community property, was actually sailing the boat of the government of APU on behalf of the absentee leader, Uzokwe.⁵⁵ Therefore, it was believed in many quarters that Ogbuefi championed the financial misappropriations.

The town union crisis, which later effectively metamorphosed into a religious conflict, had a rippling effect in the Agulu community. Other issues bordering on accusation of corruption, usurpation, attempted domination, disloyalty, and unpatriotic behaviours emerged. All these issues had streaks of religious sentiments and they caused long court litigations, which ate into the human and material resources of the town. As noted earlier, the conflict erupted with the town's throne vacant following the death of Igwe Ejidike. Another delicate issue therefore ensued and that was the question of succession to the throne. In 1998, members of the APU met and presented Chief I.E. Obodoakor as candidate for Igwe.⁵⁶ Many believed that the selection and presentation of Chief Obodoakor as candidate to be crowned Igwe was in contravention to the section 17 of the Anambra State traditional rulers law of 1981, which stipulates that where the selection or appointment of a traditional ruler was disputed in a town or community, the commissioner or chieftaincy matters may take steps to reconcile the disputants, or cause administrative inquiry to be held in respect of such dispute.⁵⁷ After some skirmishes, Chief Obodoakor was eventually crowned the Igwe and was certified by the state government in 1998. However, the members of the ADU refused to accept Obodoakor as Igwe and went ahead to crown Chief Chike Ozueh, an active member of the parallel union, Igwe, thereby precipitating another long court litigation. There was also the legal contest of the existence of the ADU.⁵⁸

Conclusion

Even though peace returned to Agulu in 2002 through the concerted efforts of the Agulu Transition Committee led by Chief Oliver Afamefuna,⁵⁹ an indelible mark has been made in the sands of time of the community.⁶⁰ The conflict broadly showed the potential devastating effect of religious bigotry. Unfortunately, religious bigotry remains a canker worm that continues to eat deeply into the Igbo society. This lingering problem could be attributed to the African attitude to the major world religions that diffused to region through their contact with the outside world. It is a popular cliché that Africans are now more “Christian” than the Europeans who brought the religion to them. In essence, religious conflicts are not peculiar to Igboland. However, considering the communalism that could be said to be an innate character of the Igbo people, the divisions which the “new” religions tend to acculturate has become a cause for concern. What is more, religion and politics have been tied together in Igboland to the point that their disintegrative tendencies are glaring. It has been a norm for politicians to take advantage of the large number of the adherents of same faith in a constituency to score more votes in secular government elections. Also, the politicians of the minority faiths are known to easily manipulate the sympathies of their members to spread the fear of domination. These attitudes have proved generally unhealthy for the socio-political and even economic growth and development of Igboland. It is pertinent to note that Agulu had enjoyed remarkable dose of internal peace, harmony and tranquility since the post Nigeria-Biafra war years prior to 1990. In other words, 1970 to 1990 can be regarded as two decades of peace and progress in Agulu. It is equally necessary to note that the discussed conflict did not degenerate to arms engagement and blood bath by parties concerned. Even though the conflict affected relationships between brothers, in-laws, members of the same kindred and so on, it was never allowed to escalate into fi

Endnotes

¹CynadoEzeogidi, “Conflict Resolution in Traditional Pre-colonial Igbo Society,” <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/335083031/> accessed on April 17, 2020.

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