

# **A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Case Study of Anglican Churches in Ụkwàniland, Delta State, Nigeria (1900-1941).**

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## **Abstract**

The item one on the theological debate in African Christianity would appear to be dealing with this problem of African identity. The theoretical framework employed in this study is the “Psycho-Cultural Conflict” theory which emphasizes the role of culturally induced conflict based on the fears that individuals and groups experience which force them to see threats, whether real or imagined, and to suspect the motives of others around them (Lake and Rothschild 1996). This was the case in Ụkwàniland during the modern missionary period that necessitated a series of social conflicts between Anglicanism and ‘Ụkwànísm’. Hence, using the case study and the historical approaches to the study of religion, this chapter is concerned about the patterns of social conflicts in an indigenous community. While identifying the stake-holders, their interests, and the attempts made to address these social issues, the study reveals that some of the social conflicts have been resolved under various conditions and that some of them that have defiled solutions are still on; each with historical lessons that may be learnt from them. This study concludes by stating that in a peoples’ struggle for cultural identity there is the need to employ bargaining and exchange as a means of conflict resolution of which the past speaks to the present. Anglican Churches in Ụkwàniland should take seriously the socio-cultural aspirations of the indigenes.

## **Introduction**

The item one on the theological debate in African Christianity would appear to be the nature of African past. Almost every work by an African scholar in the field of religion is in some way dealing with this problem of African identity (Afigbo, 1981; King, 1995; Platveot, 1996; Sanneh, 2000; Anderson, 2002; Onyeidu, 2004; Gundani, 2005; Kalu, 2005; Odili, 2005); ones past is a clue to one’s identity, without it one would not know oneself, to break from ones past is to remain rootless and insecure. The realization of this in Ụkwàniland during the modern missionary period necessitated a series of social conflicts between Anglicanism and ‘Ụkwànísm’. This study, therefore, focuses on some aspects of social conflict experienced in that indigenous African society. It is historically concerned about the patterns of social conflicts at a local level: who were the stake-holders; what were their interests, and what attempts were made to address these social issues; which of them have been resolved and under what conditions; which of the conflicts have defiled solution, how many of the problems are still on; and what historical lessons may be learnt from them? Hence, this study, “A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Case Study of Anglican Churches in Ụkwàniland, Delta State, 1900-1941”.

## **A Concise Ethnography of the Ụkwàni.**

The Ụkwàni -speaking people, of the Niger Delta, occupies the area lying approximately between longitude 6°6, and 6°42, East, and latitudes 6°31, and 5°251 North. The Ụkwàni comprise one of the major ethnic groups of the Delta State region, the others being the Igbo (Asaba), Itsekiri, Ijaw, Isoko, Ika and Urhobo (*This Day* 17 Apr. 2002; Aweto, 2003). The geographical boundaries of the territory are as follows: on the North by the Edo speaking people; on the south by the Ijo; on the East by the Niger River; on the West by Urhobo and Isoko speaking people, on the North-East by Ika and Aniocha people; and on the South-East by Ahoada Local Government of the Rivers State.

The geographical position of Ụkwàni places the country within two belts: deltaic swampy forests, which occupy the southern and South-Eastern coastal towns and villages, and the tropical rain forests, situated in the Northern part of the territory. In the swampy region, numerous creeks and impassable dense forests abound, and there are floods in certain periods of the year. Many Ụkwàni people are large-scale farmers. Those living in communities traversed by rivers and creeks also fish. Rubber and palm oil extraction have been the major source of income. The Italian company AGIP commissioned the first Independent Power Plant (IPP) built by an oil company in Nigeria (at Kwale). The area has a reputation for providing a business-friendly environment. Indigenous arts include basket weaving, metalwork and sculpture (*Okpu-Uzo*). The Ụkwàni are also widely known for their music, having produced such artistes as Charles Iwegbue, Ali Chukwuma, King Ubulu, Rogana Ottah, John Okpor, Queen Azaka, Orji Moore, Eric Enuma, and many others. Their music is one of the main influences they have had over their neighbors, many of whom have

adopted Ụkwuàni music as their own traditional music. They remain a socially tight-knit group. Community unions and clubs are the rule, even among those who have emigrated to North America, Europe, or Asia. These organizations routinely hold festivals and celebrations. Marriage and burial rites are also often the occasion for elaborate ceremonies. The people are deeply religious, like other African societies (Mbiti, 1969) they believe in the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*), pantheon of divinities, myriads of spirits, the ancestors (who play vital roles in their lives) and magic.

Grimes and Grimes (2003) claim that the dialects called Ụkwuàni (Ukwani, Ukwali, Kwale), Aboh (Eboh) and Ndoni are spoken among 150,000 people in the regions of Delta State, Ndokwa West, Ndokwa East and Ukwuani Local Government Areas (LGA) and the Ndoni of Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA in Rivers State. They also note that these dialects form a cluster within the Igbo language cluster. Nevertheless, the Ụkwuàni dialect, which is intelligible with the dialects of Aboh and Ndoni, is distinct enough from Igbo to be considered a separate Igboid language. They are by origin a mixture of Bini (Benin) and Igbo extraditions (Odili, 2010).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework employed in this study is the “Psycho-Cultural Conflict” theory which emphasizes the role of culturally induced conflict. It contends that though there are different forms of identities, the one that is based on people’s ethnic origin and the culture that is learnt on the basis of that ethnic origin is one of the most important ways of explaining social conflicts. Identity is thus seen to be the reason for social conflicts. This theory further contends that social conflicts occur when some people are discriminated against or deprived of satisfaction of basic psychological needs and aspirations on the basis of their ethnic identity. Crighton (1991) in Faleti (2006), building on Horowitz’s ‘fear of extinction’ thesis, Volkan’s ‘fear of dying off’ thesis, and Rothschild’s ‘fear of the future’ thesis, notes that social conflicts are identity-driven and grow out of the feelings of powerlessness. In consonance to this, Rothschild and Groth (1995) in Faleti (2006) asserts that a history of humiliation, oppression, victimization, feelings of inferiority and other forms of experiences which wear away a person’s dignity and self-esteem and lead people to resort to conflict constitute part of what have been referred to as the ‘pathological dimension of ethnicity’. Lake and Rothschild (1996), in another vein, postulates that the fears that individuals and groups experience force them to see threats, whether real or imagined, and to suspect the motives of others around them. This was the case when Anglicanism came in contact with Ụkwuàni socio-cultural values in 1900 through 1941.

### **Sources of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Ukwuaniland, 1900-1941.**

The Christianity that came to Ụkwuàniland during the Niger Expeditions of 1841, 1845 and 1857 were steeped with Western personnel and culture. The militant model of evangelisation (Makintosh, 1965), which advocates a ruthless elimination of anything non-Western, and a radical departure from the past as a necessity for salvation in the Church, was employed. This evangelical model constituted a series of social conflict between Anglicanism and ‘Ụkwuàni’, some of which are discussed below.

#### **1. Marriage System**

In Ụkwuàniland, marriage customs are designed to ensure social equilibrium; to prevent moral laxity and social degeneracy. It ensures protection for all members of the family and societal continuity. This is one aspect of the people’s traditional value that has greatly been a source of social conflict with the Church. In Ụkwuàniland, there are traditional beliefs about marriage, which include polygyny, the consideration of a wife as a possession, divorce and wife inheritance. Among the Ụkwuàni Anglicans marriage ceremony in the church was not an alternative to the traditional marriage ceremony. The essential custom in traditional marriage including *imefe onyiye* (dowry) and *ifo ibu* (paying of homage to in-laws) were carried through in any case, whether or not, there was a church ceremony. However, few fathers refused to accept any dowry at all. Among these were Achunike Odagwe of Isselegu (Ejechi, 2009), Matthew Ishiana of Ugiri-Ama (Agbadaobi, 2009), Peter Onyegu and Andrew Otuya of Utue-Ogume (Atieku, 2009). The feeling that without a dowry there can be no true marriage was so deep among the people that lack of it, even willingly agreed to at the time of getting married, caused trouble later on (Asuaeka, 2005). At Umutu in 1931 one Awari Ogu went to demand dowry from his son-in-law, Oza, whom he believed was maltreating his daughter, Awuli, because he married her “on a platter of gold” (Osaewe, 2006). Most of the converts went all lengths to circumvent the demands of the church that there should be no exchange of dowry in the marriage of their children. Their understanding of dowry as the seal of marriage was considered more important than the church ceremony.

In the belief of the people, there is more to the dowry and other festivities of their traditional marriage ceremony than just the union of two people (as Christians conceives it). In the rituals and the slaughtering of animals (goats and cocks) during the negotiations and after, the ancestors who are part of the family are invoked. Without their blessing and good will, the success of the marriage union would be in jeopardy. This was so strong in the minds and emotions of the people that most parents risked a dishonest attitude contrary to the requirements

of the church in order to be in good relationship with the ancestors and the community. Put tersely, what was considered as a Christian marriage ceremony was in reality a mixture of traditional and Christian values. Some of the local elements Anglican converts used in a traditional marriage included log of wood, kola nuts, bitter kola, yam tubers, alligator pepper, and gin. These elements have different connotations and they were used significantly by the leader of the occasion, usually the head Christian, for prayer.

The resolution of this aspect of social conflict was not an easy one. In 1915 at Iyege-Ame, one John Okwuene gave his daughter Ochonogo out for marriage to one Enitime without accepting dowry from the later (Ogbuka, 2008). The family members of Okwuene complained to Andrew Agunebe, the head Christian that their daughter was given out without the customary marriage rites. Agunebe was said to have considered their complaint as trivial on the grounds that such customary rites were fetish and unchristian. Members of Emitime's family, on the other hand, threatened not to recognize and accept Ochonogu as lawfully married into their family unless the traditional marriage rites were performed. This tension led to the suspension of the marriage for over a year. In 1916, the aggrieved families attacked Andrew Agunebe on his way to the farm. He was beaten mercilessly and tied to a tree for attempting to introduce a new form of marriage rite at Iyege-Ame.

A similar incidence occurred in 1928 at Umukwata when Theophilus Ukpe, the head Christian, wedded one Pius Abamba and Mary Ikechukwu; the father of Mary had insisted that his daughter must be married in the traditional way (Nedu, 2008). This he believed would earn him some respect in the community. Furthermore a marriage contracted in the Anglican way would mean a denial of his dowry rights. The tension that ensued led to his imprisonment by the then Kwale District Court. He was said to have attacked the congregation on a Sunday with a cutlass. He openly assaulted three women and got a man wounded. The head Christian reported the incidence to the then District Officer in Kwale who ordered his arrest. He was subsequently tried and sentenced to six months imprisonment. It was during this period of incarceration that his daughter was wedded to Pius Abamba, who later left for Obiaruku.

The situation was, however, not antagonistic in all Ukwuani communities. Some Anglican converts in most Ukwuani communities gave out their daughters in the traditional way. Among these was Obiasa Ozuam of Eziokpor (Meka, 2006). This, however, was met with the displeasure of F. Abanum, who subjected the former to a disciplinary action of suspension from partaking of the Lord's Supper. In 1928, Sunday Chukwuka, an interpreter followed suit and gave out his daughter in the customary way. When F. Abanum wanted to carry out a disciplinary caldron against him, the Anglican converts at Eziokpor appealed to the Church at Obiaruku for a new head Christian. This request was not initially granted until the Anglican Church at Eziokpor started recording a decline in the number of worshippers. In 1929, F. Abanum was transferred to Ashaka and the Eziokpor church was left without a head Christian for a period of two years.

The situation at Emu Unor in 1940 was quite dramatic (Okwuegbue, 2002). The influential Wajah, who was a staunch financial supporter of the church, gave out his daughter also in a traditional way. On the said day of the occasion, he was said to have invited the members of the church to his compound. He asked the head Christian then, Peter Akpogbue Okwuegbue to conduct the marriage. In the course of the ceremony, Wajah announced, to the amusement of all that:

Our in-laws have come with some Kola-nuts, bitter kola, palm wine, logs of woods, som tubers of yam and some money ... since they are ignorant of our Christian way, we should bear with them and accept them as they are; after all, no libations are made (Okwuegbue 2002)

Recalling the incidence, Peter Akpogbue Okwuegbue (2002) states, "We were perplexed. There was a mixed feeling. Since he was a very influential man, most of us stayed back". However, some of the brethren resented his actions and left the occasion. Wajah was a member of the *Onotu Ukwu* and a staunch supporter of the church there. It was through his assistance that the church acquired some piece of land at the Ikosa quarters where a church hall was erected.

It was not until the late 1940s that the church welcomed a mixture of traditional Christian marriage rights in Ukwuaniland. The native marriage was concluded with prayers said by the parents of the couple who prayed for good luck as they started their own life as husband and wife. This was followed with feasting of the guest. In most cases, the native marriages were concluded in the church with thanksgiving. It always came up on a Sunday that followed the day of the marriage. On that Sunday, some couples brought their rings for blessing, thereafter, the thanksgiving followed. Certificate for the blessing were issued.

Another marriage system that posed intractable to Anglican churches in Ukwuaniland in the period under study was polygamy. With the second phase of Anglicanism in Ukwuaniland, between 1900 and 1941, the "foreign" indigenous agents brought along with them the practice of monogamy, which is distinctively opposed to polygamy. They adjudged monogamy the ideal system. They were convinced that the Christian society must be built on Christian family life and that the ideal of the Christian family can only be realized in monogamy. Polygamy was out rightly condemned. No tolerance or sympathy whatsoever was shown to polygamists. They were not to be baptized until all wives but one had been divorced.

The indigenes embraced Christianity with open arms because they were liberated from traditional

restrictions. Majority of those converted were polygamists. Polygamy was accepted into the church because most of the powerful chiefs who played significant roles in the church were polygamists. The church, in terms of financial support and deference in terms of local politics, granted some powerful and influential men the privilege of having a special seat reserved for them. Nevertheless, the catechumenate principle was applied; they could be catechumenated, but once any of them decided to proceed for baptism, it became obligatory on him to dismiss all his wives but one. No principles were laid down as to which of the wives were to be dismissed and which were not. Generally, the youngest and most fertile of them was chosen. For instance, Ebeni, the head Christian at Abbi was refused baptism because he was a polygamist (Eseagu, 2006).

Among those who dismissed their wives was Chief P.T. Itue of Obinumbe who had three wives and a concubine beside. He sent all but one away before he was baptized in 1925 (Abamba, 2005). Another convert, one Oza Ozegebe Osaewe, who paid this price no doubt, saw it as a sacrifice. He saw his action as a qualification for special recognition in the church. His son's remarks give us a clearer picture of this issue, "For the sake of being a Christian, my father abandoned three of his wives, and since then he was recognized as the second leader of the church in our town" (Osaewe, 2005). An informant confessed that the first sermon he heard was, "Come to church, marry one wife, and be baptized so that you may go to heaven". Thus, there were polygamists who embraced Anglicanism and had to give up all their wives but one before baptism. The situation was such that one of our oral sources, (Atieku, 2009), complained:

Polygamy was a hindrance to the spread of the gospel. It was the cause of most troubles....  
Monogamy bids fair to be more dangerous than even polygamy. There were thrice as many girl children as males... and when all the people of a village were inside a church, one saw the disproportion. There was no war or emigration to alter the proportion. It seemed to be natural under polygamy

With the passage of time some polygamists who had divorced their wives but one returned to their vomits. Among these were Chiefs Thomas Azonobi of Umutu (Osaewe, 2006), Paul Akpe of Abbi (Adenu, 2005), C.Y. Osakwe of Umolu (Ikogoli, 2005) and Omenogor Ifedioga of Amai (Utuh, 2009). These, however, were not excommunicated from the church because of their vital role to the growth and development of Anglican Churches in their various communities. In 1927, Omejona Okolo of Emu Unor (Agwuatulu, 2002) was excommunicated from the church because he welcomed back two of his wives. Prior to this incidence, six months after he had divorced his wife in order to be baptized, he started complaining that the work on the farm was too much for him and his last wife, whom he had retained. When the situation became unbearable he went to his in-laws and pleaded with them to return his wives. He claimed that his divorce to them was done in ignorance. With the return of his wives, he was excommunicated from the church. It is pertinent to state that in some Ukwuani communities, prominent patrons and individuals were not baptized because they refused to divorce their wives. Among these were M. Oza of Umutu (Osaewe, 2006), John Onuabo of Isselegu (Ejechi, 2009) and M. Adenu of Abbi (Ewefah, 2006).

However, there was a case of one Philip Okpor of Sanubi who proved indispensable because of his role as an interpreter (Ezenwa, 2009). He was a trader in Warri where he embraced the Anglican faith. In 1927, following the liquidation of his business settled down to farming. The then church Agent, Bernard Onyeigbo, was an Urhobo man. Philip Akpor, having stayed in Warri for a period was able to understand Urhobo, he hardly spoke the language. He merely interpreted what he heard into Ukwuani. In June 1927 he divorced his wives in order to be baptized. Two months later, he called them back. This caused uproar in the church, and he was subsequently suspended. Within a period of one month of his suspension, the number of adherents reduced drastically to the minimal. My informant recalled that there were occasions where no one attended church services. Realizing the indispensibility of Okpor, Bernard Onyeigbo tried to persuade him to send them away. When this proved intractable, Okpor was recalled to his position as interpreter. This was a rare case.

In 1928, Anglican agents in Ukwuaniland met in Obiaruku to deliberate on the problem of polygamy (D.C.C., 1928). Some of the agents such as E. Okolo of Ezionum, D. Otuata of Orogun-Ijere, J. Edomete of Emu-Unor, and S. Oseji of Umutu maintained that polygamists were to dissolve all polygamous relations before baptism. Some argued that it was against the will of God for a polygamist to dismiss his wives but one. Among these were S. Chukwu of Obiogo, M.F. Nwosu of Ebendo, P. Okwudinta of Utue-Ogume and D. Nigbo of Isselegu. Others who argued for the validity of Old Testament polygamous marriages maintained that since no marriages were indissoluble before conversion, polygamous marriages were not to be dissolved before baptism. Others, like V. Omolu of Umukwata and B. Chikwendu of Obiaruku, while agreeing that polygamous marriages were undesired, held that neither the missions nor the colonial government had the right to declare them illegal. A. Ochei of Abbi and C. Echenum of Ashaka argued that in terminating polygamous relationships, care is needed to remove bitterness and minimize suffering to the dismissed women. B. Maduegbuna of Utagba- Ogbe, and E.G. Ebeni of Asaba-Ase maintained that the unconverted women and the childless should give room to the converted and the child bearing ones. Members of this school of thought added that a sincere convert whose conscience would not allow him to dismiss his wives for fear of exposing them to perils, should be permitted to

keep them. C. Achigbue of Obinumbe was a lone voice when he argued that although Christian monogamy is the ideal marriage, the Old Testament shows, nonetheless, that polygamous marriage was legal. He observed that Titus 1:6 referred to a polygamist. He was said to have baptized two polygamists, Peter Ikoko and Matthew Enunekwu, without giving them posts in the church. (Osaewe, 2005). He insisted that:

If a convert before becoming a Christian, had married more wives than one, then in accordance with the practice of the Jews and primitive Christian Churches, he should be permitted to keep them all. However, such a person should not be eligible to any office in the Church. In no other cases should polygamy be tolerated. In case of polygamy antecedently to conversions, the husband should boulder to retain and provide for all his wives as such, unless they choose to do otherwise (D.C.C., 1928).

Achigbue's view, at the end of deliberation, was adopted. This resolution went along way to make Ukwuani polygamists to feel at home with Anglican churches in their various communities.

## 2. Name and Naming Ceremony

Some of the Anglican agents that evangelized Ukwuaniland considered Anglicanism in its Western guise, the best for Ukwuani converts. Many of them believed that converts who did not go by European names could not be genuine Christians. They had a ready response among the early converts. The giving of European names was much easier with children whose parents had given them for initiation into the mysteries of reading and writing. Their meaningful indigenous names were described as "heathenish" and they were given Hebrew and European ones which were meaningless to them. In this way renunciation of Ukwuani names was seen as indispensable to conversion. It was not uncommon to find names such as Paul, John, Mathew, Andrew, Theophilus, Peter, and Abraham.

The extent to which some Anglican agents and Ukwuani converts regarded renunciation of Ukwuani names as indispensable to conversion may be illustrated by their reaction to the proposal of the District Church Council at Abbi 1937 about the imposition of European names on converts by Anglican agents. Prompted by the "desire to remain Ukwuani, the Council decided in a minute, that Ukwuani converts should be encouraged to retain their names provided these names had no heathenish connotation (D.C.C., 1937). One of the Anglican agents, B.C.E. Nwoso took the minute seriously. He refused to baptize children with names other than Ukwuani ones. His reaction resulted in many parents leaving the Anglican Church for the Catholic Church at Abbi (Eseagu, 2006). There were those who did not leave the church but only threw off Ukwuani names immediately after the christening ceremony and gave their children foreign ones (Usama, 2009).

The trend, however, changed at the turn of the second decade of the twentieth century. There was a massive reversion to Ukwuani names. According to Peter Okuegbue (2002), "This reversion to Ukwuani names became necessary when the converts realized that the Urhobo and Igbo Anglican agents, in addition to their European names, retained their indigenous names". From the nineteen twenties onwards important figures in Ukwuaniland discarded their foreign names. To name a few, Paul, C. Davies of Obodeti became Abamum Osabiku (Amaweh, 2006), Charles Williams of Umukwata became Opiah Ebeagu (Ossai, 2006) James Anderson of Utagba Unor became Ossai, Achonogor (Idu, 2002) and Thomas Alison of Isselegu became Okwuse Onyenike (Ejechi, 2009). Most of those who cast off alien names did so because these names separated them in feeling from their own fellow citizens, making them strangers in their own country (Maduagu, 2004). There were, however, some indigenous converts who did not totally revert to Ukwuani names. They, in addition to their European names given to them at baptism, retained their native names. Such converts include Alfred Maduagu of Ogume (Maduagu, 2004), Johnson Agwaturu of Emu-Unor (Agwaturu, 2002), J. Anaweh of Umutu (Osaewe, 2006), John Idu of Obodeti (Idu, 2002) and Andrew Osabiku of Umutu (Osabiku, 2006). The most important factor that made them decide to assume Ukwuani names, especially Ukwuani surnames, was that names helped them to trace their descent. The value of this when marriage issues arise is obvious. It makes possible observance of the law forbidding marriage by members of the same blood group. Significant as the assumption of African names was, not all cast off their foreign names; some retained European names as an appendage to their names. Most of those who reverted to Ukwuani names did not return completely to the traditional naming system of *Igo Ani Ezhi*.

*Igo Ani Ezhi* is the traditional dedication of a newly born baby to Olise-Ezhi, the arch-divinity of the people. As the chief agent of Chukwu on earth, Olise-Ezhi is believed to be the custodian of life. Consequently, a newly born baby must not see the world until homage is paid to this divinity in form of ceremonial service on the seventh day. The people believe that new born babies and their mothers have the potency of defiling the land, the divinities, the warriors and the priests if they move about in society without worshipping the arch-divinity as prescribed by the nso ani. This rite has been indigenized. Christian mothers and their newborn babies were advised to keep indoors for seven days. At the end of the seventh day, instead of rendering service to *Olise-Ezhi*, they were instructed to offer prayers and praises to Chukwu. Usually members of *Otu Ekpere Eke*, the *Eke* prayer band, helped Christian mothers in this ceremony. On the seventh day, the head of the prayer band led the

group very early in the morning to the house of the person performing the outdoor ceremony. Like the traditional priest, the Christian leader ordered the parents to bring the baby outside. Nevertheless, unlike the traditional priest who took the baby to the altar of *Olise-Ezhi*, the Christian leader merely carried the baby from its parents and offered prayers to Chukwu directly as he and his group remained standing in front of the house. After this dedicatory and thanksgiving prayer, the leader, like the traditional priest, touched the baby four times against the opened palms of the mother, pronouncing the same traditional cultic blessing, *Nwa Kene n'atanyali i n'eka*. "Let this baby be glued forever in your palms". In other words, let this baby abide with you forever. After this brief ceremony, the members, the parents and the baby entered the house. After a brief intercessory prayer, members ate whatever the parents set before them as a sign of merriment. Such occasions were marked with Christian songs, choruses and dancing in place of the traditional cultic singing and dancing which usually followed the *Igo Olise Ezhi* ceremony. Many people regarded this Christian attitude as a form of compromise with traditional religion. However, it seemed that Christians in Ukwuani had begun to feel the gravity of many of their members falling prey to the ostentatious ceremony attached to *Igo Olise Ezhi* and wisely interpolated a traditional custom into their system of worship without actually entangling himself or herself thereby. Those who were opposed to this compromise saw the idea of isolating newly born babies and their mothers or even forbidding them from public sight for seven days as superstitious and blind support of primitive traditional rites. Most Christians in Ukwuani land felt that their approach to the traditional outdoor ceremony agreed in principle with Biblical descriptions and that it was unnecessary to violate any *nso ani* that did not conflict with Christian norms.

### 3. Faith Healing

Another aspect of Ukwuani religious institution that was source of social conflict was the phenomenon of faith healing. Some Ukwuani converted to Anglicanism due to one problem or the other. The converts rejected traditional mode of ritual healing, and in its place, embraced faith healing. When a child in an Anglican household felt feverish, the child's parents would not even consider going to *dibia* or *Ogbefa*; the child would be taken to the mission house where prayers were offered intensely for the child's recovery. This, however, posed as a problem in families where one of the parents, especially, the mother was a convert. A case at hand was that of one Ochoma of Ogbegba-Ogume and his wife, Theresa (Idu, 2002). The couple had three sons and a daughter. In 1935, their second son Okwuse took ill. A *dibia* (medicine man) was consulted. He recommended a ritual of cleansing to appease the gods and to effect healing. A date was fixed on which this ritual was to be done. On the set date, Okwuse's mother took him to the church and pleaded with the head Christian, J.C. Nwamkpa, to pray for the child after which he was to be hidden in his house. At the set time of the day, Ochoma and the medicine man arrived only to discover that Okwuse had been taken to the church. Ochoma angrily stormed at the church and demanded for his son. J.C. Nwamkpa told him that heathen rituals were powerless. This was followed by open confrontations that resulted in the beating of Nwamkpa by the relations of Ochoma.

The practice of faith healing was mediated in a long communal context with ecstatic dancing, singing and spiritual experiences akin to those of the African Instituted Churches (AICs), to some degree. Members of the church were people who shared in a similar worldview with the patients, and they handled illnesses in a manner understandable to the people. The church employed healing methods that took into account indigenous Ukwuani causal explanations, and sometimes remedies. Several factors can be adduced for this. First, is the Ukwuani cosmology, which emphasizes the wholeness of life; life is sacramental. The Ukwuani believe that spiritual forces, or one's contravention of ethical codes of the divinities usually cause sickness. Ancestral belief is not left out. The *Ndichie* (ancestors) are believed to influence the activities of their descents. These invariably seemed to have increased the types of sicknesses and their dimensions which ranged from headache to fever, to attacks from various demonic or evil forces. Obstacles in life such as delay in marriage, marriage failure, failure in business, unemployment, loneliness, barrenness, misfortune, bad harvest, juvenile delinquency, among others are attributed to the displeasure of the ancestors or a spirit. Indeed the fear of falling victim to witchcraft and sorcery through the mechanism of evil men and women were the strongest motives for the establishment of prayer bands in Anglican Churches in Ukwuani land within the period under study. Nathaniel Ndiokwere (1981:279) has noted that, "The sense of insecurity is perpetuated in the African milieu by fears of evil spirits, the phenomenon of poisoning ... the unlimited anxiety over fruitlessness in marriage ..." J. Akin Omoyajowo (1970:137) comments rather trenchantly on the same situation:

Africans generally fear the power of witches and the evil spirit, who beset them in their dreams; they worry about their future and want to know what it has in stock for them. In the traditional society they consult the diviner. Orthodox Christianity repudiated this practice and substituted abstract faith (faith healing) for it.

These comments are equally true of the Ukwuani society. It was the urge to have their problems solved that drove some people to the Anglican Churches in Ukwuani land. Consequently, converts suddenly found themselves at home in the new faith, and Christianity then had more meaning for them; it took special concern

for their personal life, their existential problems and assured them security in an incomprehensibly hostile universe. This was what endured the Anglican prayer bands to the hearts of the cross section of Ukwuani society. It is pertinent to state that the prayer bands within the Anglican churches in Ukwuaniland did not transient into independent churches, as was the case of the Cherubim and Seraphim. One reason is that they were not persecuted. In fact leaders of the prayer bands were the head teachers as at then.

#### 4. Investiture

Investiture is another social institution that posed a challenge to Anglican churches in Ukwuaniland. Deserving chieftaincy titles were conferred on distinguished and deserving sons of Ukwuaniland. Some titles, such as the *Okpara Ukwu* and *Inotu*, are conferred based on age, while the title of *Ogbu* was based on performing a feat such as killing of a wild beast or human beings during war. Ritual ceremonies were associated with most of the prestigious titles in Ukwuaniland. As such, title taking was rejected. The rejection was also as a result of missionaries' derogatory attitude to most African social institutions. According to John Idu (2004), a retired catechist:

Among the factors that hindered the progress of the Gospel in Ukwuaniland were ambition to become great men of titles or to receive, which they paid a large amount in goods and money and to have many wives and slaves.

At that time a high premium was placed on the acquisition of traditional titles, many wives and domestic slaves. Some people regarded Christianity that preached against these practices as a stumbling block to be avoided.

Anglican converts who were not title holders were not allowed to participate or give a say to political matters that concerned their villages. Some were denied their filial rights since they could not perform their priestly function of their lineage by virtue of being the oldest person in that lineage. However, with the passage of time, some Anglican converts accepted such traditional titles as *Inotu* and *Isue*. Most of them were baptized members of the church. Jacob Diji was an *Inotu* and the vice-president of the *Isue* society. G.O. Shiekweme, a retired catechist, was a member of the *Okpara\_Uku* court at Abbi (Oboli, 2009). J. Dafi was a member of the *Onotu-Uku* at Obiaruku (Osabikwu, 2006). The research reveals that most of the retired catechist resorted to taking traditional title to augment their status in their various communities. Peter Akpogbue Okuegbue of Emu-Unor is a good example (Okuegbue, 2002). However, not all the converts sought for traditional titles. Convert who lived up to the age of being *the Okpara Uku* did not accept such titles because there was no way they could function as *Okpara Uku* without performing the rituals associated with communal divinities and *Ndichie*. One of such persons was Godwin Okeriaka of Emu-Unor (Okuegbue, 2002).

At a point in time, Godwin Okeriaka became the oldest man, not only in Emu-Unor, but also in the whole of Emu clan. This qualified him to the priest-king position as the *Okpara Uku*. As long as he was alive, no other man would occupy this position without evoking the wrath of the *Ndichie* (ancestors) upon himself. Hence, the community pressed on him to occupy this position and uphold the *Ofo Ndichie* (the ancestral symbol) of Emu-Unor. He, instead, requested that the *Ofo Ndichie* (the ancestral symbol) be brought to his compound, burnt and buried, and a copy of the Holy Bible be given to him in place of *Ofo Ndichie* before he would accept to be the *Okpara Uku*. The community was not ready to bargain the symbol of their traditional beliefs and practices with anything. To strike a compromise, he devolved the title to another next in age. A thing he did five times before he died. However, homage was still paid to him as "*Okpara Uku*" de jure. Chief Osamezu Maledo was to follow his steps in refusing to accept the title of *Onotu* of Ibilijie, a title attained solely by seniority (Okuegbue, 2002).

Mention should also be made of Ubiagba, a onetime *Okpara Uku* of Ezionum (Onenike, 2006). The office of the *Okpara Uku*, which goes to the oldest man in the community carries with it communal ritual worship and ceremonies. It is against this backdrop that Mr. Ubiagu refused to assume the position of the *Okpara Uku*. The traditionalists saw this as a negation of the tradition and customs of the people, and it was unreligious to pass on the post of *Okpara-Uku* to the next person in terms of age. The traditionalists, in pursuance of their custom, carried the symbols of the community divinities, the *Ofo* and *Ndichie* to Ubiagba. He refused to accept them, and consequently abandoned his house. This precipitated a crisis between the Christians and traditionalists.

#### 5. Burial of the Dead

Another important aspect of Ukwuani cultural rite that constituted a source of tension between the church and the Ukwuani was the burial of the dead. The primary concern of the Anglican churches in Ukwuaniland was on how and where the dead could be disposed. The first generation of converts believed that the deceased went straight either to hell or to Paradise. They did not consider that the obsequies performed by the deceased's relations were of any consequence to him and in some ways determined his state in afterlife. Those laying the deceased to rest were the ones reminded of the truth that they would sooner or later follow him; a thing, which ought to teach them to number their days and consider "the vanity of grieving for those whom we must quickly

follow". In the traditional milieu, he who is not accorded a proper burial is not introduced to his *otu* (age group) in the spirit world and if an elder cannot be where the ancestors are and dine with them he wonders about in disquiet harrowing and lacerating his descendants who will remain restless and un-prosperous until the proper funeral rites are performed. This is the reason for a second burial.

The first crop of converts was inhibited from participating in second burial, which was a vital social function of the people. Non-Anglicans considered it mean for a convert not to perform this essential duty to his departed parents. Not to perform it, or even be involved when other members of the extended family circle carry it out was to cut off oneself from them. Not infrequently, pressure was brought to bear on some converts to undertake this rite, or at least "dish out" money for the purpose so that their relations might do it on their behalf. This, in fact, was begging the question. A clear case of how the converts violated the burial custom of the people was illustrated by the episode at Iyege-Ame in 1936 (Ogbuka, 2008). Here the body of a woman who died at child birth was kept over-night in the town against the tradition of the people, whereupon members of the church there were asked to pay the sum of six pounds by the village court. The Christian called it a fine, while the D.O. refuted it and described it as a payment "towards the expenses of purification of the town", which by their actions the converts were said to have polluted. The converts at Iyege-Ame appeared to be utterly defiant to the rules and regulations of traditional society. They felt that Christianity, which they did not attempt to distinguish from European culture, was to supersede Ukwuani religion in all its facets. They did not seem to have believed that they had polluted the town by their action. They did not even give any indication in their letter to the Resident of what they had done. The D.O., however, appeared to have been reliably informed that that constituted their offence for which they were to pay six pounds. The despicable repudiation of Ukwuani traditions and religion by the converts was evident from the tone of their letter:

It is repulsive to decent- intended persons that the body of one who had embraced Christian Religions (sic) should be offered up in sacrifice in compliance with the heathenish idea of a handful of chiefs (Kwale District, 1936).

Against this, the D.O. aptly comments:

The actions of the petitioners ...were repugnant to the principles of the Administration. This pagan custom is a fundamental part of their religion and not the heathenish idea of a handful of chiefs (ibid).

The D.O. correctly read the signs of the time, for were the Christians supported in their defiance of Iyege-Ama customs, "any epidemic, failure of crops or calamity" might have been attributed to the infringement of their customs.

This was to be the case at Asaba-Ase in 1938 when one Ojuma, a member of the Onotu (an eminent chief) who was murdered by robbers in the bush had his body buried under the verandah of his house (Okpochini, 2008). Subsequent to his death calamity threatened the Asaba-Ase people: the rains were excessive. The people throbbing with fear of imminent famine consulted with an *ogbeapha* (a diviner) who declared that the body of Ojuma should not have been buried in the town but in *amuzo* (bad bush) since his death occurred in the bush. Ukwuani people traditionally believe that their dead relatives are to be buried in the family compound. They consider burial outside the compound to be the fate of aliens, the physically handicapped and those who died of contagious diseases or mysterious deaths. The case at *Iyege-Ama* was clearly a fragrant infringement of Ukwuani religion, which the British Administration did well to check.

The conflict between Anglican churches and traditionalists on the subject of burial also centred on the rites and place of burial. The death of a church member was usually announced by repeated ringing of the bell in such a unique manner meant to inform other members of the church that a member had died. When this information had been fully disseminated, the church sits all night long observing a Christian wake keep. In which case, Christian hymns and choruses were sung. The following morning, the corpse was washed, dressed and taken to the church for funeral service. Interment follows immediately at a graveside consecrated by the church agent in charge of the church at the church's cemetery. The tradition then was that, the corpse must be buried in the church's cemetery, were other dead members of the church were buried. In fact, at its initial stage the church believed that the dead, was only physically dead, and that the soul was only at rest and should not have any physical contact with the living. The whole burial ceremony was thus done in an entirely Christian way.

However, this practice did not last for long. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. First, it should be borne in mind that the first converts that the church had were slaves, out-casts, inconsequential people and those who were completely societal miss-fits. Therefore, the society severed all ties with them, even before, they joined Christianity. Hence, the type of burial, which the church accorded them, did not matter so much to the community. Secondly, the early converts were carried away by the euphoria of the new religion. To be buried in the church's cemetery did not only portray one as a full fledged member of the church; there was also the pride among the new converts on the saying that it is good and worthy to live, die and be buried in Christ (i.e. in the church's cemetery).

As the church made achievements, through its various conversion strategies, many important

personalities including chieftaincy holders became professing Christians. When some of these important personalities died, the need to give them befitting burial in the traditional sense of the word became imperative. Hence, Ukwuani Anglican Christians had to introduce some traditional burial rites into the Orthodox Church practice. The church started to tolerate some practices, which it prohibited in the early state of its establishment. The church cemetery was abandoned and the converts wanted their dead to be buried in their homes. It was common to see, during the burial of an Anglican member the practice of Christian and traditional burial rites going on simultaneously. The church members sat at one end of the deceased's compound, singing hymns and choruses while the indigenous people and other traditional cult members sat at another end of the same compound, performing their own traditional wake keeping which might be sometimes highly ritualistic. In fact, before the burial of a Christian, many traditional rites were accorded to the deceased. This included the killing of goat for the deceased relatives. All the relatives present ate the goat, which symbolizes a mystical re-union between the living and the dead. There was also the practice of outing in which the children of the deceased danced at the admiration of those present. The conflict over the traditional presentation of kola nuts and homage paid by various in-laws and distant family members of the deceased has also been amicably resolved. There was also the practice of putting food items in the casket of the deceased. In case of doubtful deaths, the living members invoked the spirit of the deceased to fight whosoever was responsible for its death. The corpse was then taken to the church where a burial service was held in honour of the deceased. This was followed by interment at the deceased's compound, usually at the living room or at the entrance to his compound.

The practice of burying the dead in his living room or at the entrance of his compound was influenced by the indigenous religious belief that the dead is not dead but is a living dead. Some Anglicans who buried their dead in the house revered them so much that some people started wondering whether their living Christian relations were not worshipping the deceased. For example, they poured out libation and expressed their heart desires at the graveside hoping that the deceased would grant such desires. Furthermore, most Christians observed some form of mourning in the traditional fashion. Details vary from community to community. The common features emphasized by tradition and observed by Anglican converts was the importance of restrained behaviour. The bereaved behaved meekly; spoke quietly and softly, avoided jokes and places of amusement; and for a given period of time, which also varies from community to community, there would be no wedding in that homestead. In addition, during the period after the funeral, the spouse of the deceased kept to the homestead strictly until the nine days period of mourning was over. More so, the forms of ritual performed by Christians were often unambiguously identified as traditional ones. There had been a strong tendency to modify and adapt and, in fact to disguise them by avoiding traditional names and some of the traditional ritual details by introducing elements of Christianity and Western traditions. For instance, second, burial had been Anglicized as "memorial service".

Before the advent of Anglicanism, the Ukwuani had a strong believe that life continues after the death of physical body. For them, life continues in the spirit world, as it is in the present physical world of space and time. As John Amaweh (2006) points out, "It is a belief in Ukwuani that the deceased especially if he be a great man should have an attendant or attendants for his services in the world of spirits". Consequently, the dead were given full burial rites and equipped to help them live successfully in the spirit world and to facilitate their peaceful return to the physical world where they are expected to be re-born among their relations. Behind this belief was the elaborate first and second burial rites, which involved human sacrifice in the past. According to our informants:

A chief or person of importance was not buried until the goods necessary to represent his wealth and status adequately, can be brought together, to be placed in the grave with the body. Collecting these goods took time. The corpse was laid in the ground, but not considered buried until all preparations were finished. He was mentioned to the people as being very sick, and might remain in that state for months or even years.

Here again the agents made remarkable changes. Some zealous Christians no longer entertain the idea of reincarnation. They have been "indoctrinated" to believe that man is born once and that after death judgement begins. Similarly, Christianity has condemned the traditional rites of firing of canons, dancing and second burial ceremonies. When the D.C.C. met at Obiaruku in 1937 to consider the interaction between "Christianity and native customs" it was held strongly that it is not right for a Christian to have anything to do with a second burial. This resolution still stands today, in spite of the age-long tradition that the son must perform his filial obligations to his dead father before inheriting his father's property.

## Conclusion

This study has historically illuminated the problematisation of social conflict as a social struggle between people of varied cultural background over values and claims of status and means of social control. It reveals a peoples' struggle for cultural identity and need to employ bargaining and exchange as a means of conflict resolution of which the past speaks to the present. The stake holders in the various types of social conflict in Ukwuani land

were men and women of local prominence who were, hitherto, nameless in missionary, nationalist and institutional genres of African Christian historiography. Their basic concern was to declare their Christian intentions without undermining their Ukwuàni cultural identity. Some of the social conflicts amicably resolved include giving out ones daughter in marriage in the traditional way. Such issues as baptising polygamists have defiled solution and are still an issue of social conflict in the area. It, therefore, behooves on the Church to indigenise those Ukwuàni socio-cultural values that are not inimical to the peaceful co-existence of both religious traditions. Anglican Churches in Ukwuàniland should take seriously the socio-cultural aspirations of the indigenes.

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