

PEACE ROLE OF DEITIES IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION (ATR) IN TRADITIONAL IGBO SOCIETIES OF NIGERIA: THE CASE OF OGHE PEOPLE IN EZEAGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the peace role of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in conflict resolution and management using the traditional Oghe land in Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria as a case study. The emphasis is however on the deities which forms the cardinal part of African traditional religion. Prior to the advent of Christianity in Oghe land and by extension the entire Igbo societies, the African traditional religion and the belief in the deities has long been with the people and is still relevant till date. Thus, Christianity as a religious system with its set of beliefs and religious life did not meet an empty Oghe mind but one which was already preoccupied with (Oghe) traditional thought. It is this preoccupied traditional religious and cultural mind which receives, understands, interprets and applies Christianity in Oghe cum Igbo land. The Oghe man worships the Supreme Deity/God through the smaller or lesser deities which act as official messengers. The deities are known to have provided peaceful resolutions to numerous conflicts situations in Oghe land which were discussed in the course of this paper. In view of this, it is however the modest believe of the authors that this article may not have captured all of the aspects of this study, but one can therefore say that the article has succeeded in extending the frontier of knowledge which other interest researchers can lend their opinion on. Other sundry but related issues like the land, culture and people of Oghe as well as the concepts of deity, peace, conflict and conflict resolution were equally looked at in this paper. This work however employed qualitative historical research methodology to interpret both the secondary and primary data gathered during this study. As young kids who grew up in Agueke; one of the villages in Iwollo, a town in Oghe land where the once famous deity known and referred to as "Ugwu-Agueke" was once domiciled, this paper therefore draws so much from reminiscence or better still an eye witness account to support the thesis presented in this paper. Innate theory, a sub branch of biological theory of conflict was adopted as a theoretical frame work to present a lucid explanation on how man's natural instinct to survive, protect or defend what they have or how his selfish, wicked, destructive and sinful nature has been the bane of conflict in traditional Oghe land nay human societies in general. This study concluded by advocating that those aspect of traditional religion which can help to maintain order and sanity as well as create a peaceful and corruption free society devoid of conflict should be incorporated alongside the western religion; Christianity. This would avoid the situation of throwing away the baby and the birth water which this paper tried to discuss.

Keywords: Deities, religion, Peace, Conflict, Resolution, Oghe people, Tradition, Culture, Igbo societies, and Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

The Igbo people of Southern Nigeria are known for their highly religious nature. They are at present predominantly Christians but were deeply involved in the practice of traditional religion prior to the advent of Christianity in Igbo land in 1857 (Anyabuike, 2004:12). According to Agbo (2016:6), the Igbo man was a homo-religious being, meaning that he was deeply involved in religion to the extent that he did nothing without reference to religion. And it was in affirmation to this truism that Leonard (1968:429) posited that:

The Igbo are... a truly religiously people of whom it can be said as it has been said of the Hindus that they eat religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, sin religiously... religion of these natures is their existence and their existence is religion.

In recognition of the above assertion, Mbit (1969:1) in his ground breaking book, “*African Religion and Philosophy*,” however averred that Africa (in which the Igbo and by extension Oghe people are found) is notoriously religious. A view which he later reinforced and reaffirmed when he insisted as thus:

Religion has dominated the thinking of the African people, it has shaped their custom, cultures, their social life, their political organization and economic activities... He concluded by saying that religion is closely bound up with traditional way of life, while at the same time this way of life has shaped religion as well (Mbit, 1975)

Like other indigenous beliefs of their counterparts in other parts of Africa, the Igbo indigenous religion otherwise known as African Indigenous Religion (AIR) or better still Africa Traditional Religion (ATR), is a religion handed down to the Igbos by their fore bearers which is transmitted from one generation to another. It originated from the soil of Igbo land. The people were born, nurtured and grew in it (Ibenwa, 2014:2). Just like every Igbo person, religion plays an important role in the life of Oghe man. He does not only profess it devotedly; he lives it and manifest it in everything he does be it in his private life, relationship with family members, neighbours, larger society..., traditional festival and even in conflict resolution and management (Eze, 2014:2). The same goes for planting season, harvesting period (Ihiajioku) and many other aspects of his daily life. For instance, Anikwe (2021:10) observed that like most Igbo communities, the Oghe man being very religious in their social orientation, always call on God in prayers any time a kola nut arrives or is served and cap it up with endless prayers and thanksgiving. For the Oghe man therefore, religion simply means the belief in and worship of the Supernatural or Supreme Being which equally include other beings that plays various role in the affairs of man, both physical and spiritual (Eze, 2014:2).

The belief in Supreme God is basic in Igbo worldview (cosmology) and apparently seems to be shared by majority of African cultures. The Supreme God is believed be the creator and foundational sources of all existence. He is in this regarded as a lover and source of all that is good and hater of all that is evil (Onyenze, 2014:140). In African traditional religion, every ethnic system has its own local name for the same Supreme Being. For instance, Igbo refer Him as Obasi, Chineke, Chukwu, ChukwuOkikeAbiama and so on while in Yourba He is known as Olodumare, OlofinOrun, Olurun, etc. Aside from the belief in the Supreme Deity /Being, Eze (2014:1), rightly observed that the traditional Oghe man as in other Africa traditional societies further belief in some other lesser deities, who render assistance to the Supreme Deity in the theocratic governance of the universe. Outside Oghe land across many places in Igbo land, there were many revered deities- divinities like Edo in Nnewi, Omaliko in Abatete, Akpuruokwe in Ovoko-Nsukka which are arch-deities that were identified with the origin and destiny of the people. There were also NneOmu (goddess of procreation) found in OwereAmagu, OrbaNsukka Cultural Zone of Enugu State. Most deities had large expanse of land dedicated to them “comprising their sacred groves, large open spaces in which were located their shrines and alters (pantheon). They equally had priests who were mostly appointed by them (the deities) and who carried out routine and special sacrifices (Kalu, 2002; 355; Agbo, 2016:8)

In Imo State, there were also IgweKa Ala of Umunwoha and Ala Ogbaga in both Mbaitoli and Ezinihitte Local Government Council respectively. Anambra had the famous Okija shrine/deities. These were some of the premier deities-divinities domiciled outside Oghe land which time and space could not permit us to mention here.

Recent studies reveal that there are four main belief system that characterized Africa Indigenous Religion. These according to Awusaku (2016:103), Nwaike and Onwuliri (2017:11), are: Belief in Supreme Being/God, belief in deities/divinities, belief in spirits and belief in ancestors. Nwala (2010:166-167) however, identified these Igbo indigenous religion as five in number which include, the Supreme Being (Chukwu, Chineke, Osebuluwa, Ezechitoke); numerous local deities; the divinity of the ancestors; Oracles and systems of divination and numerous abstract forces(e.g.Ogwu) “which are personifies and religiously manipulated through sacrifices, prayers, medicines and charms in order to achieve certain objectives. These beings in Igbo traditional belief system/ cosmology are structured into three separate habitation zones namely: the sky above (eluigwe), the solid earth (Ala) and underworld (Ala-mmuo) (Kalu,2002:352). *This paper is hence advocating that those aspect of traditional religion which can help to maintain order and sanity as well as create a peaceful and corruption free society devoid of conflict should be incorporated alongside the western religion; Christianity.* The significance of this paper therefore is to x-ray, examine and appraise the roles of the deities in brokering peace and ensuring amicable settlement of conflict between aggrieved parties /persons in a traditional Oghe society in Ezeagu local government of Enugu State, Nigeria. This practice is however still in vogue in the contemporary time in spite of the long emergence of Christianity in the region.

2. An Overview of Relevant Concepts

2.1 The Concept of Peace

In the words of Ikejiani- Clark and Ani (2009: 3), there are many definitions of what peace is all about. Its meaning is multilateral and multi-disciplinary, depending on which notion is central in the determination of peace as a concept. Thus, on a theoretical view points, they opined that the Animists, Christian or Muslim would view peace differently as will Pacifists, Socialists, Democrats, Fascists and Theorists of international relations.

Similarly, Ibeanu (2006:4-8) and Ikejiani-Clark & Ani (2009) interpreted peace to take the forms of psychological, philosophical, sociological, political, spiritual, Eurocentric as well as functionalist and instrumentalist definitions. The concise Oxford Dictionary 5th edition as quoted in Obiajulu (2003:102) refers to it as a social climate characterized by friendliness, absence of civil strife, freedom from war or civil disorder. It is a state of balance and understanding in oneself and between others where respect is gained by the acceptance of differences and tolerance (Oparah, 2014:1). According to Akakuru (2014:39), peace is defined as the other side of conflict that represents harmony and reflects a mutually satisfying relationship; a product of individual; group and state interaction at many levels of social, political and economic life. Peace could also be viewed as the harmonious existence of individual members of social group that is devoid of rancor hostilities, acrimonies and other ill-feeling and unpleasant attitudes usually associated with human interactions.

2.2. The Concept of Conflict

Chidiobi (2021:167) while paraphrasing the work of Okorie (2018) agreed with the fact that conflict just like crime is an inevitable part of human life (or the social system). Thus, man in the words of Offor and Umunna (2016: 69), is a social being and does not live in isolation but in groups where he interacts with the other members of the group. This interaction however, result to conflict or conflict situation in many occasions. Ohajanwa quoted in Nkwocha and Ohajanwa (2016:195) asserts that....." conflict is species specific" this affirms that conflict is predominant to man (and every living thing) and his environment. Meanwhile, the word conflict is derived from Latin word "conflictus" meaning "struck together" which is today lexically taken to mean clash, contention, a battle or struggle, controversy or quarrel (Enuka, 2003:8). Lemchi (2014:274) further informed us on the etymology of the word when he stated that the term "conflict" is derived from the Latin verb "confligere" meaning "to clash/or /engage in a fight". This he later refers/ interpreted as a confrontation between individuals or group resulting from opposite or incompatible ends, or means. Conceptually, the definition of conflicts in most cases reflects the academic background of the researcher/writer. For this reason, many scholars like Phil- Eze (2009: 397; Pondy, (1967); Katzy and Kahn (1978); Flippo (1980); McEnery (1985); Anugwom (1997) among others have defined conflict from their various areas of disciplines and understanding. However, one thing remains common among the definitions. It is disagreement, hostility or unfriendly relationship between and among individuals or groups who shares divergent or opposing interests or ideas. To Oparah et al (2014:9), conflict means armed fighting, a war and a struggle between opposing principles or aims, a clash of feelings or interests, to be at variance, clash, to struggle. Odediran (2006) quoted by (Adewale (2005: 118), see conflict to include clash of interest, disagreement, feud, discord, contention, disunity, disharmony, antagonism, spite and hostility. According to the Collins English Dictionary cited in Myom, Ikpilakaaand Ugbegili (2021:139), conflict is a serious disagreement and argument about something important. In this instance, it was noted by the Dictionary that if two people or groups are in a conflict, they have serious disagreement or argument and have not yet reached agreement. In this paper, conflict can be seen as a misunderstanding or disagreements between and among individuals, groups or persons which results to hostile relationship that is injurious to the parties involved. It is also a disagreement or hostile behaviour existing between and or among parties who shares contrary views.

2.3. The Concept of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution is aimed at providing an amicable solution that are mutually satisfying to the conflicting parties whose opposing interest or views have created a conflict situation and which in worst cases snowballs to destruction of lives and property and sometimes full blown war. Thus Offor (2016:175) stated that when a conflict situation is properly managed, it becomes constructive, but on the other hand when it is not properly managed, it can lead to crises, violence, anarchy and even war. Conflict resolution is therefore conceptualized by Oparah et al (2014:57) as methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. They further inferred that conflict resolution... encompasses the use of non- violent resistance measures by conflicted parties in an attempt to promote effective resolution. Nicholson (cited in Oparah, et al, 2014: 58) notes that "conflict is resolved when the inconsistency between wishes and actions of parties are resolved. It is also the act of keeping or bringing peace between and among parties involve in conflicting, fragile and hostile relationships.

3. Review of Relevant Literature

According to Iwe quoted in Nwaike and Onwuliri (2017:14), divinities /deities are created spiritual functionaries presiding over the natural elements of the universe and acting as intermediaries in man's relationship with the Supreme Being. They are essential channel of communication at solemn and important moments of social life. Onuoha (1987:11) quoted in Madu (2003:75) refers to the deities as gods, ambassadors or deans. Similarly, Njoku (1980:4) noted that the deities/divinities are regarded as direct messengers of the Supreme Being. Among the several agents or messengers of the Supreme Deity, Eze (204:2) and Okwesili (2021:73) however noted that Ala or Ani; the "Earth Goddess" remains the most important of them all. Ani as rightly observed by Eze above is everywhere but is segmented according to settlement or human habitation. Every clan, every hamlet in Oghe, has its own Ani. In Oghe land, this Ani; earth

goddess goes with variant or divergent appellations according to each community and these include but not limited to Ani OgheEzeaguIgbudu, Ugwu-OmalAkama, Ani Iwollo, AnuobuOyofho, OtuteAmanswdo, Ani Nneke to mention but a few (Eze, 2014: 2; Ibekwe, 2014:72; Okwesili, 2021:73). Associated with the Ani deity are smaller elements also in the category such as Akwali, Ahobunagu, Agwunsi, MmuoMmiri, etc. However, Okwesili(2021:73) further observed that some of these deities like Osisiofor, Ikenga, Ogwu/agwu, personal god (chi), etc. are structured to serve individuals, the family or kindred while the Ahobunagu specifically is an armory of native doctors and herbalists as the case may be Etymologically, the term Africa (Afraka) is an Amharic (Ethiopia) word which when translated means "land of the sun" or a sunny zone (lands of the rising sun). In Greek language it was called Afrike, while the Roman adventurers described it in Latin language as Afrika. The English explorers and invaders used Africa in their description of the continent probably on imitation of the Roman adventures who had earlier colonized them and imposed certain cultural traits including Africa. Generally, "Afraka", "Afrike" and "Africa" convey the meaning "land of the rising sun" (Chukwu, 2000:10). However, there is a preconceived notion about Africans in the West. The adjective "Afrika" has generally been used in a racially oriented way to refer to the darker skinned or black peoples who live south of the Sahara and have been assumed to possess the same culture. Ethnographers and Missionaries had given Africa a derogatory appellation as "Dark Continent". The people are dark and all their ways dark, meaning that their resources and religious traditions are yet to be explored (Nwaike and Onwuliri, 2017:2). It is based on this misconception and deliberate act of portraying Africa and Africans in bad light, that Hugh Trevor Roper cited in Manyika (2017:67) posited that:

Africa has no history and that the history of Africa is only the history of Europe in Africa and that the rest is largely darkness and that darkness is not and never a subject of history...

In the words of Ossai (2013:153), Afrika does not only mean the continent of Africa or a geographical area where African building are or where black man or black nations are found, but a total geographical, political, religious, philosophical, cultural and thoughts of any person towards the investigations explanation, demonstration and re-definition of an African person to show the outstanding personality of a black man anywhere in the World.

On the other hand, the idea of Africanity according to Ossai (2013:155) is when one realizes his or herself as an African where communal life is the watchword. In other words, Ossai further stated that Africanity is a conscious move to universalize Africa, which is Africans in America or India means the same like Africans in Ghana or Nigeria. And as the Africans in Nigeria are conscious of themselves so they should be conscious of Africans in America or India or elsewhere.

The term "tradition" according to Eze (2013:87) comes from the Latin verb tradere meaning to transmit or to give. He noted that the noun "tradio" shows the process by which something is transmitted or handed down. According to him, the central responsibility involved in tradition is receiving something valuable or precious, preserving it and passing it on to those who come after. By this implication, tradition is a phenomenon that is connected with the past. It has to do with benefits, practice, idea and norms that have been there through generations. Thus, Eze (2013:84), see it as a laid down procedure bequeathed to a people through experiences of the past. To Gross (1992), tradition is an existing set of beliefs, practices, teaching and modes of thinking that are inherited from the past and that may guide, organize and regulate ways of living and of making sense of the word. In the other words, tradition has to do with how a given people in a particular society conducts their lives with respect to their ways of dressing, worships, eating, farming and what have you which have been handed down to them from generations. It has to do with how a people or tribe has been living their lives and managing their affairs from one generation to another.

The word "traditional" therefore does not connote that African religion is static or unchanging. It is used to identify indigenous African religion and the common thread of values and experiences that are uniform among Africans (Nwaike & Onwuliri, 2017:2).Opoku quoted in Madu (1997) clarifies this when he stated that:

To all religion "traditional" is not to refer to it as something past, but only to indicate that it is under girded by a fundamentally indigenous value system and that it has its own pattern with its historical inheritance and tradition from the past.

Religion is an inevitable part of human life and human society which cannot be eliminated (Amolo & Ihuagwu, 2013:136). No wonder Okika(2013:99) averred that "life is a question and religion proposes some answers and that the primary function of religion is to give meaning to lives". This opinion was corroborated by Davies (1983:3) when he stated that "we live in a world that in spite of appearance is still fundamentally religious. It is a powerful phenomenon which is as old as man. For its potency and force, "religion has come to influence and permeate virtually all aspect of human life-religious, political, socio-economic and cultural (Akama, 1998).

According to Nabofa (1989:76) cited in Uche&Uche (2013: 131), there are almost as many definitions of religion as there are theologians and religious scholars. He observed that definitions are often made based on the given scholar's discipline, background or presuppositions or belief. Thus, this explains further, the reflection of anthropological, sociological, theological, psychological, historical definitions of religion. Chambers Dictionary as quoted in Eke (2005:109) defined it as belief in the recognition of an awakened sense of a higher unseen controlling power... Urbrurhe (2000) see religion as the feeling of absolute dependence on a Supernatural Being believes to direct the course of nature and human life. Mmah (1998) cited in Okobia (2013:124) defined it as a unified system of beliefs and practices which is related to sacred things set apart or forbidden, belief and practices that unite one singing moral community called church and those who adhere to them. In this paper, religion can be seen as the belief in a sort of

supernatural being whom its thought directs and controls the affairs of human existence as well as everything that happens in the universe.

In trying to explain the meaning of African traditional religion and what it stands for, Nwaike & Onwuliri (2017:3), noted that the word “religion” is a late-comer to the scholarly discourse about Africa because it was noticeably absent in Western news who used the old anthropological term “animism” to refer to the indigenous religion of Africa, a description which left African religions with terms which are inadequate, derogatory and prejudicial. Ossai (2013:156) equally aligned himself with this submission when he deposited that the western investigators and Christian missionaries out of ignorance and in efforts to satisfy their home government used such obnoxious and derogatory terminologies like primitive paganism, heathen, idolatry, fetishism etc in describing African traditional religion. African Traditional religion therefore means an indigenous religion for Africans. It is described as institutionalized patterns of beliefs and worship practiced by various African societies from time immemorial (Nwaike and Onwuliri, 2007:5). Awolabu and Adelumo (2005) described it as “... A religion that has been handed by the fore bearers of present generation of Africans.” The religion is traditional because it is handed down from age to age through oral tradition or history and this include moral, ethics and customs. This religion is indigenous to Africa or African continent.

4. Theoretical Review/ Viewpoint

The prevalence of conflicts and their devastating consequences has brought the imperative to theorize them to the fore of academic discourse. Consequently, theoretical explanations of conflicts have been advanced by scholars and researchers of conflict (Enuka, 2015:14). In view of this, this paper adopted innate theory; a sub-branch of biological theories of conflict to examine and explain the possible causes of conflict in human society vis-à-vis the traditional Oghe society in Ezeagu local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria.

According to Faleti (2006:46), classical biological theorists or better still the proponents of this theory included Thomas Hobbes, St. Augustine of Hippo, Malthus and Sigmund Freud. To them, human kind is evil by nature. They believed that since our ancestors were instinctively violent beings and since we evolved from them, that we too must bear destructive impulses in our genetic makeup. In their assessment of human nature, Faleti equally informed us that human beings are driven by a natural instinct to self- preservation. A tendency which to him made Hobbes described life in the state of nature as “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”. A view which was shared by both Saint Augustine (1948) and Neibuhr (1953) as well as some theologians who linked violent behavior and original sin in humanity.

As a product or sub-branch of biological theories, the innate theory of conflict therefore contends that conflict is innate/ natural/ inborn in all social interactions, and among all animals, including human beings. It argues that humans are animals, although higher species of animals and would naturally fight over things they cherish. Thus, Neibuhr, as quoted by Faleti (2006:46) asserted that humans are driven by a natural quest “will- to- live” or “will -to- power”, personal security and survival at the expense of others around them. Ethologically, this theory according to Enuka (2016:14) is premised on the argument that humans naturally have the mere instinct, which makes him defend exclusive right to a piece of property, and self- centered to the point that he does not care to injure others just to get- what he wants. So, it is in this sense that Yakubu (2000: vi) explains that by nature, man is conflict prone; his basic needs for survival and self- actualization makes him selfish and he is ready to take opposition against anything regarded as not being consistent with such interest whether it is acceptable or it is against the overall interest of the other person or the wider society. Extrapolating from this theory, it can then be said that conflict situations occurred in the traditional Oghe land and are still occurring because people are selfish, destructive, violent and what have you. For instance, it is the selfish nature of man to start laying claim to something that does not belong to him (for example, land). And it is the same nature of man to defend that which belongs to him or survive that makes the other person to resist such inordinate quest that result to conflict or conflict of interest.

5. The Land, Culture People of Oghe: A Brief Insight

Oghe is one of the major ethnic group or indigenous people that are found in the present day Ezeagu local government Area (L.G.A) of Enugu State, Nigeria. It is a part of the historical Agbaja ancestry comprising Udi and Ezeagu L.G.A(s) which are by extension a member of “Wawa” language spoken by Enugu people. Similarly; Oghe is a microcosm of a larger Enugu west senatorial zone going by geo-political divisions of states in Nigeria Oghe according to Okwesili (2021:07) is geographically placed on latitude 6° 2’32; N and longitude 7°19’59E within the tropical savanna region, with atmospheric wet climate that greatly supports economic activities including agriculture... Historically, Oghe people since time immemorial lived together as a clan and managed their own affairs with strong bond of affinity. Every Oghe man traces his pedigree to one common ancestor named Oghe-Ezeagu. Oghe is by this, one of the sons of Ezeagu which include: Owa, Umana, Umumba and Obunofia, who have also risen as separate’ clans correspondingly (Anikwe, 2013:21). According to legends, Oghe originally had ten children from two wives who comprise of Owe, Akama, Neke, Oyofo and Iwollo referred as Ikenga (right hand side). While others are, Amankwo, Amansiodo, Akasa and Umunom collectively referred to Ibute-Oha (left hand side) (Okachi, 1978; Anikwe, 2013:21; Eze, 2014:1). Unfortunately, Owe, Umunom, Obuagu and Akasa are today no longer in existence or had been absorbed by their neighbouring communities. For instance, it is widely or popularly believed that a greater percentage of Owe is now part of Iwollo with the remaining in Akama. The same goes to both Akasa and Umunom who have been allegedly integrated in Amansiodo, while Obuagu is assimilated in Amansiodo Ndiagu. Presently, Oghe has seven villages because of this ugly development.

Oghe covers a mass land of thickly populated towns which find succor in the efficacious Ogwu Oghe (Oghe medicine). Oghe is bordered by Eke, Egede and Affa in the North, Adaba, Uzo-Uwani LGA, in the West, Olo and Awha Ndiagu in the south, the Owa group of settlements and Awha-Imezi in the eastern flank. (Anikwe, 203:21; Okwesli, 2021:67). The pre-colonial economic activities in Oghe were dominated by farming. Thus, the mainstay of the economy was therefore, agriculture. Consequently, agricultural activities and seasonal changes determined the calendar of most activities (Anikwe, 2021:10). Presently, the people of Oghe are predominantly subsistence farmers producing staple crops/ foods like: yam, cassava, garri, akpu, cocoa yam, abacha including akidi, agugbu, azamu and other varieties of local beans among others.

Oghe people are blessed with one of most beautiful and captivating landscapes or topography which are second to none and which are capable of making Oghe region a potential tourists destination/ attraction centers around Enugu and across the country. For instance, Onakandi stream, IyiAgbor stream, IyiWandulu stream, AgboChiokeNbuluzo Stream, MmiriAdume Spring, Nneomu Spring, Kalawu stream and many others (Amalu, 2014: 42; Onyike, 2014:55). Others are streams like Adada, Ivo, Duu, Jaliko and so on. Traditionally, Oghe people has a number of socio-cultural practices which are believed to have been dying off or to have gone into extinction. Each of these cultural cum traditional practices, is however peculiar with each community. Akama celebrates "High Mass", Oyofo is known for "St Francis" and "MgbaOgwu", Amansiodo is "Ohuhu-ji", Aguobu-Iwollo is "St Martins," Amansiodo is "the Feast of October", Neke is "Udumi" while Iwollo once celebrated "Sacred Heart" "Mbazi" and "Ndihii." Meanwhile Ifhajioku- Itonri, Akanu and Ibono masquerade festivals are common to all Oghe clans except Neke-Oghe which celebrate Odo Masquerade Festival which is allegedly an alien tradition/culture believed to have been imported into the land /clan many centuries ago. However, there was also the feast of Olie-Oghe one of the greatest festival in Oghe because it marked the bond of unity among the people. Oghe people were also known as great medicine men because of their expertise in herbs for human treatment and other religions, cultural and social purposes. In the time past, it was said that there was no Oghe family that had no special skills in the cure of one or more diseases. Thus, Oghe people treated and cured many diseases like fever, skin disorders, broken bones, teeth aches problems among others.

In all, Oghe people are peaceful, hospitable and accommodating. This obviously account to the continuous influx of people for businesses, settlements and other purposes thereby leading to dramatic or rapid rise in population of the region.

6. Deities and Conflict Resolution in Traditional Oghe Land: An Overview

As rightly observed by Onu(2009:90), there are several traditional institutions in Africa which serves as instruments and mediums of conflict resolution in traditional African societies. These include: age grades, masquerade groups/ cults, women organizations, council of elders as well as kindred and village meetings. Among these structures however, the deities remains the most credible and widely acceptable to all. Its judgment is final and non- debatable.

So, in Africa, various traditions and religious practices exist. Conflicts are resolved traditionally through various processes in line with these traditional and religious practices and belief systems. These tend to vary from formal structures and practices most African societies inherited or learnt from Europe and North America. For instance, the Bible which guides the belief system of Christians, prescribed comprehensive ways through which conflicts among believers should be resolved. These methods centrally border on obedience to the words of God, which compels adherents to dialogue, and forgiveness for one another. The Bible therefore abhors retaliation. And to that extent Christians emphasize the principles of forgiveness and prayer (Onus 2009:89-90).

Onu further noted that most Africans who are either Christians or Muslims still patronize shrines and repose great confidence in their ability to resolve very difficult conflicts. Operators and priests of these shrines are seen as intermediaries and in situations where their intervention is needed, their judgment seen as final. In Anambra State of Nigeria, Okija shrine was very popular and was patronized by both public servants and politicians as instruments of conflict resolution. There is also the Imo Awka shrine in the heart of Anambra State capital that is consulted by both indigenes and visitors when conflicts become irresolvable. In traditional Oghe land, just like in most traditional Igbo societies the deities are revered and usually have designated places otherwise known as pantheon or holy place where they are being venerated and consulted during conflict situations. According to Pa Amaechi (2022), the prominent of these deities are usually housed, while additional building is erected very close to them. It is in this building that the chief priest stays to receive visitors or the conflicting parties. Matters leading to the conflict are presented and discussed here with the aim of resolving it. The chief priest usually has a number of messengers that assist in the day –to-day running of the activities of the deities. These messenger carries out many essential services which range from helping those on consultations to procure such ritual or sacrificial items (like fowl, kola nut, wine, drinks, nzu, odo, goat, etc) to the cleaning and clearing of the surroundings of the shrines of the deities. They also take messages to the conflicting parties or the accused and report the feedback to the chief priest. As noted by Pa Amaechi; the deities are widely consulted as a result of their unbiased judgments in uncompromising nature, speedy dispensation of justice as well as its sure punishment of those who bear false report after due warning. In traditional Oghe land, there are many aspects of conflict situation in which the deities are consulted for peace, order, sanity, justice and punishment of those found guilty. But for the purpose of this discourse, a few but important instances that are not limited to the following would be highlighted.

In traditional Oghe land, stealing is seriously abhorred. And persons caught in such ignominious act are severely punished to serve as deterrent to would be committers. According to Nwajakalbekwe (2022), sometimes persons whose property are reported missing or stolen had to report the ugly development to the deities in a bid to recover such item so stolen or to make sure that the culprit/perpetrator get the needed punishment especially when he or she fails to heed the

clarion call of returning the item(s) stolen. Sometimes before a case of theft is reported to the deities for intervention, an announcement or better still a plea is made to the general public, by the victim whose property has been stolen, asking the perpetrator of such crime/ act to return the stolen item(s) within a specified time frame. But this however, depend on the individual.

Most times, some of those alleged thieves eventually return the stolen property for the sheer fear of the deities and its possible consequences. However, some obdurate ones fail to hearken to the voice of reasoning by holding on to the stolen item. In this situation, the victim is usually left with no option than to request the intervention of the deity as a last resort and this usually comes with grave aftermath such as mysterious sickness, other misfortunes and even death. Thus many cases of theft or stolen property are known to have been recovered in this way thereby restoring peace and order to both the victim whose property was said to have been stolen as well as the alleged theft.

Murder, witchcraft or voodooism is another grievous allegation that are sometimes settled by consulting the deities. Just like most African cum Igbo societies and communities, the traditional Oghe societies believe so much in witchcraft, charms, voodooism and other traditional or religious practices. In the words of Pa Nwajaka (2022), there are many instances in traditional Oghe land where someone, relative, or a brother or sister is accused of being behind the mysterious sickness, misfortune or death of a fellow brother, sister or someone else. If such a case or allegation is reported to the deity for justice such an accused person will be invited by the Chief priest of that deity to come and prove his or her innocent of the charge(s) levelled against him or her before the deity. On the day of the hearing, the accused person would be cajoled and exhorted to say the truth before the deity and everyone their present so that he or she can be pardoned or be given a lesser punishment or be made to destroy or neutralize the effect of such charms on the victims(s). He or she would equally be reminded or told the possible aftermath of given false report before the deity. If after this, he/she insists of being innocent, in other words that the allegation was untrue and perhaps a case of character defamation, he/she would be asked to swear an oath before the deity and everyone present to prove his or her innocence. If he or she eventually swears, it is therefore assume he or she is innocence. This helps to resolve the conflict. But if after this, he or she was discovered by the deity to be guilty as charged, the information is that the deity would not hesitate to strike or pass a warning signal to the offender before it eventually strike.

Conflicts relating to true ownership of a piece of land or boundary disputes/matters are known to have been resolved through the deities across various communities/ villages in Oghe land. Over the years, the history of Oghe people has it that the parties involves in a land disputes sometimes end up at the altar or shrine of the deities. At this place, the matter is tabled before the deities and after this, they fail to reach an agreement amicably and workable solution to the problem, the conflicting parties are made to swear before the deity in turn deities with the aim of finding a lasting and permanent solution to the conflict which perhaps must have lingered. The both claimants to the piece of land are made to swear in turn concerning the authentic owner of such parcel of land. Having known the implication of giving an untrue report by swearing an oath before the deity, the party adjudged not to be the rightful owner of the land, sometimes declines from taking such an oath. By this development, the other party might be perceived as the authentic owner. In some few instance, the obdurate ones tries to out maneuver the deity by swearing falsely but are however met with grave consequences which atimes are associated with mysterious death.

Cases of infidelity/adultery is a major source of conflict which has led many families before the deities in traditional Oghe land. In Africa and by extension Igbo societies in which the Oghe land is part of, promiscuity of the women most especially the married ones are not only view with disgust but seriously abhorred. It comes with severe consequences. A woman found in such act is hated by the husband, relatives and the entire village. Most at times she is being sent back to her parents. In other words, divorce is usually the case. This is because the husband may not want anything to do with her as her presence might be irritating to him. Sometimes, a woman that is accused of cheating on her husband either by the man himself or his relatives may want to prove her innocence by proposing or agreeing to swear an oath before the deity. By so doing, she convinces everyone that she is innocent and wrongly accused especially when after sometimes nothing happens to her. This obviously ends the conflict.

Dishonesty and fraud have always been the problem of humanity since time immemorial. It has always generated conflict with a very serious and disastrous consequences sometimes leading to death or even destructions of lives and property. As a young boy, I could vividly recall an incident that occurred many years ago in my humble community in Agueke-Umuawollo in Iwollo-Oghe where the famous but defunct Ugwu-Agueke was then located. It was a conflict between two young men of Oghe extraction who were involved in a sort of transaction that did not go well. The report had it that one of them (men) out of avarice, selfishness and personal aggrandizement decided to corner part of the proceeds from their so called business deal for himself. The other man having exhausted other available alternatives to get its fair-share of the deal, felt cheated and shortchanged in the entire process, then brought the case to the Ugwu-Agueke deity for solution. At the end, the accused party was compelled to take an oath before the deity to prove his innocence and inculpable of the charges brought against him. In this way the conflict was resolved. However, report had it that the accused party was later killed by the deity which of course proved that the oath he swore was false and misleading.

7. Summary and Conclusion

Like in most Igbo lands, deities played important role in the socio-cultural and religious affairs of the traditional Oghe land nay Igbo land. Up till date, the deities are still very popular among the people and are highly revered. The parties involved in the conflict situation are always advice by the chief priest, the shrine attendants and the worshippers to be honest in their claims and not to bear false reports before it as the consequences can sometimes be disastrous which of course takes the form of instant judgment like sudden death or debilitating illness that leads to gradual demise of the

alleged offender/guilty party. So, the truth and nothing but the truth is always expected from both parties having known and being told the implication of tendering false account. According to Pa Aniezechukwu Eluke (2022), the present chief priest of the Ugwu-Agueke deity, there are few instances or cases when warning signals are sent to the guilty party in a conflict by the deity before it strikes. For instance, this takes the forms of some supernatural occurrences like a vulture mounting on the roof top, ants or bees visiting the house among many other signs. These appearances were always meant to convey urgent and important information to the guilty. Sometimes, it might be that the deities want to be lenient and thus requires the guilty person to appear before it denounce their earlier statement or submission and to ask for forgiveness or clemency. At this point, if the allegedly guilty party is a traditionalist or discerning enough, he would immediately consult the deity to know the reason(s) for such spiritual occurrence and visit.

On the other hand, the deity can equally visit the other party assumed not to be guilty in the conflict situation. This is mostly to inform such person that appropriate sanction has been meted out or as about to be meted out on the guilty and that he or she should present oneself for cleansing from the expected tragedy.

It is however disheartening and deflating that the emergence of Christianity has impacted greatly and negatively on the African traditional religion which the deities are part and parcel of. Today, traditional religion is gradually dying of in Oghe land and by extension in Igbo land in general. This is unlike some other climes like China, India, Japan to mention a few where religions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Silkhism, and many others still thrives despite being colonized by the same Britain. The problem with the modern Oghe people is that they have accepted every teaching of Christianity hook, line and sinker; without questioning and deeper thoughts about them. They have failed to incorporate those good aspects of Oghe traditional religious values and word view (cosmology) with those of Christian faith in order to establish a peaceful and less conflict prone society and to check mate the rising spate of conflict, crime, corruption, dishonesty, cheating, wickedness, and so on bedeviling us as a people and by extension the nation. In the past, people were careful and thoughtful in carrying out any action. Obviously they tremble with fear and uncertainty at the mere mentioning of the deity. Today, Christianity makes the people to behave however they want and does whatever they want without fear, throwing caution in the air. Evil and all manner of atrocities are now the order of the day leading to large scale conflict in man's societies and in Oghe land in particular. Now, people carry the bible around, professing the belief in Jesus Christ while deep inside of them they are full of evil and wickedness.

It is perhaps in line with this ugly scenario, that sometimes around this year, some elected or appointed public office holders somewhere in the country of Benin Republic in the West African sub-region, were made to swear an oath with a snake deity strapped around their necks. This development might have come on the premise that public officials in the country just like in Nigeria have not kept the oaths they swore with the Holy Bible and Koran at the assumptions of offices, hence the resort to the snake deities that do not waste time in passing instant judgement to anyone who goes contrary to the provisions of the oaths. It is my believe therefore that if this is adopted in Nigeria, it will go a long way to reduce the conflict in the society triggered by corruption which eventually results to alarming poverty, hardship, hunger, starvations, unemployment and the rest in the country.

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Oral InterviewA

- Pa. AniezichukwuE Luke, Age: 62, Chief priest, Agueke Deity, interviewed at his hometown, Agueke Village, iwollo Oghe
- Mr. Nwajaka Ibekwe, Age:73, Palm wine tapper/famer/traditionalist, interviewed at his hometown, Agueke Village, IwolloOghe
- Mr. Amaechi Agu, Age: 51, farmer/traditionalist, interviewed at his hometown, Agueke Village, Iwollo-Oghe.