

ARIDON (Nos. 2 & 3, 2022, 303 –323)

THE MANAGEMENT OF CONFLICTS AMONG WORSHIPPERS OF IGBE ORHEN IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

Fortune Afatakpa

Abstract

Congregational conflicts are reflections of; some of the challenges that voluntary, faith-based communities confront within the bid to live by their religious ideals. Studies of Igbe ro Orhen have focused on its historical growth and expansion. Other extant studies have interrogated its response to Christian missionary activities and conflicts with the colonial government in Urhoboland. The effects of syncretism and the proliferation of different brands of Igbe religion across Delta State have also received scholarly attention. However, there is still a need to explore conflict management of the Igbe ro Orhen within the same congregation. It is a qualitative and empirical study. It was, conducted in Delta State, Nigeria. It relied on primary data collected in *Ogwa Igbe* located in the following towns Kokori, Oria-Abraka, Ughelli, Otor-Udu, Eginni, Ugono, Aladja, Agbarha-Otor, Ohrere-Agbarho first in 2016. Data gathered were update in 2020. The theory of structural functionalism was engaged; as a framework for analysis. Findings show that drivers of congregational conflicts in Igbe Orhe include giving out responsibilities to new members. The Perceived partiality in leadership selection; is a cause of conflict. The attitude of toxic leaders, distribution of food during feasts, inability to pay back borrowed money and closeness to Uku/Omote Uku. The congregational conflict management mechanisms in Igbe Orhe are conflict detection, respect for the verdict of *Uku* or *Omote Uku*, religious arbitration, mediation and conciliation. The study concludes that congregational conflict management in Igbe ro Orhen is around the notion of constant reconciliation with *Oweya* and peaceful coexistence of fellow man to gain access to the divine blessings (material and spiritual).

Introduction

Conflict is a characteristic of every religious congregation. According to Dudley, Zingery and Breeden (2000) conflict, is an expression of the human side of congregational life. This statement alludes to the fact; that beyond their spiritual commitments, members of religious congregations; are real people with diverse orientations with different worldviews. Also, congregational conflict reflects the challenge of voluntary faith communities while striving to live by their religious ideals. Likewise, Lester (2009) contends that conflict management in a religious congregation is one of the most challenging tasks because most leaders are not well equipped to manage. Conflict can either be affective or substantive. He suggests that an affective conflict is relationship-oriented, while a substantive is task-oriented. It can therefore be argued a conflict cannot be managed without giving it the right classifications. Therefore, conflict management mechanisms are predicated on the classification of conflict. It must be noted that task-oriented conflict within an organisation or group can impact positively on group performance. Also, an effective oriented conflict affects the overall performance of a group.

The study used Structural Functionalist theory to establish the importance of the functional parts of a congregation in the management of conflicts. The central thesis of the Structural Functionalist theory is that society is a complex system. The different constituent parts must work together for the promotion of stability, cohesion and harmony. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) laid the principal foundation of Structural Functionalist theory. However, Porth, Neutzling and Edwards (2011) contend that it was the theory of Emile Durkheim response to the evolutionary speculations of theorists such as E. B. Tylor. It was popularised; by Hubert Spencer (1803-1920). who used the human body as a stereotype for society. For the structural-functionalist, society is interdependent; it must build consensus and promote equilibrium. Structural Functionalism is macro-sociological in focus, with emphasis on institutions and laid down structures existing as one.

There is a functional part that sees each constituent part in *Igbe ro Orhen* congregations contributing effectively to a smooth functioning system of the *Ogwa ri Igbe* (temple of worship), including the management of conflicts among members. The functionality is in the context of interdependence and equilibrium. The constituent parts are working with consensus across the

inter-relationships. In Structural Functionalist theory, individuals carry out tasks in many institutions and roles that are consistent with the structures and norms of the society. To this end, it is suitable for this paper. Based on an empirical study, this article explores how members of *Igbe ro Orhen* manage congregational conflicts. It identifies the conceptual meaning of conflict in the Igbe religion. It interrogated types of conflict, the attitudes of members and the different levels of conflict intensity. Case studies; are uncovered and the conflict management culture of the worshippers. This study affirms the significance of congregational health through prompt management and resolution of conflicts.

Review of literature

Dollhopf and Scheitle (2013) identified leadership succession as one of the causes of intra-congregation conflict. They contend that if not properly handled, leadership transition can lead to loss of membership loss and it can create factions within a congregation. They conclude that transiting from one leadership to another in the church is a complex phenomenon because it is influenced by many factors, including spiritual soundness. Awojobi (2013) also identifies leadership succession as one of the instigators of violent congregational conflict. He stipulates that in most cases, leadership succession conflict in a congregation comes to the whenever there is going to be a change of leadership. He used the death of Prophet Oshoffa, the founders of the Celestial Church of Christ as a case study. The Church of God Mission, Foursquare Gospel Church, Christ Apostolic Church Worldwide and Assemblies of God Church have suffered from intra-congregation conflicts because of leadership succession conflicts. Within then Islamic faith community intra congregational conflict occurred among the *Umma* after the death of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him). It must be clearly being stated that the literature reviewed is within the Abrahamic religions. The management dynamics of the intra congregation conflicts within the highlighted Abrahamic religions identified were not given empirical attention.

Extant studies of *Igbe ro Orhen* have been preoccupied with its historical growth and expansion; its response to Christian missionary activities and conflicts with the colonial government in Urhoboland; its monotheistic identity which is not in conformity with the normative features of classical African Traditional Religion and *Igbe ro Orhen* as a mechanism for social control; the effects of syncretism and the proliferation of different brands of Igbe religion across Delta State.

Akponwei (2009) traces the historical foundation of Igbe ro Orhe and schisms emanating from congregational conflict but failed to discuss the management approaches. Brisibe cited in Afatakpa (2019) discusses how the death of Ubiesha, the founder of Igbe ro Orhen, led to the introduction of conflicting doctrines in many *Ogwa ri Igbe* and the implications on the visibility of the religion. Likewise, Nabofa (2005) examined the leadership succession conflict consequent of the death of Ubiesha, but the management of the conflict at the congregational level was not captured. He discusses how Ubiesha Etarakpor, (the Patriarch of Igbe Ubiesha) settled herders' conflict in Kokori town through clairvoyance. However, there is still a need to explore how conflicts are managed among adherents of the Igbe ro Orhen within the same congregation. Akponwei (2009) submits that Igbe religion is the most misunderstood indigenous religion in the Niger Delta. This is owing to a dearth of understanding of its original tenets. The research of Akponwei failed to examine intra congregation conflict management in Igbe ro Orhen. Though, Akponwei uncovered the prospect of salvation in African belief systems especially as it is manifested in Igbe ro Orhen. He affirms that Igbe ro Orhen has a monotheistic worldview and it is evident in the fact that all actions are referred to God, the supreme creator of the universe. He made no reference to intra congregational conflict and the management mechanisms in Igbe ro Orhen. Nabofa (2005) affirms that some readers may feel uncomfortable with the opinion that Igbe Ubiesha is a religion in its classical meaning. Consequently, he embarked on a conceptual definition of Igbe as a religion and uses the name Igbe Ubiesha in depicting Igbe ro Orhen as a mark of honour for the founder of the religion. After establishing Igbe ro Orhen as a full-fledged religion, Nabofa (2005) explores deeper into the historical growth and expansion of the religion. His work however, did not delve into the dynamics of intra congregational conflict dynamics in Igbe ro Orhen. He examines the role of Igbe ro Orhen and its methods of prescribing rules, norms and laws that can guide and influence human behaviour in the Urhobo society. The research of Ikoba did not draw a nexus between the rules, norms and the management of intra-congregational conflict. The study of Nabofa also looks at the technique used by Igbe ro Orhen to avert afflictions that are affecting the healings of individuals in their faith community. Afatakpa (2019) contends that the moral elements of the people of Delta state, the traditions, customs, and laws are embedded in the indigenous Igbe ro Orhen and has been the custodian of the philosophy and ideology of the people. Akama (1985) centers on the introduction of the Igbe religion in Isokoland. He refers to Igbe ro Orhen as a neo-primal syncretic religion. He explains

how Igbe ro Orhen became the object of Christian evangelistic attack. He examines the fundamental beliefs and organisation of the Igbe religion and tries to ascertain whether the Igbe religious movement had anything to do with the conflict arising from culture contact or the people's reaction against foreign invaders. The reviewed pieces of literature on the Igbe religion are mainly focused on the history, growth and general structure of the religion. They all provided limited insight into congregational conflict management approaches in Igbe ro Orhen. This is the gap this article intends to fill.

Methodology

It is a qualitative and empirical study. It relied on data collected from *Ogwa ri Igbe* located in Kokori, Oria-Abraka, Ughelli, Otor Udu, Eginni, Ugono, Aladja, Agbarha-Otor and Ohrere-Agbarho. All the towns are in Delta State in the South-South geopolitical zone, Nigeria. The population of congregants in an *Ogwa ri Igbe* varies. There are congregations with less than thirty members and, some have over one hundred members. The theory of structural functionalism was deployed; as a framework for analysis. A total of 10 in-depth interviews; were conducted with Uku (*Uku* is the ordination title for a Male High Priest in Igbe ro Orhen. He presides over the spiritual and political administration of the *Ogwa ri Igbe*) (5) and Emete Uku (*Emete Uku* is the ordination title for a High Priestess in Igbe ro Orhen. She presides over the spiritual and political administration of the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. *Emete Uku* is plural. *Omote Uku* is singular) (5). Key Informant Interviews; were conducted with Inori (*Inori* is the plural for *Onori*. It is the ordination title for the Chief Priests in Igbe ro Orhen) (6), *Oni ri Igbe* (*Oni ri Igbe* is the ordination title for a Chief Priestess in Igbe ro Orhen. The plural form is *Ini ri Igbe*) (6). One Focus Group Discussion (FGD); was conducted comprising (8) member participants in Kokori. Data; was also collected through non-participant observation. The respondents were purposively selected; from each of the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. Data for the causes of conflict in Igbe ro Orhen congregation were collected in 2016. In the year 2020, data for congregational conflict management mechanisms in Igbe ro Orhen were collected. The interviews; were conducted in Urhobo Language and Pidgin English. The interviews; were transcribed into the modern-day-English Language for analysis. Data collected; were analysed using the narrative approach.

Conceptual Clarification

The Concept of Management

Kumar (2019) believes that management is a process that entails accomplishing tasks in alignment with specific goals. There is also, the view that the concept of management and leadership are interconnected. It opines that the word management has a French root. The research of Nienaber contends that all tasks fall within the ambience of management. He argues that an objective; not well managed cannot achieve the desired result. However, it will take a combination of management and leadership to get things done. Management has been in practice for a very long time. It hovers around harnessing the capacities of humans and other resources to achieve or meet some specific targets. Afatakpa (2019) supports the idea that management implies using existing resources to achieve objectives. However, they submit that management involves; the use of skills to be able to deal with the individuals that are involved in the task. Accordingly, management as a concept does not exist in isolation. It involves setting goals, meeting objectives, engaging human resources, following management and leadership processes to achieve the set goals.

Congregation

The study contends that congregations are faith communities. However, there are parameters determine the definition of congregations. The parameters include being faithful to the gospel, missional identity and the integrity of the congregation. Ammermann (2005) defines congregation as a denomination of a Church located in a particular region. It is the submission of the paper that religious communities and congregations are critical to identities. So, a congregation can be described as a complex religious community that helps people find meaning through transcendent, ideological and social context. In other words, beyond spiritual and religious cleavages, there are the ideological and social dimensions to the concept of the congregation. Pargament (2007) defines congregation as a formal gathering of people for religious worship, fellowship and education. His definition tried to differentiate religious congregations from religious communities. He contends that a religious community is more of an informal type of gathering for religious purposes. These include faith-based organisations, campus ministries or para-church congregations. This paper argues that there is an overlapping paradigm between a congregation and a religious community. It also argues that the congregation

can either be religious or non-religious. A congregation can be termed as non-religious when individuals with shared identities and ideologies gather for non-religious purposes. A congregation can be religious when people of the same religious belief system, theistic commonality and doctrinal identity come together for worship and religious indoctrination.

Conflict

There are assertions that a conflict exists whenever incompatible actions ensue. In other words, when a particular person or group of persons interfere, disrupt or obstruct the activities of another person or group of persons or in some other way making another party's action less effective. This paper submits that conflict is the supposed discrepancy of interest. It is the contention of interests that can stop the aspiration of all the parties simultaneously. Accordingly, Conflict is the incompatibility or potential clash of interests and objectives. These can be deemed as the principal motivation of conflict.

Concept of Igbe ro Orhen

Defining the word religion has been a major challenge among scholars. To solve this challenge, it will be apt to establish the anatomic features of the world religions (especially the Abrahamic religions). The features of the Abrahamic world religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) placed side by side with the features anatomic features of Igbe ro Orhen. Once the commonalities are identified, establishing Igbe ro Orhen as a religion to be reckoned with, would no longer be a challenge. Nielsen cited in Afatakpa (2019) identified the following commonalities among the world religions. According to him the first feature of the world religions is the belief in the almighty God who is charge of the realities of every human existence and experience. The almighty God is seen as a *mysterium fastinum*. He must be worshipped with awe and adoration. Igbe ro Orhen believe in the almighty God. The nomenclature for God in Igbe ro Orhen is Oweya (Oweya is the nomenclature for the almighty God in Igbe ro Orhen. He is worshipped and revered by all adherents). He is the ultimate controller of the destiny of mankind. Oweya is revered because he has the power to bless and curse. No adherent of Igbe ro Orhen wants to get into a conflict with Oweya. Secondly, the Abrahamic religions believe in sacred and profane spaces, as well as sacred objects. It is also a common feature in Igbe ro Orhen. The Ogwa ri Igbe is the temple of worship in Igbe ro Orhen. It is believed that the

presence of God is constant in the Ogwa. Hence members of Igbe ro Orhen do not joke with the Ogwa ri Igbe. The Orhen is seen as sacred in Igbe ro Orhen. Most adherents of Igbe ro Orhen carry the Orhen wherever they go. It is perceived to possess some mystic powers that guarantee deliverance and prosperity. Thirdly, the Abrahamic religions have programmed ritual activities for their adherents. These include hours of prayers, fasting days of worship, annual thanksgiving and confession of sins. These are also evident in Igbe ro Orhen. Fourthly, the Abrahamic religions espouse firm moral codes to provide guidance for the faith community. This is also evident in Igbe ro Orhen. Every new member of Igbe ro Orhen is asked if he/she they can uphold the *Urhi* (extant laws) of the religion. In the fifth instance, the Abrahamic religions experience religious ecstasy when they engaged in some of their ritual exercises. It is also evident in Igbe ro Orhen. One of the prominent rituals in Igbe ro Orhen is votary dancing. The dancing gets to a particular point and adherents begin to prophesy. Sixthly, the world religions have special ways to communicate with the divine. In Igbe ro Orhen they communicate with Oweya through votary songs and dance. The seventh anatomic features of the Abrahamic religions are sacred stories and mythologies. Nielson cited in Afatakpa (2019) contends that mythologies and sacred stories helps to the religions to have a lucid worldview. Based on oral traditions, Igbe ro Orhen has its sacred myth of origin. In the eight instances, the Abrahamic religions regulate and organise the lives of their adherents. Some denominational variants even have dress codes and specific periods of the year set aside for special celebrations with the almighty God. Igbe ro Orhen, adherents don white garments. The white garment symbolises purity of the heart and soul. Others variants of the religion don white and red garments. They also set aside the month of May every year to celebrate the Ore Isi Festival (see Afatakpa, 2017). In the ninth instance, the Abrahamic religions have strong leadership and have institutionalise their teachings and practices. Igbe ro Orhen has strong leadership institutions build around the *Uku Supreme* (title reserved for supreme leader of Igbe ro Orhen worldwide). Last but not the least, the Abrahamic religions promise their faithfuls with eternal life in the hereafter. In Igbe ro Orhen, Odjuvwu is the place of eternal rest for adherents that have served Oweya faithfully. These anatomic features cohere with (Nabofa, 2005). Thus, Igbe ro Orhen assumes the status of monotheistic, non-Abrahamic religion.

Congregation Conflict Management

Being a member of a religious congregation in our contemporary society has its prospects, challenges and opportunities. According to Oppenshaw, Nel, and Louw (2018) the challenges in a religious congregation can dovetail into violent conflicts if they are not properly managed. They posit that congregations will always experience conflict. However, the root causes must be properly understood before conflict management approaches can be applied. In furtherance of their argument, congregational conflict can only be managed where there is strong leadership. This affirms the earlier position of this paper that leadership and management go hand in hand. Ford (2008) postulates that most congregation leaders are untrained in the nuances of congregational conflict. Therefore, management becomes a difficult task. This paper argues that congregational conflict can be managed from a sociological and theological perspective. Thus, congregational leaders are expected to back up their theological knowledge with sociological skills for the proper management of conflicts in their congregations. Mayer (2010) coheres that it is the perception of the members of a congregation that determines how effectively congregational conflicts can be managed. They submit that perception plays a great role in the behavioural responses of conflict parties in a congregation. In this paper, congregational conflict management is conceptualised as the approaches adopted by the leadership of a congregation to resolve conflicting matters of interest among the congregants. The sole purpose of congregational conflict management is to allow the spirit of God to move freely in the midst of the congregants. To this end, they will not be denied access to the blessings of God.

Igbe ro Orhen as a Monotheistic Non-Abrahamic Religion

A Brief History of Igbe Orhe

The word "Igbe" is an Urhobo word meaning dance. Thus, Igbe is a religion of dance (Nabofa, 2005). It is seen as polytheism by most people who are not familiar with the technical details of the religion because the practices are largely derived from local beliefs. However, adherents of Igbe religion believe in one God called Oweya who is worshipped through votary dance and consumption of the Orhen (native white chalk). Ubiesha Etarakpor founded the Igbe Religion in the mid-19th century in Kokori town (Akama, 1985), located in present-day Delta State, Nigeria. Therefore, long before Christianity gained entrance into Urhoboland in the 20th century, Igbe religion was well entrenched in the 19th century. The spiritual headquarters of Igbe Religion is

located at Ubiesha's home at 11 Egbo Street, Kokori- Inland, Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State.

Clarifying Igbe Orhe as Monotheism Non-Abrahamic Religion

The dominant narrative in the study of religion centres on the primacy of the practice of monotheism only in the Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). However, little is known about the genre of monotheist non-Abrahamic religions in both Western and African scholarship. It has been observed through empirical investigations that members of Igbe ro Orhen believe in one God, known as Oweya. In the cosmology of Igbe Orhe, Oweya is one and indivisible who can be called upon directly. Nabofa (2005) contends that Oweya carries the idea of one indivisible, all-mighty God who has an infinite capacity to influence the activities of mankind. This affirms as Baaren (2019) argues that monotheism is the belief in the existence of one God, or the oneness of God. Therefore, the argument that monotheism is the exclusive preserve of the Abrahamic religions is not correct. Accordingly, Igbe ro Orhen has been conceptualised as monotheistic non-Abrahamic religion because the members acknowledge Ubiesha Etarakpor as patriarch, while Oweya is the Supreme God of history and revelation.

Congregational conflict management in Igbe Orhe

Uku Supreme Obaoga Ibodje categorizes conflict in an *Ogwa ri Igbe* into two: the first is a conflict with *Oweya* and conflict with man. According to him:

An adherent conflict with *Oweya* when her/she violates the *Urhi*. *Such* a person cannot be blessed in the *Ogwa* (temple of worship). Conflict with man has to do with personal dissatisfaction with the attitude or actions of a person to the extent of taking offence. Conflict must be managed and resolved in Igbe ro Orhen because we must maintain a balance, a sort of divine equilibrium with *Oweya* when we gather in the temple to worship. The absence of that balance with the divine presence of *Oweya* will deny us of material and spiritual benefits (I. Ibodje, personal communication, May 10, 2020)

This position substantiates the structural-functional theory because the receiving of blessings from Oweya is dependent on the seamless interpersonal connectivity of members of the congregation that is devoid of acrimonies. This claim substantiates Vrolijk (2011) that material possession can only be enjoyed from God if all layers of relationships (human and divine) are in order. This is because of the dynamism involved in the relationship of God with humanity and the sophistications that are attendant with human relationships.

Causes of Intra-Congregational Conflicts in Igbe ro Orhen

A. Giving out responsibilities to new members

In the words of Onori Akpiri Onoriode “I have been in this *Ogwa ri Igbe* as an *Onori* for close to 9 years. One of the causes of conflict in our congregation has to do with *Uku* assigning responsibility to a new member. It makes the older members feel cheated or unjustly treated (A. Onoriode, personal communication, September 24, 2016).” This submission coheres with the thoughts of Heuser and Shawchuck (2010) that when an older member of a group is denied certain responsibilities the feeling of injustice builds up, which can trigger the release of negative energy into the group. In some cases, negative energy can affect the productivity of a group. Mrs Abigail Kapovia, a participant in the focus group discussion (FGD) explains, “some people feel offended, especially, those that have spent some time here in the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. More so, when it is obvious that they qualify to carry out the assignment that was given to the so called a new member and to make matters worse, we are not even sure of his/her spiritual / moral standing (A. Kapovia, personal communication, August 7, 2016)”. Mrs Dorcas Agabi, a FGD complained that “when supportive members notice some form of sidelining, it makes them lethargic in things that pertain to the *Ogwa ri Igbe* (D. Agabi, personal communication, August 7, 2016)”. Uku Supreme Obaoga Ibodje further alluded that “once people begin to feel bad and such is not addressed, it hinders the flow of the spirit of Oweya in the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. Oweya cannot inhabit a place that is laced with strife (I. Ibodje, personal communication, May 10, 2020)”. In other words, the reaction of the person who feels offended will deny the *Ogwa ri Igbe* from being in a state of divine equilibrium. What has been pointed out by the respondents is called ‘disturbance’ in the thesis of structural-functional theory. Therefore, the issue in contention must be addressed

for the *Ogwa ri Igbe* to get back to the state of divine equilibrium. In the context of Igbe ro Orhen, a state of divine equilibrium is attained when the power of *Oweya* is felt in the course of worship, especially during the votary dance session.

Perceived partiality in leadership selection

In any religious congregation, how leaders are selected to occupy strategic positions is very important. In light of the theory of structural functionalism, the legitimacy of the leaders is crucial for the stability of the macro-society. It can also be applied in a religious congregation because it is the macro-dimension of a belief system. The legitimacy of leaders in the eyes of members is crucial for the stability of a congregation. Omote Uku Dorcas Eseoghene submits that “the way people are ordained to occupy the office of *Onori* or *Oni Igbe* is one causes of conflict in some of our congregation. Some people have left some *Ogwa* because of such scenarios (D. Eseoghene, personal communication, November 5, 2016)”. Mrs Ogheneruemu Okoloba, a participant in the FGD made the following assertions:

In Igbe you grow through the ranks in the service of *Ogwa ri Igbe*. It is through service that we learn the details of Igbe ro Orhe and then grow to become a leader. Now conflict will surely ensue when a person is selected and ordained as *Onori simply* because he has money, whereas there are people in the *Ogwa ri Igbe* who have been spending their energy and time. It causes conflict in some of our congregations (O. Okoloba, personal communication, August 7, 2016).

It is important to mention that leadership selection in Igbe ro Orhen is contingent on the principles of lay stewardship. Even when it evident that the one who is being called to serve is divinely selected by *Oweya*, he or she will still follow the route of lay stewardship. Lay stewardship entails that member contribute their time, talent, moving close to *Oweya* and developing spiritual powers by participating in outreach activities and sharing faith with others members of the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. Consequently, in congregations where there is a violation of the principles of lay stewardship conflict is inevitable.

The attitude of toxic leaders

Mrs Paulina Akusu a participant in the FGD indicates, “we have very good leaders in our Ogwa ri Igbe. However, there are some *Ogwa ri Igbe* where the attitudes of the leaders leave much to be desired. Their character and conduct do not reflect leadership (P. Akusu, personal communication, August 7, 2016)”. According to Uku Okpako Oherhe, the toxic attitude of some leaders is “sometimes rooted in bad communication. Some of them don’t know how to talk to members and when such occurs, some people in the congregation get offended (O. Oherhe, personal communication, November 22, 2016)”. Singh, Sengupta and Dev (2018) argue that one of the dark sides of a leader is toxic attitudes. It is their submission that toxicity in leadership results in malevolent communication, unguided utterances that are capable of plunging an organisation into a crisis. These attitudes do not fit into the framework of the theory of structural functionalism. Since leaders play a cardinal role in the establishment of equilibrium in a society, there must be a measure of courtesy in the way they relate with the people that they are expected to lead. One of the respondents, Oni Igbe Eloho Ogagaoghene, categorically mentioned, “some of our leaders are very proud and they look down on people. Such an attitude is not healthy for any congregation and it sometimes causes conflict amongst us (E. Ogagaoghene, personal communication, December 18, 2016)”. It supports the notion that it will be toxic to build leadership on ego because it is capable of generating conflict that can harm the system. Understandably, the existence of toxic leaders is a painful reality in many groups, communities and societies. Their behavioural patterns necessitate dysfunction and create a workforce that is disillusioned.

Distribution of food during feasts

One common feature among adherents of Igbe is the celebration of the feast of thanksgiving. Apart from the general annual Thanksgiving Feast that takes place at Kokori every year, all Igbe ro Orhen congregations must celebrate an annual mid-year Thanksgiving Feast and an annual Thanksgiving Feast. One of the features of the celebration of feasts in Igbe ro Orhen is the distribution of food and drinks. The researcher observed that foods served during feasts are sumptuous and tasteful. Every adherent of Igbe ro Orhen looks forward to when the annual

festival celebration will be announced in the congregation. All respondents attested that the distribution of food is one of the major causes of conflict in Igbe ro Orhen Congregations. According to Uku Joseph Amakashe “the purpose of the thanksgiving is to rejoice before Oweya for his mercies in the previous year and to thank for the years ahead. But you see members of the same congregation bearing grudges because the food did not get to them during the feast (J. Amakashe, personal communication, December 18, 2016)”. It is necessary to stress that food distribution as a cause of congregational conflict predates the founding of Igbe ro Orhen. Uku Samson Mukoro submits that:

In Igbe ro Orhen congregations, it is not the lack of food that causes conflict because we prepare adequately. Rather, it is the mismanagement of the distribution process. Some of the people who are saddled with that responsibility are not dispassionate about it. Often, they serve their friends and personal guests. All this happens without the knowledge of the Uku or Omote Uku in charge of the congregation. As a result, some members of the congregation get angry. Once members are angry, it defeats the whole essence of the festival (S. Mukoro, personal communication, September 4, 2016)

According to Quak cited in Afatakpa (2019), the mismanagement of food distribution can fuel conflict. Though his submission is not within the context of a religious setting, it coheres with the finding that when food items are not properly distributed within a group, disillusion and conflict can ensue. It justifies the submission of Uku Felix Idigu that “beyond our usual festivals, there are occasions where food is served in some Ogwa ri Igbe, you still find some people getting angry and causing conflict (F. Idigu, personal communication, September 8, 2016)”.

Inability to pay back borrowed money

There is consensus among all respondents that one of the causes of congregational conflict has to do with the failure of a member to fulfill a promise concerning payment of debt. In the words of Oni Igbe Mary Davikpuvie “in Igbe ro Orhen, we hold people accountable for their words. If you

cannot fulfil a promise, then do not give it. If you borrow money, then pay as at when due (M. Davikpuvie, personal communication, September 4, 2016)". This was affirmed by Oni Igbe Oghenegweke Sakpra that "when a member refuses to pay back borrowed money it is not good enough. It makes the congregational relationship to be tense. They will no longer be free with themselves. We have had cases where members leave the Ogwa because of their inability to pay what they owe (O. Sakpra, personal communication, September 8, 2016)". When a congregation is in a state of tension, it negates the interdependence continuum of the structural-functional theory. It is worthwhile to mention that within the setting of a congregation, just as in the macro-society, interdependent relationships become seamless when people are at peace with each other. This assertion is predicated on the thesis that while most sociological approaches recognize the interdependence of the elements of a society, the functionalist approach tends to regard these elements of society (individuals or institutions) as having particular functions to perform. Therefore, if the indebtedness of members causes tension and disharmony, the role that they are supposed to perform in the congregation will be truncated.

Closeness to Uku/Omote Uku

According to the Onori French Oghenevoke, "whether we like it or not some people are very close with the Uku or Omote Uku. But I have come to discover that some people in the congregation feel jealous about it. Then they will start to give them attitude. The older members are guilty of this (F. Oghenevoke, personal communication, April 21, 2016)." According to Alfonso (2014), jealousy can appear to be harmless, but the consequences can be devastating. Jealousy can introduce negative energy into a congregation which is capable of distancing people from experiencing joy (Alfonso, 2014). When jealousy is not quickly addressed, a congregation cannot carry out its structural function. Mrs Bridget Ejowhodiowo in the FGD mentioned that "it is not everybody that can be close to *Uku* or *Omote Uku*. For example, there are some people with special cases and *Uku* must draw them to help them out. This single issue has caused conflict in some *Ogwa ri Igbe* (B. Ejowhodiowo, personal communication, August 7, 2016)". Onori Michael Ese affirmed "the people who are guilty of this are those who have been very close to *Uku/Omote Uku* before (M. Ese, personal communication, November 22, 2016)". This phenomenon is referred to as reactive jealousy because the member who is trying to get close to

Uku or Omote Uku is wont to threaten the stability of the relationship of those who were initially close.

Conflict Management Mechanisms in Igbe ro Orhen

In the context of this study, the dominant conflict types in Igbe ro Orhen congregations are mostly affective because they border on the inter-personal relationship. According to Uku Pascal Omonigho, “we don’t waste time in dealing with conflict in Igbe ro Orhen (P. Omonigho, personal communication, April 22, 2020). Thus, one of the factors that ensure divine equilibrium in Igbe ro Orhen is the strong interpersonal relationship among the congregants and it justifies the importance of sound management and interpersonal relations in the smooth running of a group or community whether religious or secular, as espoused in the theory of functionalism. “Once conflict a conflict is exposed; we deal with it squarely. An unmanaged conflict hinders the flow of the power of *Oweya* (P. Omonigho, personal communication, April 22, 2020)”. This submission agrees with the equilibrium continuum in the theory of structural functionalism.

A. Conflict Detection.

Omote Uku Onajite Oghenekevwe contends that in Igbe ro Orhen “we first detect a conflict before we talk about how to manage and resolve it. (O. Oghenekevwe, personal communication, April 17, 2020).” Accordingly, conflict management in Igbe Orhe goes with conflict resolution. Therefore, it contradicts the submission of Robinson and Clifford (1974) that not all conflicts can be resolved, but that they should rather be managed constructively. It also contradicts Barker et al (1987) that conflicts are not always resolved, rather, they are managed as individuals try to work out differ. Omote Uku Antonia Ighotegwolo made the following observations “conflict is detected through direct revelation from the spirit of *Oweya* to Uku or Omote Uku; it can also be detected through open confession in the congregation; it can be detected through direct personal reporting to the spiritual head. It helps the spiritual activities in the *Ogwa* (A. Ighotegwolo, personal communication, April 14, 2020). This account brings into line the notion that conflict detection helps the organisation to function optimally (Afatakpa, 2019).

B. Respect for the verdict of Uku or Omote Uku

It must be mentioned that Igbe religion operates an “Episcopal” administrative model, where the Uku or Omote Uku sits as overseers. Omote Uku Cecilia Ogbeide posits that “the office of *Uku* or *Omote Uku* is saddled with spiritual and administrative responsibilities in the *Ogwa ri Igbe*. According to her, “in managing conflicts in our congregations, the pronouncement of the presiding Uku or Omote Uku is taken as law. The words of Uku or Omote Uku are regarded as direct words from Oweya. The verdict of Uku or Omote Uku is taken as a direct verdict from Oweya. Also, Uku or Omote Uku manage and resolve conflicts in line with our Urhi (extant laws) (C. Ogbeide, personal communication, August 17, 2020)”. The theory of structural functionalism affirms that a strong leadership framework helps the macro-functioning of any society and findings in Igbe Orhe congregations support it. This submission fits into the structural-functional model that certain individuals in the society executes tasks in various institutions and roles that are consistent with the structures and norms of the society.

C. Religious Arbitration

Findings uncovered that an adherent of Igbe ro Orhen does not take a fellow adherent to court. According to Uku John Emuejevoke “we do not go to court in Igbe ro Orhe. It is against the laws of the religion, except, it is an offense committed against the government. But if it has to do with infractions amongst the adherents, the court of *Uku* or *Omote* will arbitrate (J. Emuejevoke, personal communication, August 17, 2020)”. Arbitration takes place inside the *Ogwa ri Igbe* in the presence of the Inori, Ini-Igbe and presided over by the *Uku* or *Omote Uku*. Arbitration is mostly used when the conflict has to do with a violation of the laws of the religion such as adultery, accusations of stealing, practice of witchcraft, disobeying the Uku or any leader etc. These are offences that are tried in line with the laws of the religion. Onori Gilbert Efemena made these assertions “when we sit in the court of *Uku* to arbitrate, we decide by consensus based on the norms and values of Igbe ro Orhen (G. Efemena, personal communication, August 18, 2020)”. This submission agrees with the concept of religious arbitration. Walter (2012) affirms that in the United States and Canada, God and law intersect in the form of religious arbitration. However, while it is a voluntary phenomenon in America or Canada, it is compulsory on Igbe ro Orhen. Oni Igbe Ruth Ikpe responded that “violators of the laws of the religion who refuse to submit to *Uku* or *Omote Uku*’s court of arbitration are expelled from the *Ogwa ri Igbe* and our decisions are binding on all disputants (R. Ikpe, personal communication, August 18, 2020)” It must be

mentioned that it is not in all cases that expulsion is used as a measure to deal with members who do not respect the authority of Uku or Omote Uku. In some instances, deviant members are given the 'silent treatment' by Uku or Omote. But relationship is restored when they become remorseful and *shi gwe ki baba*. It also fits into the structural-functional theory because when a social or religious system lacks order and consensus, anarchy will be the order of the day. Also, there is a connection with Durkheim's social facts or moral regulation in that they govern behaviour and values to be consistent with the equilibrium state of society, or normal state of affairs. For an adherent of Igbe ro Orhen, it is sacrosanct that divine equilibrium must be maintained in the congregation.

D. Mediation and Conciliation

Mrs Dolor Emudiake, a participant in the FGD put forward that "when it has to do with issues like marital conflict, we are very careful. I am not talking about adultery, but a quarrel between husband and wife. Uku can send Inori or Ini Igbe to go and persuade them to sheath their sword. We do not look for who is guilty. We persuade them to see the reasons why they must settle their quarrel (D. Emudiake, personal communication, August 7, 2016)". This submission is in tandem with the principle of conciliation. The conciliator does not give any award or order. He tries to bring an acceptable agreement as to the conflict between the parties by mutual consent (Shinde, 2012). Onori Abel Kodu posits that "In matters like a breach of agreement, breach of contract or refusal to pay a loan, impregnating a woman out marriage, or clash with a leader in the Ogwa ri Igbe, we mediate because they are issues that can unsettle a congregation (A. Kodu, personal communication, August 16, 2020)". It affirms the structural-functional theory postulation that a disturbance within a social or religious order would require some specific roles to be played to return the society to a more normal state of affairs. One of the cardinal roles of Onori or Ini Igbe in Igbe ro Orhen is mediation.

Conclusion

The management of congregational conflict is sacrosanct in Igbe ro Orhen. Not properly managed and resolved, congregational conflict can lead to severed relationships, break ties and hurt the members which is contrary to the structural functional theory that emphasizes the interdependence of relationship for the smooth running the society. Thus, in the cosmology of

Igbe ro Orhen, conflict with *Oweya* must be resolved quickly, while conflicts with a fellow man in the congregation are managed and resolved from conflict management structures that are entrenched within the religious system. Also, conflict is quickly managed and resolved once they are detected because it allows for a seamless flow of material blessings once there is no upset in divine equilibrium. Therefore, the concept of congregational conflict management in Igbe ro Orhen is woven around the notion of constant reconciliation with *Oweya* and peaceful coexistence among fellow men to gain access to the divine blessings (material and spiritual).

REFERENCES

Secondary Sources

- Afatakpa, F. 2019. Intra-Sectarian Conflict Management Mechanisms amongst Worshipers of Igbe Orhe in Delta State, Nigeria. *A PhD Thesis submitted in the Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.*
- Afatakpa, O. F. 2017. An African Monotheism: The Igbe Religion of the Urhobo and the Economic Importance of Ore – Isi Festival. *Yoruba Studies Review (2) 1 Special Edition. pp.317*
- Akama E.S. 1985. Igbe cult in Isokoland: Missionary response and government response. *Journal of African Religion*, **15**, 25-49.
- Akponwei, P.S. 2009. *Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Monotheistic Religion. Ibadan: Rural Books.*
- Alfonso, T. 2014. The Spiritual Consequences of Jealousy. Retrieved on April 5, 2020 from <https://www.religiaodedeus.org/en/>
- Ammermann, N.T. 2005. Pillars of faith: American Congregations and their Partners. *University of California Press, Berkeley.*
- Awojobi, P.O. 2011. *Church Management*. Ilorin: Kingdom Power Communication
- Baaren, T. P. van 2019. *Monotheism. Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved on April 10, 2020 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/monotheis>
- Barker, L., Kathy J. W., Wahlers, K. W., Watson, K.W and Kibler, R. J. 1987. Groups In Process: An Introduction to Small Group Communication, Third Edition. *Englewood Cliff: Prentice Hall.*

- Dudley, C., Zingery, T., and Breeden, D. 2000. Insights into congregational conflict. Faith Communities Today. *Hartford Seminary 77 Sherman Street, Hartford, CT 06105*
- Dollhopf, E.J, and Scheitle, C.P. 2013. Decline and conflict: causes and consequences of leadership transitions in religious congregations. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 52: 675–697
- Ford, L. 2008. Transforming leadership: Jesus’ way of creating vision, shaping values & empowering change. *Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL*.
- Heuser, R. and Shawchuck, N. 2010. Leading the Congregation. *Maryland. Abingdon Press*
- King James Bible*. 2008. Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1769)
- Kumar V. 2019. Management. Retrieved on the September 30, 2021 from <https://www.roarwap.com/management-process/concept-of-management/>.
- Lester L. A. 2009. Congregational Conflict Resolution: The Pastor’s Role. Retrieved on February 20, 2020 from <https://www.mediate.com/Today/congregational>
- Mayer, B. 2010. The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A practitioner’s Guide. *John Wiley & Sons, San Francisco, CA*.
- Nabofa, M. Y. 2005. Igbe Ubiesha: An Indigenous Charismatic Movement of Urhobo people. Studies in Urhobo culture. In P. Ekeh. Ed. *Lagos: Urhobo History Society*. 371– 402.
- Singh N., Sengupta S. and Dev, S . 2018. Toxic Leadership: The Most Menacing Form of Leadership, Dark Sides of Organizational Behavior and Leadership. *Maria Fors Brandebo and Aida Alvinus, IntechOpen, DOI: 10.5772/intechopen.75462*. Available from: <https://www.intechopen.com/books/dark-sides-of-organizational-behavior-and-leadership/toxic-leadership-the-most-menacing-form-of-leadership>
- Oppenshaw, D.L., Nel, M. and Louw, L. 2018. Conflict resolution and reconciliation within congregations. *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 74(2), a4641. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i2.4641>
- Pargament, K. I. 2007. Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred. *New York, NY: Guilford Press*.
- Porth, E., Neutzling, K., and Edwards, J. (n.d.). Anthropological Theories - Department of Anthropology - The University of Alabama. *The University of Alabama*. Retrieved April 15, 2017, from <http://anthropology.ua.edu/cultures/cultures.php>

- Robinson, J.W. and Clifford, R.A. 1974. Conflict Management in Community Groups. *University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, North-Central Regional Extension Publication*, 36-55.
- Shinde, U. 2012. Conciliation As an Effective Mode of Alternative Dispute Resolving System. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, **4**, 1– 7.
- Vrolijk, P. 2011. Jacob's Wealth: An Examination into the Nature and Role of Material Possessions in the Jacob-Cycle (Gen 25:19-35: 29). *Leiden. Brill*
- Walter, N. 2012. Religious Arbitration in the United States and Canada. *Santa Clara Law Review*. **52**: 501- 569