

Orita

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ENDOGENOUS PEACE PROCESSES AND THE
RESOLUTION OF AFU-AFUGHI RELIGIO-CULTURAL
CONFLICT¹ IN NANKA, SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

Chinyere Ukpokolo, PhD

Abstract

This study looks at a communal conflict, termed 'afu-afughi' religio-cultural conflict in Nanka, southeastern Nigeria, and the efforts made at resolving it, including the employment of endogenous peace processes. It is discovered that while the western-oriented peace approach achieved minimal results, endogenous peace processes were employed. The paper concludes that cultural meanings which the people could identify with are associated with the home-grown peace approach, and this 'native understanding' contributed to its acceptability, thereby affirming the continued relevance of endogenous peace model in contemporary Igbo society.

Introduction

Local communities are characterized by attachment to certain ancestral beliefs which the people consider to give meaning to their lives. Such beliefs are perceived as source of their constructed identity, or "what it means to be 'us'"². Thus, members of local communities often crave for cultural

¹ 'Religio-cultural conflict' is used here to refer to conflict emanating from conflicting perspectives between

Christian religion and African culture.

² Harrison, R. and John Schofield (2009) 'Archaeo-Ethnography, Auto-Archaeology: Introducing Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past'. *Journal of the World Archaeological Congress: Archaeologies*. Volume 5 Number 2, August, pp. 186.

preservation as a mark of their 'being' in a complex but homogenizing world. This collective consciousness constitutes elements of group connectedness, and is often the source of contention when there is a perceived threat either externally initiated or from within.

In recent decades, several Igbo communities in, southeastern Nigeria are witnessing various types of conflicts, ranging from 'religio-cultural' conflicts to those emanating from land ownership and chieftaincy issues (see Nwolise, 2004; Ezeugwa, 2011,³ for instance). Some of these conflicts emanate from the remarkable differences between Igbo endogenous practices and values, and those of the Christian religion, which is a product of Western contact, and the changes which the current trends and tendencies of globalization have thrust up. Government initiated efforts using mainstream peace instruments and processes in an attempt at bringing peace to these conflict-torn communities often prove inadequate. This is not surprising as even at a macro level (national and international), conflict management in Africa using Western peace initiatives have not always succeeded. Interestingly, a number of scholars, notably Hountondjin, Malan, Smock, Osaghae, Zartman and Nwolise, have drawn attention to the need to begin to imagine alternative approaches particularly in Africa where there have been protracted conflicts in different parts of the continent (see for instance, Hountonjin (1997), Malan (1997), Smock (1997), Osaghae (1999), Zartman (2000), and Nwolise (2004).⁴ Hountondji, P. (1997)

³ Nwolise, O. (2004) 'Death Knell for Zero-sum Game. A Celebration of Traditional Methods of Bargaining and Conflict Resolution'. A paper prepared for Dr. O. Albert's Senate Research Grant Report and Publication on 'Conflict in Africa'. February 2004; Ezeugwa, S.N.C. (2011) *Bumpy and Rugged Road to the Traditional Throne*. Enugu: Collybest Production.

⁴ Hountondji, P. (1997) 'Introduction'. *Endogenous Knowledge Research Trails*. Hountondjin, P. Ed. CODESRIA BOOK SERIES. 1 – 15. Malan, J. (1997) *Conflict Resolution: Wisdom from Africa* ACCORD 1997. South Africa. Smock, D. R. (1997) Building on Locally-Based and Traditional Peace Processes. June 10th, 2003, from <http://southsudanfriends.org/Locally-BasedPeace.html>. Osaghae, E. (1999) Research in Africa. *International Journal on World Peace* Vol. XVI No. 4, December 1999. 53-71. Zartman, W. I. (2000) 'Introduction'. In: *Traditional Cure for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict 'Medicine'*. Zartman, William, I. (Ed.). London: Lynne Rienner Publishers. 1 - 11.

Zartman (2000),⁵ for instance, notes that, despite the efforts of regional, international and private agencies to bring peace into the African sub-region, African conflicts remain impervious to these attentions. According to him, though these attempts involve seasoned peacemakers using the best of personnel skills and recently developed knowledge about ways of managing and resolving conflicts, international efforts at conflict management have not been particularly effective in overcoming crisis that they have intended to address.⁶

Evident in these attempts is the application of Western-oriented techniques and methods of peacemaking, conflict resolution, and post-conflict reconciliation. These approaches, scholars have observed, do not take into account Africa's peculiar cultural imperatives and endogenous knowledge. Oftentimes, in the Western-oriented peace initiatives, the signing of treaties with the combatants and their leaders and/or representatives in round-table discussions is assumed to be the signal that sustainable peace accord had been initiated. However, what often obtains is a relapse into violent conflict. This less-than-ideal situation has resulted in an inevitable high rate of failures recorded with Western-oriented approaches to peace in Africa. Commenting on the failure of the mainstream peace processes in the continent, Malan cautioned that though the current techniques of conflict resolution from America, Europe, Asia, and Australia come with professional quality and scientific underpinning, stakeholders in peace efforts in Africa should not allow the apparent appeal of such contemporary materials make them forget the time-proven methods, which originated on African soil.⁷ He, then, noted that conflict management in Africa, for instance, takes social reality seriously, and this, according to the scholar, is one of the major lessons the rest of the world may learn from Africa. Social life, he affirmed, is where values and norms are formed, and in fact I may add, sustains values and norms. In line with this, Smock calls for an innovative approach to peace efforts in Africa, which he suggests should involve locally-

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 1 - 11.

⁷ Malan, J. (1997) *Conflict Resolution: Wisdom from Africa* ACCORD 1997. South Africa, pp. 16

based peace processes.⁸ The challenge is the search for new methods that would be more relevant and effective in the African situation. Or what Zartman calls "African conflict Medicine",⁹ a case of alternative approach to peace processes in the continent. To him, such methods need to have originated from Africa and would not be strange to the people concerned.

The suggestions of these scholars are particularly appropriate in local communities in Africa where members still have strong attachment to endogenous belief systems, and sources of conflicts have to do with cultural issues. Against this background, this paper examines a communal conflict termed *afu-afughi* conflict which took place in Nanka, a local Igbo community in southeastern Nigeria in the early 1990s with the intention of investigating the employment of endogenous peace processes in the resolution of the conflict and, in the process, give an insight into the Igbo people's psychology of peace. The study explores also previous attempts at resolving the conflict and the extent to which they succeeded. Resolving conflicts in a rural community in Igbo land thrust up the complex realities and at times the irreconcilable differences existing between the endogenous and exogenous perspectives that have come to characterize the contemporary societies in Africa. Certain questions are pertinent in this study. What is *afu-afughi* conflict, and what was the remote and immediate cause of the conflict? What were the initial efforts made to resolve the *afu-afughi* conflict and to what extent did they succeed? What role did the endogenous peace processes play in the resolution of the conflict? How was it employed, and to what extent did it succeed? What implications does this have for the contemporary African society?

Data for this study were generated through fieldwork. Methods include key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Twenty key informants were interviewed while six focus group discussions were held in the community. Research findings were analyzed using descriptive and interpretive techniques. Documentary evidence was

⁸ See Smock, D. R. (1997) Building on Locally-Based and Traditional Peace Processes. June 10th, 2003, from <http://southsudanfriends.org/Locally-BasedPeace.html>

⁹ Ibid. p. 2

also consulted and this helped to validate the data generated through interviews. Informants include selected indigenes of the community whom I perceived to be knowledgeable in the customs and traditions of the community and are also conversant with the subject matter of this study. Among these are those who occupy leadership positions at different levels in the community, including the chief priest of the community and the leader of vigilante group (local security outfit). The chief priest in particular, as the chief ritualist of the community, was actively involved in the use of the traditional peace processes in the resolution of the conflict. Also, the leader of the town union at the period of the conflict was also interviewed. Between the year 2000 and 2006 a total of six field trips were carried out.

Nanka Local Community

Nanka town is a local community in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra state, southeastern Nigeria (see Fig. 1 indicating the location of the study area). At the time of contact for this study, the population of Nanka was estimated to be about 34, 000 people. A town of seven villages with several patrilineages, Nanka came in contact with Christian religion back in 1912 and 1915 for Catholic Church and Anglican Church respectively. Erosion problem has continued to be a major challenge in the town and in pre-colonial times several rituals were carried out as a means of appeasing the gods and contending with the challenges of this menace. Major economic activities include peasant farming and trading. Despite the long contact with Christianity, many Nanka indigenes including many of those who claim to be Christians still have strong attachment to elements of indigenous belief systems including those that contradict the tenets of their Christian faith such as what is termed '*afu-afughi*' (this shall be explained later). This attachment is, particularly, obvious in those practices that impinge on the day to day life of the people, more especially those indigenes resident in the town. For instance, informants pointed out that many of the rural people still consult traditional herbalists for solution to their personal problems. Sacred places and sites can also be found in several places in the seven villages of the town, an indication of the people's traditional belief system.

In pre-colonial times, these deities and shrines helped the indigenous people connect to their ancestral beliefs and find meanings for their lives. In recent decades, however, these sacred sites have continued to lose their influence in terms of regular visitations as Christian religion continues to gain in road into the consciousness of the members of the local community. That notwithstanding, many indigenes, including some of these Christians, still find meaning in and connection with what these places stand for, a connection to their ancestral beliefs, customs and traditions central to their identity, despite their Christian profession. Kin group helps to cement intra- and inter- group relations in this local



Fig 1. Map of Anambra State Showing Study Area, Nanka.
SOURCE: Geographical Survey, with modification by the author, 2004.

Fig 1. Map of Anambra State Showing the Study Area, Nanka

community as the people interact, share and participate in various ceremonies and festivals such as marriage ceremonies and burials rites, and new yam festival. Communal life and meaning are re-enacted and shared through 'native understanding'.¹⁰ Adherents to some of these culturally defined patterns of behavior and interaction in the community ensure that group identity is concretized and sustained, and as long as there was no strong contestation with these, the people could participate in both Christian religious rites and their communal life, and peace reigned.

Afu-afugh Conflict: When Culture Matters

Amartya Sen, in his article, 'How Does Culture Matter?'¹¹ raises the question of the place of culture both in the society and in the processes of development. He contends that the criticism that economists and to a large extent, the development experts, traditionally had undermined the significant place culture occupies in the way societies work, and the processes of development¹² is a justified one. In the same vein, Christian religious leaders in Igboland seem to be coming to the realization, in recent years, of the deep-seated place which customary norms and values occupy in the life of an Igbo person including professing Christians. Indeed, to the Igbo people, culture matters and *afu-afugh* communal conflict in Nanka is a typical example of where and when culture matters. In 1985, a year that marked a century of the presence of Catholic Church in eastern Nigeria [Igboland], the then Archbishop of Onitsha lamented what he called the prevalence of 'idolatry in a century old faith' in Igboland. What the Archbishop perceived and described as idolatry, to many Igbo indigenes, is the way of life of their fore fathers which marks their identity.

Customs and traditions shape people's views and perceptions about realities, including the choices they make in their day to day lives. *Afu-*

¹⁰ See Geertz, Clifford (1983) *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

¹¹ Sen, Amarta (2004) 'How Does Culture Matter?' In: *Culture and Public Action*. Walton, Michael and Vijayendra Rao (Ed.). Stanford: Standard University Press. p. 37.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 37.

afughi literally means 'should we see or should we not see'. The term, because of its descriptive nature, has been coined and explained in diverse ways. For instance Ugochukwu¹⁴ calls it '*afu-afughi ozu*' meaning 'should corpse be seen or not'. Though Ofoegbu recognizes the cultural practice as '*afu-afughi*' he explains it as 'seen but not seen'.¹⁴ In the community itself, it is often referred to as '*eje afu na ejeghafu*', meaning, '[are we] to see or not see'. Ezeugwa¹⁵ also made reference to the cultural practice in his work on Nanka customs and traditions and refers to it as '*afu-afuro*', which is simply a dialectical variation of *afu-afughi*, hence means the same as the latter. Despite these divergent coinages, the cultural practice is still understood for what it means: a spouse must not see the corpse or coffin of the partner immediately he or she was publicly pronounced dead. For Nanka people, this customary practice had existed since time immemorial. *Afu-afughi* conflict emanated from the irreconcilable differences between Christian religion and the customary practice of Nanka people that forbade a spouse from seeing the coffin or corpse of the partner immediately he/she was pronounced dead publicly. Contact with Christian religion in the early twentieth century initiated a paradigm shift in the culture of the people, affecting the way certain customary practices are perceived. This is not peculiar to the people as culture is dynamic. However, members of the community including many Christian converts still adhere to certain traditional practices that contradict their Christian profession, such as *afu-afughi* issue. With time, particularly from 1940s, the cultural practice began to generate crises in the Christian community beginning with the Anglican Church, and then the Catholic Church. Some members of these churches began to question the sincerity of the Christian converts who still observed the

¹⁴ Ugochukwu, J. O. (1998) *Nanka Martyrdom: Faith, Crisis and Resolutions (Afu-afughi Ozu)*. Nkpor-Onitsha: Artworld Publishers.

¹⁵ Ofoegbu, Timothy G. (1997) *To Die is Gain: A Faith-stirring True-life Story of the Cold-blooded Murder of two Members of Catholic Charismatic Renewal*. Lagos: The Flame Books.

¹⁶ Ezeugwa, S.N.C. (1999) *Synoptic History, Culture, Customs, and Traditions of Ifite Village Nanka with Biography of Ezeugwa Ezenachukwu (1933 - 1943)*. Enugu: San Press Limited, p. 21.

customary practice. Yet, some church members maintained that the custom must persist. This group often termed 'dissidents' or 'anti-abolitionists' found support among backslidden Christians and adherents of traditional religion in the larger society. To this group, the cultural practice was part of the people's cultural identity. As Rao and Walton rightly noted:

Culture is concerned with identity, aspiration, symbolic exchange, coordination, and structures and practices that serve relational ends, such as ethnicity, ritual, heritage, norms, meanings, and beliefs.¹⁶

Indeed those that strongly resisted the abolition of the cultural practice, in the words of Ugochukwu, include some people "who had previously been policy makers in the parish council".¹⁷ Yet to others, the fear of the unknown was particularly pertinent in understanding the people's attachment to the custom, particularly in a rural community where social life is hinged on kinship network and harmonious neighbourhood relations. Peace to such people must include harmony and consensus within the kin's network on the one hand, and with the ancestors on the other. The inability of the dominant church denominations in Nanka community to successfully resolve these contradictions was the long term cause of the conflict.

1993 marked the climax of the crisis following the death of one Mr Jerome (pseudonym) in the midst of this controversy. The wife's insistence on participating in the burial ceremony, according to her Christian conviction, was rejected by many members of the kin group, majority of the villagers and supporters of the custom in the larger society. This led to an outbreak of violence at the burial ceremony of the deceased, which led to the death of two members of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Accusations and counter accusations followed the incident. The death of these people, which was widely carried in the dailies, attracted the attention of the then state governor.

¹⁶ Walton, Michael and Vijayendra Rao (2004) 'Culture and Public Action: Relationality, Equality of Agency and Development'. In: *Culture and Public Action*. Walton, Michael and Vijayendra Rao (Ed.). Stanford: Standard University Press, p. 16.

¹⁷ Ugochukwu, J. O. (1998) *Nanka Martyrdom: Faith, Crisis and Resolutions (Afu-afughi Ozu)*. Nkpor-Onitsha: Artworld Publishers, p. 17.

The police stepped in, made some arrests and charged the case to court after detaining those arrested for three years at the state headquarter. Following this new development, the state government insisted that the people found an acceptable way of abolishing the custom and resolving the conflict. The detainees were later released for lack of incriminating evidence.

Social Agencies and Afu-Afughi Conflict

Two important social agencies that participated in the intervention processes were the Church and the police/government. This section looks at the efforts of these social organs.

The Church Leadership

Although the crisis started in the church and snowballed into the community, the church leadership made efforts to resolve the matter amicably to prevent violent conflict, which unfortunately later took place. The Church leadership also tried to convince the people to identify with the position of the Church, by making several peace efforts aimed at reconciling the aggrieved members. Sunday homilies were employed as instruments of winning members to the position of the church, to preach against all forms of 'heathen' practices, while enlightenment campaigns in all the seven villages and Out-Stations of the mother Church were regular practices. Catecheses were also provided with the intention of persuading the people to disregard the cultural practice and end the crisis that the issue was generating both in the Church and the larger community. Within the church community also, the religious leaders began to legislate against the practice. Sanctions were imposed on those who maintained that the cultural practice must persist, and this included refusal of Church wedding and infant baptism for their babies. On the efforts of the church, Ugochukwu explained:

They [the church leaders] did not begin by legislating against the practice and imposing sanctions on defaulters or dissidents. Apart from their Sunday homilies, they provided adequate catecheses and organized enlightenment campaigns in all the five stations, ... with the councilors.¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p. 16.

This position was supported by an informant who observed: Delegates went from village to village informing people of the need to abolish the custom. [The church leadership] selected some people and with the priests went from village to village telling the people to allow people to do things in their own way [that is 'to see'], that there is nothing in the custom (Personal communication: March, 2006).

Through prayers and other forms of Christian religious rituals, the church publicly proclaimed the custom abolished. The congregation was encouraged 'to see' as they were, then, freed from any negative consequences non-observance of the taboo could bring. In all these, the efforts of the church were geared toward evangelizing the society, including "...criticizing, and even denouncing the aspects of a culture that contradict the gospel message and represent an attack on the dignity of the human being" and to transform the ethos of the society.¹⁹ Ironically, the greatest resistance to the transformation efforts of the church was from the supposed Christian converts, making the Church's task of liberating "every socio-cultural system from false human values" difficult. While some Christian converts found strength in the efforts of the church, for others, the pressure from kin group, compounded by primordial sentiments, and the preservation of cultural identity, made the pressure from the larger society overwhelming. This group consequently maintained that the Church had no power to abolish the custom that marked their identity. According to Ugochukwu "[T]he dissidents approached the [traditional] chief priest, *nwadunu*, and warned him not to sanction the abolition by the [church]... They later teamed up with '*Ndi Nze na Ozo*' [traditional titled men in the community] and dissidents from other churches to make the abolition ineffective".²⁰

¹⁹ *Inculturation in Nigeria: Proceedings of Catholic Bishops' Session*. November, 1988. Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. August, 1989. Lagos, pp. 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.17.

The Police and State Government

Government's intervention in the *afu-afughi* crisis dates back to several months of visitation to police station by parties in conflict in late 1980s and early 1990s. Several cases were reported at the police station both at Local Government Headquarter and state capital. In each case, the position of the police remained that the parties in conflict should resolve their differences amicably, as it was a customary matter. Generally in rural areas in Igbo land, police's involvement in customary matters is minimal; as such they are perceived to be outside the jurisdiction of the police. In any case, their intervention hardly resolves such problems. For instance, land matters in rural areas are resolved at the *umunna* (the patrilineage) level. Even when such cases get to the court, the position of the *umunna* is paramount, and the court always seeks to know the stance of the *umunna* on the matter. The position of the police on the *afu-afughi* issue is, therefore, understandable. Eventually, when the violent conflict broke out and two people were killed, the case was charged to court. The suspects were later released for lack of any incriminating evidence.

Resolving the Afu-afughi Conflict through Endogenous Peace Processes

Culture offers the context and determines the content of symbolic exchange. Religion reflects human's attempt to connect with the metaphysical world, with practices embedded in complex belief systems that may not be visible and meaningful to non-group members. Yet, humans practice religion in a social world, a world intertwined in social relationships which shape human behavior and conducts. As Rao and Walton, rightly noted, "culture is about relationality – the relationships among individuals within groups, and between ideas and perspectives".²¹

²¹ Walton, Michael and Vijayendra Rao (2004) 'Culture and Public Action: Relationality, Equality of Agency and Development'. In: *Culture and Public Action*. Walton, Michael and Vijayendra Rao (Ed.). Stanford: Standard University Press, pp. 4.

At the heart of the *afu-afughi* conflict was a people's traditional culture in conflict with faith as understood in Christian religion. Culture was therefore, the propelling force that sustained the *afu-afughi* conflict. The communal relationship that characterized the rural community also constitutes hindrance to attempts at creating change, especially as provision of alternative coping mechanisms seemed to be lacking. Any attempt, therefore, that must succeed in the resolution of the crisis, must take culture seriously. This section explores the employment of endogenous peace mechanisms in the resolution of *afu-afughi* conflict taking into cognizance the cultural contexts of the crisis. Endogenous peace approach in the context of this study is to be understood as those peacemaking structures and mechanisms that originate from the local community under study, and in the context of this paper, Igbo society. They are not products of external importation but have been part of the people's culture and were passed from generation to generation. The following section explores these structures and processes.

Traditional leader and the town union executives

The intervention of the traditional leadership was basically to find an amicable way of resolving the conflict. A meeting of representatives of the seven villages of Nanka was held in the town on the 28th of February, 1993. The resolution to abolish the cultural practice was taken and all the town union executives and village executives signed the resolution. The president of the town union was then mandated to approach the chief priest of the community and the '*ndi nze na ozo*' [traditional titled men] of the seven villages, and communicate to them the decisions of the executives, on the employment of customary approach to abolish the cultural practice and resolve the conflict. To prepare for the rituals of abolition, first, certain amount of money needed for the rituals was provided by the town union. The chief priest insisted that the money for the abolition must be community money if the sacrifice must be effective. The chief priest, as custom demanded, was delegated to purchase all that were needed for the rituals of abolition. The chief ritualist, accompanied by the priests of the respective seven major deities in the town, and '*ndi nze*' (titled men) performed the required rituals of abolition.

Rituals of abolition

The chief priest of the community, *Nwadunu*, in the traditional Nanka social thought, represents the link between the living and the ancestors. He is the chief priest, hence the chief ritualist in issues that deal with the customary practice of the people. *Nwadunu* in Nanka traditional society is a lineage of the chief priests from where a chief ritualist of the town emerges. According to oral tradition, the first *nwadunu* of the town came from Nri, the spiritual home of the Igbo²². The present *Nwadunu*, at the time of contact, was an eighty-year-old man with 'ichi' (facial scarification), a symbol of a generation that is passing away as the cultural practice of facial scarification has been abolished in the community. *Nwadunu* is in-charge of the promulgation and abolition of customs and traditions in the community, for according to the *nwadunu*, "to abolish a custom, the people will come here [his place] and will find out how to solve it" (Personal communication; August, 2003, translation mine). According to another informant, Madam Mgbokwu Enechi, in those days "*Nwadunu* fixed the day for traditional festivals like '*ilo mmuo*'" (a traditional festival). Owing to his role as the final arbiter, he is also known as '*Okwu nyia oha, nnaa ya ekwube*', which means "when a case is beyond the people, only him [*nwadunu*] will settle it". He is, therefore, the final arbiter in any dispute or conflict when other means have failed.

Although the traditional religionists constitute a small percentage of the population of the town, the *afu-afughi* conflict exposed the continued recognition of his role in the community, even among some Christian converts. As an agent of peacemaking, the chief priest and other priests are in charge of sacrifice and rituals that are either for atonement when the injunctions of the Earth goddess ('*nso Ala*' or '*alu*') is violated, to seal a resolution, abolish customs, or in cementing relationships between individuals, or in establishing harmonious relationship between the physical and spiritual realms of existence. Speaking on the resolution of *afu-afughi*

²² See Onwuejiegwu, M.A. (1981) *An Igbo Civilization: Nri Kingdom & Hegemony*. London: Ethiope Publishing Corporation, for a detailed explanation of Nri hegemony in Igboland.

conflict, the chief priest submitted that: "*Okwukwe ekwekotala onu, obulu ezi okwukwe*", meaning, "The faith that is shared by all, becomes a good faith", in other words, when the community reaches consensus on an issue, then things work out well", thereby stressing the significance of agreement in any community. He further noted that "*Alunsi soro oha bia, na eso oha ana*" meaning, "the deity that the community installs will leave at the instance of the community". For the chief ritualist, the community has the right to do away with any customary practice which the people believe no longer serves their needs.

Commenting on the resolution of *afu-afughi*, the chief ritualist submits, "Nanka brought money for the abolition". The money, according to him, was for the purchase of goat, '*nzu*' (white chalk), tubers of yam, '*oji*' (kola nut) and jars of palm wine. While the goat was slaughtered at the shrine at the chief priest's compound, others were distributed to the seven deities in the seven villages of the town (see Table I below). At the shrine of each deity, the chief priest, the priest of the respective deity and '*ndi nze*' performed the '*oji*' and '*ofo*' rituals and offered the sacrifice of abolition. According to Ukpokolo,²³ '*oji*' and '*ofo*' as symbols of peace, justice and authority in Igbo culture, integrate the physical and spiritual dimensions in tempo-spiritual relationship through ritual performances that bring male and female in a symbiotic interaction.

Table 1: Names of the seven villages of Nanka, and the respective deities that received objects of sacrifice for the resolution of *afu-afughi* conflict

Names of villages in Nanka	Name of the respective deity
Agbiligba	' <i>Udo Onicha</i> ' deity
Ifite	' <i>Ezekwem</i> ' deity
Amako	' <i>Ntai</i> deity' deity
Umudala	' <i>Udo Azu</i> ' deity
Etti	' <i>Mbirimbi</i> ' deity
Ubaha	' <i>Agwu Ubaha</i> ' deity

²³ Ukpokolo, Chinyere (2011) 'Gender, Symbols and Peacemaking among the Nanka Igbo People of Southeastern Nigeria'. *Human Affairs* Vol. 20, pp. 87 - 123.

According to the chief priest:

We went to different deities and told them that the day we would abolish this [the traditional practice] let the heart of the spirits be like the heart of the people. We appealed to them to support the abolition. Kolanut, palm wine, and yam tubers were all used. The white chalk of the deity was used to draw four lines (Pers. Comm.: March 2006, translation mine).

The four lines signify the four market days of the Igbo (*Eke, Oye, Afo, and Nkwo*), which is a week in Igbo calendar. It signifies completeness, connectedness and total agreement. All the 'nze' title holders participated. The chief ritualist affirmed that in front of each deity/shrine, and in the company of the priest of the respective deity, he appealed for support from the deity in the following words:

Bianu kwado ife anyi n' eme Come and support what we are doing.
Unu bu ndichie, anyi afughi anya. You are the ancestors that we can't see.

Unu bidoro ye. You started it.

Kitaa ndi oyibo achiba go. Now the 'oyibo' people (symbolizing Western culture) are ruling.

Bianu kwado ife anyi n' eme. Come and support what we are doing.

Anyi ejeghi adi iche. We can't be different.

(Personal Communication with the community Chief Priest, March, 2004).

Raising their individual *ofo*, they invited the deities and the cosmic forces to participate and accept the abolition of the customary practice and the resolution of the *afu-afughi* conflict. Tubers of yams were equally offered to the deity. An analysis of the speech of the chief priest before each deity suggests the apparent helplessness of the indigenous people to the encroachment of Western values, as they watch their cultural values collapse against the cultural contestations between indigenous culture and Western value system in the contemporary African society. This is demonstrated in

the statement: '*Ndi oyibo achi ba go. Anyi ejeghi adi iche*', meaning 'The White people are now ruling. We cannot be different'.

The second phase of the rituals of abolition and reconciliation was performed on the 19th of February, 1993, and for three purposes (i) the public abolition of '*afu-afughi*' cultural practice (ii) resolution of the conflict (iii) post-conflict communal reconciliation. In a public ceremony organized by the community leadership, many members of the community gathered at a primary school field, which functions as a modern village square for the final peace processes encoded in kolanut ritual. Five stages as identified in the kolanut ritual performed by the chief priest are indicated below:

STAGE I: Presentation of the kolanut: The traditional leader presented kolanut to the governor (the visitor) who then presented it to the chief priest of the community, whose duty it was to perform kolanut ritual as an elder.

STAGE II: Invitation of the spirit beings: As the kolanut is raised up, God the Creator is called upon; '*Ala*' (the Earth goddess), this time '*Ana Nanka*' that is 'Earth goddess of Nanka', and the ancestors are also invited to come and participate. Greetings are extended to them. By inviting the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the Earth goddess of the community, the chief priest acknowledges the dualistic nature of human existence as contained in Igbo worldview, and through their participation, the kolanut as a symbolic object becomes instrumental in connecting the living in a communion with the cosmic forces. They were invited to be participants and hence their agential in this peace process was acknowledged and affirmed. This is demonstrated in the extract below:

Chineke,

Ndi nna nna anyi

Ana Nanka Ududo, anyi ekene gi.

God, the Creator

Our ancestors

The Land of Nanka (Earth goddess of Nanka), we greet you.

Anyi n'ekene gi na nke imereme We are thanking you for the one you did before;
n'ekene gi na nke ije emereanyi n'ihu. And thanking you for the one you will do for us in the future.

STAGE III: Acknowledgement and appreciation of the Supreme Being, the gods and ancestors for “*nke imereme, na ekene gi na nke ije emere anyi n'ihu*”, that is “for what you did in the past and thanking you for what you will do for us in the future”. The expectation is that they (the Supreme Being, ancestors and the Earth goddess) will continue to protect and prosper the people. For the governor, “*Ana Nanka nyere ya aka ka ochika kwaa nka*” meaning, “May the Earth goddess of Nanka help him to rule and reign till old age”. The Earth goddess is here personalized. She can bring a thing to be. Her agency is reflected in the belief that she can assist the governor ‘to rule till old age’. Appreciation is extended to the governor who wants peace in the community. Proverb is then used to admonish the people: “*Onye choro udo, udo dikwara ya*”, meaning, “May he/she who wants peace also have peace”. Conversely, whoever does not want peace to reign, will not have peace. The prayer leader then begins to curse: “*Onye wetere anyi ajo afa na nkpari, onye ahu, Uwa asaa, uwa asato, ezi na uno ye enwekwana udo*”. That is, “the person that brought us bad name and insult, seventh, eighth generation may he and his households not have peace”. By invoking curses into this supposedly day of peace, the community re-enforces the need for members to strive for harmonious co-existence. Through this process, the leader reminds the people that every action has its consequences – positive or negative.

STAGE IV: Blessings/benediction: As the kolanut ritual continues, blessings are again extended to the governor; “*Ochichi ya ba kwara ya ulu, bakwara umu ya*”, meaning, “May his leadership bring fortune to him and his children”. The generality of the people are blessed - male, female, children and ‘*umuada*’ (daughters of the patrilineages and the town).

STAGE V: Final prayer request: The kolanut ritual then ends with another prayer, asking God to bless the kolanut for the nourishment of the body of the ‘communicants’. And the people echoed *ofooooo*, meaning ‘so be it’, reflecting collectivity and total agreement.

The ritual performances carried out at the community centre symbolizes communal agreement. By performing the kolanut and ‘*ofo*’ rituals for the resolution of ‘*afu-afughi*’ religio-cultural conflict, these symbols, in the form of the elder [the chief priest], kolanut, and ‘*ofo*’, transcend their original nature to assume a unifying figure embodying male and female in a tempo-spiritual fusion. The outcome is that of consent given, taboos abolished, and peace restored. Henceforth the community could ‘see’ without endangering their lives. All along, the kolanut ritual is interjected with proverbs. The proverb is a cultural artifact that encodes the people’s perception of reality and is often reenacted in conversations. According to Nwachukwu-Agba, the proverb functions as conversation opener, discourse flavour and dialogue closure and to the mature Igbo speakers the use of proverbs in conversation indicates their knowledge of their traditions and values.²⁴

Again, the Igbo see the proverb as the embodiment of truth, a perspective shared by members of the group. It serves as rhetorical tools in persuasions, raise the image of their users and imbue what is said with poeticism.²⁵ Similarly, Akporobaro and Emovon noted that proverbs has been and remain a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideals of a people from one generation to another. In essence, the proverb reflects the social values, norms and customs of the people. Indeed, proverbs are for the

²⁴ Nwachukwu-Agba, J.O.J. (2002) *Igbo Proverbs: A Study of its Context, Performance and Functions*. Enugu: John Jacob’s Classic Publishers Ltd, pp. 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*p.6

most part philosophical, morally perceptive, pragmatic and didactic.²⁶ In the resolution of 'afu-afughi' crisis, the Nanka chief priest, while performing the kolanut ritual on that special occasion, embellishes his speech with proverbs, which positions the chief priest as the symbol of the people's values, norms and customs. In this communicative encounter the people's participation is ensured as they are connected and share in a more concrete way in the interactive processes, not as observers or receivers but as active participants. It, therefore, symbolizes their oneness, their interconnectedness, and subsequently their past, present and the mapping of the future for their community.

Implications for Practice

The traditional Igbo society, like most African societies, is fundamentally a communitarian one. Social relation is characterized by a sense of community. Among the Gikuyu people of Kenya, for instance, Kenyatta noted that in Gikuyu thought system "nobody is an isolate individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost he is several people's relative and several peoples contemporary".²⁷ This is not limited to the Gikuyu people but also reflected in the Nanka incident. Obviously the sustenance of the *afu-afughi* conflict was propelled by the people's understanding that the decision on whether 'to see' or 'not to see' is not a personal decision but a collective one, not even a segment of the community has the power to take a position contrary to what the generality of the people agreed upon. This essentially informed the rejection of the churches' attempt to bring to an end the cultural practice through the church's model; the model that is contrary to the thinking of the larger population of the people. Obviously, this cultural practice was an institutional one rather than an individual expression. Little wonder that, despite the religious leaders' efforts at persuading the members of the community 'to allow

those that want to see to see', the community members continued with their resistance and even insisted on their 'interference' in what could be, in the context of Christian religion and Western social thought system, a violation of the individual's rights and freedom of choice. This collectivity that characterizes the indigenous people's life style is, therefore, in opposition to the ideals that the Christian religion represents and was promoting, a situation where salvation is a personal thing. To understand the traditional Igbo people's idea of peace, therefore, one needs to take three issues into consideration: (i) the people's belief in the existence of two worlds – the temporal/physical world and the metaphysical world, which is engraved in their consciousness and connects them to their ancestral beliefs, norms and values that mark their identity. Lack of this understanding and the undermining of this component hindered the efforts of the church's leadership to abolish the customary practice through sermons and admonitions, (ii) the communitarian and coherence social relations with kin group and network functioning as the nucleus of social interaction, and subsequently provides the nexus that interconnect the community members. Consistent with this reality is the people's belief in the promotion of harmonious neighbourhood relations, thereby putting a serious limitation to the effectiveness of any approach that does not promote peace within the kin group. Particularly important also is the fact that in Nanka community, like most rural Igbo communities, residence is patrilocal and members of the same kin group tend to reside closer to one another than with other groups. Not only are the members of the kin group providing bonding blood relationship, but also by living closer together, they also provide and promote bonding through neighbourhood interactions. This complicates the attempt at making personal decision that contradicts the position of the larger segment of the kin group. Invariably, the people's idea of peace is a complex one, hence must not be underrated in the search for peace that can work in a local Igbo community, and (iii) The people's insistence on 'doing their thing their own way' depicts their continued attachments to an ancestral belief system. This is still common in most Igbo societies. This perspective is embedded in a complex ancestral belief system, a complexity that only endogenous rituals have the capacity to resolve. Such ritual performances are exemplified in the activities of the

²⁶ Akporobaro, F.B.O. and J.A Emevon (1994) *Nigerian Proverbs: Meaning and Relevance Today*. Lagos: Published for *Nigeria Magazine* by The Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture: Lagos, pp. 165.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 297.

chief priest and the priests of local deities, while the traditional leadership, the town union executives initiated and anchored the processes. The significance of such rituals according to Giddens is that:

Communal rites provide a focus of group solidarity at major transitions as well as allocating definite tasks for those involved *Rites de passage* place those concerned in touch with wider cosmic forces, relating individual life to more encompassing existential issues. Traditional ritual connected individual action to moral frameworks and to elemental questions about human existence. The loss of ritual [in Western-oriented modern peacebuilding system] is also the loss of such framework.²⁸

Although the western peace approach lacked rituals in the sense explained above, the Church's approach, which also incorporated ritual performances such as sermons, catecheses *et cetera*, was rejected by a larger segment of the community for apparent disconnect and its inability to communicate cultural meanings from the insider's perspective, as Geertz would argue, 'poking into people's turn of mind'.²⁹

Nevertheless, for those members of the church community who agreed with the position of the church leadership, culture can be negotiated. This position finds support in Rao and Walton (2004) that:

Culture is not a set of primordial phenomena permanently embedded within national or religious or other groups, but rather a set of contested attributes, constantly in flux, both shaping and being shaped by social and economic aspects of human interaction.³⁰

²⁸ See Giddens 1991 as cited in King-Irani, Laurie E. 2000. 'Rituals of Forgiveness and Processes of Empowerment in Lebanon'. *Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict "Medicines"*. Zartman, William I. (ed.). London: Lynne Rienner, Publishers, p. 131.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 59.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 4.

In these shaping processes, conflict may likely ensue as contestations may be the only option for progress which is the case with the *afu-afugh* conflict. Of course, Kelman contends that some degree of conflict is an inevitable and often desirable process in any social system³¹ and at times could be a catalyst for "enhancing social justice and introducing needed change". The community people's resistance of what some church members could term rejection of 'social justice' that will introduce the 'needed change' in the community was an inevitable ingredient for violent conflict that ensued. The challenge of leadership is being able to resolve the intricacies and contradictions that emerge in any social context and being able also to ensure the incorporation of the views and voices of the diverse groups represented in the collective. By integrating the home-grown peace approach in the resolution of the conflict, the town leadership recognized that for peaceful co-existence in this local community, no group ought to feel alienated.

Although Nanka peace processes may not be generalized in other African societies, certain salient issues that emerged in this study may be useful: (i) certain structures such as traditional leadership, including the town union and chief priests, priests and deities provide the local structures in peace making, which local community may employ when and where necessary. (ii) Cultural symbols communicate cultural meanings and are useful instruments of peace. Each local community has peculiar peace symbols, which can be applied to bring the 'unconvinced' into the collective. (iii) Finally, home-grown processes that connect with the metaphysical, reflecting the dualism that characterizes the African worldview may not have out-stayed their relevance in promoting intra-group co-existence. In sum, resolving communal conflict in Africa must of necessity, therefore, take culture seriously, and cultural values which provide the context for intra- and inter- group relations must be negotiated in the ways that will accommodate the sensitivity of most people, if not all, for the sustenance of peace.

³¹ Kelman, H.C. (1981) 'Reflection on the History of Conflict. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*. Vo. 5. No.2 Spring, p. 108.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to explore the employment of endogenous peace processes in the resolution of a communal conflict that threatened the peace of a community for decades. Our discussions exposed the social and cultural connections the *afu-afughi* cultural practice held for the members of the local community, which formed the basis for the recommendation of endogenous peace approach by the community leadership. Although not all the members of the Christian community sanctioned the employment of indigenous approach as decided by the community leadership, this approach nevertheless played a key role in resolving the imbroglio that entangled the community. Within the context of the Christian community, the application of Christian religious rituals, sermons and catecheses certainly worked for some of the members. For the rest of the community members, however, the employment of endogenous peace processes was efficacious, particularly for those who rejected the Western-oriented model. Apparently, the mainstream Western-oriented peace processes such as the police and the court, including those employed by the Christian religious bodies created some form of disconnect between the people's values, belief systems and norms, and the problem it was intended to resolve. The home-grown approach demonstrated a kind of connectivity as divergent entities, both temporal and spiritual, were involved as contained in the people's worldview. For the camp that believed in its efficacy, it triggered off the needed meaningful dialogue between all the stakeholders – the living, the unborn, men, women, children, the ancestors and the Earth goddess. Meanings were decoded and communicated. The agencies, the structures and constructed meanings are harmonized in the symbolic exchanges represented in ritual sacrifices, kolanut and *ofò* ritual performances, and the employment of proverbs. Stakeholders identified the goal, processes of attaining the set-goal, the transactions and the essence. This interconnectivity is apparently the missing link in the Western-oriented peace approach.