

Security and Development Consequences of Communal Conflict: A Reflection on Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict in Anambra State

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Abstract: *This paper studies the phenomenon of conflict in Anambra state using the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict as a focus with a view to find out its fundamental cause and consequences for security and development in the area. Using the economic theory of conflict, interview and archival method of data collection, the paper discovered that colonially inherited boundaries, concentration of development in the colonial area of Otuocha that was given to Umuleri and the struggle for ownership and control of the area gave rise to the conflict. This has strong negative effects on development and security in the area. Thus, the paper recommends that all ill-famous colonial boundaries in Nigeria should be revisited with the parties forming the boundaries adjustment committee.*

Keywords: communal conflict, boundary dispute, local economy, land, Aguleri, Umuleri and Otuocha

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The multiethnic character of Nigeria, the artificial colonial boundaries, and the increasing need of land for agriculture, industries and other development projects have led to un-ending conflicts in the country. Within the past fifty years of Nigeria's existence as independent state, the country has experienced incessant dysfunctional conflicts between and among communities, ethnic groups and religious groups [Ubi, 2001; Imobighe, 2003]. The last decade witnessed pervasive and extremely worrisome communal, religious, political or ethnic conflicts. Example of such conflicts include among others; the conflict in Shagamu, Ogun State; Eleme-Okrika in Rivers State; Zango-Kataf in Kaduna State; Tiv-Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State; Chamba-Kuteb in Taraba State; Itsekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State; Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State; Ijaw-Ilaje conflict in Ondo State; Basa-Egbura in Nassarawa State; Hausa/Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi State; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam, both in Plateau State, among others [Omotayo, 2005].

Most of these conflicts such as the Ife-Modakeke crisis have been going on for more than a century [Agbe, 2001; Toriola, 2001] to the extent that Augsburg [1992] and Omotayo [2005] argue that their current goals/intentions have deviated from that which led to the conflicts originally. Although these conflicts vary significantly in dimension, process and the groups involved [Famoriyo, 1983], scholars have come to agree that the following factors are responsible for them; resource distribution and use [Momale, 2003]; Struggle for land [Barlowe, 1978]; pastoral areas and fishing spots [Maiga and Diallo, 1998]; etc. In fact, Famoriyo [1987] argued that the causes of these conflicts have social, political and cultural dimensions as well as legal.

Anambra state has not been spared of such conflicts. Communal crises have become an endemic phenomenon in Anambra State, state that is made up of 177 communities. Political factors, union activities, boundary disputes and struggle for rich agricultural farm lands have been dominantly responsible for making the state a theater of conflict. There have been outright wars and bloody communal clashes such as the conflict between Nkwerre-Ezunaka and Onitsha, Ajalli and Akpu, Ajalli and Ndiokpalaeke, Ogbunka and Owerre-Ezuakala, Obosi and Onitsha and Nkpor, Akpu and Ajalli, Owerre-Ezuakala and Ogbunka; Nkerehi and Umuchukwu; Ezira and Umuomaku; Ndiokpalaeke and Akpu, as well as Umuchukwu (Nkerehi), to mention but a few.

The worst of these recent communal crises in Anambra State are the Umuchukwu community - formerly known as Nkerehi - where brothers rose up against brothers because of change of name from Nkerehi to Umuchukwu, and the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict. This paper reflects that most internecine of all the conflict, which took place in Aguleri-Umuleri between 1999 and 2000, with a view to: -

- i. Identify ownership structure and tenure systems existing in the study area.
- ii. Identify the factors that orchestrated the agricultural land use conflict.
- iii. Explain or describe the effects of land use conflict on the economy and security of the environment and the state in general.
- iv. Give recommendations on how to restore lasting peace between the two communities and avoid such conflicts in the future.

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study is based on one month of field research in the Aguleri and Umuleri. The purpose of the field research was to observe at first hand the effects of the conflict on the socio-economic development of the two communities, and to sample views and perceptions on the ground on the effects of the conflict. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used both primary and secondary data. The principal method of collecting the primary data has been through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and library research. These different methods were meant to complement and corroborate each other.

The researcher visited the two communities during their market days, on Sundays, and the resident of their traditional institutions. Through a simple random sampling technique, respondents to questions raised were chosen in their market squares and church premises. The visits equally enabled the researcher to observe and assess the current population of the two towns in relation to their pre-conflict status.

In all 60 people were interviewed – thirty on both sides. The respondents were selected on the basis of location, religion, denomination and gender. The respondents were gender balanced as the researcher interviewed 30 women/females and 30 men/males. Religion/belief was equally considered as the respondents were drawn from traditionalists, Anglicans, Catholics and Pentecostals in the towns. Interviews were equally granted to some key personalities in the traditional institutions of both communities.

The interviews were designed for key personalities who the researcher believed would have a good knowledge of the conflict, the towns, and the implications of the conflict or its consequences. The interview guide had questions that were strictly based on the objectives of the study for easy categorization. The interviews were semi-structured and used with flexibility regarding sequence and formulation. Modifications were made to questions when important issues beyond previous planning came up during the interviews.

During the field work, the researcher had to build trust during the fieldwork with the respondents considering the fact that the study area is an antagonist zone where skepticisms have reigned since the end of the conflict. Though I had tried to make contact with most of my highly placed interviewees before I got to the field, I was unable to meet with some of them. I was unable to interview all the members of Igwe-in-Council of the two communities, although I interviewed their traditional rulers.

3.0 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

Conflict: Conflict is understood here as a collision of interest between different persons and groups who are motivated by the economic, political, cultural and social rewards they are likely to enjoy by having a kin or communal identity.

Security: Security here refers to the existence of conditions within which people can go about their normal daily political, social and economic interests and activities without any threats to their lives.

Development: Development is defined as “the progressive satisfaction of the needs of human and non-human nature, starting with those most in need”.

4.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

4.1 Communal Conflict in Nigeria

Horowitz (2000) perceives communal conflict as that violence that is perpetrated ‘across ethnic lines in which at least one party is not the state and in which victims are chosen by their group membership’. This definition though contested by scholars like [Gurr and Harff, 1994], has come to be accepted in as much as it is characterized by significant destruction, displacement and suffering [Barron, Kaiser, and Pradhan, 2004].

Scholars argue that such conflicts begin as clashes and then escalate into full scale war. For instance, the quest for new communal balances in the Nigeria political landscape after independence in 1960 led to the creation of many states, request for more states and clashes between communities. Boundary adjustments after such creation do lead to clashes and conflicts. The redrawing of Osun state boundaries and movement of its headquarters in August of 1997 led to a bloody conflict between Ife and Modekkes with over 65 deaths in August, and at least another 30 in September [Agboh, 1997]. Similarly, Jukuns, Cambe, and Kutep clashed over a political boundary adjustment in November 1997 [Post Express, 1997].

On June 6, 1999, the Ikot Ottung and the AmeakereIbiono clashed over a political boundary drawn to federalize power, and when amendments were affected that gave the contested area to Ikot, houses were burned, many were killed, and 800 villagers fled as refugees (Okwe, 1999). Similar incidents took place between the Okun and Ikun in Cross Rivers State over an unclear political boundary [Okwe, 1999]; Okere-Urhobo and the Itsekiri of Warri [over the request for the creation of “Warri Central Council for the Urhobos and the location of its capital” by the Urhobos [Nwosu, 1999; Okafor, 2001];

In November 1999, the Oleh and Olomoro communities in Delta State also clashed over the ownership of pipes abandoned by Shell oil [Onoiribholo, 1999]. These communal conflicts are not limited to competition among the smaller ethnic groups nor are they found only in south-South Nigeria. Among other recorded and unrecorded conflicts, one of the worst communal conflicts in the history of Nigeria began in April 1999 between the Umuleri and the Aguleri in

Anambra that claimed the lives of over 700 people in two weeks [Ebele, 1999]. Thus, the literature is perverse with cases or incidents of communal conflicts in Nigeria.

4.2 Causes of communal conflicts

In Nigeria, we have too many kinds of conflicts of which boundary and communal conflicts/wars are inclusive. Much of these disputes came about over ownership of land (farming, fishing, oil deposit, solid-mineral deposit etc.) and in defence of community pride and properties and even the people (Nwanegbo, 2009:500). They were usually very intense and as destructive as major civil wars and even deep-rooted.

As noted by Wolff [2006], Deeka [2003] and Otitte [1999:20-22], most conflicts in Nigeria are caused by struggle for land space and resource competition; disputed jurisdiction of traditional rulers; creation and location of local government council headquarters; scarce political and economic resources; micro and macro social structures of Nigeria; population growth; and disregard for cultural symbols. Other scholars agree that the conflicts are associated with group pluralism and interactions to achieve diverse objectives [Coady, 1999; Deeka, 2002; Jega, 2002; Abah, 2009], and bad governance [Lund, 2003; Jonsoon, 2007].

5.0. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Available resources, time and space, etc places severe limitations on any attempt by this paper to test all the theoretical propositions on conflict [communal conflict]. Consequently, the paper adopts the economic theory of conflict in its reflection on the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict, which assumes that all the parties in the conflict are assumed to be rational economic players driven by the urge to maximize power in order to have access to the economic rewards of victory.

From the orthodoxies of Collier and Hoeffler [1998], Hirshleifer [1994], Bakonyi and Stuvøy [2005], and Azam [2001], the economic school which consists of two theories – Classical Greed School and the Greed and Grievance School – holds that conflict is a rational economic activity that is propelled by lack of economic opportunities [Collier et al. 2001: 4], the possibility of looting, trade-off, and low opportunity cost for appropriation.

Although one can correctly argue like El jack [2003: 89] and Flores [2004:3] that violence is a complex phenomenon that can hardly be caused by factor and therefore unlimited to one theoretical explanation, this paper still posit that behind every human act [with the exception of leisure] is economic interest.

Thus, as this paper is not entirely on theoretical evaluation, it should be stated here that the adopted economic perspective for the study is founded on the basis that the two

communities went to war basically on the feeling of low opportunity cost for appropriation of the fertile agricultural land under context and the economic rewards associated with victory over the other.

6.0 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data generated were processed through selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the raw data as postulated by Miles and Huberman [1984; 2 cited in Silverman, 2000: 177]. There-from, inferences were drawn after establishing what things mean, noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configuration, causal flows and propositions. Thus, context analysis was our method of data analysis and conclusion.

6.1 The Cause of Aguleri-Umuleri Conflict

From the analysis, the paper observed that the crisis between Aguleri and Umuleri, who are two communities of the same Igbo ethnic extraction and predominantly Christians, dates back to the beginnings of each community's recorded history. The central point of conflict has been which them first settled in its current territory and which community has the prior claim to the area known as Otuocha.

From the ancient times, the said Otuocha land is of direct economic importance due to its fertility and due the primary occupation of both communities as farmers. The land served variously for the payment of dowries, reparation for murder and other serious crimes and as a means of exchange. It I symbol of wealth, ancestral power and has high social standing in the environs. Who possess the land is the central factor of the conflict? The issue of absence of clearly demarcated boundaries between the two pre-colonial communities has been raised as excuse for attacks and manipulated by each in their quest to possess Otuocha.

Over the years, this led both communities to develop and train a warrior class which is able to defend the land already in each's possession and to capture more land. The seed of acrimony and phobic philosophy was sown between the two communities in 1930s by Captain O'Connor, the district officer of the area who encouraged or supported Umuleri even at war to make claims to the whole of the Otuocha land [Chinwuba, 1981:1]. The superior power of the colonial master suppressed the Aguleri people in favour of Umuleri.

Otuocha was consequently developed by Europeans through trade, construction of residential homes for administrators and missionaries, churches, schools and farms, government residential quarters and administrative infrastructures. In fact, Ibeanu and Matthew [1988] noted in their survey that this land is actually located at the boundaries between the two communities.

To worsen this problem, there were competitions between the European merchants and settlers on acquiring one's area

of control particularly among the missionaries leading the border areas to be further divided against each other depending on who controls what. One of the consequences of this schism is the emergence of conflict ridden petty-bourgeois class that advanced the struggle beyond independence in their struggle for political power. Thus, under colonialism, the Aguleri people became politically and economically marginalized by Umuleri.

Thus, after independence, reclaiming of the control of Otuocha and or consolidation of control became the pivot upon which the hostile relationship between the two communities is based. It has equally been fundamental in structuring contest for local power and by extension political representation in the state and federal governments. Land became a rallying point for villages, town and community's development, politics and security.

The struggle between the two communities' claims over the Otuocha and Agu-Akor lands first took a legal posture [Chinwuba 1981:25] as litigations continued up to the Supreme Court. Outside other suits that existed prior to the amendment of the instrument which constituted Otuocha, the headquarters of the then Anambra County Council, by altering the name to 'OtuochaAguleri' in 1964, Umuleri filed another suit challenging the amendment. Although this suit was overtaken by the civil war, the East Central State Government restored the name to 'Otuocha' without Aguleri attached to it. However, in 1984 the Supreme Court ruled that 'neither the Aguleri, nor the Umuleri have been able to establish that they are exclusive owners of Otuocha land'. This made Aguleri community to embark on a belligerent mission to claim Otuocha as its exclusive property.

With the state watching, public property including schools, banks, post offices, town halls and even churches were razed to the ground in September 1995 while over 200 private houses were destroyed and countless people killed. Another attack took place in April 1999 that led to the death of Mike Edozie, an Aguleri indigene – the then chairman of the local government council during the 1995 crisis. During his funeral, suspected Umuleri youths attacked the mourners and killed over one hundred persons. This led to full scale war that lasted from 1999 through 2000.

The Consequences of Aguleri – Umuleri Conflict:

From the interview, the followings have been established as the major consequences of the conflict.

1. The security of lives and property is now a major concern of the people living in the two towns. The people interviewed reveal that citizens or residents of the two towns had acquired arms to protect themselves, their families and their properties because of fears of further attacks. All the 60 respondents said that the conflict had created more security problem than before.

2. The conflict has led to proliferation of small firearms and an increase in crime rates in the area wherein arson, looting, killings and gun battles are common during the night. This has led to the increase in armed/unarmed robbery, motorcycle theft, cattle theft, and general lawlessness.
3. As security has a direct impact on the levels of investment, the conflict reduced investments in the different sectors of the local economy. Even citizens that established a branch of their businesses in the two communities have relocated them to the cities for fear of vandalism and destruction.
4. The conflict adversely affects agricultural production, marketing and investment in agriculture because youths have relocated to cities in search of white-collar jobs and businesses and to secure their lives from possible and sudden assassination. Even the those left behind are not encouraged to embark on commercial farming any longer for fear of destruction and vandalism.
5. Transportation networks have also been disrupted due to the violent clashes because commuters are readily stopped and killed during clashes by both communities. This makes it difficult for farmers to transport their foodstuff to the market places.
6. The conflict has equally forced virtually all the financial institutions to close down and relocate out of the two towns due to insecurity.
7. Commerce, the second most important economic activity after farming in the two communities has also been negatively affected. Restricted movement, disruptions in businesses, the loss of capital through burning of houses and shops, and limited and selective business transactions were all cited by various respondents as effects of the violence.
8. The conflict has equally made it difficult, if not impossible, for the local government to generate its revenues. The Local Government Treasurer held that the ability to collect revenues has been severely affected by the fall of businesses, lawless environment, skepticisms and belligerent attitudes of the people living within the area, which emanated out during the conflict. Many villagers refuse to pay if their own men are not in power.
9. High cost of security budget due to a number of security measures that have been put in place to respond to the perennial violence in the area.
10. The conflict also claimed hundreds of lives, mainly youths, women and children. These are the hope of tomorrow and the instrument of development.
11. Properties running into several millions of naira were lost during the conflict. These properties belong to both parties; however, Umuleri community was worse affected. of many people from both factions. The fund that is being used to re-build these damaged properties would have been

used for further development projects if the said conflict did not take place.

7.0 CONCLUSION

Boundaries are made by human beings, for human beings and should therefore be made for human convenience. When and where an existing boundary poses a security threat, both parties should form a boundary adjustment committee by themselves to address the issue and not government imposing such adjustment on them. The dominant political force among the parties normally employs the instrumentalities of the state to re-adjust the boundaries to their advantage, thereby shifting the evil days of the conflict. The Aguleri-Umuleri conflict arose out of the quest by the two communities to control the famous colonial centre and local government headquarters – Otuocha and environs.

From field work, the consequences of the conflict on the two communities are disastrous and destructive economically and security wise. It shall take both Anambra state and the two communities many decades to correct the anomalies it created.

Thus, this paper recommends that all the ill-famous colonial boundaries in Nigeria should be revisited by the various communities under the supervision of state authorities to forestall such conflicts like the Aguleri-Umuleri conflict.

Finally, even development projects should be sited in both communities to reduce the pressure on Otuocha.

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