

RELIGIOUS CHANGE AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION IN UBOMALAND

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Abstract

Society is dynamic. So also is the religious institution and indeed the worship God. The functionalists had argued and correctly too, that for any institution (Religious institution inclusive) to be alive it must have some roles or functions which it performs in the society. Further to that, for such an institution to perform its roles, it must be dynamic as the society itself. The inversion and conquest of Africa by the colonialists with their missionary religion were not able to eradicate indigenous African practices completely. The encounter of African Traditional Religion with Christianity and Islam witnessed a robust exchange of cultural facets. Uboma land was not left out in the ensuring debacle.

Introduction

Uboma is one of the two communities that make up the present day Ihitte/Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State. Uboma is made up seven(7) autonomous communities with each autonomous community having her own traditional ruler as a mark of its autonomy. The people are predominantly farmers of subsistent nature majoring in yam, cassava, palm produce, and local production of rice. It is here that we have an Igbo dialect known as **Uboma Isu**.

According to Shorter (1975:140) change is the only permanent reality and to live is to change. This implies that every phenomenon in the world changes. In this area of tradition according to Egbucha (2007:58) change is not static. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary posits further that tradition is handing down from one generation to another generation of opinion, belief, custom etc. during this process of handing down, change is bound to occur. Since change is an essential attribute of all living organisms, Moore (1972:336) articulates social change as:

The significant alteration of social structures (that is, of patterns of social action and interaction) including consequences and manifestations of

such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct) values and cultural products and symbols.

Theories Of Change

Isokun (1993:103-108) identifies three theories of change in the society, namely; evolutionary theory, diffusionist theory and sociological theory. The Theory of Evolution proposes that human cultures go through a process of development beginning from the lower simple to the higher complex form, a process which was characterized by conflict which only the fittest survive. Egbucha (2007:60) writes that Robin Horton identifies Edward Tylor's proposal of a scheme of three main stages of savagery barbarism and civilization as the lines of human progress which every society must pass through in its development (Horton, 1989: 103-108).

Tylor goes further to assert that western culture has moved to the 'civilized' (science oriented) level while Africa and other cultures remain at the savage (magico-religious) level. This implies that whilst savage cultures have remained at an infantile level of intellectual development 'civilized' cultures have attained an adult level of development. In line with Tylor's argument however Leach remarks that "the inferiority of others was essentially a matter of material incapacity, their ignorant stupidity was that of small children...the paternalistic discipline exercised by their masters was thus a form of benevolence" (Isokun 1993, 103-108). It should be noted as a matter of serious importance that this theory cannot and will never fit into the people of 'Uboma' as the religious change affecting them never reflected this unwholesome theory. Even the history of evolution of religion itself, it must be pointed out, is far from being clear.

The diffusionist theory of change posits that no society in the world ever has developed or can develop in isolation. Through the social interactions from different societies there is a tendency of assimilation or acculturation. Isokun puts it this way "the distribution of socio-cultural traits in societies could have been through social interaction between or among various cultures. Consequently through colonization, borrowing, imitation, cultures may get diffused. Hence there have been similarities in cultures that are far apart from another. Similarities in cultures could also be due to human beings taking similar steps to deal with some human problems that confront them e.g. shelter", (Isokun, 1993: 103).

If one considers the application of this theory in the religious change in Uboma there may be some elements of truth in it as the major agents of religious change

have been the interaction between Europe and Uboma on the one hand and other Nigerian communities on the other. From the countries of the core we have colonialism, commerce and Christianity. No doubt these external factors have diffused into the African (Uboma) culture and religion, resulting to changes in specific aspects of their traditional religion and belief systems.

Egbucha (2007:62) notes that the mid 20th century anthropologists borrowed the theory of structuralism to elaborate an approach to social change. This approach is called structural functionalism (Otite & Ogionwo1979:21). This theory postulates the existence of certain basic institutions like religion, political and kinship that determine social change order because of their functional interdependence (New Encyclopedia Britannica, 1992: 919). It goes further to state that Marxist economic theory concluded that social change is the result of various sub-groups within a group vying for power. However sociological theory of change can be seen in the light of social interactions different societies. The consequences of these interactions are changes which occur in different directions. In Uboma experience therefore this type of theory throws little light on the religious change pattern. This is because as society changes, its belief system changes too. Thus the Uboma society and her people cannot be an exception in this regard.

The most stimulating attempt to explain the phenomenon of religious change in especially in Africa and which has provoked reactions in the seventies is Horton's intellectualistic theory (Horton, 1971:85). The advocates of this type of theory assume that religious change in Africa occurs in response to changes in social organizations. They also assume that the major causes of religious change are Christianity, Islam, colonialism and commerce. These scholars views on this theory may be divided in four sections according to Egbucha thus, J.S. Trimmingham's theory; Robin Horton's intellectualist explanation; Humphrey Fisher's historical approach and Ifeka-Moller's approach.

Trimingham (1955: 12-13) attributes the drift from African traditional religion to Christianity and Islam to the collapse of the structures of African traditional societies and world-views which was perpetrated by the impact of colonialism, technological superiority, Christianity, industrial economy and education. Since African traditional religion is tied with these structures, the collapse of these structures must affect them. This is based on the observation of Egbucha (2007:63) the fact that African traditional religion is local and ethnic with no organized future. Such local religion could not face competition with Islam and Christianity. Hence Trimmingham reasons, "the indigenous religions, being primarily local and ethnic have no future in their organized forms and religious

future of Africa lies between Christianity and Islam...his choice is between religions which lay claim to universality, whether positive or negative in their approach to life values" (Trimingham,1955: 12-13).

Based on the fact that the experiences of indigenous religion were local when the individual operative horizon widened, therefore, the indigenous people adopted the new religious experience. According to Trimingham, the proliferation of African types of Christianity was a result of refusal of the missionaries Christianity to tolerate some elements of African traditional religion into it, which was not so in the case of Islam. Robin Horton's thought experiment theory also contributed a lot to our knowledge on religious change in Africa. In his "African Conversion (1971, 373-399), he states how the unelaborated idea of Supreme Being and other areas in African traditional religion had great adaptive potentials. He reasons that when faced with the challenge of social change, i.e. commerce, education, science, technology etc) people do not abandon their traditional cosmology rather they remold and develop it until it attains once more its pristine level of explanatory coverage. This is obviously true of the Uboma people as their belief and worship of traditional deities and other forms of their traditional religion seem to have taken this explanatory coverage.

Hence according to Horton (373-399), African traditional cosmology has two-tier arrangement of spiritual beings. The first- tier comprises local spirits with the local community and its environment-the microcosm. The second-tier comprises the Supreme Being-the macrocosm. As long as people did not go away from their microcosm, they paid much attention to the spiritual entities and less on the Supreme Being. However as people become more involved with the wide world, they paid more attention to the Supreme Being who directed it. In this situation Islam and Christianity can be seen as 'catalysts' in the change process already in the air. He goes on to argue that Islam in recent past of its existence in Africa has tended to be content with this catalytic role, since it allows, to some extent, a continuation of most traditional practices (e.g. magic, use of charms, amulets, divination). Horton goes on to reason that missionary Christianity has not been content to play this catalytic role. It has been rigid and dogmatic in its insistence on individuals' acceptance of official doctrine. This as he asserts has led to the independent churches.

In Uboma as it is in most Igbo communities, Christianity plays the most dominant role of religious change. People were attracted to this religion at the initial stage not because of spiritual benefits but because of material gains like education of their children and employment by the colonial government.

Therefore Horton's thought experiment theory of religious change can aid our understanding of religious change in Uboma. Egbucha (2007:65) opines that Humphrey Fisher's analysis of religious change in Africa can be appraised from the historical perspective as far as the African traditional religion and Islamic encounter are concerned. Fisher argues that there are three stages in the African religious process involving Islam. The stages are quarantine stage, the faith is represented by the new comers. As people embrace the faith, bringing with them elements of their traditional beliefs, a mixing stage ensues. Finally after a lapse of decades or centuries, reformation sweeps away the mixing and restores the orthodoxy of the first stage. The cycle may repeat itself (Fisher, 1973:27-40).

Fisher differentiates between 'conversion' and 'adhesion'. Conversion implies a deliberate turning from an earlier deity to another while adhesion allows a believer to adopt new worship as a supplement to his former beliefs. Fisher also identifies two types of conversion and pinpoints literacy as a weapon used in reformation and presentation of orthodoxy. Reform movement may take the form of jihad or Revivalism. The consequence of jihad is reformation of old beliefs and making of new converts as a result of dislocation of traditional religion. This was made possible because of the character of Islam as a prophetic religion, literacy, ritual prayers, pilgrimages, the favor of clerics and so forth which serve the purpose of both keeping aglow the light of the faith during the mixing period, and at an opportune time, precipitate a reform movement (Metuh, 1985:264).

Ifeka-Muller (1974:55-72), sees religious change in what she proposes as having a socio-structural explanation. She argues that if cosmology is embedded in social order, as were indigenous cosmologies in Eastern Nigeria, change in the social order will affect the cosmology. From this point of view, one can explain reasons for conversions as well as reasons for the resistance to conversion, which she claims better explains 'conversion' understood as either, 'a change of affiliation from cult (traditional religion) to church, or from orthodox Christianity to spiritualist church (Aladura)'. She identifies Onitsha and Awka areas of Igbo land as a case whereby irrespective of long exposure to commerce and European colonialism, missionary work still recorded a low response to Christianity. This is because the earlier contact with Western civilization put them at an advantage over power from other areas in securing well paid jobs during colonial period. So colonialism did not bring sudden disruption of traditional society in this area nor frustration arising from unfulfilled expectation. Ifeka-Muller also identifies that Owerri and Calabar areas of Igbo land which have had comparatively less exposure to modernization during the

same period, recorded conversion on a massive scale to Christianity and Aladura Churches. This could be attributable to rapid social change and growing frustration among the inhabitants and failure to reap rewards promised, by colonialism.

The Concept Of Religious Change

The traditional religions of Africa have witnessed series of revolutionary changes (Egbucha, 2007:59). Every aspect of this religion is involved. *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (1981:920) explains change from the social point of view. It is the alteration of mechanism within the social structures characterized by change in cultural symbols, rules of behavior or value system. If this change is applied to religious traditions of Africa, the consequences are tremendous. Still the Encyclopedia remarks that social and cultural change consists of the modification of social institutions, ideas, value, technology and other products of human interaction. Beatie (1964:241) sees social change as a continuous process of events occurring over time and space resulting in the modification, displacement and replacement of systems within a particular society. Egbucha (2007:59) argues that the encyclopedia of religion and Ethics posits that change in its comprehensive sense is any fact, event or action which is contrasted with rest or stability and involves some elements of difference, either of quality, space or time. However, religious change in Africa and indeed Uboma cannot be explained from these definitions only. The review of types of religious change and theories of change have explained religious change more significantly.

Types Of Religious Change

Generally speaking one can recognize four types of cultural change which also affects religion given the obvious fact that religion is part of culture either in African or any other part of the world. These types include externally induced change, directed/planned change, internally induced religious change and complex religious change. While considering externally induced religious change, Onwubiko (1991:132) cites the postulation of Basden concerning the Igbo which becomes relevant and handy "...ancient native law custom cannot exist side by side nor intermingle with the principles of British Government". He was however not totally right to posit that "...native law and custom received its death-blow when the British Administration became operative in the Ibo country" nor was he right to say that "what now passes for native law and custom is but a travesty of what it was in the old days, it is but the shell; the kernel has been destroyed". It is such views as this that has introduced the phrase, "African cultural revival" into African studies. Revival presupposes a

“cultural death” or “near death”. It questions the African cultural dynamics and resilience. Since the ‘kernal’, according to Basden, has been destroyed, he could not feel ill are ease to tell his European audience that:

To contemplate conserving native law and custom is to concern ourselves very largely with a corpses. It will not respond as anticipated, because, life has ceased to animate it. The deed is done and, unless Europeans abandon the country altogether, and provide the opportunity for ancient laws and custom to be resuscitated, it may just as well be counted as dead, for it has no future under modern conditions.

It is to be noted Basden came out with this view after he was forced, like many other colonial writers to re-investigate Igbo culture after the Women’s riot of 1929. This riot practically questioned some of the assertions Basden had published in 1966, in his book: *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*. The British colonial Administration was seriously then contemplating on how to integrate some elements of Igbo tradition customary laws into its Administration. In defence of his published views, Basden saw the venture as not worthwhile and proposed the then impossibility-the end of colonialism. It is observable that colonization, civilization and Christianization constitute identifiable three arms through which African cultural and religious belief systems were externally influenced to changes. Thus the old order changed yielding place to new. To colonize aims at the assimilation the devise peoples culture and religion into the white man’s culture and through it confer on Africans western citizenship, education and Christian religion. The British indirect rule system caused serious harm to the indigenous religion and culture by operating as a colonial principle of the use of a culture itself. It was based on practical cultural ethnocide.

Planned or directed religious change works on the presumption of the responsibility of a “superior” culture/religion towards an “inferior” one. “culture-manipulation” in planned culture/religious change is very important. It has a triple aim; to change the physical environment, the thought patterns and therefore the behavioral patterns of a given people. Professionalism and expertise advice furnish lines of action. Professionalism here means that the solution to cultural problem depends on the biased recommendations of a professional. This implies that his professional guidelines must be implemented to the letter, especially, “Where an individual or s group (or professionals), working with the tools research has provided, moves into a social situation with the aim of alternating patterns of thought and action so as to achieve a given practical end. It represents the logical working out of these

aims of physical science, prediction and control, which for so many years have been accepted by the students of human behavior and human institutions as the ends towards which they, as scientists, should strive" (Onwubiko,1991:136).

Concerning internally induced culture/religious change, it has remained one aspect that authors and researchers writing about African often do not appreciate. However this is an inherent characteristic of a dynamic and resilient culture. Obviously they are accommodated by indigenous cultural and religious institutions. As Onwubiko (1991, 138) posits correctly, a living culture (and religion), has among others, three important factors inextricable interrelated: a specific cultural base, an innate innovative quality, and an established slow and cautious attitude to change. Internally induced changes may cause temporary tension and even momentary conflicts within people and between older and younger generations, but these are quickly resolved within the culture itself, because enculturative elements of two culture do two permanent functions: as modes of pedagogy-official process of culture transmission-tend to hand on the culture intact, that is, they are conservative.

Many scholars have affirmed that Igboland belong to such society where this type of change can easily take place especially in their religion. Citing Obiechina Onwubiko (1991:139) insists that in traditional Igbo society there was scope for change "but it had to be in areas outside those sacrosanct by the religious and ritual order". This is not totally correct. The African traditional religion is not a static religion which would not allow change in the sense of its self-purification. Further changes that simultaneously affect religion in a society are realized through process of secularization of religious concepts and beliefs. As an example, one can correctly posit that Part one of the book 'Things Fall Apart' depicts life in the traditional 'Umuofia'; life unadulterated by the European contact. Yet internally induced changes in areas of religious beliefs and ritual were noted. Such changes were realized because 'Umuofia' philosophers and old men like every other Igbo community (Uboma inclusive) had to recognize their logic; and the enculturative function of pedagogy was used to provide within resources of traditional philosophy, reasons to approve the changes.

The Uboma people are ready to assert succinctly that "if a god becomes recalcitrant, it would be shown the tree from which it was made (agbara nawa unara, e zi ya osisi e jiri pia ya). Again the people say "if a god becomes insolent, its worshippers would abandon it at the cross-road". In Things Falls Apart it is also evident in the conversation Ogbuefi Ezeudu had with the two men who came to visit him " ...somebody told me yesterday, said one of the young, 'that

in some clan it is an abomination for a man to die during the week of peace'. 'It is indeed true', said Ogbuefi Ezeudu:

They have that custom in Obodoani. If a man dies at this time he is not buried but cast into the Evil forest. It is a bad custom which these people observe...they throw away large numbers of men and women without burial. And what is the result? Their clan is full of the evil spirits of these unburied dead, hungry to do harm to the living.

Concerning complex cultural change, it is the acculturation and enculturation processes that produce it because of the interplay of different cultural factors. New cultural items impose new beliefs and affect attitudes of old ones. An example is the difficulty to explain how the belief among most motorists in Nigeria developed that if a driver kills a duck or sheep with his car, it is a bad omen and that he would be involved in an accident: but that it is good luck if he kills a dog with a new car. But the question remains, how did such beliefs originate as 'elite' beliefs and superstitions. Surely complex situations and reactions must have introduced and influenced them. And while resolving the problems these complex situations have introduced, a new practice can be adapted to old processes and concepts; and a new process can be controlled by the natives and mastered by them, if they are not forever to be manipulated by outsiders (Onwubiko, 147). One can readily find an answer to the principle of cultural/religious dynamism in the Igbo proverb which "nku din a mba na eghere mba nri" (a people use the firewood in their community to cook their food).

Causes Of Religious Change

Metuh (1986: xi) argues that the causes of religious change in Africa are many and varied. However, generally, one could group them into two broad categories- religious and non-religious factors. Religious factors here are taken to refer to impulse to change generated by religious convictions and activities. Thus missionary work, the appeal of the teachings and ways of life of a religious system, reformation or revivalism, conversion, syncretism, or proselytism and so forth, all in different ways bring about religious change. Non-religious factors are also many. There are historical factors, socio-structural factors, political factors, rapid social change, conquest, urbanization, education, and so forth. Of course religious and non-religious factors often overlap.

It has been surprising to many historians of African traditional religion to note that Westernization and Arab civilization have become the dominant paradigm by which contemporary observers analyze and evaluate the vast religious

changes in Africa. A general impression has been created by these theorists and writers that African traditional religion knew no changes before the advent of Christianity and Islam. It also becomes very sad that some African writers are guilty of this mistake by their Western contemporaries. Is it not Mbiti (1969:18) who posits that the traditional organization of the African idea of time is two-dimensional? (Zamani-referring to the glorious past and Sasa-referring to the present and vague future). If we go by this postulation, it will make human life static and stable. Ant radical change is unknown, not accepted or so slow that it is not noticed. Thus changes that occurred were due to the emergence of European missionaries from culture and civilization including Christianity.

Idowu (1973:83) also identifies problems bedeviling the study of African traditional religions which according to him included the influence of other cultures and religions. He argues that with this culture contact, Africans either forgot their traditional religions or combined their practice with these new religions (may be Christianity and Islam). In this condition according to Idowu, the old religions in their conservative mode became a thing of the past.

Recently there has been an upsurge of interest in religious change in Africa, particularly in the reconstruction of socio-religious change in pre-Christian and Islamic background. It is based on this that Booth, (1975:11) says that African traditional religion has the ability change and in fact has been changing before the advent of Christianity and Western lifestyles. Lending his voice to this, Okeke (1982: 52) looks at the religious change in Ikenanzizi, a central Igbo village and a close community to Uboma , positing that long before the coming of Christianity, the people abandoned old deities and cults which they saw as no longer relevant and accepted new spirits, gods and institutions which they saw as more relevant. He cites an instance where 'amadioha', a god of thunder and lightening in Ikwerre land was adopted before the advent of Christianity. This is in line with the belief of Uboma people that "if a god becomes insolent, its worshippers will abandon it at the cross-road.

Okorocho (1987: 15) re-echoes the views of Okeke that religious changes among the Igbo occurred mainly to satisfy peoples need at particular times. Gods seen as not fulfilling such needs were either abandoned or given new functions to meet these needs. Going outside the Igbo area, Ranger and Kimambo (1972:2) identify that the main problem with the study of African Traditional religion is that most scholars have seen the religion as having external and unchanging outlook and have made an erroneous assumption that religious change did not occur. They further assert that the historical study of traditional religion should

proceed along the same line as the historical study of say, pre-colonial systems using archives, oral evidence, linguistic and archaeological evidence.

Metuh (1985:163-164) points out what he calls two exotic factors/ causes of religious change especially in Igbo land to include colonialism and missionary penetration, he later identified four factors which characterized social change and which challenged not only the priests, diviners and medicine men in Igbo land but also other institutions and beliefs systems like the deities. The four factors are; an exotic superior political colonial power, religious pluralism, urbanization and the new Christian Westernized elite. While Islam and Christianity fit into Metuh's religious pluralism, commerce leads to urbanization, Christianity and urbanization produced Christian Westernized elite. Onwubiko (1991:115-123) identifies three agents of change in African culture to include, the colonial administrator, the British trader and industrialist and the Christian missionary. No matter how one looks at these factors or causes, each of them has many effects on the traditional beliefs of the people.

Abdul (1973:125-126), observes that when Islam came in contact with West Africans, it did not demand a total break with immediate past, and in fact it had many points of contact offering immediate values without displacing the old order. Conclusively, Abdul posits "divining and magical practices attract the animist, since Islamic magical elements and methods of divination introduced parallel to indigenous methods. The clerics even though they form a new class, yet they are at one and the same time the teacher, the guide, the trader, the artisan, the local medicine man. All these appeal to the local people". Falola and Adediran (1983:54), argue that the jihads of the late 18th and 19th centuries were responsible for religious change in West Africa. According to their account, the devout Muslims of that period were convinced that there were still many people who must be converted and that Islamic customs and practices should not be contaminated with pagan practices.

Mohammed Bello, one of the leaders of Sokoto jihad recalls in details some of the reasons that forced them to launch the jihad thus "their rulers (i.e. of Borno) and chiefs today have places to which they hide, where they offer sacrifices and then pour the blood on the gates of their towns. They have their great houses containing snakes and things to which they offer sacrifices. They proclaim rites to the river... they keep such festivals in which they, Quaran Reciters, their ruler and populace participate but no one else, which they designate the custom of the country". Ozigbo (1988:145) remarks that the expansion of Islam in Nigeria (north and south) during the colonial rule was enormous indeed. He tries to point out the extent of religious change which British government

precipitates as far as Islam is concerned. According to him it was this British style of governance that made thousands of non-Muslims went over to Islam so as to minimize their losses and disadvantages under the prevailing circumstance.

The above instances have shown that Islam is a factor of religious change in many African societies. In Uboma it was not a factor of religious change. Nonetheless, the appreciation of how Islam affected other societies is necessary in this context because the structure of religious change in these societies is not the same in areas where Christianity is a major factor of change. Colonialism is another major agent or cause of religious change in Africa. On this note Egbucha (2007:76) rightly posits that “The intellectual and cultural background of Western Europe should not be lost sight of in any serious discussion of the causes of religious change in Africa”. Early European travelers disseminated tales about the peoples and the general life in Africa. Such folk stories fuelled the imaginations of some armchair theorists like Edward Tylor, James Frazer, and Sigmund Freud etc helped them to formulate their theories on the religion of the primitive peoples. Thus the Europeans whose contacts were hitherto restricted to the coastal towns started penetrating into the hinterlands in a move to control trade and commerce. As imperialists, they started eyeing the total political and economic control of both the coasts and hinterlands. Onwubiko (1991: 117-119) has this to say about the colonial administrator “the colonial administrator dabbled into local affairs uninvited under different guises. Convinced that he had a mission of ‘putting order’ where he thought none existed, he began to set up his own patterns of administration”.

While citing Margret, Egbucha (2007:77) asserts that the Europeans came to West Africa before, prepared for many thrills-the thrill of suppressing hideous, bloody fetishes of mystery of darkness respected people. In many place the colonial government adopted military attacks on the inter land to destroy the people’s political culture, customs and traditional religion. It is based on this that Ekechi (1971:118) remarks Sir Ralph Moor’s contention, for example, that unless the ‘Chukwu’ oracle was destroyed, disorder and lawlessness would prevail, and that such anarchy would be exceedingly dangerous to peace and general welfare of the territories. As they adopted the military confrontation against the people and in the process destroyed the religious institutions of the Aros. No wonder Ekechi asserts further that it is therefore a gross exaggeration on the part of imperialists to posit that the slave trade was practically the only trade known or carried on by the Aros. On the same note, Ottenberg (1958:299-306) postulates that it was their skillful control of the ‘Chukwu’ oracle, known

to the Europeans as 'Long Juju' that gave the Aros their dominant influence in the country. Colonialism promoted religious change in Uboma.

With the abolition of slave trade in Europe, what is termed 'Legitimate trade' was established. It was a trade on the raw materials and cash crops of West African people. This trade put the European dealers into the hinterland of sub-Saharan Africa. Because of constant contact with these traders, their exchange of articles sometimes moved to exchange of cultural ideas and beliefs. This was a potential cause of religious change in West Africa. As a result of the changes in trade, people began to move from their homes to where they mixed with peoples of other cultures. As Ekechi puts it, in the search for the raw materials, Eastern Nigeria became a focal point of interest. From 1892, the Macdonald administration made desperate attempts to penetrate the hinter land (Ekechi, 1971:115).

Christianity was another agent of religious change in Uboma land. The evangelical revival in Europe in the 19th century brought many Christian missions to Africa. This grew out of two factors. Egbucha (2007:81) writes that there was a humanitarian movement to abolish the trans-atlantic slave trade. As a way of eradicating this obnoxious trade, Christian missionaries began to invest heavily in agriculture. The second factor was the increase in missionary activities in Europe itself. At the turn of 19th century, there arose many militant Christian groups in Europe and America, which saw the complete evangelization of West Africa as a task. As Falola and Adediran (1983:107) rightly observe, the result of these two factors launched missionaries to play a leading role in the exploitation, exploration and European occupation of West Africa in the 19th century.

In Uboma land, Christianity first entered Ikperere where the church missionary society (Anglican) planted its church in 1912. According to the building committee (1988:7), it was the activities of some youths in the persons of one Nwachukwu Nwokenna (later baptized as Josiah Nwachukwu Nwokenna) and another adventurous one called Odugh Okeke (later baptized as Daniel Okeke) who both traveled out to Umuokpara Umuahia as servants of palm produce buyers and while there, they embraced the transforming religious spirit of Christianity. On their return from Umuokpara, the two young and zealous men learnt that the Christian gospel had already been embraced by Ezeoke Nsu community with seat of the Christian faith at Chief Nwachukwu Nwadigo's house. Having later fulfilled the preliminary stages for the posting of a teacher from Egbu, the CMS Headquarters in all Owerri and environs, the

Rev. Alphasor Chukwuma Onyeabo located a church teacher in 1916. It was from here that Christianity spread to the entire Uboma land.

Thus, all Christian denominations mapped out strategies on how to convert the local people to the Christian religion. A look at father Shanahan's report on Igboland to the directors of the congregation of Holy Ghost Partners is an indicative of the anxieties of various denominations. As he asserts, "the barriers, which prevented Europeans from penetrating the hinterland, have been removed. A new era is opening for the immense Ibo race. The soul of that race is at stake, who will take possession of it? Will it be the goddess or the true envoys of Christ? (Ekechi, 1971:129). Peel (1968:1&92), while talking about the emergence of African Independent churches, shows how Christianity has been both a cause and effect of social change. These churches were therefore a response to deprivation, the absence of stable social relations and authority which is the result of enforced and abrupt social change. Bengt Sundkler (1961:3 &37) focuses his interest on Bantu separatist independent churches in South Africa. He says that the colour-bar in the white churches gave rise to separatism. The implication is that the nature of mission churches signifies religious change. No wonder Paden & Soja (1970:198) assert that the Christian missions were characterized in general by lack of tolerance for tradition and cultural practices, especially polygamy. They therefore exacted a powerful influence for social change in the direction of assimilation into rigidity in retrospect, which seems to account for the rise of independent African churches.

Tasie (1978:167) highlights the role of Garrick Sokari Braide in the religious change of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Sokari Braide as an illiterate man, operating in a set up where the traditional religion was being run by the local people, felt that this would occur in Christianity. This agitation was of great historical significance since it triggered off series of calls for more native agency and contextualization of Christianity to the peoples' linguistic and cultural milieu. Also the revivals in the Christian missions in the early 20th century in different parts of West Africa furthered religious change. The establishment of African independent churches like African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Baptist Church, Cherubim and Seraphim Church of Aladura all furthered religious conversion and change of African people.

Conclusion

The contact or clash of two or more cultures will always manifest struggles, resistances, give and take. In Northern Nigeria for example, while the Jihadists

led by Othman Dan Fodio conquered the Hausas militarily, the Hausas conquered the Fulani Jihadists culturally. In Igbo land as, has been seen from this article, the missionary religions did not find it easy dealing with the Uboma people, their culture and religions. There were pockets of resistance generally. Some parts or aspects of the people's culture/religion gave way for the new culture. Some of the missionary religions culture gave way for the Uboma tradition and culture. It is manifest that the Igbo language is today used to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. That remains the truth and it must be told.

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