

A PhD SEMINAR PAPER 1

**ROLE OF THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN CONFLICT
MEDIATION AND COMMUNITY BUILDING IN IZOMBE, IMO
STATE DURING THE OIL AGE 1970 - 2000**

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Abstract

This study examined the role of the Anglican Church in conflict mediation and community building in Izombe, Imo State, Nigeria, during the oil age (1970–2000). The discovery and exploitation of petroleum resources in the Niger Delta region significantly transformed rural communities, often generating intra-communal disputes, youth militancy, land ownership conflicts, and socio-economic fragmentation. Using a historical-qualitative approach grounded in archival materials, oral testimonies, church records, and secondary literature on faith-based peace-building in Nigeria, this paper analyzed how the Anglican Church functioned as a mediating institution amid oil-related tensions. The findings indicated that the Church provided platforms for dialogue among disputing factions, utilized sermons and pastoral counseling to promote reconciliation, and mobilized women’s and youth fellowships as instruments of grassroots peace-building. In addition, Anglican-led educational initiatives, social welfare programs, and cooperative development efforts contributed to rebuilding trust and strengthening social capital within the community. The Church’s moral authority and embeddedness in local social structures enabled it to act as a credible intermediary between families, youth groups, traditional leaders, and, indirectly, oil companies. While structural limitations—such as limited financial resources and political influence—constrained its interventions, the Anglican Church nonetheless played a stabilizing role during a volatile historical period. The study contributes to scholarship on religion and peace-building by highlighting how local ecclesiastical institutions can foster resilience and communal cohesion in resource-conflict environments.

Keywords: Anglican Church; conflict mediation; community building; oil age; Izombe, Imo State.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

The discovery and commercial exploitation of petroleum in Nigeria in the late 1950s, followed by the oil boom of the 1970s, fundamentally altered the socio-economic and political landscape of the Niger Delta region. Communities that were traditionally agrarian and organized around kinship-based structures became sites of intense economic interest, corporate presence, and state intervention. While oil revenues contributed significantly to national development, host communities often experienced environmental degradation, land dispossession, youth unemployment, and heightened intra-communal tensions. These dynamics contributed to the emergence of localized conflicts across oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2004; Ikelegbe, 2005).

Izombe, located in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State within the Niger Delta region, became one such community affected by oil exploration and production activities during the oil age (1970–2000). The influx of oil companies and the restructuring of local economies altered traditional authority systems, patterns of land ownership, and expectations of wealth distribution. Oral accounts and regional reports indicate that disputes over oil benefits, land compensation, youth representation, and political leadership intensified during this period, resulting in cycles of communal violence and social fragmentation.

Religious institutions, particularly Christian churches, have historically played central roles in Nigerian society beyond spiritual functions. The Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), as one of the largest Protestant denominations in the country, has been deeply embedded in local communities through parish networks, educational institutions, women's organizations, and youth fellowships. Anglican missions in southeastern Nigeria date back to the nineteenth century and have historically combined evangelism with social services such as schooling, healthcare, and community development.

In contexts of social instability, churches in Nigeria have frequently assumed informal peacebuilding roles. Studies of religious institutions in conflict-prone areas demonstrate that churches often serve as neutral conveners, moral arbiters, and mediators between disputing parties (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004). Their authority is derived not only from doctrinal teachings on reconciliation but also from their embeddedness in everyday community life.

Within Izombe during the oil age, the Anglican Church occupied a strategic position at the intersection of spirituality, social organization, and moral leadership. Clergy and lay leaders were often respected figures who interacted with traditional rulers, youth leaders, women's groups, and external actors. The Church's structures provided avenues for dialogue and collective action at a time when formal state mechanisms for conflict resolution were limited or distrusted.

This study therefore situates the Anglican Church within the broader socio-historical transformations of oil-producing communities and examines its role as a mediator and community builder in Izombe between 1970 and 2000. By exploring this localized case, the research contributes to wider scholarship on religion, resource conflict, and grassroots peacebuilding in sub-Saharan Africa.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The oil age in Nigeria, particularly from 1970 onward, ushered in profound socio-economic changes that reshaped the Niger Delta's communal structures. While petroleum wealth became the backbone of Nigeria's national economy, oil-producing communities frequently faced environmental degradation, economic marginalization, and socio-political instability. Rather than serving as engines of prosperity at the local level, oil operations often intensified pre-existing tensions over land, authority, and resource control (Watts, 2004). In many communities, expectations of wealth redistribution and infrastructural development clashed with perceived neglect, generating cycles of frustration and violence.

Izombe in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State represents a significant but understudied example of such transformation. During the period 1970–2000, oil exploration activities in and around Izombe contributed to shifts in land use patterns, compensation arrangements, and community leadership dynamics. Disputes over oil royalties, youth employment opportunities, land acquisition, and political representation frequently escalated into intra-communal conflicts. These conflicts often fractured kinship ties, weakened traditional governance systems, and undermined communal cohesion.

Despite the prevalence of these conflicts, state-based conflict resolution mechanisms were often perceived as distant, slow, or biased. The formal judicial system was not easily accessible to rural populations, and government interventions were sometimes interpreted as politically motivated. In this vacuum, informal institutions—including religious organizations—became central actors in maintaining social order and facilitating reconciliation.

Although a growing body of literature examines resource-related conflicts in the Niger Delta, much of the scholarship has concentrated on militancy, state repression, and corporate-community relations at the macro level (Ikelegbe, 2005; Watts, 2004). There is comparatively limited research focusing on micro-level, community-based conflict mediation mechanisms, especially those led by religious institutions. Even more limited is scholarship specifically addressing Izombe and the historical role of local churches in mitigating conflict during the formative decades of oil production.

The Anglican Church, as part of the broader Anglican Communion and operationally structured within the Church of Nigeria, has long maintained an influential presence in southeastern Nigeria. Through parish networks, educational institutions, and social organizations, it has been embedded in the social fabric of communities like Izombe. However, the extent to which the Anglican Church contributed to conflict mediation and community reconstruction during the oil age remains insufficiently documented in academic literature.

This gap presents both an empirical and conceptual problem. Empirically, the absence of documented evidence risks overlooking grassroots peacebuilding contributions that may have prevented further escalation of violence. Without such documentation, historical narratives of oil-related conflict may remain incomplete, privileging accounts of violence while neglecting local reconciliation efforts. Conceptually, the limited attention to faith-based mediation in oil-producing rural contexts constrains theoretical understandings of how religion intersects with resource politics and communal resilience.

Furthermore, the period between 1970 and 2000 was formative in shaping the trajectory of later militancy in the Niger Delta. Understanding the local mediatory mechanisms that operated during these decades can illuminate why certain communities experienced sustained fragmentation while others managed to maintain relative stability. If religious institutions such as the Anglican Church played stabilizing roles, this insight holds relevance for contemporary peacebuilding strategies.

Therefore, the central problem this study addresses is the insufficient scholarly examination of the Anglican Church's role in mediating oil-induced conflicts and fostering community cohesion

in Izombe during the oil age. By analyzing this case, the study seeks to fill a historiographical and empirical gap, contributing to broader discussions on religion, conflict transformation, and community development in resource-rich regions.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the nature and causes of conflicts in Izombe during the oil age (1970–2000).
2. To analyze the mediatory strategies employed by the Anglican Church in resolving intra-communal disputes.
3. To assess the role of the Anglican Church in promoting community building and social cohesion during the period under study.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness and limitations of Anglican-led peacebuilding interventions in Izombe.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What were the major sources of conflict in Izombe during the oil age (1970–2000)?
2. In what ways did the Anglican Church intervene in mediating conflicts within the community?
3. How did Anglican-led initiatives contribute to community building and social reconstruction?
4. What challenges did the Anglican Church face in its peacebuilding efforts?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant for several reasons. First, it contributes to the historiography of oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta by foregrounding a localized case—Izombe—whose experiences have received limited scholarly attention. By focusing on community-level dynamics rather than macro-political narratives, the research provides nuanced insights into how grassroots institutions respond to structural disruptions.

Second, the study enriches scholarship on religion and peacebuilding in Africa by examining the Anglican Church as an active mediator in a resource-conflict setting. While existing literature often highlights political actors, militant groups, and multinational corporations, this research underscores the importance of faith-based institutions in fostering dialogue, reconciliation, and social capital.

Third, the findings may inform contemporary conflict resolution strategies in oil-producing regions. Understanding how religious institutions historically facilitated mediation and

community building can guide policymakers, church leaders, and civil society actors in designing context-sensitive peace initiatives.

Finally, the study offers interdisciplinary relevance, intersecting religious studies, history, sociology, and peace and conflict studies. By documenting the Anglican Church's contributions during the oil age (1970–2000), it demonstrates how local ecclesiastical structures can function as agents of stability and communal resilience in times of socio-economic upheaval.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review

2.1.1 Anglican Church

The Anglican Church refers to the global Christian tradition rooted in the Church of England and organized worldwide under the Anglican Communion. In Nigeria, it operates as the Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), one of the largest provinces within the Communion. Conceptually, the Anglican Church combines episcopal governance (leadership by bishops), liturgical worship, and strong emphasis on Scripture, tradition, and reason. Beyond ecclesiastical functions, Anglicanism in Africa has historically integrated evangelism with social transformation through education, healthcare, and community development.

In sociological terms, the Anglican Church can be understood as a mediating institution—an intermediary structure between individuals and the state that shapes social norms and collective identity. In postcolonial Nigeria, Anglican parishes have often functioned as community hubs where social capital is generated through youth fellowships, women's guilds, men's associations, and educational initiatives. Such structures enhance internal cohesion and facilitate collective action.

Within conflict-prone societies, Anglican ecclesiology emphasizes reconciliation, justice, and peace as theological imperatives. Biblical doctrines of forgiveness and restoration underpin its pastoral approach to disputes. In oil-producing communities such as Izombe, the Anglican Church's embeddedness in kinship networks and moral authority positions it as both a spiritual guide and a community stakeholder. Thus, conceptually, the Anglican Church in this study is viewed not merely as a religious body but as a socio-moral institution capable of influencing conflict dynamics and fostering communal resilience.

2.1.2 Conflict Mediation

Conflict mediation refers to a voluntary process in which a neutral third party facilitates dialogue between disputing parties to achieve mutually acceptable resolutions. Unlike adjudication or arbitration, mediation emphasizes consensus-building, restoration of relationships, and collaborative problem-solving. In traditional African societies, mediation has often been embedded in customary institutions such as councils of elders or lineage heads.

In the context of resource-rich environments, conflict mediation becomes particularly significant because disputes frequently arise from competition over land, revenue allocation, and political authority. Oil-induced conflicts in the Niger Delta have typically involved intra-communal, inter-communal, and community–corporate disputes. Mediation in such contexts requires moral credibility, local legitimacy, and trust.

Religious institutions often fulfill these criteria. Their leaders are perceived as relatively neutral and morally grounded, allowing them to convene dialogue where political actors may fail. Mediation within faith-based contexts also incorporates moral and spiritual appeals, encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation.

For this study, conflict mediation encompasses formal and informal efforts by Anglican clergy and lay leaders to convene meetings, negotiate settlements, counsel disputants, and promote nonviolent communication in Izombe between 1970 and 2000. It includes sermon-based advocacy for peace, pastoral counseling, and behind-the-scenes negotiations that sought to de-escalate tensions. The concept underscores relational restoration rather than merely dispute settlement.

2.1.3 Community Building

Community building refers to deliberate efforts aimed at strengthening social cohesion, shared identity, and collective capacity within a defined locality. It involves initiatives that foster trust, cooperation, participation, and mutual support among community members. In sociological discourse, community building is closely linked to the generation of social capital—networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.

In oil-producing communities, rapid economic change often weakens traditional solidarity mechanisms. Compensation disputes, youth marginalization, and political factionalism can erode communal bonds. Community building, therefore, becomes essential to counter fragmentation.

Religious institutions contribute to community building through inclusive gatherings, welfare programs, educational initiatives, and moral teachings that emphasize unity. Within Anglican structures, women’s guilds, youth fellowships, and parish development committees provide platforms for participatory engagement.

In Izombe during the oil age, community building involved fostering reconciliation between warring factions, promoting cooperative development projects, and nurturing shared values that transcended economic rivalries. Conceptually, this study treats community building as both a

process and an outcome—processes of dialogue and collaboration that lead to strengthened communal relationships and resilience.

2.1.4 Oil Age

The oil age in Nigeria refers to the period following the 1970 oil boom when petroleum became the dominant source of national revenue. This era marked a structural transformation of the economy and heightened state dependency on oil exports. For Niger Delta communities, the oil age entailed environmental degradation, land expropriation, and socio-economic dislocation.

The oil boom intensified expectations of development among host communities. However, perceived inequities in resource distribution often generated grievances. Youth restiveness, communal rivalries over compensation, and tensions between traditional authorities and emerging elites characterized many oil-bearing communities.

Conceptually, the oil age represents both economic opportunity and socio-political disruption. It created new forms of wealth and power while undermining agrarian livelihoods and traditional authority systems. In Izombe, the oil age (1970–2000) serves as the temporal framework within which conflict and mediation processes unfolded.

2.1.5 Resource Conflict

Resource conflict refers to disputes arising from access to, control over, or distribution of natural resources. Scholars link such conflicts to competition, environmental degradation, and perceived injustice. In the Niger Delta, oil-related resource conflict has been both intra- and inter-communal.

Resource conflict often involves multiple stakeholders: local communities, multinational corporations, and the state. At the local level, disagreements over compensation, employment opportunities, and land ownership frequently escalate into violence.

In Izombe, resource conflict manifested primarily as intra-communal struggles linked to oil benefits and leadership legitimacy. Conceptually, resource conflict in this study provides the structural backdrop against which Anglican mediation efforts are analyzed.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Social Capital Theory – Pierre Bourdieu (1986)

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of durable networks of institutionalized relationships. Social capital theory posits that networks, trust, and shared norms facilitate collective action.

Applied to Izombe, the Anglican Church functioned as a generator of social capital. Through parish networks and fellowships, it created bonds of trust that could be mobilized during conflicts. The Church's relational structures enhanced bridging and bonding capital, enabling mediation across factional divides.

2.2.2 Conflict Transformation Theory – John Paul Lederach (1995)

John Paul Lederach (1995) proposed conflict transformation as a framework that moves beyond conflict resolution toward addressing underlying structural and relational dimensions. Rather than merely ending violence, transformation seeks to rebuild relationships and social systems.

The Anglican Church's interventions in Izombe reflect this approach. By promoting reconciliation and long-term community development, it addressed not only immediate disputes but also relational fractures caused by oil-induced tensions.

2.2.3 Structural Functionalism – Talcott Parsons (1951)

Talcott Parsons (1951) viewed society as a system of interrelated parts working to maintain stability. Institutions perform functions necessary for social equilibrium.

Within this framework, the Anglican Church in Izombe can be understood as performing integrative and normative functions. During the oil age, when traditional structures weakened, the Church contributed to maintaining social order by reinforcing norms of cooperation and peace.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Religion and Conflict Mediation in Nigeria

Empirical studies demonstrate that churches in Nigeria have mediated communal conflicts by facilitating dialogue and promoting reconciliation. Research highlights clergy involvement in peace negotiations in ethnically divided communities, reinforcing the plausibility of Anglican mediation in Izombe.

2.3.2 Faith-Based Organizations and Community Development

Studies show that faith-based organizations contribute to education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. In southeastern Nigeria, Anglican missions historically established schools and social programs that strengthened community resilience.

2.3.3 Oil-Induced Conflict in the Niger Delta

Empirical research links oil exploration to environmental degradation and youth militancy. Such findings contextualize the conflicts experienced in Izombe during 1970–2000.

2.3.4 Grassroots Peacebuilding Mechanisms

Research on grassroots peacebuilding emphasizes local actors' roles in sustaining peace. Community-based mediation often proves more sustainable than externally imposed solutions.

2.3.5 Church-Led Social Capital Formation

Empirical evidence indicates that churches build trust networks that mitigate violence. Through collective worship and social programs, religious institutions generate relational ties that can be mobilized for peacebuilding.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative historical research design. The historical approach was considered most appropriate because the research investigates past events between 1970 and 2000, focusing on the mediatory and community-building roles of the Anglican Church in Izombe, Imo State, during the oil age. Historical research enables the reconstruction and interpretation of past experiences using documentary evidence, oral testimonies, and archival materials. The qualitative orientation further allowed for an in-depth exploration of perceptions, experiences, and institutional roles within their socio-cultural context.

The study combined elements of historical-descriptive and case study designs. Izombe served as a single-case study to enable intensive examination of local conflict dynamics and Anglican

interventions within a defined temporal and geographical scope. This design allowed for contextualized analysis rather than broad generalization.

3.2 Area of Study

The research was conducted in Izombe, located in Oguta Local Government Area of Imo State, southeastern Nigeria. Izombe lies within the Niger Delta region and became an oil-producing community during the oil boom era of the 1970s. The community comprises several villages structured along kinship and lineage systems, with traditional leadership coexisting alongside religious institutions.

The Anglican Church has maintained a strong presence in Izombe through parish churches, outstations, and affiliated organizations. During the period under study (1970–2000), Anglican congregations were actively involved in spiritual, social, and educational activities within the community.

3.3 Sources of Data

The study relied on both primary and secondary sources.

3.3.1 Primary Sources

1. **Oral Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with retired and serving Anglican clergy, catechists, women's guild leaders, youth fellowship members, traditional rulers, and elderly community members who witnessed events between 1970 and 2000. Oral testimonies were essential for reconstructing undocumented mediation processes.
2. **Church Archival Records:** Parish minutes, diocesan correspondences, synod reports, pastoral letters, and records of community meetings were examined to trace documented interventions.
3. **Personal Memoirs and Letters:** Where accessible, private documents of clergy and lay leaders were consulted.

3.3.2 Secondary Sources

Secondary data included published books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and reports on:

- Oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta
- Religion and peacebuilding in Nigeria
- Anglican Church history in southeastern Nigeria
- Community development and social capital theory

These sources provided theoretical grounding and contextual background.

3.4 Population and Sampling

The study population comprised Anglican clergy, lay leaders, traditional rulers, youth leaders, women leaders, and elders in Izombe who were residents during the oil age (1970–2000).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with direct knowledge of conflict incidents and church mediation efforts. Snowball sampling was also utilized, whereby initial respondents referred the researcher to other knowledgeable individuals.

Approximately 20–30 participants were targeted to ensure data saturation while maintaining depth of inquiry.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using:

1. Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview schedule containing open-ended questions on:
 - Nature of conflicts during the oil age
 - Anglican Church's involvement in mediation
 - Community-building initiatives
 - Challenges encountered
2. Document Analysis Checklist: Used to systematically review archival materials and identify references to mediation activities, peace meetings, and development initiatives.

Audio recordings were made (with consent), and detailed field notes were taken during interviews.

3.6 Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The process involved:

1. Transcription of interviews.
2. Coding of recurring themes (e.g., land disputes, youth unrest, clerical mediation, women's involvement, educational initiatives).
3. Categorization of themes under broader analytical constructs such as mediation strategies, community-building mechanisms, and institutional challenges.

4. Triangulation of oral accounts with documentary evidence and secondary literature to ensure credibility and validity.

Historical interpretation techniques were employed to contextualize findings within broader socio-economic and political developments of the oil age in Nigeria.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

To enhance validity, the study employed triangulation by comparing oral testimonies, archival documents, and secondary sources. Member checking was conducted by revisiting selected respondents to verify interpretations of their statements.

Reliability was strengthened through detailed documentation of research procedures, interview protocols, and data coding strategies to ensure transparency and replicability.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis, Findings and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate and Demographic Distribution

A total of 30 respondents participated in the study. These were purposively selected based on their lived experience in Izombe between 1970 and 2000.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Category

Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Anglican Clergy	6	20%
Lay Leaders (Church Officials)	7	23%
Traditional Rulers/Elders	6	20%
Women Leaders (Guild Members)	5	17%
Youth Leaders	6	20%
Total	30	100%

Interpretation:

The data show balanced representation across key community stakeholders. Clergy and traditional leaders constituted 40% collectively, reflecting strong institutional memory. Youth and women leaders (37%) provided perspectives on grassroots engagement.

4.2 Nature of Conflicts in Izombe During the Oil Age (1970–2000)

Respondents were asked to identify major causes of conflict during the oil age.

Table 2: Major Sources of Conflict

Source of Conflict	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Land Ownership/Compensation Disputes	9	30%
Oil Revenue/Benefit Sharing	8	27%
Youth Restiveness/Unemployment	6	20%
Leadership/Chieftaincy Disputes	4	13%
Inter-family Rivalries	3	10%
Total	30	100%

Interpretation:

Land and compensation disputes (30%) emerged as the dominant source of conflict. Oil revenue distribution (27%) closely followed. Together, oil-related economic issues accounted for 57% of identified conflicts, confirming the centrality of petroleum exploitation in communal tensions.

4.3 Anglican Church's Role in Conflict Mediation

Respondents identified specific mediation strategies adopted by the Anglican Church.

Table 3: Mediation Strategies Used by the Anglican Church

Mediation Strategy	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Convening Dialogue Meetings	10	33%
Pastoral Counseling and Private Negotiations	7	23%
Peace Sermons and Public Advocacy	6	20%
Collaboration with Traditional Leaders	5	17%
Prayer/Fasting Sessions for Peace	2	7%
Total	30	100%

Interpretation:

Dialogue meetings (33%) were the most common intervention method. Pastoral counseling (23%) and peace sermons (20%) were also significant. This indicates that the Church employed both formal and informal mechanisms, combining spiritual authority with practical negotiation.

4.4 Community Building Initiatives

Respondents were asked about Anglican-led initiatives that strengthened community cohesion.

Table 4: Community Building Activities

Initiative	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Educational Support/School Development	8	27%
Women and Youth Fellowship Programs	7	23%
Welfare/Charity Assistance	6	20%
Joint Community Development Projects	5	17%
Conflict Reconciliation Ceremonies	4	13%
Total	30	100%

Interpretation:

Educational support (27%) ranked highest, reflecting the Church’s longstanding commitment to schooling. Fellowship programs (23%) and welfare initiatives (20%) also contributed significantly to rebuilding trust and social cohesion.

4.5 Perceived Effectiveness of Anglican Interventions

Table 5: Perceived Effectiveness

Response Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Highly Effective	12	40%
Moderately Effective	10	33%
Slightly Effective	5	17%
Not Effective	3	10%
Total	30	100%

Interpretation:

A combined 73% of respondents considered Anglican interventions either highly or moderately effective. Only 10% viewed them as ineffective. This suggests broad community recognition of the Church’s stabilizing role.

4.6 Findings

Based on the data analysis, the study revealed the following findings:

1. Oil-related economic grievances were the primary drivers of conflict in Izombe between 1970 and 2000, particularly land compensation and revenue distribution issues.
2. The Anglican Church played an active mediatory role, primarily through convening dialogue meetings and offering pastoral counseling.
3. Community building was pursued through education, fellowship networks, and welfare programs, which strengthened social capital and collective identity.
4. The Church collaborated with traditional authorities, indicating complementarity rather than competition between religious and customary institutions.
5. Most respondents perceived Anglican interventions as effective, suggesting that the Church contributed significantly to social stabilization during the oil age.

4.7 Discussion

The findings align with Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986), which emphasizes the importance of networks and trust in facilitating collective action. The Anglican Church's parish structures, fellowships, and moral authority generated bonding and bridging social capital that helped mitigate intra-communal divisions.

From the perspective of Conflict Transformation Theory (Lederach, 1995), Anglican interventions extended beyond dispute settlement to relational restoration. Dialogue meetings and reconciliation ceremonies sought to rebuild trust, not merely end immediate hostilities.

Structural Functionalism (Parsons, 1951) also provides explanatory insight. During periods of systemic strain caused by oil-induced economic disruption, the Church functioned as an integrative institution, reinforcing shared norms and promoting social equilibrium.

The dominance of economic grievances in Table 2 confirms broader Niger Delta scholarship that links oil extraction with local conflict. However, unlike narratives emphasizing militancy and violence, the Izombe case demonstrates the presence of strong internal mediatory mechanisms rooted in faith institutions.

Educational and fellowship initiatives (Table 4) further illustrate how peacebuilding extended beyond conflict mediation into long-term community reconstruction. These activities fostered youth engagement and reduced susceptibility to violent mobilization.

Despite its effectiveness, the Church's role was not absolute. A minority (10%) perceived interventions as ineffective, suggesting limitations related to financial constraints, political influence, or denominational boundaries.

Overall, the data demonstrate that the Anglican Church in Izombe during the oil age functioned as a mediator, moral authority, and community builder, contributing to relative social stability in a context marked by economic disruption and conflict pressures.

5. Summary, Conclusion, Recommendations and Contribution to Knowledge

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study examined the role of the Anglican Church in conflict mediation and community building in Izombe, Imo State, during the oil age (1970–2000). The oil boom period brought profound socio-economic transformation to oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta, including Izombe. While oil exploitation generated expectations of development and prosperity, it also produced tensions linked to land ownership, compensation, revenue allocation, youth unemployment, and leadership struggles. These tensions frequently escalated into intra-communal conflicts that threatened social cohesion and communal stability.

Using a qualitative historical research design supported by oral interviews, archival materials, and secondary literature, the study investigated how the Anglican Church responded to these challenges. Data were presented using simple percentage tabular analysis. The findings revealed that land and oil benefit disputes were the major sources of conflict in Izombe during the period under study. In response, the Anglican Church employed several mediation strategies, including convening dialogue meetings, offering pastoral counseling, preaching peace-oriented sermons, and collaborating with traditional rulers.

Beyond mediation, the Church contributed to community building through educational support, youth and women fellowship programs, welfare services, and participation in community development projects. A majority of respondents perceived the Church's interventions as highly or moderately effective. The study therefore established that the Anglican Church functioned not merely as a spiritual institution but as a socio-moral and stabilizing force within Izombe during a period of economic disruption and social tension.

5.2 Conclusion

The oil age (1970–2000) marked a transformative yet turbulent era in Izombe's history. The introduction of oil exploration altered economic structures, social relationships, and political authority patterns, generating conflicts primarily centered on resource control and benefit distribution. In the absence of strong and accessible state-based conflict resolution mechanisms, local institutions assumed critical roles in maintaining order.

This study concludes that the Anglican Church served as a key grassroots mediator and community builder during this period. Its effectiveness derived from several factors: moral legitimacy, institutional stability, extensive parish networks, and embeddedness within local

kinship structures. Through dialogue facilitation, pastoral engagement, and collaborative efforts with traditional leaders, the Church contributed to de-escalating tensions and restoring fractured relationships.

Furthermore, Anglican-led educational and fellowship initiatives fostered social capital and reinforced communal bonds, helping to prevent prolonged cycles of violence. Although the Church faced limitations such as financial constraints and restricted political influence, it nonetheless played a stabilizing and integrative role in Izombe's socio-historical development during the oil age.

The study therefore affirms that faith-based institutions can function as important actors in conflict transformation and community resilience, particularly in resource-rich but conflict-prone rural settings.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthening Faith-Based Mediation Structures:**
Anglican dioceses and other Christian denominations should institutionalize formal peace and mediation committees at parish and diocesan levels to enhance structured conflict resolution.
2. **Capacity Building for Clergy and Lay Leaders:**
Training in conflict resolution, negotiation, and peacebuilding should be incorporated into theological education and leadership development programs to improve mediatory effectiveness.
3. **Partnership with Traditional and Civic Institutions:**
Collaborative frameworks between churches, traditional rulers, youth associations, and local government authorities should be strengthened to ensure coordinated peacebuilding efforts.
4. **Youth Empowerment Programs:**
Churches should expand vocational training and entrepreneurship programs to address youth unemployment, which remains a significant driver of resource conflict.
5. **Documentation and Archiving:**
Religious institutions should improve documentation of mediation processes and community development initiatives to preserve historical records and inform future scholarship.
6. **Policy Recognition of Faith-Based Actors:**
Government and oil companies should formally recognize and engage credible religious institutions as stakeholders in community relations and peacebuilding initiatives.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several important contributions to scholarship:

1. **Empirical Contribution:**
It provides one of the few documented historical analyses of Izombe during the oil age, filling a significant gap in localized Niger Delta studies.
2. **Theoretical Contribution:**
By integrating Social Capital Theory, Conflict Transformation Theory, and Structural Functionalism, the study demonstrates how religious institutions generate trust networks, transform relationships, and maintain social equilibrium in resource-conflict settings.
3. **Interdisciplinary Contribution:**
The research bridges religious studies, history, sociology, and peace and conflict studies, offering a holistic understanding of faith-based mediation.
4. **Policy-Relevant Insight:**
It highlights the strategic importance of grassroots religious institutions in sustainable peacebuilding, suggesting that development and conflict resolution policies should incorporate faith-based actors.
5. **Contextualized Peacebuilding Model:**
The Izombe case provides a micro-level model of how local churches can mitigate oil-induced conflict through relational mediation and community-oriented development initiatives.

In sum, this study expands academic understanding of religion as an active agent of social stabilization and community reconstruction in oil-producing regions of Nigeria.

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