

# Egbudu Akah -Where things have fallen apart

By Gabriel Omonhinmin | 23 July 2017 | 3:41 am



*A burnt vehicle*

## • As Two Brothers Battle Over Ancient Throne

Rustic Egbudu Akah, Aniocha South Local Council of Delta State was the recent theatre of an ugly clash between two warring princes over the ancient chieftaincy stool of the agrarian community. The traditional ruler, Obi Paul Nzemeka Okolie will surely live with sour memories for a long time.

On that fateful day, he was relaxing in his palace, when fierce-looking thugs wielding assault rifles, cutlasses, rods and other dangerous weapons rushed in, shoving and shooting sporadically. Clearly, they were out to get him, and he only escaped death by whiskers from the dark-goggle wearing goons, who executed commando like raid on the palace.

Even before echoes of the final shots fired by the invaders died, it was obvious they were determined to leave destruction and death in their wake. And truly, when the 'battle' was over and the dust had settled, there was chaos everywhere. The king was beaten blue black, and with bruises all over his body. The monarch's residence was desecrated and vandalised, while his official car and other personal properties were equally destroyed.

One Monday Ossai, the teenage son of a palace chief, Eric Ossai, was allegedly killed in the orgy of violence, while several persons, including Obi Paul Okolie and his queen, Theresa were injured.

With his face bandaged, Obi Okolie, who is undergoing treatment at an undisclosed hospital in Asaba, wailed that unless security situation in his domain improves, his life is in danger, and he is scared of returning home.

**But what could have gone wrong? Why would brothers rise up against one another and refuse to dine at the same table?**

After three scores and 10 years on the throne of his forebears, Obi Alfred Okolie I, who some reckoned the longest reigning monarch in Africa, joined his ancestors in September, 2016 at age 104.

Princes Paul Okolie and Solomon, who were crowned by different feuding factions in the crisis-torn town and at separate times after their father's transition, are at daggers drawn, as regard the true successor.

While Prince Solomon, a clergyman, who preaches salvation to 'lost souls' at the neighbouring small town of Nsukwa, was coronated on October 20, as Obi Solomon Ogwuagwu I; Prince Paul staged his own show on November 8, as Obi Paul Nzemeka Okolie.

Without mincing words, Prince Ben Okolie laid the blame at the doorstep of Obi Ogwuagwu's supporters, claiming they attacked Obi Paul Nzemeka, when they discovered he was maintaining his late father's property.

He alleged that his brother's supporters invaded Nzemeka's residence to unleash terror, and that in self-defence, the Obi's wife, Theresa, poured acid on the invaders, while some of the acid also splashed on her face.

He equally blamed Ogwuagwu and his vicious gang for Ossai's death, insisting it was when police came to restore normalcy that Ogwuagwu's men engaged the security operatives, and that the victim was caught in the cross fire.

President-General of Egbudu-Akah Development Union, Chief Anthony Egbune, however, said the crisis was caused by Obi Paul, whom he said was deceived by the council of Obis in Aniocha South Local Government Area.

Egbune said Nzemeka was obviously spurred by the local Obis' promise that they would facilitate presentation of staff of office to the factional king by the state government, even when the matter is still in court.

He said: "Solomon was first to be crowned Obi, but when the other people now crowned Paul, he (Paul) went to sit on the throne. As a result, Solomon took him to court. But rather than file his defence, Paul filed preliminary objection, which the court dismissed and asked him to file his defence before June 29.

"However, the Obi of Ubulu-Unor, who is chairman of council of traditional rulers in the locality, called a meeting and invited Paul. They told him that the case against his Obishop had been dismissed and that they would facilitate presentation of staff of office to him.

"Paul paid over N300, 000.00, while preparing for the presentation, and based on the promise made by the council of Obis, he went into his late father's garage and started using the Sienna car, when the court had ordered that nobody should touch the late Obi's property, until the case is determined.

"So, some youths accosted him, and reminded him that the late Obi's property was not supposed to be touched by anyone. It was in the process that Paul was manhandled. Later, some people went to his house to settle the matter, and that was when his wife poured acid on them."

According to him, after the acid bath, Paul and his wife went into hiding, but the people, mostly women, insisted that they be smoked out, as Paul had mobilised some anti-cult people known as Okowa boys from Agbor.

He alleged that it was when the anti-cult boys came into town that confusion broke out. In the midst of all this, Monday Ossai was shot and killed by anti-cult people, which resulted in anarchy in the town.

But Kenneth Ariyo, an indigene, said the current spate of violence, which started on June 8 2017, was triggered, when Obi's wife bathed five persons with acid for supporting Obi Solomon Ogwuagwu, which led to a mob action by angry youths, resulting in the brazen assault of Obi Paul and his consort.

Determined to have their own pound of flesh, Ariyo explained that some armed youths rose in defence of Prince Paul and unleashed terror on the sleepy community, leading to the tragic death of Ossai, the 17-year-old son of Chief Eric Ossai, who was shot at close range.

"Monday died on his way to hospital from gunshot injuries," he narrated. "Other children were shot, including the son of Frederick Osiegbu, another friend of Obi Ogwuagwu. Consequently, the news of his death led to the destruction of houses belonging to the family members and cohorts of the alleged persons, who shot Monday Ossai."

He said Ogwuagwu was not around during the incident, and that when he returned, he allowed Paul to take refuge in his house in order to save him from the rampaging youths.

He said: "While in Ogwuagwu's house, he was fed and washed, and a medical personnel was invited to treat his injuries. The police was contacted, and assurance was given that they were on their way."

Obi Paul Nzemeka, however, faulted Ariyo's verdict, alleging he was abducted alongside his wife by his brother's loyalists. He said over 30 youths stormed his palace with dangerous weapons. They kicked, beat, shoved and dragged him to their ringleader's house, where a witchdoctor shot him at close range with a pistol, but the gunshot miraculously missed him.

"I later bled from the spot I was shot, while my abductors kept me all night in the cold without clothes," he said. Obi Paul accused a top security officer at Nsukwa Police Division of aiding his assailants, alleging that the policeman, who was supposed to promote peace, turned a blind eye.

"He conspired with them, and even after phone calls were made to police headquarters at Asaba and contingents of anti-riot policemen were dispatched to Egbudu-Akah from Umunede and environs, the top police officer prevented them from gaining entry into the town to rescue me and others.

"He did not also stop the arson and destruction of our properties. So, the aggressors had a field day, as they dealt ruthlessly with me in the secluded place. They did not spare my wife, as they also pounced on her."

Delta State Commissioner of Police, Mr. Zanna Ibrahim, said the conduct of those arrested in the chieftaincy tussle bordered on criminality.

He said: "On June 8, one Prince Paul, the Obi of Egbudu-Akah, called to report that his brother, Prince Solomon, used instrumentality of the village's vigilante to attack him. And as soon as police were alerted, personnel from Nsukwa Division were immediately sent to the palace, but the thugs prevented them from gaining access to the palace."

Zanna said the rioters dared the policemen, who tactically withdrew to a neighbouring village awaiting intelligence from plain-clothed detectives. Continuing, the police commissioner said: "On June 9, the team stormed the village and rescued

the Obi, his wife, Theresa Nzemeka and one George Nnemuku, whose house was burnt. Leader and sponsor of the violence, the Obi's brother, one Solomon was arrested with nine other perpetrators."

However, Obi Solomon Ogwuagwu insisted he is the rightful occupant of the throne, going by the tradition of Egbudu-Akah, which stipulates that the eldest surviving son of the Obi should succeed him.

He said his mother was legitimately married to the deceased centenarian king, while Obi Paul's mother was an inherited wife from an uncle. His story: "My mother, Mrs. Adaeke Okolie, was the first legal wife of my late father, while Paul's mother was only inherited by my late father, with some of her children, including Paul. The inheritance was an error and contrary to the customs and tradition of our people. Unfortunately, they couldn't reverse it.

"You see, my grandfather, Enemokwu, married four wives. My father was not the first child of his father, as there was one son before him whose name was Babadi Enemokwu, but he died while his father was alive.

"Before his death, he had four wives. Two were alive, when his father died in 1946. So, Obi Okolie was mandated to inherit his late brother's two surviving wives and children. My father then inherited them through a traditional process known as Igbulu na nzo.

"My father had inherited his brother's two wives before he married my mother, who gave birth to myself and two other sons, who later died. Therefore, I am the rightful living first son of the late Obi Okolie."

According to him, after his two elder brothers passed on, his father was scared that he (Prince Solomon) might also die. Therefore, the late monarch and the entire royal family resolved to take him to the palace of Obi of Idumuje-Ugboko in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State for safety.

"It was a taboo for my father to have expected that a senior male child from an inherited marriage could ascend to the throne of our forefathers as the king. Paul can never be the king.

"The much he can be is head of the family or quarters. But to think that he, Paul, can become the Obi is impossible. I am the heir apparent and rightful son of the late Obi Okolie. It wasn't until I returned to Egbudu Akah that I knew it was a taboo for my late father to have inherited the two wives," he insisted.

Buttressing Prince Solomon's claims, Ada Nwaedo Adagbo, his maternal cousin, faulted the choice of Paul Okolie as king. "Why would the community allow someone, who is not the direct child of the late king to rule them? Do we now allow illegality in our town," he queried.

As the child of an inherited wife, Adagbo said Paul cannot be allowed to mount the throne, because it is not his right. He said Paul was secretly installed through a fraudulent process without the community's approval, and that he is only a prince. "It is a few old men, who are no longer in touch with realities of the situation, that are propping him, but he can never ascend the throne. These people know the truth. They only wanted to give Paul a false sense of belonging. Now, he can't publicly say he is the king. And if indeed he is the rightful person, let him call a town's meeting (Izu Ani). Our tradition is completely against his actions, because he is not the heir apparent to the throne."

Ariyo wondered why Paul would want to be king, when he had actually benefitted by taking part in the sharing of the late Babadi's property. "This fact was recognised by Paul himself, who inherited properties belonging to the late Babadi,

including the man's personal house and compound. In fact, for several years, there was conflict between Emmanuel and Paul over the way and manner the properties belonging to the two brothers were shared.

"This conflict was settled amicably, as the two brothers were allowed to share the properties equally. It, therefore, beats simple logic that Paul should inherit from two fathers," Ariyo said.

But Obi Paul Nzemeka Okolie, 67, insisted he is the eldest surviving son of the late Obi Albert Okolie, and that Solomon Ogwuagwu is his younger brother, and by tradition, cannot ascend the throne, when he is alive.

The retired principal maintained that his half brother is his deceased father's seventh child, and the third son among those alive. He explained that the bereaved children were supposed to mourn the late royal father for three months before the next king would be installed, as required by tradition, but was speechless at his hurried installation, which was wrong in the first instance.

"He is not the rightful person," he said. "The king makers are from the family. The eldest man of the royal family (Diokpa Umu-Obi) is the person that should tell the quarters who should be installed as the next king, according to our tradition. As it is in Obi Okolie's family, Diokpa Augustine Ikwesi presented me to the quarters."

Obi Paul, however, conceded that his mother was inherited. Besides, he also paid her bride price in line with the custom and tradition of his people."

"Again, my father was traditionally required to be married before he could ascend the throne. My mother was the first wife. After he inherited her, she gave birth to my sister and I. So, it is important to point out here that my father did not inherit my sister and me. I am a bonafide son of my father. I was born after he inherited my mother. I am 67 years old. Prince Solomon is not even the next child after me. There is another brother before him," he said.

No doubt, things have truly fallen apart at Egbudu Akah and the centre can no longer hold. Sheer anarchy is threatening to engulf the once peaceful community, except something is urgently done to arrest the situation.