

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL SOLIDARITY AMONG NSUKKA PEOPLE AS MODEL FOR NATIONAL UNITY

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DOI: 10.13140/ RG.2.2.23433.67684

Abstract

Cultural solidarity which is explained as the unification of people belonging to the same cultural identity among Nsukka people is deeply rooted and embedded in their way of life. This interconnectedness has contributed immensely to their spirituality and so formed the bedrock as well as catalyst for development and integration. It is in view of this that this research is poised to explore, so as to be used as model for Nigeria to enhance national development and integration. In a country where the call for restructuring and true nationalism in the spirit of the founding fathers of Nigeria is high, there is need to recommend the solidarity that exists among Nsukka people as a model for the country. The qualitative phenomenological research method will be used in this study. Data for the study were collected using oral interview as primary source. Also, as a secondary source of data collection, library materials, internet sources and written documents were used. The result revealed that if emulated, Nsukka cultural zone has a lot to offer to the nation for National Unity.

Keywords: African, Traditional, Solidarity, Community, Nsukka, National Unity

Introduction

Nigeria is a country blessed with many natural and human resources. Her amalgamation by the British colonial masters saw the fusion of peoples of different languages, religions and tribes. This amalgamation of people with different tribe and religion has been severally identified as the major source of division in the country. In a country where the call for restructuring and true nationalism in the spirit of the founding fathers of Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikiwi, Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa and lots more no longer holds ground, Nsukka people of Northern Igbo-land have an example rooted in the idea of solidarity that could be modelled for national integration. In the face of religious and tribally anchored chaos and call for disintegration faced by the Nigeria state, there is a very germane necessity to propose a model that will help balance the differences

aroused by the multi-faceted realities of the Nigerian State. This work is therefore geared towards proposing the elements of Cultural solidarity among Nsukka people as a model for National integration. The fact that Nsukka has practitioners of all the three major religions of African, Islamic and Christian regions adds impetus to the model.

The elements of cultural solidarity among Nsukka people of Enugu State are observable but not limited to the following activities; Respect for constituted traditional institutions (Onyishi/Igwe), Agriculture and Hard-work, Eating habit, Festivals, Use of symbols, the concept of Umuada and Masquerade Cult. The Nsukka people like most organized culture areas in Africa are bounded by certain features like the concepts of Umunna, Umuada, masquerade cults, festivals, general sanitation etc. all centred in the concept of *Igwebuike* (solidarity). Whenever any form of dispute reared its head in the land, the people of Nsukka culture zone, like other non-centralized societies have different traditional techniques for dispute-resolution procedures in order to maintain internal peace. Based on the existing virtue of solidarity imbedded in African/Nsukka religion, disputes were easily resolved through some cultural institutions who are very familiar with the approved solidarizing strategies. One of such strategies was oat taking which indicates the power of the gods/spirits. This interconnectedness has contributed immensely to their way of life and so formed the bedrock as well as catalyst for development and integration.

The political life of Nigeria in recent times has been agog with the call for restructuring. This call for restructuring is anchored on lack of trust for other component members of the nation as well as negligence. An average Nsukka person seems to be a very hard working and independent achiever seeking to make ends meet without egocentric dependence on another. Ugwu (2018) recently observed that people and regions are more productive when they are self-reliant. Thus he observed that:

the restructuring of the nation back to real or true fiscal federalism will no doubt strengthen the sub-units and make them less dependent on the Federal government. For instance, after the Nigerian independence in 1960 the University of Nigeria was built by the defunct Eastern Region with the resources raised mainly through agricultural products and inaugurated in October 7, 1960 just a few days after independence. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe did not wait for any Federal Allocation or budget. They knew what the

people needed and went ahead to produce quality and affordable education.

The inability of the different geo-political regions in Nigeria to fulfil their dream has triggered division in the country. The oil rich South-South wants to control their oil wealth, the South East believes they are industrious and can exist as an independent sovereign State other regions in the country have also given different reasons while they need to be restructured.

Since regions in Nigeria are clamouring for self-determination, it is pertinent to mention that Nsukka people are Self-dependent and have the zeal for hard work which has become part and parcel of the average Nsukka man. This culture has seen one beckoning on his neighbour to be hard working and cooperative in the collective zeal to excel, protect one another in the face of attack and seek the good and success of his kinsman. Factors like ethnicity, religious pluralism, corruption, nepotism etc. have negated the concept of National solidarity as found among the Nsukka people. The aforementioned problems are the focus of this work using cultural solidarity in Nsukka as the panacea to solve the Nigerian problem.

Problem

The focus of this work is particularly about the total loss of trust for one another in Nigeria. Hatred and wickedness are daily being brewed in the nation. People are no longer their brother or sisters keepers. Daily, one cannot tune to the television or pick a National daily without news of deaths of fellow citizens. Stories about how innocent citizens are killed are told daily. Chains of terrorists attacks are also being reported. These disheartening atrocities have sowed seeds of discord and disintegration in the hearts of Nigerians. The positive powers of cultural solidarity manifested amongst the Nsukka people, is presented in this research as a model towards solving this problem that is cancerous to our national growth. This can be anchored through cultural solidarity that had sustained Nsukka people from time immemorial.

Despite the fact that Nigeria as a country had made several efforts to foster solidarity, like the National Confabs, development of different stages and types of Nigerian constitutions and daily debates at the upper and lower chambers of the National Assembly, the quest for the disintegration of the country still persists. The persistent nature of Nigeria problems is the problem this work on the elements of cultural solidarity among Nsukka people as a model for national integration seeks to address.

This work will examine how a model for true national solidarity in the face of the call for restructuring can be planted using the cultural model of Nsukka as an example or case study for resuscitating a greater nation built on trust. The main aim of this study is to examine the concept of cultural solidarity among Nsukka people of Northern Igbo culture area of Enugu State as model for national integration. The specific objectives are to: examine Solidarity among the Nsukka People of Northern Igbo Culture area; examine previous failed or successful strategies in Nigeria before the adoption of the cultural solidarity as a model; use Nsukka cultural solidarity as a model for national integration. Examine the effects of Solidarity on the Development of Nsukka Cultural Area; proffer solutions to the Nation Using Nsukka Solidarity as a model.

Cultural Solidarity

The definition of Cultural solidarity as the unification of people belonging to the same cultural identity as defined by Khurana (1998) is adopted in this work. The cultural solidarity existing among Nsukka people in seem in their respect for constituted traditional institutions (Onyishi/Igwe) as final decision making body, Eating Habit, Farming Habit, Hunting, Festivals, Use of symbols, Communication network, Ostracism in case of default or deviant behaviour. These are the cultural elements that the people of Enugu North Senatorial zone are known for. Every Nsukka man sees it as both a religious and cultural duty to ensure that none of these defaulted for doing so will amount to disobeying nature and God. As Okwueze (2004:11) noted "Each community in Igbo-land maintained a traditional system of belief and practices through which the people showed their subordination to a supernatural, transcendent Supreme being".

Plato in his work the Republic was probably the first to have advocated for solidarity among a people when he wrote to say that maintaining a state religion, even if it was not true, is strictly a sort of social adhesive (Plato in Russell 1988). As have been noted, the way of life of the Africans cannot be different from their Religion and culture. The African man as described by Mbiti (1970) is chronically religious seeing God in almost everything. The Nsukka people as Africans also see Solidarity as a duty.

Religion refers to human beings' relationship with that which they regard as Holy, Sacred, Transcendent, Worthy of special reverence or divine. It is important to note that religion is not just about humans' relationship with the Supernatural or Sacred. It also includes the connection between this human-God

(vertical) relationship and human-human (horizontal) relationship. It is the understanding of religion from both angles that allows us to understand the nature of the role of religion in societies, the social relevance of religion. According Durkheim (1947:37), 'Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, to things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community to all those who adhere to them.'

Durkheim (2001:88) further elaborated on the cultural role of religions when he commented on solidarity. By solidarity, Durkheim referred to a people's ability to perform similar tasks and develop a shared consciousness for commitment. He illustrated solidarity using a farming community in which everyone is involved in planting, cultivating, and harvesting. Members of this group have so much in common that they know how almost everyone else in the community feels about life. Societies with mechanical solidarity tolerate little diversity in behavior, thinking, or attitudes for their unity depends on similar thinking.

Roy (2016: 54) agrees perfectly with Walsh when she added that a united family cannot easily be penetrated by external forces; as people encountered new information and experienced some disorientation, or simply a confrontation with information that did not agree with the views they previously held, they were more likely to question their prior assumptions about a range of topics. Adding impetus to the idea that cultural solidarity could be exploited politically. Ezike, (2010:12) asserted that;

Belief and acceptance of blood relationships among communities can be exploited fruitfully for political, social and economic ends. There is no doubt that the knowledge and appreciation of the history, tradition and other cultural attributes of a people provide the facts for socio-economic and political development planning.

African culture, despite the presence of foreign religions like Christianity and Islam in the area under study still holds sway. Custom which is an established socially accepted practice of the society still holds deep on the Nsukka people.

Solidarity makes people strong. It is usually observed that whenever Nsukka people decides on an issue, they are all spiritually bound in the spirit of brotherhood to implement that decision, going contrary will be breaking that cultural solidarity.

Hobbes in Russel (1987:203) stated that Cultural solidarity is when people belonging to the same cultural identity unite. As for it's uses - if a group has a common cause or grievance, it could be a tool to support action. A humorous example would be the 'one day solidarity' the Irish have on Saint Patrick's Day in New York City.

Back to our dear country, activities leading to Independence 1960 show that all Nigerians had cultural solidarity against the British colonialism. Nigerian elites all rallied around Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Belewa and other Independence fighters. In doing this, their cultural solidarity was made manifest.

Sociologist Ednar (2017:20) went further to assert that what forms the basis of solidarity varies between societies. In simple societies it may be mainly based on kinship and shared values. The European Union according to Woods (2002:12) a British anthropologist, has a day set aside for solidarity; "Solidarity is also one of six principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and December 20 of each year is International Human Solidarity Day recognized as an international observance". Woods (2002:12)

Africans are deeply connected to their culture. Culture defines the day to day activity in more advanced cultures like Nsukka. In the words of Quarcoopome (1987:68), although Africans are different individuals, they perform different tasks and often have different values and interest, the order and very solidarity of society depends on their reliance on each other to perform their specified tasks. Different individual here refers to the interdependence of the component parts. Thus social solidarity is maintained in more complex societies through the interdependence of its component parts.

The important role of cultural solidarity in the formation of formidable institutions; like traditional institutions (Onyishi/Igwe) as final decision making body, farming and hunting regulations and Communication network, which were developed by the creative genius of the Nsukka people over the years can induce one to appreciate its relevance to National integration. The immense importance which the mutual-support instincts, inherited by Nsukka people from its long evolution play even now in our modern society and have been used as a good tool in the hands of strong politicians of Nsukka extraction to foster development.

Today, the Nigerian federal and state governments and their agents are in many ways more exploitive of individuals at the local level as were the colonialist this negates the principle of solidarity advocated among the Nsukka people. But now the “native,” is mostly educated, and has a public voice while this rarely occurred under colonialism.

According to him, African spiritual communalism is an idea that derives from the indigenous African principles of “live and let live; collective sharing; common concern for one another; sense of belonging together; social justice; economic progress and viability for all; and the African indigenous political process of participatory democracy”. Further, in line with the African spiritual communalism, it is one’s age, responsibility and service to the community that are valued. The economic principle and process recognize sharing according to the needs and responsibility of the individual. Whatever economic benefits that accrues to the individual must be shared with the individual’s family and community. He states socially, in African spiritual communalism, there is a collectively acknowledged hierarchical order based on *age*, responsibility, and service to the people. It is not class consciousness hierarchy but rather service for the people consciousness. Hence age, wisdom, accomplishment, and responsibility are very important variables (Onwuachi 1977:17).

Nyerere (1968), following the African communalism ethics, rejects atheism and a materialistic view of African societies. He insists that African societies are communitarian by ‘nature’ and are characterized by a profound sense of collective identity eschewing any traits of individualism. A man’s livelihood has a meaning only within the context of his family, kinsmen and tribe. His advocacy for a socialist Africa derives from these principles, with “UJAMA” – familyhood as its underlying philosophy.

Culture and National Integration

The people of Nsukka has a strong belief in respect for constituted traditional institutions (Onyishi/Igwe) as final decision making body, Eating Habit, Farming Habit, Hunting, Festivals, Use of symbols, Communication network, Ostracism in case of default or deviant behaviour. These are all the elements of cultural solidarity among Nsukka People and they have proven that culture can unit people.

There has always been a call for mutual respect, understanding and communication for there to be national integration in our nation. Believers in cultural solidarity advocate that parents should start by teaching their children values that are original to Africans. This is because when family solidarity is strong where children obey their parents and consider their guidance, then the nation will collectively enjoy solidarity.

Agbese (2007), Pearl (2018) and Ugwu (2018) all mentioned problems that threatens National Unity among which are the following: Resources control, Ethnic diversity, Poverty, Language multiplicity, Structural imbalance, Revenue allocation, Religious fanaticism, Youth restiveness, Nepotism, Corruption, Political Wranglings and Agitation. This research agrees with the aforementioned problems of Nigeria as a source of serious threat to Nigerian National Unity.

Anti-secessionists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Gowon, Obasanjo and incumbent president Buhari all see lack of solidarity as one factor that poses a great danger to our unity. The declaration of the State of Biafra in late 1960s triggered by lack of national trust (manifested in the incessant killing of the south-easterners) in the North led to terrible communal riots which culminated into the 1967-1970 bloody civil war. A very large number of people lost their lives and their homes and had to undergo a lot of suffering to resettle.

The failure of the citizens of the Nigerian State to see themselves as brothers, an understanding that obtains among the Nsukka people, has led to “the call for restructuring”. People call for restructuring because they see a great lacuna in cultural solidarity. Ugwu (2018) in a recent paper delivered at the College of Education Eha-amufu noted that A graphic representation of what restructuring is can be linked to an ecosystem or a habitat with some many big trees and shrubs (flora) and powerful animals (lions and tigers) and other rodents, insects etc all co-habiting in the same environment. In this scenario, the iroko and mahogany trees as well as other smaller plants all survive each naturally acting as a check on the other.

Enugu North senatorial zone among other culture zones seems to have the highest number of Igbo Muslims, all forms of Churches exists and traditional Religion is still intact yet the regions enjoys peace and cultural solidarity because there is trust in the culture that bounds all together. Lack of trust is also because of the exploitation of such feelings by some politicians to further their interests.

Cultural Solidarity as an enhancement to the Economy and Politics

When a people's culture is respected the cultural artefacts are also respected thus building the economy, through export and tourism. Prior to independence, the nation had a lot of locally produced goods but with the discovery of oil all these were abandoned. Cultural solidarity will help our nation to appreciate what we can locally produce and free us from dependence. As Igbo and Anugwom (2007:36) noted;... the economic factor is the fundamental basis of society. The economic system determines the other institutions of the society. This is what has been termed economic determinism in Marxian terminology" Soyinka (2018) lauding the cultural festival of the Ogun people expressed that national festivals also act as an important unifying force. Cultural solidarity among Nsukka people is usually made manifest during cultural festivals. Eze (kings) are seen paying courtesy visits and homages to their colleagues in other communities during festivals. By extension activities like Independence Day, Democracy Day, and other national festivals that are celebrated by all Nigerians and in all parts of the country, regardless of language, religion or culture should be fostered because they remind us of our common nationality.

Solidarity is also seen in the political parties we have in Nigeria. Recent days have witnessed chains of decamping from political parties for different reasons ranging from ego-centricism to deceptive altruism. In Nsukka cultural solidarity the allegiance to traditional institutions like *Onyishi* (eldest man)/ Igwe (traditional ruler) prevents people from betraying others. Once a decision is made by the chief in council it stands and every member of the community is expected to publicly support that decision and vote accordingly Punishment for breaking decisions that fosters solidarity can lead one to been ostracized from the community, lack of support for rival, removal from Party etc. If a member of the community wants power or a cabinet position, they follow the rule of the game.

Over the years, Nigerian national integration started suffering some threats leading to divisions along the lines of social status, ethnicity and religion. The call for national solidarity has always been associated with the entity Nigeria. Efforts have previously been made to ensure that all the regions are united in solidarity. These efforts manifest in the development of the different Nigerian constitutions in the country, national confabs and panels set up by different governments.

Findings and Conclusion

Nigeria had previously adopted failed strategies like the development of the different Nigerian constitutions, national confabs and panels set up by different governments. Nsukka cultural solidarity can serve as a model for national integration given the fact that the zone among other culture zones seems to have the highest number of Igbo Muslims, all forms of Churches, and traditional Religious practitioners yet the region enjoys peace. The Nsukka people like most organised culture areas in Africa are bounded by certain features like the concepts of *Umunna*, *Umuada*, masquerade cults, festivals, general sanitation and many others; all are centred in the concept of *Igwebuike*- (solidarity) and these can generate Development of Nsukka Cultural Area. Nigeria should emulate the peaceful co-existence of the three major religions found in Nigeria among the Nsukka people and emulate their tolerance.

The review of related literatures has shown the overwhelming scholarly attention the issue of national unity and solidarity have received from scholars. Many scholars approached the issues of solidarity from different perspectives-ranging from conceptualization, the identification of the root causes of Nigerian problems, through the discussion on their impacts, to the elaboration of their different suggestions for a better Nigeria.

However, there were few authors or study that has examined or explored the role of the solidarity that exists among the Nsukka people in relation to national development and unity. These authors did not advocate the way forward, thus the gap this work intends to fill is the cultural solidarity of Nsukka people as a model for national integration. The envisaged result is that in the near future, the life of our people will be better and Nigeria will be great again. This is where the literature gap lies. This justifies the focus of the present study which is to explore the role of elements of cultural solidarity among Nsukka people as model for national integration and development.

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