



The Role of African Traditional Religion in Building Community Solidarity among Enugu-Ezike People

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ABSTRACT

The research work underscores the Role of African Traditional Religion in Building Community Solidarity among Enugu-Ezike People. The work explores that African Traditional Religion (ATR) is one of the oldest and most enduring belief systems in the world, deeply embedded in the cultural, spiritual and cosmological worldview of African societies. It is a complex and dynamic system of beliefs, rituals, and practices that have been passed down through generations, primarily through oral traditions. African traditional religion is not merely a religion but a way of life that encompasses the spiritual, social and cultural dimensions of African communities. The methodology adopted in this work is phenomenological approach. The findings revealed that African traditional religion provides a framework for understanding the universe, the relationship between humans and the divine, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. The cosmology of African traditional religion is particularly significant as it offers insights into how African societies perceive the origin, structure and functioning of the universe. The theoretical framework adopted in this work is Emile Durkheim Theory of social order where it says that religion works along with society. The work concludes that Enugu-Ezike, like many other African communities have a rich tradition of oral narratives, myths and rituals that explain their cosmological beliefs and creation stories. These narratives are not merely tales but are integral to the community's identity, values and worldview. The work recommends that African traditional religion resonates in the life of the people and should be developed in the Nigerian educational curriculum.

Keywords:

African Traditional Religion, Community Solidarity, Ritual, Symbols and Enugu-Ezike

Introduction

The heightened phenomenon of individualism and materialism in our societies today remains not only a cause for panic but also clear evidence of spiritual and moral decadence in our socio-

religious and cultural lives. The value of community solidarity, which weaves the entire spirituality of African people, has recently been eroded by self-centredness (self-autonomy) and a money-centred mentality (capitalism). Today,

many people do not seem to consider what would benefit the entire community or what would foster the common good. Instead, an unexamined quest for self-assertion, power, riches, fame, and a place of honour guides the motivating factors for human aspirations and actions.

This being the case, the values of brotherhood, collective responsibility, solidarity, love, and care for one another is downtrodden. The result is clear: conflict of ambitions, unhealthy competition, struggle for dignified positions, and the like. Governed by this, Enugu-Ezike people today are faced with the reality of insecurity, political corruption, false spirituality, and religious proliferation, as well as economic crises, cultural confusion, etc. Therefore, lack of community solidarity remains the major problem that fuels socio-religious and economic woes that besiege the people of Enugu-Ezike today. As a matter of reality, a lack of community solidarity has won the faces of kidnappers, unknown gunmen, ritual killings, Yahoo-Yahoo, and the like.

It is on this background that this research aims to examine the role that African traditional religion plays in fostering community solidarity among the Igbo people of Enugu-Ezike. Consequently, this research adopted Emile Durkheim's functionality theory of religion as the theoretical framework. This sociological theory of religion gives credence to how African traditional religion fosters community solidarity among Enugu Ezike people.

Theoretical Framework

Émile Durkheim's functionality theory of religion is used in this research to investigate how African traditional religion fosters community solidarity among the Enugu-Ezike people. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, and died on November 15, 1917. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim describes religion as a cohesive system of actions and beliefs connected to sacred things and ideas (Durkheim, 1915). He defined "sacred things" as things that are distinct and taboo, such as behaviours and ideas that bring people together into a single moral society known as a church and those who follow their teachings. He

believed that sacred objects and concepts may be everything from rocks and trees to spirits and gods, as well as works of art, houses, rivers, oceans, and trees. He held that anything might be deemed sacred in a certain world (Durkheim, 1915).

Durkheim's main concerns are the significance of the sacred and its enormous bearing on the well-being of the community as a whole. Therefore, he views religious beliefs as symbolic representations of social realities, which provide the framework upon which religious practices and beliefs are based and without which there would be no meaningful concepts. By making this claim, he highlights the social role that religion plays for an individual or group in society, as evident among the Igbo people of Enugu-Ezike. According to Durkheim, for society to thrive, certain norms of conduct that are typically crystallised into principles must be invented or created as found in religion. One of Durkheim's most well-known thought is that religion develops from collective effervescence, which he describes as the emotional energy that results from rituals and group gatherings. According to him, people's religious beliefs and practices originate from this emotional energy, and it is by these rituals that people can feel a feeling of community. He contends that social order and cohesiveness originate from collective awareness and that people can only feel a sense of solidarity and oneness with others when they are part of this consciousness.

Durkheim further maintains that religious rituals and beliefs have their roots in collective consciousness and function to unfold social norms and values. According to him, religion is a social construct that supports social cohesiveness and unity. He contends that religion is a collective phenomenon that emerges from a group's collective consciousness rather than merely a personal or individual experience. For him, religion plays a social role in preserving social order and fostering social integration. Durkheim asserts that religion gives people a sense of belonging and common values. Thus, the foundation of Durkheim's theory of religion is his idea of "collective consciousness", which he describes

as the shared ideals, norms, and behaviours of a community.

Conceptual Clarification of Community Solidarity

The phrase community solidarity, in this study refers to a strong, integral sense of community bonding, communion, and collaboration among people bound by common origins and values. Community solidarity in the traditional Igbo area of Enugu-Ezike springs from family roots and blood ties. That is why Isichei (1977) has this to say: The Igbo "World" is a world of family affection in which people see themselves as *umunne* or *nwane*, that is, brothers, sisters, or relatives. This community-centeredness means "each person lives in the community, by the community, and for the community" (Ugwuanyi, 2023). However, while community refers to a group of people that share a collective value as an expression of faith, belief, or cultural orientation, solidarity implies unity, union, collectivity, togetherness, and sharing. According to Anthony Umoren (2016), community solidarity implies people who share and participate in each other's life events, good or bad.

The Resilience and the Resurge of African Traditional Religion

African traditional religion is currently recovering from the "intellectual and religious assassination" attempt and project of the colonists and the imperial world. "Currently recovering" is deliberately used here to designate the resilience nature of the indigenous religion of the African people and also the interesting (but not without some serious challenges) resurge of the African people's indigenous religion in different forms in contemporary African societies and especially in the Igbos area of Enugu-Ezike.

This intellectual and religious assassination attempt and project, intentionally meant to burry, destroy, or replace African people's inestimable cultural heritage, is something lamentable that has resulted in altered confusion, identity crises, and socio-ethical disorder among African people today. According to Olumati (2014), it is this misconception and cultural prejudice resulting from cultural blindness, and perhaps it is the

intolerance that has made western culture and Christianity jointly wage a kind of war against the African (Ikwerre) symbols as they did against other belief and worship systems in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

The mindless attack on indigenous cultural values and belief systems is something that is part and parcel of the western scheme of life, more radically (or recklessly, better put) expressed through foreign religions, especially Christianity and Islam. On this note, Tasie (2013) has the following observation:

As for Mission Christianity, from the very beginning, it made no pretense in its rejection of the indigenous order and in its attempts to create out of African converts the so-called civilised man. So imbued by the trappings-political, social, economic, health, etc. that Christianity offered, many were attracted to it, only to realise soon after that conversion requires the rejection of the fundamentals on which life in the traditional setting was hinged. As a result, many converts soon became disenchanted and suffered a relapse into the indigenous religion.

Christian missionaries highlight the eradication of sacred symbols and objects associated with the indigenous religion as a genuine conversion tactic. Even more tragic is the reality that Christian missionaries demolish shrines and all of its accoutrements on a daily basis throughout Africa. The indigenous religious values and the cults that worshipped them have disappeared as a result of missionary evangelism.

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shrines and all of their accessories every day throughout Africa. As a result of missionary evangelism, native deities and the cults that worshipped them have been extinct.

Sadly enough, a considerable number of indigenous Africans have been wrongly malformed and misguided into destroying their own world by themselves. As Tasie (2008) observes, "more than the mission-founded churches, the indigenous churches have been more vocal, fearless, and vigorous in condemning the indigenous religion and all that seems to be the symbol of the "pagan faith." Of course, this is an obvious reality, as is the behaviour very obvious in the African Nollywood industry, where the African world is depicted and recklessly associated with evil or Satan.

The willful act and the strategic move to clampdown African worldview in all its ramifications account for the intellectual invention of wrong nomenclatures and terminologies associated with African worldview. Such obnoxious and erroneous labelling includes fetishism, idolatry, heathenism, paganism, animism, primitive, Juju, and ancestor worship, to mention but few. From the above unfair assessment of the African world, it shows the level of ignorance, prejudice, and ethnocentrism that characterised early perception, stereotyping, and writings about African indigenous religion.

Against all odds, African traditional religion has shown its resilience by enduring and surviving all the attempts and projects of annihilation from various quarters and at various times, means, and levels. Today, African traditional religion has resonated in an interesting manner, commanding the religious emotion and sensitivity of many Africans, thereby calling the numerous youth back to the root, and at the same time satisfying the spiritual, religious, social, psychological, and economic aspirations and needs of the African people. It is on this interesting background, therefore, that we shall briefly discuss the dimensional roles of African traditional religion in building community solidarity among Enugu-Ezike people.

Dimensions in which African Tradition Religion Fosters Community Solidarity

African traditional religion has contributed enormously to building community solidarity in various areas of life among African societies. In all dimensions of life, the indigenous religion of the African people has played a crucial role in fostering community consciousness, unity and peace, progress, and harmonious co-existence. And at the same time, lay a solid foundation for socio-political and moral orderliness. We shall, therefore, examine some of the dimensions in which African traditional religion contributes to building community solidarity among Enugu-Ezike people.

1. Socio-Cultural Dimension

The indigenous religion of the Igbo area of Enugu-Ezike has played a significant role in promoting cultural consciousness through its rituals and ceremonies. These rituals and ceremonies help to reinforce social norms and values and promote a sense of community and shared identity among its adherents. For example, the *ma afa* festival, which is celebrated in Enugu-Ezike, promotes moral values such as respect, care, and love of one's own parents. According to Ugwuanyi (2023), the spirituality of *ma afa* does not only lie in ritual ceremonies that involve the killing of goats and fowl, as well as drinking and enjoyment, but more powerfully in our relationship with our present fathers and mothers. Here on earth, the spirit of *ma afa* challenges Enugu-Ezike's sons and daughters to unfold respect and care for their parents. What it means is that you cannot celebrate your dead parents, whom you did not take well care of while with you were on earth.

ATRs contribute to building community solidarity by preserving cultural heritage. The preservation of cultural practices and values helps to reinforce community identity and promotes a sense of shared history and shared values. Essentials to this cultural heritage include generosity, compassion, honesty, purity of heart, truthfulness, and kindness, to name but a few. These cultural values and practices help to foster a sense of mutual support and cooperation, which contributes to better spiritual and health outcomes. Citing Ejizu (1988), Rowland Olumati maintains that one of the subject matters of African traditional religion is the maintenance of stable social

order, which is the characteristic concern of all indigenous African traditional people. According to him, the desire to achieve social order and religious tranquility involves the use of certain realities to elicit awe among the people (Ejizu, 1988) and bring the supernatural element into focus. Consequently, traditional ceremonies and rituals, which often involve communal gatherings and shared meals, promote social bonding and a sense of solidarity.

2. Spiritual Dimension

In the Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion, community solidarity is fostered through the concept of *Chukwu*, *Chineke*, or *Chukwuokike*, who is the ultimate reality that governs the universe. *Chukwu* is believed to be the source of life, and its presence is felt throughout the community. This shared understanding of *Chukwu* creates a sense of unity among the people as they recognise their dependence on the Father, who is the creator of heaven and earth. For Igbo people in general, God is not only at the centre of the community but also has to do with everything and, at the same time, remains the focal point of every individual and collective aspiration.

The essence of getting together, as integral spirituality in the Igbo area of Enugu-Ezike, is not for mere social benefit but, above all, for the spiritual nourishment of the entire community. This is a point made very clear by Achebe in his celebrated work, *Things Fall Apart* (2008):

When we gather in the moonlight on village grounds, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. Therefore, let us continue with the team spirit and enjoy the power of togetherness. Let us smile not because we do not have problems but because, with God, we are stronger than the problems.

A theological look at the above expression shows that the spiritual life of the traditional Igbo people is centred on community consciousness, dialogue, and fraternal relationships, where everyone is concerned

about one another. Moreover, key to the contribution of ATR in fostering community solidarity among the Enugu-Ezike people in the area of spirituality is the belief in “*chi*,” which refers to the personal deity or ancestral spirit that is believed to guide an individual’s life and destiny (Igwe, 2013). The concept of *chi* emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals and their responsibility to one another. According to Igwe, “the *chi* is not just a personal deity but also a communal force that binds people together.” This necessitates the consciousness that the well-being of one person is linked to the well-being of the entire community. As Mbiti (1975) rightly observes, “I am, because you are. And because you are, therefore, I am. The individual exists only because the corporate group exists. He is a part of the whole,” which means an individual, apart from the community, is not real.

3. Ritual Dimension

The Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion has a rich tradition of ritual ceremonies that bring people together and promote community solidarity. For example, the “*Iwaji*” ceremony, which marks the initiation of young men into adulthood, is an important ritual that reinforces socio-spiritual and religious bonds and emphasises the importance of collaboration among all members of a given community. It must be noted here that religion for Igbo indigenous people is a community thing, as are ritual worship and sacrifices. Although there are individual rituals and sacrifices, the primary concern of indigenous Igbo religion is community solidarity. That is why, among the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria, the community deity, gods or goddess takes precedence over personal *chi*. Consequently, many ritual ceremonies performed in the Igbo area of Enugu-Ezike are designed to foster a sense of belonging and unity among members. For example, during the *omabe* festival, families come together to honour their ancestors and share in communal feasting and merriment (Nwachukwu Ape, 2021). This sense of shared experience and collective participation strengthens emotional bonds among community members. *Omabe* festival is considered one of the most significant ritual festivals among the Enugu-Ezike people

because they believe that their ancestors, in the guise of masquerades, came to live with them, bringing peace and togetherness to the community. Moreover, there is an idea that the masquerade is a spiritual mediator and that when it appears; it purges the community of all forms of evil-spiritual and human-and therefore fosters communal harmony.

Furthermore, Tasie (2006) observes that African indigenous religion is rich in sacred carvings, paintings, and images and they are the focus of mediation during rituals and worship, and as such, they embody to the faithful the unquestionable truth about the cosmos and man's place in it. But in the last one hundred years or so, these important emblems of indigenous religion have come under serious threat from Christian missionaries.

4. Moral Dimension

African traditional religions have been the foundation of spiritual and moral guidance for millions of people across the continent for centuries, before the advent of colonialism and foreign religions. These indigenous belief systems played a significant role in shaping the standards of good living and forming integral aspects of the spiritual and ethical lives of the African people. Various existing institutional deities, gods, or goddesses have spiritual and ethical codes of conduct that inspire community members to do good and avoid evil. Afterwards, the respect for and fear of these deities forms human conscience, helps foster good ethical behaviour, and also builds solid community solidarity among the people.

Practically, one of the well-known institutional deities in Enugu-Ezike is "*Enwe*", instituted by Ezech Ugwuoji, nicknamed Ogrute. Ezech Ugwuoji, also known as Ogrute, is the progenitor of Umuidoko, Umyogirize, Umuasanya, Umyodumogwu, and Umuoyinawnee, which predominantly occupy the presence of Ogrute, Umuiyida, and Umuopu. Enwe deity is worshipped by the people of Ogrute, Umuiyida, Umuopu, and above, and it is respected and, at the same time, celebrated for its well-organised moral commandments, which collaborate with the biblical "ten Commandments of God". Basic ethical

principles of this "*Enwe* deity" in Enugu-Ezike include:

1. Do not kill your brother, sister, or an innocent person.
2. Do not commit adultery or have a romantic affair with another's wife.
3. Do not steal or claim what does not belong to you.
4. Do not bear false witness against another.
5. Do not commit incest.
6. Do not poison anyone.
7. Honour the elders and preserve human lives even in the womb.
8. Honour the deities, ancestors, and masquerades, etc.

African indigenous religion provides moral and ethical guidance, promoting rituals, sacrifices, and worships while at the same time emphasising the importance of spiritual and emotional well-being for all. These values and practices laid the foundation for a harmonious and prosperous way of life that was later sought to be replaced and instigated against by western ideological prejudice. As Tasie (2007) rightly observes, in traditional Africa, one of the basic restraining influences on anti-social behaviour may not necessarily be the rebuke one gets from living elders but the fear of the pervasiveness of spirits, who the traditional people believe see everything and also punish in the present and hereafter.

Consequently, African Traditional Religion (ATR) plays a significant role in shaping the moral conscience and formation of character among the Igbo people. In fact, African indigenous religion is not just a set of rituals and sacrifices; it is a way of life that is deeply rooted in the community and is governed by a set of moral principles. According to Olumati Rowland (2022), the African people recognise the fact that the Supreme Being is the final guardian of moral laws, whose violation is greatly punished and whose adherence is greatly rewarded. The implication is that the issue of morality is of particular importance among Enugu-Ezike people as it helps to validate the transcendental origin laws, which are above the dictate of people.

5. Political Dimension

The Igbo area of the Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution within the community. Enugu-Ezike arbitration systems are based on the principles of dialogue and reconciliation. Elders and spiritual leaders mediate disputes and help parties reach mutually acceptable agreements. This approach promotes healing and forgiveness, which in turn reinforces community solidarity. In Enugu-Ezike, this approach has been effective in resolving disputes between individuals and groups, thereby reducing tensions and promoting peace. Central to Enugu-Ezike indigenous means of administering effective leadership is the use of *ofor*, as a symbol of authority, legitimacy, holiness, justice, and equity. According to Nwosu, "the *ofor* symbol is used by traditional Igbo leaders to resolve disputes and conflicts. Its presence is believed to bring clarity and wisdom to the decision-making process." The *ofor* is a symbol of the authority and legitimacy of traditional Igbo leaders, and its presence is believed to bring respect and obedience from the community. It is a reminder of the importance of justice and fairness in Igbo society. That is why Olumati Rowland (2022) maintains that justice among Africans is influenced by their theogony in the sense that gods play a prominent role in the dispensation of justice.

Ofor, among Enugu-Ezike people, is also a symbol of truth and purity, a complete sign of clear conscience and moral uprightness, especially on the side of the holders. It is used to promote fairness and equality, and its presence is believed to bring peace and prosperity to the community." The *ofor* sacred symbol is a reminder of the importance of justice and fairness in Igbo society, and its significance extends far beyond its physical presence. The *ofor* sacred symbol is used in traditional Igbo justice systems to resolve disputes and conflicts. According to Nwosu, "the *ofor* symbol is used by traditional Igbo leaders to resolve disputes and conflicts. Its presence is believed to bring clarity and wisdom to the decision-making process." The *ofor* symbol is a symbol of authority and legitimacy of traditional Igbo leaders, and its

presence is believed to bring respect and obedience from the community.

Enugu-Ezike indigenous people have also contributed to the political network by promoting cultural values such as respect for elders and those in authority. In Enugu-Ezike, this has been achieved through the respect accorded to traditional rulers and elders, who play a key role in maintaining social order and resolving conflicts. Respect for elders is deeply ingrained, and this respect is rooted in the belief that elders possess spiritual power and wisdom, which help to instill obedience in individuals, contributing to the formation of good character. And it also helps to instill a sense of discipline in individuals, which is essential for the development of good moral character.

6. Security Dimension

The Enugu-Ezike communities were consecrated to and, at the same time, founded on the deities, gods, and goddesses believed to be mediators between humanity and the Supreme Beings. The implication is that the security consciousness is also the consciousness of the divine powers believed to be capable of protecting, safeguarding, and warding off bad omens or evil occurrences. In this sense, security among Africans is primarily the thing of the gods. That is why every bad occurrence is somehow attributed to the wrath of the gods, which may require ritual sacrifices in order to be appeased and thus ward off the pending doom.

In times of difficulties, insecurity, and social meltdown, the presence of the Supreme Being is sought through the mediation of the gods and institutional deities. In recent months of social quagmire, moral bankruptcy, and total clampdown, human means of subsistence were restored with the aid of the Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion. During this period, all the human agents employed failed, including the intermediaries of foreign religious personnel, only to be effectively achieved through traditional means. This was achieved through "*Ikpo mma*", which implies the invocation of the presence and the wrath of the gods on anyone who violates social order as established cultural norms and values.

From the moment of “*Ikpo mma*” to date, Enugu-Ezike has been at peace and orderliness. As a result, the sons and daughters of Ezike can now travel back home either to visit or celebrate one festival or another without fear of anyone, as they did before. The effects of “*Ikpo mma*” have relatively reduced the activities of kidnappers, ritual killers, unknown gunmen, and other forms of man’s inhumanity to man, as those who contravene the demands of the gods are exposed and often times lose their lives. If for anything, the fear of the wraths of the gods and institutional deities serves as a deterrent to those who would willingly commit crime or immoral acts, not just against others but also at the expense of the social order.

Furthermore, African traditional religion has made significant contributions to the security network in the Enugu-Ezike area of Igbo land through the establishment of vigilante groups and community policing initiatives. The creation of Ebube agu and other local security agents among various Enugu-Ezike communities marked the beginning of peace and social order. Virtually all the thirty-five (35) communities in Enugu-Ezike have organised local vigilante groups to handle their various security affairs. These security networks are primarily guided by spirit-filled power from the indigenous religion. As such, armed by charms, armlets, and the protection of gods and institutional deities, these local security agents embark on the duty with confidence, conviction, and firmness, knowing that the gods are with them and that the work they do is the primary service to the African ancestors.

The reality of indigenous religious influence on the security of lives of African people is something so obvious that every African society experiences. During the leadership of Chinweoke Mbadinuju, the then Anambra state governor, it was the security efficacy of the vigilante group called “*bakassi* boys” that restored social order after the state had been engulfed by armed robbers and ritual killers. In Rivers State today, it is the activities of the OSPAC security network that bring the activities of cultists, violence, and insecurity, as well as reckless killings, kidnapping of expatriates and oil workers, hijacking of helicopters,

destruction of communities, piracy, robbery, vandalism of oil installations, and general unrest to order.

The impact of ATR in the area of fostering security among Africans cuts across all facets of human endeavor. George Tasie (2022) captures the situation clearly in this form:

Drivers and motorists make abundant use of the power of medicine and the forces that abound in nature for the useful purpose of protecting lives and vehicles. These preventive medicines work in a variety of ways. Some may prevent the driver and passengers from being noticed by armed robbers and kidnapers. Others may help the driver attract more passengers and protect the vehicle and its occupants from unwanted events. While others are specifically meant for the driver’s protection, who may vanish to safety in case of a crash.

According to Tasie, road accidents are oftentimes not blamed on poor road infrastructure but placed on the doorstep of the witch and sorcerer. For this reason, people approach medicine men and diviners for counteractive charms to secure a feeling of security. ATR plays significant roles in building community solidarity from the security dimension because Africans believe that misfortune and bad omens “are not purely physical experiences but are mystical experiences of a deep religious nature”, (Mbiti, 1969).

7. Economic Dimension

Right from the beginning, Igbo culture took into account the impacts of poverty and laziness in human societies and what these contribute to causing social disorder. To overcome this impending reality, the Igbo culture emphasises the importance of hard work, diligence, and

creativity and encourages all to embrace such values as means of a solid economic network foundation. The Igbo indigenous religion emphasises that economic growth and progress are built through hard work, diligence, and creativity, which form an integral part of community solidarity.

It is in this sense that Igbo traditional farmers often work together to cultivate and harvest crops, sharing resources and expertise. This cooperative approach, as emphasised by the Igbo indigenous religion, fosters a sense of mutual dependence and interdependence, which reinforces community solidarity. The emphasis on reciprocity and mutual aid promotes social cohesion and cooperation, while the encouragement of hard work and entrepreneurship fosters economic development. Additionally, the emphasis on environmental sustainability ensures that economic growth is achieved without compromising the well-being of future generations.

8. Ecological Dimension

The Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion places a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship, which is essential for maintaining community solidarity. African traditional belief systems in general recognise the interconnectedness of all living things and encourage sustainable use of natural resources. According to Ugwuanyi (2024), Enugu-Ezike culture is a traditional Igbo society whose deep reverence for nature and its creations is reflected in their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Their religious expressions and spiritualities are deeply rooted in the natural world, where everything is considered sacred.

The Igbo people believe that all living things are interconnected and that their spiritual well-being is dependent on the health of the environment. On this note, George Tasie (2011) rightly observes:

In indigenous Africa, in addition to plants, fish, and animals, other biotic elements are also considered to possess medicinal values. The medicine man is often at

liberty to tap the medicinal values of these biotic elements for the treatment and prevention of illness. Animal and fish bones are also important ritual objects employed for both healing and divination. Even birds in indigenous Africa are considered important emissaries of the gods, through whom they make their intentions known to man.

The value attached to nature and creation in general is further emphasised by Podimattam (2018). According to him, if we are not able to relate to our world, we experience a kind of confusion-an almost physical being drawn off-towards nothing. So devastating is this loss of the world around us that we may even be in a position to lose something of reality, which is our own body. We can only experience our body in so far as we relate to other bodies. The lesson derived from the Podimattam opinion is that our environment is very important to our future, our destiny, and the authenticity of our existence.

Consequently, the implications of ecological dimensions of community solidarity are that by working together to manage natural resources, community members develop a sense of shared responsibility and collective identity. In the Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion, individuals are taught to live in harmony with nature and to respect the natural balance of the environment.

9. Medical Dimension

African traditional religion has made significant contributions to the healing process and sickness control among the Igbo people. Traditional medicine has been used to treat various ailments, while spiritual healing has helped to restore balance and harmony to the individual's spiritual being. According to Okoro (2013), in his book, *Igbo Culture and Traditional Medicine*, Igbo indigenous religion has been used to explain the causes of illness and to develop treatment strategies. One of the key contributions of Igbo indigenous religion to the

healing process is the use of traditional medicine. He notes that traditional medicine is an integral part of Igbo culture and has been passed down through generations.

Traditional healers use a range of herbal remedies, including plants, roots, and minerals, to treat various ailments (Ezeanya, 2011). For example, the bark of the ash tree is used to treat fever, while the leaves of the bitter leaf plant are used to treat stomach problems. Moreover, the Igbo people believe that illness is often caused by spiritual or supernatural forces, such as evil spirits, ancestral spirits, or witchcraft (Ezeanya, 2011). To address these causes, Igbo traditional healers, known as a range of techniques, including herbal remedies, rituals, and spiritual interventions, Igbo people believe that spiritual factors can play a significant role in the healing process. Spiritual healing involves the use of rituals and prayers to restore balance and harmony to the individual's spiritual being. This may involve cleansing ceremonies to purify the body and soul or offering sacrifices to appease ancestral spirits (Ezeanya, 2011).

Ways to Reinforce Stronger Community Solidarity Among Enugu-Ezike Communities Today

Fostering wider and stronger community solidarity in the contemporary Enugu-Ezike communities requires a good number of factors. Consequently, we shall briefly examine the areas and the factors that can help foster stronger community solidarity among Enugu-Ezike people.

1. Collective Responsibility

The traditional African culture encourages collective responsibility, where the well-being of the community is prioritised over individual interests. This emphasis on collective responsibility fosters a sense of empathy and compassion among the Igbo people, leading to strong community solidarity regardless of religious, political, or ethnic affiliations. It is through this that we remind ourselves that individual success is not solely dependent on individual effort but also on the collective efforts of the community. This emphasis on communal living encourages individuals to develop a sense of responsibility and accountability towards others, which is an

essential aspect of moral, religious, and social character.

2. Religious Tolerance and Collaboration

Religious tolerance is a vital component of building and maintaining community solidarity in the Igbo area of Enugu-Ezike. It allows individuals from diverse religious backgrounds to coexist peacefully, fostering a sense of belonging and shared identity. According to R. D. Putnam (2000), when religious beliefs are respected and tolerated, it creates an environment where individuals feel valued and heard, leading to stronger social bonds and a sense of community. When people from different religious backgrounds, says K. Hill (2018), come together, they are more likely to share values and goals, leading to increased cooperation and collaboration. This cooperation can lead to the development of strong social networks and a sense of community identity.

3. Right Orientation

The wrong assessment of African culture has significantly contributed to identity crises and moral meltdowns in African societies. According to Mazrui (2014), "the negative stereotypes and misconceptions about African culture have led to a loss of confidence in our own cultural values and traditions." This negative perception of African culture has resulted in a crisis of identity, as many Africans struggle to reconcile their cultural heritage with the values and norms imposed by colonialism and globalization. One of the consequences of the wrong assessment of African culture is the erosion of traditional values and norms.

According to E.B. Idowu (1972), all over Africa, people have been led to the stage of dispersing their own native traditions and culture (including religion and its symbols) and of regarding foreign ideas and cultures as the only way to human dignity. In this regard, when African cultures are reduced to stereotypes and caricatures, it can lead to a loss of respect for traditional practices and beliefs, resulting in a crisis of identity and a sense of moral disorientation.

As a consequence of this, the right orientation towards African culture can significantly contribute to fostering community solidarity

among African societies. A deep understanding and appreciation of one's cultural heritage can promote a sense of belonging, identity, and shared values among community members. According to Ogot (1992), "culture is the foundation upon which the fabric of society is woven," and a right orientation about African indigenous cultural values can help to strengthen this fabric by promoting unity and cohesion among community members. For example, in many African societies, community members are expected to work together to achieve common goals and support one another in times of need, regardless of affiliation, gender, qualification, or one's position in the community. The right orientation about African culture can also promote community solidarity among Enugu-Ezike people by providing a sense of shared history and identity. Many African societies have a rich cultural heritage that includes stories, myths, and legends that have been passed down from generation to generation.

4. Cultural Patriotism

Cultural patriotism on the part of Enugu-Ezike people has been identified by this brief research as a significant factor in fostering stronger community solidarity among African societies. Cultural patriotism is the love and loyalty to one's culture and community, and it is essential for building strong and cohesive societies, especially in the area of cultural preservation and promotion. As Mafeje (2013) notes, "Cultural preservation and promotion are essential for maintaining cultural heritage and promoting national identity." When communities come together to preserve and promote their cultural heritage, it can foster a sense of shared identity and responsibility, which can help to build strong and cohesive societies.

Moreover, cultural patriotism can contribute to community solidarity by promoting social cohesion. When communities share a common cultural heritage, it can provide a sense of common ground and shared identity, which can help to promote social cohesion. In any case, cultural patriotism is an important factor in fostering community solidarity among African societies.

5. Unbiased Inculturation

More than ever, African cultural values, including religion, need to be assessed, studied, and respected with the same vigour, respect, and disposition as others. Many Africans are in the wrong habit of epistemic assumption of their culture, whereas such dispositions remain at the level of mere "assumption", leading to altered ignorance of their own very selves. This kind of assumption results from the "Paradox of Familiarity", where over-familiarity blinds one's supposed knowledge.

Today, many African sons and daughters who embrace other faiths, especially Christianity and Islam, outright without sincere commitment to the study of their own cultural values result in misinterpretation, hatred, or destruction, sometimes to favour those who acclaim superior religions and, at other times, to express human reckless ignorance. As a consequence of this, what we call inculturation is a mere systematic abuse of indigenous culture, which neither bears true witness to the uniqueness of African culture nor serves the interests of African people. This kind of abusive inculturation does not either bear witness to God nor is it rooted in the true practice of the spiritual essence of any foreign religion. It is human-made, strongly rooted in the unjustifiable bias of those who claim that they are better than others. For when Anslem says that "there is no salvation outside the Catholic Church," it was not Jesus saying such; it was a human being.

Conclusion

Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion plays a vital role in building community solidarity by fostering emotional bonding, promoting conflict resolution, encouraging economic cooperation, promoting environmental stewardship, and preserving cultural heritage. The shared understanding of and belief in *Chukwu*, *Chineke*, or *Chukwu Okike*, the emphasis on communal living and cooperation, and the rich tradition of ritual ceremonies all contribute to a strong sense of community solidarity. The African notion of community solidarity is rooted in the belief that the universe is organically structured. Sequel to this structure, every creature, as well

as every individual member of the human family, has a role, contribution, and special place that is fundamentally needed for the full development and progress of all. All are needed, and no one is less needed. Such is the beauty of community spirit.

Consequently, through its emphasis on communal living, community policing initiatives, reconciliation, and conflict resolution, the Enugu-Ezike indigenous religion has helped to promote peace and stability in their various communities. As a result, foster the security, economic, medical, political, moral, and spiritual well-being of the people of Enugu-Ezike. The emphasis on respect for authority, hard work, and self-reliance, as well as forgiveness and reconciliation, has also helped to shape the values and beliefs of the Igbo people. Finally, the research emphasises collective responsibility, religious tolerance, right orientation, and cultural patriotism as ways of building stronger community solidarity in contemporary African societies. They provide a sense of continuity, linking the past, present and future, and serve as a moral compass for the community (Uchendu, 1965).

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