Urbanization and Cultural Pluralism: The Rebisi (Port Harcourt) Experience in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Rebisi is coterminous with Port Harcourt City. This paper examined urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi, Rivers State, Nigeria. Three Theoretical Frameworks were adopted to give the paper an enriched and panoramic analytical consideration, namely: Functionalism, Conflict Theory, and Symbolic Interactionism. It identified three historical phases of urbanization with associated co-existence of multiplicity of alien cultures in Rebisi. The paper contended that urbanization and cultural pluralism, which have been experienced by the Rebisi people for over 114 years and still counting, have engendered, and brought to the fore a mixed bag of costs and benefits; noting that the greatest challenge posed by the duo are threats to the preservation and promotion of her rich and cherished cultural heritage, especially the endangered Ikwerre language. The paper concluded that more than ever, Rebisi needs an urgent cultural renaissance. This requires concerted, consistent and progressive efforts and the support of every genuine son and daughter of Rebisi. The Rebisi traditional political leadership has vital, decisive, and pivotal roles to play in the success of the renaissance, especially by providing the relevant leadership stimulus, direction, and sustainability.

Keywords: *Urbanization, Urban areas, Urban bias theory, Culture, Pluralism, Cultural pluralism*

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Background to the Study

Urbanization is a global phenomenon. Generally, it depicts the process of transition from a rural community, area or countryside into a city or town, thereby assuming the status of an urban area. Some notable characteristics of an urban area include population increase and concentration, expansion and transformation of land for various purposes, enhanced infrastructure and social transformation due largely to population increase, resulting in the emergence of diverse cultural values. Urbanization cuts across many academic disciplines, especially in Social Sciences. In Sociology, urbanization is concerned with studying urban life; the socio-economic, religious and social relationships, patterns, cultures, structures, processes and changes in cities or towns. Thus, one dominant branch of Sociology is known as "Urban Sociology" as different from "Rural Sociology". The Political Scientist examines the implications of urbanization in policy and decision-making processes, urban governance, resource allocation, political culture and representation and security challenges, etc. In Economics, urbanization studies the population living in urban and rural areas, including indices such as gender, age, occupational distribution; causes and impact of urbanization on rural economies, urban and regional planning and development; urban poverty, human capital development and how to bridge rural-urban migration. In Geography, urbanization is looked at from two perspectives: physical and demography. Whereas the physical component also includes urban geography (the study of towns and cities) and refers to the physical expansion and development of the urban areas, inclusive of urban planning and transportation; the demography or human population component measures increase in population and the associated demands and their implications for both the government and the environment. The opposite of urbanization is counter-urbanization, also known as deurbanization (i.e. urban-rural migration). In Nigeria, many hitherto rural communities have and may likely continue to experience rapid urbanization with associated cultures. The Rebisi people of Port Harcourt are not an exception.

Culture is a universal, sociological and social anthropological reality. It remains a critical and defining attribute of a particular people, organization, association, or society. In fact, society can hardly exist and thrive without cultural continuity and sustainability, and humanity is likely to lose its essence and vitality. In like manner, culture cannot also exist without society. Culture influences, determines and dictates the ways of life of a people, including their behavioural and attitudinal patterns, social standards, character and pace of growth and development. To a very large extent, it impacts positively or otherwise on their socio-economic, political, legal, governance structure, education and belief systems etc. Given its pervasiveness and dynamism, culture can be contagious, thereby resulting in cultural change, which may be caused by a number of factors, including cultural diffusion – transfer of cultural traits and values from one society to another.

Pluralism suggests the multiplicity or diversity of views, perspectives, perceptions, languages, religions, interests, values and people, etc. Generally, whereas cultural pluralism implies the co-existence of two or more cultures; urbanization entails the process of evolution or development of a rural area or community into an urban area(s), towns and cities, with increasing population, etc. Presently, Rebisi which is conterminous with Port Harcourt is not

only urbanized in every respect, it can also be described as the "melting pot" in which the indigenous Rebisi and alien cultures co-exist, although without some culture shocks, especially on the side of the indigenous population. In the face and presence of urbanization and cultural pluralism, the Rebisi people have over several years been confronted with and exposed to a mixed bag of costs and benefits. In the light of the forgoing, this paper examines urbanization and cultural pluralism in the context of the experience of the Rebisi people in Rivers State.

Theoretical Framework
Three Theoretical Frameworks of Analysis were adopted for this paper, to wit, Functionalism, Conflict Theory and Symbolic Interactionism. The Functionalist Theory of Urbanization stresses the usefulness or functions and contributions of urbanization in society such as attraction and concentration of population diversity and social transformation, including cultural pluralism, as well as the burdens or consequences of urbanization. Some major proponents of Functionalism are Emile Durkheim, August Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Talcott Parsons.

The Conflict Theory adopts a critical approach to urbanization and cultural pluralism. It argues that urbanization is largely propelled by political and economic decisions and factors which create two classes: the rich (haves) and the poor (have-nots). While the rich have access to and enjoy the full benefits of urban life, majority of the poor (urban poor) do not and are disadvantaged. Conflict theorists, therefore, contend that the values, interests, beliefs and practices of the haves (high culture) often clash with those of the have-nots (low culture), thereby resulting in culture conflicts. They, therefore, come to the conclusion that political and economic elite use their resources and with the support of government, to develop urban areas or cities for their own benefit and not for the overall benefit of society. The political economy of urbanization also leads to displacement of the indigenous population and imposition of alien culture on the people. Thiorstein Sellin was a prominent conflict theorist of urbanization.

Symbolic Interactionism focuses on the nature, character, perceptions and various aspects and life of urban residents. The theorists argue that human beings as social animals interact with their natural and social environments "in terms of symbols, the most important of which are contained in language" (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). One of the votaries of Symbolic Interactionism, Elijah Anderson, holds that urban centres or cities have parks and gardens and other recreational facilities which he calls "urban canopies" where urban residents meet to interact and recreate. Other interactionists are Elliott Liebow, George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer. In all, Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes that the interplay of socio-economic, political, cultural, environmental and other factors; state and non-state actors make it possible for urban residents to interact at various levels for distinct purposes.

Conceptual Clarifications
Conceptualising Urbanization
Rapid urbanization is one of the key hallmarks of developing countries, especially in Africa. In fact, urbanization has assumed an increasing trend globally and Nigeria is not an exception. Nwodim, Ogali&Ndu (2019) contend that the rate of urbanization in Nigeria is equally a source of concern to both urban dwellers and scholars of development studies in view of the new challenges posed by rapid urbanization. Prior to examining the concept of Urbanization, it is important to first define an "urban area".

Urban Area
The term "urban" relates to "town" or "city". An urban area, therefore, is determined by high population concentration, built-up infrastructure, availability and access to basic social amenities and services. The National Urban Development Policy (2006) adopted a threshold population of 20,000 people as a core criterion or index for defining an urban area or centre.

Consequently, Ezeani &Elekwa (2001) have posited that:

> *On urban area is a heterogeneous settlement with a population of 20,000 or more inhabitants and characterized by predominantly non-agricultural activities and the presence of sizeable social infrastructure.*

To this end, the Rebisi Kingdom (Port Harcourt City), in every sense, is an urban area. Nigeria has a greater number of large cities and the highest urban population in sub-saharan Africa (Desai, & Potter, 2008). Other major cities in Nigeria include Lagos, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Kano, Kaduna, Zaria, Akure, Benin, Jos, Owerri, and Onitsha, among others. All state capitals and local government administrative headquarters are also regarded as urban centres. Essentially, four major features define an urban area, namely: high population, heterogeneity, economic mobility and division of labour; social distance and formal relationships.

Urbanization
In generic terms, urbanization refers to the progressive migration and concentration of human population in urban areas or centres. The concentration leads to social transformation, including changes in patterns of behavior, attitudes, values; the presence and co-existence of diverse cultures; expansion and transformation of land for residential, commercial and industrial purposes. In the words of Darity (2008), urbanization "is the transformation of social life from rural to urban settings". It can also be seen as the process through which areas or settlements become urbanized in terms of shift and increase in population overtime. Some cardinal factors that influence urbanization are industrialization, employment opportunities, commercial/business activities (economic); social amenities, services and benefits (social), rural –urban transformation as well as government development policies, plans, and decisions (Political). Urbanization process can be divided into four stages: initial stage, acceleration stage, deceleration stage and terminal stage. In the industrial societies, the stages are three: Pre-industrial urbanization, industrial urbanization and post-industrial urbanization. In Nigeria, three phases of urbanization have been identified. They are pre-colonial, colonial and past-colonial phases. This goes to show that Nigeria has a long history of urbanization.

Urban Bias Theory

The Urban Bias Theory is largely associated with Michael Lipton (1977). The central thesis and thrust of this theory is that urban-rural disparity primarily arises especially in developing countries due to imposition of taxes by government on agricultural products and farmers, which may at times be excessive; while on the contrary, the government in developed economies give subsidies to farmers. Similarly, development in terms of provision of basic social amenities and services such as education, housing, electricity, health services and other infrastructure are concentrated in urban areas and are enjoyed by urban residents, but the rural dwellers are neglected and do not have access to these basics. The rural population is faced with abject poverty, illiteracy, inequalities, hunger, etc. This prevailing situation motivates some rural dwellers to migrate to the cities and towns in search of greener pastures and better life, with the hope to be rescued from what Karl Marx referred to as "the idiocy of rural life". Urban Bias Theory has generated concern in development studies, which has informed many rural development policies, programmes and strategies in developing economies.

Rebisi and Urbanization in History: A Synopsis

Rebisi Kingdom is an indigenous Iwhuruohna (Ikwerre) speaking people in Rivers State. Rebisi, coterminous with Port Harcourt City, the capital of Rivers State, is said to have been founded by the progenitor himself, Rebisi, the last son of Apara, about 800 years ago (Amadi, 2017). Rebisi is made up of seven (7) ancestral communities, namely:Olozu, Worukwo, Abali, Ogbum, Ochiri, Ezimgbu, and Ada. The predominant occupation of the Rebisi people include farming, fishing, hunting, wine tapping, and trading (ORAG, 1989; RPM, 2006; Dibia, 2009; Akani, 2022; Nduka, 1993; and Nwanodi, 1994). However, the urbanization of Rebisi for 114 years (1909-2023) and still counting has substantially stunted and vitiated the main traditional occupation of the people. Whereas some within employable and productive age brackets are either gainfully employed in the public or private sectors of the Nigerian economy, self-employed or have become "professional rentiers"; others, especially majority of the active youth population are underemployed, unemployed or unemployable. The history of urbanization in Rebisi can conveniently be classified into three phases.

First Phase of Urbanization

Any reference to Rebisi urbanization must begin with colonialism. The British government formally established and imposed the colonial state in Nigeria on January 1, 1900. Before this time, in 1861, the British had already acquired Lagos as a Crown Colony and started extending its influence, impact and control into the interior. Aside from the fact that colonialism was motivated by economic considerations, principally intended to exploit and appropriate the economic resources of the indigenous people of Nigeria, it equally imposed Western cultures on the people.

In 1909, (three years after the Colony of Lagos was united with the Protectorate if Southern Nigeria in 1806), Albert Ernest Kitson, a geologist, discovered a large deposit of coal in Udi, near Enugu, while prospecting for silver. Coal was needed as a raw material to feed the industries and the rail transport system in Britain. This became one of the primary motivations for establishing a port in Rebisi land, known as Port Harcourt, in 1912. The port

was founded by Lord Frederick Lugard, Governor of Southern and Northern Protectorates, and named after Lord Lewis Vernon Harcourt, then British Secretary of State for the Colonies, known in London as a sexual predator. Established in 1912 and named on 18th May 1913 by the British Colonial Government, the City of Port Harcourt was known as "Igwuocha" or "Igwecha" in Ikwerre dialect of Rebisi, or "Obomotu" (ORAG, 1989; RPM, 2006; Ogionwo, 1979; Alagoa & Nwanodi, 2013 and Daminabo, 2013).

This marked the first phase and beginning of urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi, under the British colonial administration. In fact, in 1914, the year of the amalgamation of the Colony and Protectorate of the Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of the Northern Nigeria into a single administrative unit known and referred to as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, the first consignment of coal from Enugu through Port Harcourt was shipped to the United Kingdom. The coal was also needed domestically to power the emerging rail transport system in Nigeria.

According to Baiyewu-Teru (2015),

> The discovery of coal in Enugu had a kaleidoscope of effects on the town and indeed the nation. For one, it contributed to the rapid development of the town and made it a commercial hub for the region. The wealth generated from coal was so strategic that Enugu became the capital of the Eastern Region in 1938. Its widespread influence also led to the establishment of a thriving port at the area now known as Port Harcourt (which also became a city of reckon) to ship coal out of Enugu to Europe.

The colonial influence on urbanization in Rebisiwas dominant, as most of the colonial administrators and professionals were Europeans. Some areas were designated as "European Quarters". In actual fact, the earmarking and gradual build- up of areas such as the Old GRA; Orije Layout; Rumuwoji, which later became Wobo Layout; D/Line (instead of Orogbum) Layout; and other parts of Rebisi communities, over time became urbanized (Alagoa & Nwanodi, 2013).

Second Phase of Urbanization
What may be regarded as the second phase of the urbanization process and cultural pluralism in Rebisi is connected with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, in the present Bayelsa State in 1956. It should be recalled that the present Bayelsa State which was created in 1996 was in the old Rivers State and Port Harcourt was the capital of the Old Rivers State and continues to serve as the capital of the present Rivers State.

The discovery of oil attracted many oil firms with their administrative headquarters to Port Harcourt, namely, Shell BP, Chevron, and Mobil, among others. Some indigenous oil firms and service providers also moved into Port Harcourt. The Federal Government established the petrochemical company in Eleme and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) (now Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited) with its zonal office moved to Port Harcourt. Many people from distinct cultural backgrounds desirous of employment or

business moved to Port Harcourt. These establishments employed or engaged the services of expatriates and other employees with diverse idiosyncrasies and cultures. This development further expanded the horizon of urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi. Today, Port Harcourt is not only an oil-rich and Garden City, but also one of the major commercial hubs of Nigeria.

The Richards Constitution of 1946 laid the foundation and introduced regionalism in Nigeria, while the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 introduced Federalism and granted more autonomy to the regions. It is equally important to note that the creation of Eastern Region in1954 by the Lyttleton Constitution significantly contributed to urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi. Port Harcourt was under the Region and some of the policies and programmes of the Eastern Region Government had urbanization implications for Rebisi. For example, the creation of the Trans-Amadi Industrial Area, covering an area of 2,500 acres, the acquisition and lopsided allocation of other land areas for public purpose and in favour of non-Rebisi people, especially the Ibos. This also encouraged the influx of people into Port Harcourt for various purposes.

Port Harcourt was elevated to the status of a municipality in 1955 (Ogionwo, 1979). As a result of the firm control of the Eastern Region Government by the Ibos, they extended same control to urban politics, governance and administration in Port Harcourt. This strongly accounted for the emergence of Richard Nsimiro as the first elected Mayor of Port Harcourt Municipal Council in 1956, under the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). His wife, Mary Nsimiro, who was the daughter of one of the Warrant Chiefs during the British Colonial administration, was a very prominent, active and successful businesswoman. She was also an influential political activist and politician and greatly contributed to her husband's election as the first mayor of Port Harcourt Municipal Council. Richard Nsimiro, during his period as mayor, expanded the frontiers of urbanization in Rebisi. He died in 1959.

The Third and Contemporary Phase of Urbanization

The third and contemporary phase of urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi started in 1967, following the creation of Rivers State and the appointment of Commander Alfred Diete-Spiff (now HRM King Alfred Diete-Spiff, the Amayanabo of Twon-Brass) by General Yakubu Gowon as the first Military Governor of the old Rivers State. Between 1967 and 2023, Rivers State (old and present) has witnessed various military and democratically elected governments. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) also helped to rebuild and further urbanize parts of Port Harcourt, which were destroyed during the war, by virtue of Gowon's policy of Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Reconciliation. It also created a new socio-cultural and political consciousness and awareness among the indigenous population, including the Rebisi people. The Port Harcourt City Local Government has equally experienced successive administrations in terms of sole administrators, caretaker committees and elected chairmen and councillors. These governments, both at the state and local government levels, have one way or the other, formulated and implemented development policies, plans, and urban renewal programmes that have transformed the landscape, reinforced urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi.

In fact, Okowa remarked in Alagoa and Nwanodi (ed) (2013):

> *As the Igbo took over the commanding heights of the politics of Port Harcourt, the minorities fearing ethnic hegemony began to agitate for some form of recognition and self-determination. The result of these pressures was the creation of a Rivers Province in 1957, with Port Harcourt as its headquarters. Rivers Province comprised Ahoada, Brass, Degema, Ogoni, and Port Harcourt.*

These Administrative Divisions became known as PABOD. During the the administration of Diete-Spiff, he, among others, established PABOD Finance Limited and PABOD Bakeries Limited which were Rivers State Government-Owned companies. Similarly, the Ibos were occupying most of the key political and administrative positions in Port Harcourt (Ogionwo, 1979). They were equally dominant in business and commercial activities. Most of the notable legal practitioners were also from Ibo extraction. These made it possible for the imposition and dominance of Ibo culture in the city of Port Harcourt. In fact, by June 1967, 90% of the residents of Port Harcourt was Ibo (Ogionwo, 1979).

To further acknowledge and reinforce the corruption of Rebisi culture as a result of contact with external forces, the RPM (2006) elaborately stated:

> *Much of the Rebisi's flourishing culture was debased or totally destroyed through the ruthless ideological exploitation of the Kingdom by Europeans. But much has survived to give modern scholars of history, anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics a dependable guide to Rebisi and her unique contribution to the total human nature… The interplay of the potency of those elements to a very great extent shaped the cultural outlook of the people of Rebisi and has remained the moderating influence against the erosion of cultural heritage occasioned by rapid urbanization of Igwuocha following its acquisition and subsequent development into an urban settlement by the British colonialists from the second decade of the twentieth century.*

What is Culture?

Culture is a social construct possessed by man alone. Sociologists and social anthropologists have subjected the concept of culture to multiple definitional analyses and operational interpretations. However, there are two scholars whose definitions of culture are not only outstanding but are generally and universally accepted. Firstly, Ralph Linton (1945) is of the view that "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation" (Haratambos& Holborn, 2008). To this end, culture is not genetically transmitted. It finds eloquent expressions and impressions in the acts of the people.

Secondly, Edward A.B. Taylor in 1871 had earlier postulated what is now referred to as the classical definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Umoren, 2001). From the above expositions, it can be deduced that the central thrust

of the concept of culture is the people. It gives identity and meaning to the people. Culture is the sum total or totality of the ways of life of a people, such as common patterns of behaviour, language, ethics, customs, beliefs (tradition), norms, values, symbols, foods, clothing, housing patterns and institutions, etc. it is learned, shared and transmitted from generation to generation, especially through language and communication. This makes enculturation important. Enculturation is the process by which new generation of children are encouraged and helped to imbibe and internalize the cultural values of the people. It can also be seen as the process of learning from cradle or infancy (birth) to death. This is, however, different from inculturation, being "the process in which the gospel is rooted in a particular culture and later, is introduced into Christianity" (Umoren, 2021). Other characteristics of culture include that it is symbolic, dynamic (capable of change or modification) or even obliteration or extinction as result of both endogenous and exogenous factors. Thus, sociologists talk about acculturation, which is the process of change, especially when the culture of a people is substantially modified, altered or displaced by another culture. In other words, it is the process by which one culture or group acquires the cultural traits of the other or vice versa. Where a politically or economically dominant country through colonialism, trade relations, media, internet or globalization imposes their culture on another, it becomes cultural imperialism. The imposition of English language, British governance structure and legal system on Nigeria constitute clear examples of cultural imperialism. Culture is also integrated and has value orientation. It is estimated that there are approximately 3,800 unique cultures globally.

Cultural Universals
Logan (2020) has identified ten (10) elements (features) or universals which every culture must have, namely:

1.   Geography
2.   Language
3.   Family

4.   Food
       Clothing
       Transport   FCTS
       Shelter
       Values
5.   Beliefs   VBR
       Rituals
6.   Economics
7.   Politics
8.   Education
9.   Technology, and;
10.   Cultural Expression

UNESCO and Culture
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) defines culture as "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features

of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature but lifestyle, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs". The cultural mission of UNESCO is to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity. As an essential component of human development, target 4.7 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), emphasizes the need for education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, an appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development, especially through cultural tourism, etc. Culture is considered as the 4th pillar of sustainable regional development.

Culture has been acknowledged not only as a transformative power house, global public good but an important enabler and pathway to the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations by 2030. Thus, to strengthen the synergy between culture and development, UNESCO provides support to member countries not only to integrate culture into their development plan and processes, but to use it as a cross-cutting tool for sustainable development.

To underscore the premium placed on culture, the G20 members at its Summit in New Dehli, India, with UNESCO as a knowledge partner of the Culture Working Group, declared "Culture as a Transformative Driver of SDGs" and stated:

> *We call for full recognition and protection of culture with its intrinsic value as a transformative driver and enabler for the achievement of SDGs and advance the inclusion of culture as a standalone goal in future discussions on a possible post 2030development agenda (UNESCO, 2023).*

Types of Culture
There are many types of culture. The two major categories are material culture and non-material culture. Material culture represents physical things produced or created by a society. On the other hand, non-material culture are non-material or intangible things produced by a society or non-material attributes of a society such as ideas, values, behaviours or attitudes. Culture can also be classified into:

i. Institutional Culture
ii. International or Global Culture
iii. National Culture
iv. Subculture
v. High Culture
vi. Low Culture
vii. Popular Culture
viii. Mass Culture
ix. Folk Culture (culture of ordinary people, especially rural communities and people)
x. Culture of Poverty (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008; Darity, 2008; Chuku, 2014)
xi. Political Culture (Ake, 1979; Kalagbor, 2001).

Cultural Pluralism

Pluralism is derived from the latin word "plures" meaning "several" or "many". Pluralism literally suggests the co-existence of diversity or multiplicity of social groups, interests, perspectives, beliefs, views, opinions, values, religions and people within a society. One basic characteristic of pluralism is inclusiveness as all members are treated equally. It recognizes social heterogeneity and prevents any group from gaining dominance. In fact, it affirms and celebrates diversity within a society. Pluralism can be applied to several disciplines. To this end, we have philosophical pluralism, ethical pluralism, political pluralism and cultural pluralism, etc. Some notable theorists of pluralism will include Robert A. Dahl, David Truman, Harold Laski and James Madison, among others.

In Political Science and theory, political pluralism stresses the need for diverse interest groups to share, control and exercise political power. Elitism is the opposite of pluralism. i.e. there is diffusion of political power among many divergent groups. The Elite political theory developed by Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Roberto Michels as a theoretical counter discourse to Marxism contends that the dominant minority (few persons) referred to as "ruling or governing elites" always and effectively exercises political power and control in society (Kalagbor, 2001).

The idea of cultural pluralism was coined and first used by Horace M. Kellen in Harvard University around 1906 (Ratner,1984). Cultural pluralism has to do with the harmonious and peaceful co-existence of diversity of cultures in a given society, while maintaining their unique cultural identities, often referred to as "salad bowl". By "this" it means that in a typical salad bowl, the different ingredients of a salad can be identified individually, they do not fuse together to form a single substance. No ingredient dominates the other. In cultural pluralism, therefore, there is always a dominant or hegemonic culture which may be indigenous to the people and society, co-existing with diverse and minority cultures. In other words, cultural pluralism occurs when smaller groups within a society maintain their unique cultures or cultural identities, whereby their values and practices are accepted by the dominant culture. The Open Education Sociology Dictionary (2023) defined cultural pluralism as "a mixing of different cultures in which each culture retains its unique identities…." "it is the co-existence of many dissimilar things or patterns of activity… or a system where different culture groups coexist and share a common cultural platform without losing their respective identity" (National Institute of Open Schooling, NIOS, 2003).

In many urban centres or areas, including the Rebisi Kingdom (Port Harcourt City) and given its cosmopolitan character, people from diverse ethnic nationalities and cultural backgrounds live, work, school and engage in business activities, having transferred their diverse cultures to the locality. This is very common in pluralistic societies, unlike in mono societies such as Japan and North Korea where cultural monism (one or single culture) is encouraged, enforced and practised. Some prominent examples of countries that are associated with cultural pluralism will include the United States of America, Germany, Canada, Switzerland and Madinah. Cultural pluralism is distinct from multiculturalism. The major difference between cultural pluralism and multiculturalism is that in the later, there is no dominant or hegemonic culture. All the cultures simply co-exist cooperatively.

Urbanization and Cultural Pluralism in Rebisi: Manifest Indicators

One of the primary and major sources of cultural pluralism in Rebisi is obviously urbanization. The seeming complete urbanization of Rebisi communities has brought with it and greatly engendered the emergence of diverse peoples and cultures. A critical and ethnographic study and analysis of Rebisi as presently constituted will reveal that aside from the Rebisi people and culture, there is an overwhelming presence of many ethnic groups, nationalities, and cultures, which include, but are not limited to the Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, Ijaw, Ogoni, Ekpeye, Benin, Etche, Efik and Ibibio; Africans of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as other foreign nationals who live, work and do business in Rebisi. Available information on the demographic profile of Rebisi (Port Harcourt) indicates that "the city is dominated by the Ikwerre, Ijaw and Ogoni, among others" (http://www.refword.org./docid/4e4a21682.htm-accessed 14 December 2023). To demonstrate the heterogeneous character and impact of urbanization in Rebisi even in the 1930s, Ogionwo (1979) noted that:

> By the beginning of the thirties, the population of Port Harcourt had become heterogeneous, detribalized, and for the most part, of an advanced stage of sophistication. Among the African population, some sorts of "unions" were organized to cater for the interest of members in the resolution of problems arising out of urban development. Such unions were organized mostly on ethnic bases. The principal unions in Port Harcourt in 1930 were those organized by residents from Ikwerre, Owerri, Onitsha, Aba, Awka, Bende, Arochukwu, Ahoada, Okigwe, Orlu, Calabar, Ibibio and Itchekiri.

Some Positive Evidence and Benefits

Without doubt, the urbanization of Port Harcourt has some positive evidence and benefits. The benefits will include the establishment of educational institutions (private and public; primary, post-primary, and tertiary) and provision of access to formal education; provision of social amenities and services by government such as water, electricity, hospitals, recreational facilities; establishment of financial institutions, especially commercial banks and access to credit and other banking services; creation of employment opportunities in the informal and formal sectors, especially through industrialization (e.g. the Trans-Amadi Industrial Layout); the establishment of federal and state-owned institutions, agencies and parastatals as well as private firms. The establishment of major markets such as the Nkpolu-Oroworukwo market, Rumuwoji market, Ogbum-nu-Abali Fruit market, the Creek Road market, and the New Layout market, among others, has helped to boost commercial activities in Port Harcourt. Traditional community-based markets in Orogbum and Elekahia have been reconstructed. Urbanization has also attracted improved and modern motor parks and public transport system to Rebisi, expansion and construction of network of tarred roads/drains, streetlights and flyover bridges. Some community and family town halls, through individuals, governments and efforts by companies in exercise of their corporate social responsibilities, have been reconstructed, expanded and remodeled, to accommodate the increasing population and reflect modern architectural designs. As a means of internal revenue generation, the leadership of the communities and families let out the halls to faith-based and religious organizations, individuals and social groups for social and political events such as meetings and wedding receptions, etc.

With respect to youth empowerment and job creation, despite the unavailability of comprehensive records and information on the number of Rebisi sons and daughters who have benefited from scholarship awards at different levels of education, including overseas scholarships; skills training programmes and employment opportunities, it is undeniable that many Rebisi sons and daughters have benefitted from the existence and operations of many companies in the Kingdom. The presence and establishment of the Nigerian Police Headquarters, Rivers State Command, many divisional police stations and offices of other security agencies, have helped in the reduction of crimes and criminalities and tremendously improved security of lives and property in Rebisi.

Urbanization and Cultural Pluralism as Threats to Rebisi Culture

Urbanization and cultural pluralism certainly have negative effects for the indigenous communities and culture of Rebisi people. Elem (2020) contends that:

> The idea of urbanization substantially alters a people's way of life, especially the indigenous people's lives… clearly, the age-long hyper-urbanization witnessed in Ikwerre land has produced growth, not development. It merely made available social infrastructure through excessive land acquisition without equivalent qualitative increase in the building of Ikwerre culture.

The above description is equally true of the Rebisi people. Urbanization and cultural pluralism in Rebisi have not only resulted in culture shock and culture gap, the entirety of the rich cultural heritage of the people is under serious threats of complete erosion or extinction. Urbanization and cultural pluralism constitute major threats to the Rebisi culture in the following ways:

i. Gradual disappearance of core ancient landmarks, cultural identities, signals and symbols in various Rebisi communities, families, ceremonies and interactions among the people.

ii. Language is one of the most important elements of culture. It constitutes a veritable means of communicating, learning, sharing, expressing and transmitting cultural values of a people from one person or group to the other; it fosters sentiments of group identity, solidarity, cohesion and preservation of cultural heritage. Unfortunately, the Ikwerre language of the Rebisi people has not only been corrupted as a result of urbanization and cultural pluralization, but it is also under a serious threat of extinction. There are adult Rebisi sons and daughters who find it difficult to fluently communicate in the indigenous language. Many youths can hardly understand, speak, or translate the language into English language. The role and power of language in the preservation of Rebisi culture can, therefore, not be underestimated.

iii. There is a sharp decline in feelings of strong sense of communalism and consanguine relationships among the people in preference for feelings of individualism and relative autonomy by some families and communities.

iv. Exposure to cultural conflict (the clash of different cultural values/beliefs). Many aspects of the Rebisi culture seem to be misunderstood, misinterpreted or clearly rejected by those who should embrace and preserve them. Some see them as "satanic", devilish, "barbaric", anachronistic, anti-people, anti-development, etc.

v. The annual or seasonal inter-community wrestling competitions, masquerade dances, craft making (e.g. beads, mat, pottery, sewing, bamboo and cane craft, basketry) etc., are no longer fashionable, attractive and encouraged. This is inimical to development of entrepreneurial skills among the youths.

vi. Some marriage and burial rites, processes, and procedures are no longer observed in accordance with the age-long customs and traditions of the people. Some of the practices and rites have even been monetized. There are also obvious discrepancies and, in certain cases, contradictions in conduct of burial and marriage rites within Rebisi communities. This is unacceptable and contrary to the Rebisi cultural practice established from time immemorial.

vii. Fertile land is a principal scarce resource and fixed asset given to the Rebisi people by God. Regrettably, urbanization, especially with specific reference to land development and utilization occasioned largely by Government acquisition for overriding public interests, voluntary and "forceful" sale of land by some people or families for fear of compulsory acquisition by government, have nearly decimated available land space in Rebisi for farming, hunting and residential purposes. The present generation of the people is at the risk of being "tenants" in their own land. Expansion, due to the growing population, has become a major challenge. Some young people now buy and develop land at exorbitant prices, especially in Obio/Akpor and Ikwerre Local Government Areas where they reside with their families. This has created a further challenge of socio-cultural dislocation and distance which have unquantifiable implications for the people. "Amangori", "Okwee" and "Odopipi" farmlands, etc., are now industrial and residential areas. Streams such as Miniwokora, Minijiriji, and Okolo, among others, have become extinct. Substantial parts of Weja River have been reclaimed with attendant pollution, which makes fishing difficult. Also, the Onueza River has been adversely affected by land reclamation and urban pollution; and

viii. The use of traditional medicine through the application of natural herbs and leaves to prevent and cure various illnesses and diseases as well as local orthopaedic practices as integral parts of Rebisi culture are almost non-existent. This has been heightened by lack of interest, knowledge, transfer of relevant skills and absence of forests as dependable sources of natural herbs and leaves.

Conclusion

The urbanization and cultural pluralism experienced by the Rebisi people for over 114 years and still counting, have engendered and brought to the fore a mixed bag of costs and benefits. The greatest challenge, in the context of this paper, confronting Rebisi are threats to the preservation and promotion of her rich and cherished cultural heritage, especially the endangered Ikwerre language, language being a potent unifying force and cultural identity of a people. More than ever, Rebisi needs urgent cultural renaissance. This requires the collective energies, support and resources of the intelligentsia; political, business and professional class; youths, elders, men and women of goodwill, owhor holders and the traditional political institution to achieve and sustain this vision. What is more, the traditional political leadership of Rebisi has a pivotal responsibility to define the direction, chart the course, sustain the momentum, and mobilize the requisite resources. This is a task that must be fulfilled,

particularly considering the fact that as John C. Maxwell aptly noted, "Everything rises and falls on leadership".

Recommendations

It should be borne in mind that the World Bank had remarked that no country globally has been able to successfully solve the problems of urbanization. However, deliberate, concerted and consistent efforts are required in order to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the Rebisi people. Consequently, the following recommendations are considered apposite:

1. Language remains the strongest virtue and identity of a people. Pragmatic programmes should be designed, and energy exerted to encourage our children to continue to learn, speak and communicate in Ikwerre language. Parents and guardians have a greater role to play in this direction. The establishment of a formal Ikwerre language and literacy school will be a welcome development. Deliberations at meetings, reading of minutes of meetings and conduct at Ikwerre social ceremonies and events should be in the native tongue. Reading of Ikwerre Bible in family devotions and events should also be encouraged.

2. Technology has made all countries of the world a global village. Thus, the importance of information and communication technology (ICT) education and the role of ICT in Ikwerre language education cannot be gainsaid. The present generation of Rebisi youths, at home and in the Diaspora, is largely ICT literate and compliant. Therefore, there is the indispensable need to deploy relevant ICT infrastructure and media platforms to facilitate the teaching and learning of Ikwerre language, in particular, and the promotion of Rebisi culture, in general.

3. The study of Ikwerre language should be incorporated into the curricula of primary and junior secondary schools in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State and should be made compulsories for all pupils and students of Rebisi origin.

4. Education (formal, informal and non-formal) is a catalyst for the development of a people, including their culture. Library (physical and digital) plays a critical role in the process. The establishment of Rebisi Library and Resource Centre is long overdue.

5. Rebisi traditional burial and marital rites and practices should be harmonized, standardized and adopted by all the communities.

6. There is need to establish Rebisi Archive Museum Heritage Centre to serve as an institutional memory and source of reference for research on the history and culture of Rebisi people and other purposes. It can also serve the purpose of tourism and a source of revenue for its maintenance.

7. The Rebisi Annual Cultural Festival should be sustained. Its contents should be regularly reviewed and enlarged to reflect, express and promote the arts and culture of the Rebisi people, with active youth participation; and

8. A standing committee on Rebisi Arts and Culture should be constituted by the traditional political leadership. Its terms of reference, among others, should include to formulate a Rebisi Cultural Policy; ensure the coordination, promotion, preservation, and development of the arts and culture of Rebisi people; and liaise with individuals, associations and relevant agencies and international organizations on cultural matters as well as advise the traditional political leadership on all arts and cultural matters.

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