

Nri Influence: The Position of Nwadunu in Nanka Administrative Set Up

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Abstract: *Nanka is in Orumba North Local Government Area in Anambra State of Nigeria. This work centred on the function of Nwadunu in Nanka administrative set up. This work is meant to make people understand administrative set up in Nanka clearer. Thus removing doubts that often arise as regards to the function of Nwadunu institution in Nanka. The work is also meant to draw the attention of researchers and educationist to the existence of this unique institution in Nanka. The researcher's paper being a stepping stone from where other researchers can take off. In carrying out this research, the researcher prepared questionnaires for oral interviews which the researcher administered on Nwadunu himself, the clan head of Umudunu quarter, Nanka and some selected elders from the seven villages that make up Nanka. From analysis of the responses, the researcher was able to arrive at conclusion of what Nwadunu's position in administration set up in Nanka is.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nanka is one of the sixteen towns that make up Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The town lies about fifteen kilometers North of Awka town. From Amawbia junction, one takes right towards Nise, Agulu, the third town is Nanka. Nanka is fairly a big town and enlightened community with a population of about one half million (1991 census). The people of Nanka are industrious, liberal, social and accommodating. Like other towns in Igbo land Nanka practices democratic system of government. The town has a traditional ruler – His Royal Highness Igwe Godwin Ezeilo. The traditional ruler and his cabinet members see that peace and progress reign in the community. They make laws, settle disputes etc. The Igwe is recognized by the state government.

The town is also ruled by the town union – Nanka Patriotic Union. Members of this union are more enlightened than the former. They also see that peace and progress reign in the town. They attract innovations in the town such as building roads, construction of bridges, building schools and giving scholarships to her citizens. They also make laws. The roles of town union of various communities in the state are recognized by the state government. Their union comes under one umbrella known as Anambra State Amalgamated Town Union (ASATU). Through this association, the government makes its impact felt in various towns of the state.

The institution of Nwadunu is the third arm of administration in the town. This leadership is mainly spiritual. Nwadunu is the chief priest. He is highly respected. His verdict about cultural and spiritual issues brought before him is final. No one can say when Nanka originated or when it started to exist in the place she found herself today. A renowned archeologist Thurstan Shaw dates the archeological findings at Igboekwu from A.D. 700 to A.D. 1020. If the people of Igboekwu could produce such things

discovered by Shaw at such a time, it all then means that Igboekwu was there before A.D. 700. Nanka and Igboekwu are two neighboring towns, no one can say which of the two towns came to their present location first before the other. One can rightly say that Nanka existed in the present location before A.D 700.

2. THE INSTITUTION OF NWADUNU

Nwadunu is the chief priest and the cultural head in Nanka. The present Nwadunu is the 9th Nwadunu in their lineage. The name of the present Nwadunu is Ezenwafor Ezeokafor, he is popularly called Nwadunu Nwankwo.

When the researcher visited him in his house, he looks sober, unassuming and soft spoken. He wore anklet 'akwali' round his ankles this signifies authority. On getting to his house, one feels a sort of awe for his compound is surrounded by thick bush 'ofia Nri' (Nri bush). In the middle of his compound is his 'Obi'. No one is expected to enter but he alone. The 'Obi' is where he goes to consult his ancestors. The compound is demarcated with wall and no visitor is expected to cross from his wife's apartment to his own apartment. In front of his compound lies the Ogboli (narrow winding foot path) which is decorated with red and white cloth and 'nzú' (native white chalk). It is through this 'ogboli' that the departing spirits of the dead from the seven villages of Nanka get to Nwadunu's house, and then enter into the 'Nri Bush'. Nwadunu sits in front of his house welcoming those whose death are mature but orders those whose death are premature back to their owners. When that happens, the dead is revived. Nanka has only one Nwadunu at a time. This means that the wife continues giving birth to females when Nwadunu is advanced in age, she gives birth to a male child. Usually, the birth of new Nwadunu is celebrated by the people of Nanka. All cultural and ritual performances in the town are purely specified and regulated by Nwadunu. The present Nwadunu is about eighty years old and ninth Nwadunu in their lineage. He is supposed to have

a male child who will succeed him by now. As a result of modernization, Nwadu can now give birth to male children during his life time from then new Nwadu is selected at the demise of his father. He claims that only he and his father witnessed the arrival of the whites in Nanka.

3. THE PROBABLE DATE FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF INSTITUTION OF NWADUNU IN NANKA

Afigbo (1981:15) affirms: "It would also appear that by the time of European advent in the 16th century, major movements were more or less completed and that the basic character of Igbo culture and society had emerged". This means that the period before 16th century was a period of great movement of Igbo people from one place to the other. Prominent among these groups of people were the Nri people. Supporting this view Afigbo (1981:5) says: "The Nri of Northern Igbo evolved an elaborated and highly ritualized priest-kingship around which rich traditions have survived". From the above, one can conclude that the institution of Nwadu was established in Nanka around 16th century when the major movement of Igbo people were more or less completed. It was during this period that Onwuejeogu (1980:36) commented on when he says: "formerly Oraeri men were interant ritualist and diplomats until 1911 when their activities were proscribed by British administrator". Though Nri activities were proscribed in 1911 by British Administrator. Shaw (1977:97) says that their ritual activities continued after this period. Basden (1983) notes that Nri was well known over much of Igbo land and Nri priest so ubiquitous and influential. Afigbo (1981:5) adds:

Nri of the Northern Igbo evolved an elaborate and high ritualized priest-kingship around which rich traditions have survived Eze Nri has control over yam, coco yam, palm oil, title taking, institution of 'ichi' (facial marks) and names of Igbo market (p. 9).

At this period, 'ani' (land) became so important to Igbo people and it became function of Eze Nri to preside its worship, veneration and purification. Because of the above claim by Nri, her neighbours or other towns were coming to Nri with their local products in exchange with Nri yam, coco yam, palm oil and bread fruit. Nri people at this period move to every part of Igbo land performing the function of Eze Nri as his representative. It was at this period that Dunu and his group arrived at Nanka with their highly ritualized, cultural tradition and practices. Thus the institution of Nwadu was established in Nanka to cater for religions lives of the people. He is in charge of purification and other cosmological practices in the town. The people of Nanka consult Nwadu for solution to spiritual and cosmological issues. After consulting his ancestors inside his 'Obi' he interprets the problem and enumerates things required for sacrifice, or purification. He never charges consultation fee. The individual finds any other Nwa Nri (Nri man) for the

cleansing services. Nwadu performs the rituals affecting the whole town. The people of Nanka love Nwadu, they continue coming to him for solution to their problems even in this modern period because there is realism in his verdict.

4. WHO IS NRI?

Nri was the first son of Eri, the founder of Eri nation. From Nri Chukwu, the great God of Igbo people sent Eri down to heaven Omambara River basin in Aguleri. At that time everywhere were water logged and morass. Eri therefore sat on an anthill. Chukwu invited black smiths from Awka to come and bellow the whole area dry. They did so and Eri climbed down and stood on earth. God was in-charge of his feeding. Eri married his first wife who gave birth to four boys. Nri was the first born and okpala and the most prosperous of the children. Nri the first son married a wife, they had five sons and a daughter. The first son is Agukwu became the okpala, others are Enugu-Ukwu, Nawfia, Enugwu-Agidi. Thus Agukwu the first son of Nri, whose father, Nri was the first son of Eri (their founding father) therefore became the commodity that houses the big *of* not only of Umunri clan but also of Umueri tribe. He labours the spirit of entire group in that sense he may be regarded as the heart of Igbo nationality. So, Nri can be called the Holy City of Nri.

According to their oral tradition when Eri landed at Aguleri, Chukwu (the great God) gave them as gift the control; of all important Igbo cultures. Afigbo (1981:41) says "The Nri are pre-eminent amongst the few Igbo groups who evolved divine kingship institution. Because Nri was obedient to Chukwu when Chukwu instructed him to kill one of his sons and one of his daughters, bury each in a separate grave he obeyed. He then killed one of his slave males and one of the slave females and buried each in a separate grave. Three native weeks later when he visited the scene, yam tendrils sprouted from the grave of the son, cocoyam sprouted from the grave of his daughter, palm tree sprouted from that of his male slave and bread fruit sprouted from the grave of the female slave. With these commodities Nri was able to feed his family and the entire Igbo nation. God was so impressed with him that He gave Nri the control over food, taking of titles, institution of ichi facial marks and the control over market days of Igbo land.

Nri also recognized the importance of 'ala' as one of the agencies that sustains their lives on earth. It was from the land that yam, coco yam, palm oil and bread fruit sprouted from which he was able to sustain the lives of his family and entire Igbo nation. Nri therefore deities *ala* (earth) and was in charge of land worship, veneration and purification of the land. It was at this period that agriculture was born and land was playing great role in the social, religious and cosmological lives of Igbo people. Nri priests and agents travelled widely throughout Igbo land. They are representatives of Eze Nri and so they are highly respected and honoured. Commenting on this allegation Afigbo (1981) says: "Nri was well known over much of Igbo land and Nri

priests so ubiquitous and influential that the name of Nri had come to be given in the century.” Leonard in Afigbo (1981:55) also notes that “It is believed that no religious rite is so striking or effectual as that which is performed by Nri priests who hold their office merely as a divine and sacred right.”

5. FUNCTIONS OF NWADUNU

1. He counts the year and performs necessary sacrifice to usher in new year.
2. He performs necessary sacrifice to usher in farming season.
3. He has the privilege of displaying his new yam in the market (Afọ Udo) before any other person.
4. He initiates people into Nze title society.
5. He in conjunction with Nze title holder can amend or abolish customs.
6. His verdict on materials required for sacrifice or cleansing is indisputable.
7. He regulates the town festivals and fixes dates for each festival every year.
8. He is not supposed to step out of his house at night.
9. He is not supposed to travel far from his house. That means that he is not supposed to sleep out of his house.

The people of Nanka very much enjoy the services of Nwadunu. No one had ever thought of challenging his activities. Few individuals that attempted selling their yams before Nwadunu met their misfortune eight days later. When the people of Nanka want certain custom to be abolished or amended, they go to him. He then consults his ancestors. If his ancestors agree, he carries on the amendment in the presence of ndi Nze Nanka and elders.

The people of Nanka enjoy his services. They had formerly bought a bicycle for him so as to make his work in the town easier. Now the Nze Nanka is constructing a four bed room zinc house for him. This is aimed at making him more comfortable. On each occasion he comes out to display his new yam at Afọ Udo market, he receives many gifts from the people. These portray the love the people have for him.

6. THE PRESENT POSITION OF NWADUNU

Modernisation and introduction of Christianity had affected the institution of Nwadunu, for example;

- i. The wall that demarcated his abode from that of his wife has drastically reduced to stump.
- ii. The number of his clients had also reduced. People consult him only when external help had failed them, for example when hospital could not solve their problems, they then come to Nwadunu.
- iii. The thick bush ‘Ofia Nhi’ which harboured the souls of the dead had reduced drastically in size.

- iv. People no longer come to his house through the ‘Ogbali’ narrow foot part but come from any way they feel like.
- v. After the building of his four bedroom zinc house by ndi Nze Nanka, his compound will wear modern look.
- vi. He can give birth to any number of male children without any challenge from the people of Nanka.

7. FINDINGS

The institution of Nwadunu survived in Nanka from 16th century to the present century (21st century) because of the following factors:

1. There is realism in his verdicts. If one does what he prescribes for him for the abolition of his problem. His problem will be solved.
2. He is obedient, sober and patient with the people of Nanka in the debate concerning any cultural issue.
3. He always appreciates gifts given to him by the people.

8. SUMMARY

Nwadunu is the chief priest and the cosmological head in Nanka. He is to Nanka what Eze Nri is to the people of Nri. He is the representative of Eze Nri in Nanka. Since the establishment of this institution in about 16th century ago, the Nwadunu had been discharging his functions diligently and the people of Nanka had been obeying his verdicts/leadership. He has procedure for his consultations which one must obey. The present Nwadunu is the 9th Nwadunu in their lineage and the people of Nanka are still obeying his instructions. They are obeying him because there is realism in what he is doing. After hearing the problem of his client, he tells him what to do, if the client does what he instructed him to do, the client’s problem is over. The client becomes happy again.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the important role Nwadunu plays in Nanka as the chief priest and cosmological leader, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. That the institution of Nwadunu as the chief priest of Nanka be recognized by the government.
2. The compound of Nwadunu be preserved as monumental area for tourists and researchers who might like to come and see it.

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