THE INFLUENCE OF MODERNITY ON IGBO TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CULTURAL VALUES

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Abstract
Great changes have taken place in Igbo traditional religion and its cultural values. The influences of modernity have altered the Igbo way of life. The spirit of community life, hospitality and human relations which were part of Igbo cultural heritage and values have been shattered. Their traditional religious belief and pattern of worship to their gods and divinities have been thwarted. Things are no longer the same. Thus, this paper x-rayed the influence of modernity in Igbo traditional religion and its cultural values. Phenomenological research approach was adopted for optimal result. The paper maintained that to large extent modern factors such as Christianity, education, urbanization, industrialization to mention but these have greatly influenced the Igbo traditional religion and its cultural values. In order to address and protect the Igbo traditional religion and cultural values from bastardization and extinction, this paper recommended among others that Igbo people should embrace their cultural heritage and treat western cultures as alternative way of life.

Key Words: Influence, Modernity, African Traditional Religion, Cultural Values, Igbo People.

Introduction
Prior to modernization, Igbo culture was well established among the traditional Igbo people. But with the recent exposure to modernity people’s way of life changed. The move towards Christianity, western education, urbanization and industrialization were geared towards destroying the indigenous Igbo pattern of life. Achebe (1977) lamented that the Igbo traditional religion and cultural values have been adulterated and shattered as a result of cultural diffusion between the western world and the Igbo people. Aka (2016) also opined that westernization equally furthered the incipient destruction of Igbo values, thus, the dwindling of moral life at the moment in Igbo society is traceable to modernity. Formerly, Igbo belief in the creator God called Chukwu. They worship their God through the divinities, deities, ancestors and spirits. But recently, Christianity has taken over, leaving us with a number of churches and numerous denominations. The traditional attire has been replaced with modern clothes like skirts, trousers, shirts. Some traditional festivals that the Igbo cherish so much such as new yam festival (iwa ji) masquerade festival (iti mmuonwu) have been altered as a result of modernity. People that practice this culture are seen and addressed as pagans. Even the traditional marriage system is no longer the same, formerly, the Igbo practice polygamy but now monogamy is the prevalent form of marriage in modern Igbo. Ikeji (2014) lamented thus, monogamy is a prevalent form of marriage in our modern culture, bye bye to ancient polygamy. Arowolo (2010) also noted that extended family has given way to nuclear family. Traditional African family values are breaking down very rapidly. Extended family that was wonderful instrument like a social verve, social security in our community has given way to nuclear family. There is no more respect for the aged, and no more regard for values that we held sacrosanct. People no longer communalize, nobody wants to be anybody’s brother’s keeper. Urbanization has led to exodus of rural dwellers and the displacement of large segments of the
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Christianity

The approach of Christianity was misguided and geared towards destroying the indigenous pattern of life. It even thought there were some fundamental negative aspects of the Igbo belief system, Christianity condemned virtually every aspect of the belief system with no second thought, they saw Igboland and by extension the entire Africa as ‘Nazareth’, where nothing good could come from. In their blindness, they failed to recognize some positive elements of the traditional religion. Instead they contentiously used various derogatory words and opprobrious terminologies in describing it. In the words of Udeagha (2010:21), the choice of terms which the western missionaries and scholars used in describing the native, indigenous and traditional religion of the Africans, were not just derogatory and opprobrious but also inflammatory and seditious. They condemned the religion as idolatry, paganism, animism, ancestor worship, heathenism, fetishism and others. Such blatant condemnation was borne out of pride and arrogance. In view of their cultural sophistication, the Europeans disregarded the way of life that does not measure up to their own cultural pattern. The intrusion and imposition of the western religion and culture on Igbo traditional religion and culture is fictionalized. According to Chinue Achebe in Things Fall Apart (1958:24-25) Obierika soberly equipped that:

The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peacefully with his religion; we are amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.

Of course, things fell apart as Christianity started to dominate and win converts. But they failed to look at the values of Igbo religion and culture before uncritically imposing their religious pattern, the effects are far-reaching.

Today, the dwindling moral life in the society is traceable to Christianity. Because of the weakness of Christianity to punish evil immediately, the moral decadence of the society is continually on the increase. As long as the people are concerned, Christianity reserves punishment post-mortem. Whereas the traditional religion believes that no human action good or bad escapes the vigilant attention of God, ala (the earth goddess), and the ancestors. These forces sanction or reward according to every one’s action. The punishment and condemnation of evil and any immoral act, therefore was done immediately. But, Christian agents and other forces destroyed the Igbo means of social control. The Christian converts were taught against oath swearing, oracles and taboos as means of social control, contrary to the traditional way: they destroyed the beliefs in the fear of the wrath of the gods and ancestors. To this end, the Christians become fanatical towards the gods and started to cut down and destroy various sacred groves and shrines. The most important of the oracles with its shrine in Aro-Chukwu was the long juju popularly known as the Ubiniukpabi of the Aros. In 1901/1902 the British carried out expedition in Aro-Chukwu in pursuance of its opening up of the interior of the country but with the specific aim of destroying the shrine of the long juju (Ileogu 1985:70). Thus with the assistance of the colonial military, various shrines and gods were destroyed in order to enable the missionaries apply more effectively their teaching that Christians should ignore social control and other uses made of the groves and shrines. The massive and intolerant destruction of those places was a major onslaught on the Igbo traditional religion and cultural practices.

Christianity infiltrated the Igbo marriage institution, destabilized and bastardized it. Christianity preached against polygamy as a form of heathen practices and way of life which should be put away or not to be practiced by Christian converts. For Christians it should be one husband one wife. The Igbo regard polygamy as a healthy institution which ensure respect for husband and love for wives, assures social security to the children and check flirting and prostitution. As such, the young Igbo are always conscious of his communal existence and root traceable to the polygamous relation and association. The most painful aspect of this infiltration is the bastardization of the traditional marriage culture through gay marriage. To the Igbo gay marriage is not just a taboo but also an abomination of unquantifiable magnitude. It is a sin against Chukwu (God), ala (earth goddess), the gods, the ancestors, and man.
The Christian strategy of attracting converts with material gifts has triggered off materialism, worldliness, get-rich-quick-syndrome, ostentatious living as well as corruption and other criminal acts that are associated with them. It is disheartening that this well-intended strategy has pushed aside ethical and moral values of Igbo culture and apparently enthroned a materialistic worldview.

The spirit of communalism, hospitality and human relations which were part of Igbo cultural heritage and values, have been shattered by Christianity. Christians of the same kindred and community who would have enjoyed communalism are always against one another because they are Christians of different denominations. Their fanatical intolerance is more manifest against non-Christians. They can hardly tolerate or intermingle with them. Some of them do not belong to community development association and other meetings. They justify their stand with the biblical injunction “be not equally yoked together with unbelievers” (II Corinthians 6:14). The practice of these extremists has affected adversely the cultural values of the Igbo. The sense of moral awe and fear which characterized an average traditional Igbo has been disregarded by Christianity. At times they induce their converts to break the laws and taboos. The Igbo were always mindful of taboos and the sacred laws which bring about moral and social order. But Christianity and western life style that are associated with it, have thrown up “I don’t care and care free attitude”, hence the convert upsurge of moral decadence in the society.

The Christian whirlwind also blows around the Ozo title institution. Ozo title in some sub-cultural areas of Igboland is an ethically and socially elevated traditional title. Therefore the individual who has taken Ozo title must live a holy life, uphold publicly and privately the morality of the land and observe all the taboos, religious ceremonies of all the gods and goddess of his community (Ileogu 1985:31). This highly elevated institution was condemned by Christianity as paganism and anyone who claims to be a ‘born again’ Christian is not allowed to take it. Achebe (1985:123) painted such picture in Things Fall Apart when Obierika regretted that:

The Church had come and led many astray not only low born and outcasts but sometimes a worthy man has joined it. Such a man was Ogbuefi Ugonna, who had taken two titles and who like a Madman, had cut anklet of his titles and cast it away to join Christianity.

Traditional chieftains were also affected by this influence; it is indeed painful that irrespective of the enormous social control principles that were associated with Ozo title taking, Christianity condemned it. The entire institution of sacred specialists was also affected by the wave of Christianity. Most Igbo beliefs and practices that underscored the place and roles of diviners, medicine men, mediums, priests and other traditional specialists were challenged. Most of the functions of sacred specialists have been taken over by the Christian Religion. Such functions of medicine men, prophets/prophetess, diviners/mediums are becoming irrelevant since the Christian religion have among them those who perform miracles, see visions and interpret dreams and more importantly, they also believe in the existence of evil spirits and their negative effects on people which in most cases are cast out through prayer instead of consulting the traditional priests for sacrifice or the medicine men to prepare medicine or charm to ward off the evil spirit. These without doubt have affected the traditional religion and cultural practices in Igboland.

**Education**

The agents of Western education and civilization in Igboland were the missionaries. Through evangelism they introduced western cultures and values, and the Igbo were made to accept them as a better way of life. They gradually imposed western culture on Igbo traditional culture. “The viable approach adopted by the missionaries was the introduction of schools and this certainly radicalized the ground work of Igbo society. In fact, education in modern historiography has been acclaimed as being responsible for the massive conversion to Christianity” (Achebe 2002:68). The missionaries saw the introduction and acquisition of western education on the part of the native Igbo as a means of actualizing their aims in the school system, churches and traditions. Education facilitated the process of evangelism as educated personnel mostly graduates of the mission schools constituted the power house of missionary enterprise and the manpower on which the colonial government used to administer Igboland. The European did not border to understand the nature of Igbo traditional value system. On this note, Okolo (1979:20) remarked that; “Neither African nor her culture was really understood”. It was furthermore a sobering fact for him (African) to realize that colonized education gave him academic degree but denied him pride in himself, in his culture and in his fellow Africans. Above all, it did not teach him to be self-reliant. The impatience of westerners to
observe the culture of the Igbo may probably be because “the education that comes along with the foreigners are in some respect higher and more sophisticated than traditional value” (Ugwu and Ugwueye 2004:134).

The foreigners only saw the transient and negative aspects of the African religion and culture. Thus the inability of the agents of western education and culture to appreciate the positive elements of Igbo culture dealt a negative blow on the traditional values. As result of this influence of western education and values, Igbo cultural heritage became vulnerable. Education influenced greatly the social order of Igbo traditional system. Generally, children who went to school were unable to participate in the activities of their age grades and peers because they were preoccupied with Christian school activities. Therefore, such socio-cultural activities like initiation into the masquerade societies, training to become a sacred specialist, learning the social and cultic dances and the various acolyte duties associated with the sundry celebrations, sacrifices and public worship of clan and family gods were consciously denied these children by the missionaries. On the other hand, the emphasis of the missionaries was on the running of boarding schools in which the children would be socialized in different values and ethos far away from what was obtaining in Igboland (Ileogu 1985:69). Those who attended school were taught based on Christian principles as such the hitherto affinity in traditional value system gradually lost hold for Christianity. On this note, Afigbo (1980:349) remarks that, the success of the Christian missionaries in Igboland was like in many other parts of Africa, brought about not so much by preaching ‘Christ crucified’ as through the parade of the advantages of literacy over illiteracy, which is through school.

Today the effect of this has degenerated to the extent that some educated Igbo men, have forgotten their culture in preference to western culture. Chinweizu (1978:498) underscored this disheartening trend in the following manner:

What European does we automatically assume as the standard we must imitate in order to be civilized. As a result we have lost our ability to define ourselves. We gladly accept every ridiculous definition of what we are supposed to be, so long as it is proffered by the west.

With this Eurocentric mentality, some Igbo native frown at most aspect of their own culture, they see it as barbaric and devilish. They speak the Western English language and other foreign languages; they talk like them, dress, eat, walk, bathe, build houses and simply do everything imitating white men. They will conveniently speak English language to their kith and kin at the peril of their native Igbo dialects and language. Provoked by this, Nze thundered:

Little did the Igbo know that by accepting western education, they had indirectly accepted western culture at the expense of their own culture. That is why for anything to be appreciated in Igboland and accorded prestige, it must be made in foreign country. Degrees and certificates must be from London, America, Germany etc. a good shoe manufactured in Onitsha, Aba and Nnewi market must have his shops tagged made in Italy, France etc. to get market for them.

The educated elite interpret things scientifically instead of consulting the Diviner/Medium to see and interpret their problem. Their scientific approach to problems has made the service of traditional specialists irrelevant. In case of ill health, people prefer to consult orthodox doctors who will diagnose their ailment scientifically and prescribe appropriate drugs for them thereby making the services of Medicine men/Diviners ineffective. The rainmakers are not left out; the weather is now being interpreted in scientific way. Their services are no longer needed. The educated people also prefer to be addressed as doctors, lawyers, or engineers as the case may be rather than to be addressed as king or queen, making the kingship institution ineffective.

The adverse influence of education on Igbo culture is far-reaching. However, it must be mentioned here that the influence of Western Education was not wholly on the adverse dimension. There are some positive contributions which seem to tilt heavier towards the positive than the negative on the scale. Formal education is considered as very significant for improving standard of living in Nigeria, phenomenal development in science and technology, reliable methods of keeping records, achievements of literacy among some population of the Igbo and abolition of some obnoxious and cruel aspect of Igbo culture. The most important positive impact of western education is the fact that some educated Igbo people have come to realize that the momentous wave of western cultural values alienated them from their traditional cultural
roots without giving them satisfactory substitute. This realization has interestingly triggered off the search for and preservation of Igbo culture. For instance through the Ahajioku Annual Lecture and other similar means, the Igbo are making concerted efforts to bring Igbo culture into the picture of modern world.

Urbanization

Urbanization is used here to refer to the movement of people from the rural areas to cities or urban areas, which in most times, result to the expansion of the urban area at the detriment of the rural area. Following the advent of Christianity and colonialism, the Igbo traditional societies that had been predominantly rural for most of its history experienced a rapid and profound reorientation of their societies and a shift of the means of survival towards cities and urban centers. The concentration of wealth, prestige, political power and religious leaning in the cities attracted large number of migrants, both from the neighbouring rural areas and from distant regions. Urban areas offered greater occupational opportunities which rural areas did not have. Such job opportunities enabled workers to earn more money and to send money back to family members in rural areas. In addition, the availability of modern facilities has facilitated the movement of the Igbo to urban cities. “But with modern facilities and commoditization links and networks of roads and bridges, distant places are now relatively near. The railways link up important towns like Enugu, Aba, Port-Harcourt, Umuahia, the Niger bridge links Onitsha with Asaba”, (Achinike 2002:69). It is instructive to stress that the native of the Igbo is a strong factor for their presence in most urban areas and cities. They are found anywhere in Nigeria and beyond, as a result of the above socio-economic, adaptive and acclimatize nature. In view of this, Nebo stresses: “there is almost no village in Nigeria where the Igbo do not live and contribute their quota to its economic output. Wherever they settle, unlike most other ethnic nationalities, they build their homes, according to their old age saying “Ebe onye no ka o n’ awachi.”

On a global attestation of the above truth, Anyika (1988:349) confirmed that: “for one thing, the Igbo are great travelers and ebullient traders and there is hardly any place in Africa, indeed the entire world where they are not found”. The effect of such population migration to everywhere in the world is far-reaching on Igbo traditional life and culture. The traditional culture of Igbo has been adulterated as a result of urbanization. In the urban areas, the Igbo live among people of other races and cultures as against an ideal traditional Igbo society. This breeds cross-fertilization of beliefs and cultures which consequently propels the Igbo to adopt a pattern of life that is not in tandem with what is obtained in his own Igbo villages and communities.

Urbanization affected adversely the social and religious order of Igbo traditional society. Those who migrated to urban areas were unable to continue with the traditional religious practices of the Igbo. Urban life characterized by its individualism is an unfavourable atmosphere and milieu for the Igbo belief in Umunna bu ike or Igwe bu ike (the family or unity is strength/solidarity). This has led to so many losses of lives which the assistance of groups in a rural area setting would have helped in solving some of those problems that eventually degenerated to be demise of such individual in the urban area. The growth of urbanization within Igboland and the consequent drift from the village to the cities have led to gradual desegregation of traditional society, which provide ideal setting for convergence of art and life in which folktales, oral tradition, art and play life find their vibrant from and dynamism. This indeed portend danger in Igbo traditional art and oral literature which are means of socialization, including values as they are deeply loaded with a sense of unity and existence.

Moreover, it has far-reaching effects on the institutions of sacred specialists. Some shrines and deities have been abandoned by those who are supposed to be their priests/priestesses and moved to urban areas. Youths who are dedicated to serve deities from birth, grow up to reject and disassociate themselves from any such practices. As a result of this, many shrines and deities do not have ministers any longer. The kingship thrones which in most cases are hereditary suffer much set-back because those who are supposed to inherit the throne are nowhere to be found within the rural area. All have gone in search for greener pasture. These in no small measure have affected the Igbo religion and culture.

Industrialization

The influence of industrialization is indeed another pattern of change in Igbo traditional society. Industrialization is the art of establishing group of firms that can produce products and render services. Industries are established in areas especially urban areas where there are availability of infrastructural facilities and other materials that will enable the growth and the survival of the industry. It is a means of economic development and empowerment. The beginning of industrialization and the training of the Igbo in
western technology closely ushered in the twin brothers of Christianity and colonization. The industrial mission run by the C.M.S. had as early as 3rd January, 1876 admitted boys at Onitsha to train in technical skills and trade like brick-making and brick-laying, carpentry and the like”, (Ileogu 1985:90). Through the various educational skills and facilities provided by the missions, the desire for industrialization and technological practices of Europeans were gradually introduced in Igboland. Not quite long, industrialization within and outside ‘Igbonland gave rise to Igbo Diaspora’, which created commercial contact with other ethnic groups in Nigeria and beyond. Propelled by the gains of industrialization, the Igbo rapidly took advantage of new economic opportunities available across Nigeria, moving to locations across the country. People from rural areas migrate within the Igbo area of Abia, Enugu, Nnewi, and Onitsha but the bulk of migration was outside Igbo hinterland to Western and Northern Nigeria especially, Lagos, Kano, Jos and Maiduguri as well as to the neighbouring countries like Benin, Togo, Ghana, Cameroon etc. On this Anyika (1988:347) remarked that, “for one thing, the Igbo are greatly travelers and ebullient traders and there is hardly any place in Africa, indeed in the entire world where they are not found”.

The influence of industrialization has brought many individuals in Igboland into situations entirely unknown in Igbo traditional life. Some are forced directly or indirectly by economic realities to go and work in the industries mainly located in the cities, leaving their ancestral land, home kith and kin. This detachment from the land to which the Igbo are mystically bound and the thrust into situations where corporate existence has no meaning have produced uncultured individuals. Such individuals or industrial workers are cut off from corporate morality, customs and traditional solidarity which are the mark of identity and ideal Igbo society. Prior to the coming of the white men, either as a missionary, or colonial administrator, or industrialist, the Igbo traditional society provided for the people with satisfactory living with only the necessities of life.

The influence of industrialization has indeed underscored Igbo values. Provoked by this ugly trend Ileogu (1985:04) recalled with nostalgia that: “collective participation in meaningful labour and the exercise of skill is abandoned”. For in the traditional society craftsmanship was held in honour. A village basket maker regarded his skill as a gift from ancestral spirits for the wellbeing of the community of which the dead ancestors were still a part. No consideration of quantity will diminish the quality for the finished product of all forms of skills and craftsmanship were means of looking beyond the temporal to the spiritual source of beauty. There was the fear that failure to execute skillfully in wood carving or blacksmithing or building the walls of a house could incur the wrath of the ancestors and bring calamity upon the community. With the influence of scientific technology, such fear was destroyed.

Some traditional Igbo cultures of leisure, oral literature, traditional wrestling and even town criers are at the risk of eventual extinction as result of industrialization. With the modern technological means of leisure, entertainment, instruction and dissemination of information as facilitated through television and radio especially with the wave of digital cable networks such as MYTV, DSTV, HITV, GOTV, REALSUMMIT and the establishment of many radio stations which their wide reaches penetrated even the remote hamlets and agglomeration, sent dangerous signals to places which hitherto were grounds and strongholds for traditional leisure and information.

In the area of medicine, industrial products have affected beliefs and practices. Medical equipment that are produced in these industries are always available to help in diagnosing the cause of an ailment, unlike the traditional method which places premium on spiritual forces due to the machinations of evil forces. The influence of technology in dealing with the tropical diseases has seriously undermined traditional medicine. The influence of industrialization has indeed made a dichotomy in road in Igbo land, driven a wedge between traditional life and computer age which was something unknown in traditional Igbo way of life.

**Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

- The Igbo leaders should assist in order to ensure that the Igbo traditional religion and cultural values are not adulterated as a result of cultural diffusion between the western world and the Igbo.
- Christianity should be patterned to assume a true image of social change rather than destroying the Igbo way of life.
- The spirit of communalism, hospitality and human relations which the Igbo were known for should be strictly embraced once again by the Igbo.
- The Igbo elites should from time to time organize cultural festivals that will bring together those in Diaspora to unite with their kith and kin with the view of reviving their cultural heritage.
Conclusion
This paper has taken the bold step to investigate the influence of modernity on Igbo traditional religion and its cultural values. Modern factors such as Christianity, Education, Urbanization and Industrialization have been recognized agents that facilitated the changes, alteration and bastardization of Igbo cultural values. However, there are some positive influences of modernity which seem to outshine the negative side of it. For instance, the influence of western education was not wholly on the adverse dimension. Therefore, suggestions were made thus; that the Igbo elites should assist to ensure that the Igbo traditional religion and its cultural values are not altered as result of cultural diffusion between the western world and the Igbo.

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