## SOCIAL CHANGE: CHALLENGES TO CULTURAL PRESERVATION OF ARTIFACTS AND RELIGIOUS OBJECTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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**Abstract**

*Every society is culturally rich in diverse ways and there are challenges to proper preservation of such work of arts and religious objects. A lot of people are virtually against the preservation of artifacts and religious objects as they are seen as mere fetish objects. The objectives of the study were to assess the contribution of western education, modernization/ technology to the people of Akwa Ibom State. Examine the influence of western education, modernization/ technology to cultural artifacts and religious objects in Akwa Ibom State. The historical phenomenology method was used in the study. The findings of the study showed that traditional education during the pre-colonial period was a socializing agency which produced people who were to fit into the community and the system was primarily vocational and moral, purely functional.*

**Introduction**

Nigeria is a society with abundant rich cultural heritage that are scattered within the diverse ethnic nationalities. These cultural heritages include language, marriage and burial rites, dressing, greetings, music, folklore, religion, and other tangible cultural monuments, natural sites and cultural landscapes. Some of these art forms have died or reduced to infinitesimal level over time due to Western influence and need to be revitalized. The Nigerian society is a dynamic society hence susceptible to changes, although Christianity as a world religion had brought positive influences or effects on the Nigerian communities, they had also dealt a staggering blow on social, economic, religious and political systems (Ugwu, 2002).

Concern with social change has spanned many centuries of social thought. Dahrendorf (1959, p.162) notes that "society is at every point subject to the process of change, that social change is ubiquitous". In the same manner, Moore (1963, pp.46-47) defines social change as "the significant alteration of social structures including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms, values and cultural products and symbols". This definition embraces small scale, large scale, cyclical and revolutionary change in its scope. According to Strasser and Randell (1981, p.17) who note that "social change is regarded as a part of cultural change, which embraces all change in any branch of culture such as art, science, technology and philosophy".

The whole theme of religious change in Africa has been a very difficult task in the sense that it has been seen from the perspective of a phenomenon which only began when Africans came into contact with Europeans (Onunwa, 1990). However, the pattern of change among many West African societies had been an ongoing process moving in different directions. To support this, Onunwa (1990, p.150) notes that "numerous primary and secondary migrations within the different territories dating far back into history before contact with Europeans were made and occasioned with some religious changes like borrowing and losing of some religious ideas and artifacts".

The problem of this study is that many people do not still see the negative impact unleashed by western education, and modernization/ technology despite its contributions on the cultural preservation of artifacts and religious objects in Akwa Ibom State. Also, most of those artifacts and religious objects cannot be found anymore for preservation due to the influence of western education, and modernization/ technology.

It is therefore the aim of this chapter to look at some of the areas in which social change affects or challenges the value and preservation of artifacts and religious objects in the Nigerian society. The specific objectives were to: assess the contribution of western education, modernization/ technology to the people of Akwa Ibom State. Examine the influence of western education, modernization/ technology to cultural artifacts and religious objects in Akwa Ibom State.

**Methodology**

Historical phenomenology method was employed in this study and the reason for its choice being that of suspension of judgments, biases and habitual mode of thoughts by the researcher in being open minded to what the subject offered. Secondly, it enabled the researcher to seek for the use of historical tools such as artifacts and religious objects to gather information by relying on the history and experiences of the people in the study area. Thirdly, this phenomenological method revealed the work of what it was, by its presence, and with what the researcher knew about it, as an insider undertaking a work on the people with the researcher's personal experiences of the subject of study.

The research instruments used in the study were primary and secondary sources of information and observation. The primary sources included data obtained from the field through oral interviews and personal observation by the researcher as an indigene of the study area. The secondary sources included: published and unpublished books, seminar papers, journals, intelligence reports, archival and internet materials, and government publications.

**Theoretical Framework**

Cultural Identity theory in cultural studies was used in this work because it refers to a person's sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. This process of identity involves learning about and accepting traditions, heritage, language, religion, ancestry, aesthetics, thinking patterns, and social structures of a culture (Lustig, 2013). This means that culture is a part of people's self- concept as people internalize the beliefs, values, norms, and social practices of their culture and identify themselves with the said culture.

This theory is very important because it elucidates the content of values as guiding principles, to meaningful symbols, and to lifestyles that people share together in a group which the people of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria is not an exception. It further shows how the concept of self- concept becomes dynamic and multifaceted within a changing social society.

The gap filled in this study is in the area of reiterating the place of importance of traditional education, arts, religious objects, etc which remains alive, active in the daily lives of the people of Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria.

**Social Change and Western Education**

Education is the foundation of human development and can be acquired from the school system, regarded as 'formal education' or out of school system that is, also regarded as 'informal education' (Diogu, 2010). These training systems are relevant and have contributed to the development of man in the society. Okafor (1992, p.17) notes that "education is one of the most important factors that distinguish man from animals, and in a broad sense embraces all those experiences of the individual through which knowledge is required".

The history of Western education (formal education) dates back in Nigeria to the early contact of some people in Nigeria with the Europeans (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). This early contact was not devoid of religious motives as the Portuguese also had interest in Christianizing the people (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002). In order to effectively engage in meaningful dealing with the indigenous people, the Portuguese then thought it necessary to give the people some rudimentary education and Christianity (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). According to Erhagbe and Osagie (2002, p.84) who states that "a number of African missionaries and teachers were produced in Sierre Leone like Samuel Ajayi Crowther, from where some of them found their way to Badagary- a town near Lagos, where the first English speaking church was established".

What can be considered as the first formal school in Nigeria was opened in Badagary on the 24th September 1842 by Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman and Mr. and Mrs. Graft of Wesleyan Missionary Society (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002). It is from this early beginning that the influence of the missions on education was vitally evidenced. Fafunwa, quoted by Erhagbe and Osagie (2002, p.82) agree that "Samuel Crowther and Henry Townsend, who began their missionary work in 1844 both arrived at Abeokuta where mission houses, churches and schools were built". It is interesting to note that the success of the early moves to establish schools in Nigeria is largely attributed to the efforts of these pioneers. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission (RCM), and Primitive Methodist Society (PMS) were at the forefront in this endeavour (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002).

The colonial government of the British started showing interest in education after a long period of about forty years and at this stage, missions were given grant to help facilitate education. After some years the colonial government also intervened in the sector with the promulgation of 1882 education ordinance aimed at supervision of educational activities across

West African Coast, making education gradually passed on to government control (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). Even with the full involvement of the government in education, the missions continued to maintain the lead in providing education for Nigerians. For instance, Fafunwa (1974) notes that:

In 1912 the number of government-owned primary schools stood at fifty-nine (59) while mission-owned schools were ninety-one (91). He also notes that the large number of pupils who graduated from these schools necessitated the provision of secondary education which again were basically the efforts of the missions. (p.91).

So, with the help of the government through favourable education policies, the missions provided functional and affordable education in Nigeria at that earliest period.

The activities of the missions were centered mostly in the south because of the resistance of the mission activities in the north and this situation accounts for the great disparity in educational orientation of the two regions (U. Friday, Personal Communication, December 22, 2013). Meanwhile, the issue of furthering education beyond the secondary school level eventually led Nigerian secondary school leavers to agitate for higher education from the British colonial government (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). Efforts of Edward Blyden and James Horton were quite remarkable in this regards though some Nigerians found their way into Britain and America for further studies and the missions provided necessary support to students who graduated from their secondary institutions (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012).

The quest for higher education in Nigeria continued to engage the minds of various sections of the society and from 1943, decision to establish universities in West African Coast was taken (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). In May 1947, a college was established at Ibadan and by the first half of 1960's, indigenous universities had started emerging across the country with the university of Nigeria, Nsukka leading the way in 1960 (Erhagbe & Osagie, 2002).

Since 1960 till date, Nigeria has witnessed exponential and astronomical increase in the establishment of schools at all levels thus, from non availability of schools, attention has gradually shifted to the issue of standard and affordability of education in Nigeria (Ebhomielen & Idemudia, 2012). Education, above all, has come from the churches and educated African owes much to the missions. According to Parrinder (1974, p.143) who notes that "many people do not realize that Africans who visited Europe for study are nearly all products of mission schools and so are favourably disposed towards the church unless they get soured by a colour-

bar". The missionaries introduced Western education and established schools in various parts of Akwa Ibom State like Holy family College, Abak (1942), Methodist Boy's High School, Oron (1905), Cornelia Connelly College, Afaha Oku-Uyo (1944), Union Secondary School, Ibiaku (1948) (Umanah, 2008). With these numerous mission schools, Western education made the people to read and write as a result illiteracy was wiped out.

**Social Change and Modernization/ Technology**

The theory of modernization argues that societies develop in fairly predictable stages through which they become increasingly complex. Development depends primarily on the importation of technology as well as a number of other political and social changes believed to come about as a result. At the very first beginning of the evolution of human society, there were simple and rudimentary technology like stick, bow and arrow and later when iron became part of the people's cultural repertoire like knife, hoe and sword (Uche, 1998). These artifacts set the tone for social life and also the socio-economic activities during pre-historic times.

An American economist, Walt Whiteman Rostow postulates "the model that economic growth occurs in five stages of varying length: traditional society, preconditions for take-off, take-off, drive to maturity and age of high mass consumption" (Anele, 1999, p.71). Explaining this, Rowstow asserts that "countries go through each of these stages fairly linearly, and set out a number of conditions that were likely to occur in investment, consumption and social trends at each state" (Anele, 1999, p.72). This means that not all of the conditions were certain to occur at each stage and the stages and transition periods may occur at varying lengths from country to country, and even from region to region.

The whole idea about modernization involves a linear movement from a traditional past towards a modernized or developed future. The emphasis is on the degree of difference or modernity between different societies, especially that between the Western and Third World societies. As a Western originated theory, modernization theory assumes that the Western world is developed whereas, the non-Western nations are under developed and so, for the latter to develop, they must replicate the developmental path followed by the former (Anele, 1999).

On the other hand, the application of pure science to the immediate, practical ends of human beings is defined as technology (Uche, 1998). Technology is the application of scientific knowledge acquired from inquiring into the forces and materials of the environment (Torka'a,

2000). Technology, as an aspect of material culture covers a wide range of activities which include: arts, textiles, sculpture, ceramics and others which are among the important aspects of cultural heritage in which civilizations are built (Sharer & Ashmore, 1979). In support of this, Okoli (1988) states thus:

> Technology is to a large extent, a product of human activities and part and parcel of his culture. And culture has been defined simply as the way people do their thing. It is the way of life of a people. It includes all the ideals, arts and artifacts through which a group of people make meaning out of their everyday challenges. (p.7).

It shows that the tools in the service of the Christian missionaries were not only religious but also that challenges which confront a society are met with the technology available to it.


## CHALLENGING FACTORS IN CULTURAL PRESERVATION OF ARTIFACTS AND RELIGIOUS OBJECTS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

**Influence of Western Education**

The process of education in traditional society took place with groups of young people under the supervision of an older person. The high point of the educational process was their initiation into adulthood, or the 'rites of passages' (E. Ekanem, Personal Communication, January 28, 2014). This goes to show that the process of education was in totality with the well-being of an individual in the society aforementioned. Anyanwu (2004, p.168) notes that "children acquired linguistic skills and enlarged their vocabularies through listening to folktales, sagas, proverbs, riddles, athletic skills such as hunting, fishing, swimming were taught, knowledge to build houses, make pots, weave baskets, art of warfare and social norms of society".

Boys and girls were taught separately those practices and customs important for their assuming the sex-role responsibilities of adults (E. Ekanem, Personal Communication, January 28, 2014). Thus, the main aspect of this educational process is that it was based on the accumulated practical experience of the people which was passed from generation to generation by oral tradition and apprenticeship relationships (Babu, 1981, p.16). Fafunwa (1974, p.15) points out that "African society regarded education as a means to an end and not an end in itself, and in old Africa education was an integrated experience as it combined physical training with character building and manual activity with intellectual training".

The educational system in the traditional Africa therefore reinforced the physical requirements of soldiering, hunting and combined these with moral education (Ifeanacho, 1998). Thus, the author notes that "the purpose of education was inculcated in African's spiritual and moral values as well as the physique and co-operative attitudes which they required to perform their social responsibilities" (p.76). Again, the author further observed that "its dynamics were prevalently informal and participatory and ceremonies, rituals, recitation, demonstration, imitation and story- telling, provided leading opportunities for Africans" (p.76). It goes to show that to meet the needs of society then, education in traditional Nigerian society provided men and women with the skills, knowledge and attitudes they required to master and dominate their environment.

However, despite the positive function Western education played in transforming the traditional society, the missionaries used it to destroy indigenous institutions, artifacts and religious objects either by attrition or neglect. Diogu (2010) notes that:

> During the colonial and early colonial periods, arts and crafts, which was regarded as unimportant subject was not given serious instructional attention but was practiced as hobby and usually placed at the last period unlike home economics, sports, fine and applied arts, music education or theater arts. (p.218).

Ilogu (1974) and Okwueze (2003) note that on arrival Christianity and Western education became veritable social forces, disrupting many aspects of traditional way of life observed by the African.

Western educated people replaced the traditional arts with Western art works. It taught the people that artifacts and religious objects are part of fetish belief. They greatly sowed a seed of discord between tradition, culture, customs and Western style of life. Schools were also used by the missionaries basically as an avenue for conversion of the people. It should be noted that the level of literary education received from the missionary schools was just enough to engage the converts to the service of the European missionaries, administrators, and the merchants.

Omenka (2005, p.36) states that "the missionary bodies were seen as the religious arm of the colonial imperialism, whose duty it was to train people who will be of service to the imperial government". From the foregoing, Nigerians embarked on social, political, economic, and religious changes in the bid to salvaging Nigeria from the degradation of the colonial masters and the missionaries on their cultural values.

Furthermore, Chinweizu (1978, p.xiv) reinforces that "it was mis-education which encouraged the Africans to glorify all things European and taught a low esteem for and negative attitude towards things African". This ideology has groomed a good environment for racial discrimination to thrive. Placing of Western culture as superior to traditional culture as a result of education shows in the way people respond negatively to norms and values of traditional religion including the use and appreciation of artifacts and religious objects. Perhaps, no other factor more seriously contributed to the decay and disappearance of many aspects of traditional culture than the introduction of Western education (Anyanwu, 2004).

This educational system became a party to the undermining of parental authority and the development of a crisis of personal identity, with its individualistic tendencies the communal way of life encouraged by the traditional religion was much threatened (Anyanwu, 2004). Amponsah (1975, p.20) reiterates that "Western education made the educated West Africans look down upon traditional customs and institutions as unprogressive and to withdraw from any of the traditional festivals and observances". The children who went to schools were unable to or more likely prohibited from participating in the activities of their age sets like initiation into masquerade societies, learning social and cultic dances, celebrations marking puberty rites (Anyanwu, 2004). Ogbuji (2010, p.136) also reinforces that "in time past, youthful energy was employed in farm work, morning to evening with the advent of education the youth seems to have more time to themselves than is necessary".

**Influence of Modernization/ Technology**

Akwanya (2012, p.68) notes that "even science and technology and material wealth were involved, aspects of material culture which mainstream Christianity would hardly acknowledge as part of its system".

Also, hairstyles are mindlessly copied from outside the country. Punk, Tyson and other hairstyles are the craze among Nigerian youths and the greatest victims seem to be the women folk as their hairstyles, dresses and general carriage are artificial and foreign, and black is no longer beautiful (Okoli, 1988). Nwonyeh (2007) commenting on the influence of technology on indigenous Nigerian music notes that:

The period in which we are is a technology age, and also an age when technology is in vogue. It is a time when great importance is attached to the study of physics, chemistry,

biology, mathematics, computer, etc, forgetting that meaningful and relevant education of an individual or group of persons cannot be achieved with technology education only, but with the combination of other disciplines. (p.271).

The passage of time has brought modern ways of approaching issues and of doing things which is in line with world best practices. Agu and Ali (2012, p.182) note that "prior to colonial rule, Nigeria possessed technological feats that were comparable if not better than their foreign counterparts and these feats were facilitated by the existence of guilds of crafts in various parts of Nigeria who produced masterpieces particularly sculptures".

Christianity and modernization have had serious effects on the traditional methods of protecting and maintaining morality in traditional societies, Western legal and judicial system that followed Christianity have replaced the traditional systems declaring most of their methods illegal (Okwueze, 2003). Further, Okwueze, commenting on the legal and judicial system notes that:

Religious beliefs and practices which formed the basis of the most effective means of social control in the villages have not been given effective recognition by the modern legal system. For instance, the use of divination and other devices for detecting offences in the traditional ways are not recognized by the modern legal system. Also, sacred objects used in the village to prevent violence, effect peaceful settlement of disputes, were ordered to be taken to the police station. (p.89).

It must be noted that the use of divination is accompanied with religious objects and artifacts as well.

The adoption of Western trousers, skirts, ties, jackets, long gowns, blouses, necklaces, beads, bracelets, rings, earrings, chains, caps and hats have reduced the use of tribal costumes as a strong mark of cultural identity (Eboh & Inyang, 2004). The youth culture is greatly at variance with known etiquette and manners as girls move about half-naked at the best, wearing trousers/ jeans and blouses that are extremely tight hence, exposing the counter of very sensitive parts of their bodies (Ojukwu, 2010).

To buttress this point, Ukaoha (2013, p.136), commenting on the introduction of Western dresses before the advent of Christianity which brought modernization/technology notes that "the traditional mode of dressing that portrays traditional moral code/ sanctions did not allow seductive/ suggestive dressing/nudity in public but the advent of Christianity brought bizarre,

abuses/insults on the public sensibility and the sacredness of African morality". This shows how some cultural traits become negative and should not be emulated as it goes against traditional values of a people.

This drift to modern products has adversely affected the patronage and sustenance of its traditional forms. Akande (2002) notes that Western adventures made efforts to undermine the cultural heritage of traditional peoples round the world through colonization, imperialism and now modernization and the colonized left in a state of cultural disorientation which is vulnerable to cultural invasion. Commercially, production, distribution and consumption of cultural goods and services have become commodities along with the essentials of life, that is, music, food, clothes, fashion, arts, sports images are now sold in the market (Nwegbu, Eze & Asogwa, 2011).

This means that what was once an element of Nigeria's cultural way of life has become a product rather than unique things which they have made to suit their specific needs and circumstances. Nigerian markets are increasingly bombarded with new art forms, images, new music, clothes and values, and the impact is that the familiar and the old artifacts are being discarded. All these will be lost simply because they are not valued by global markets and the undermining of the peoples existing values, cultures has corrosive impact on the sense of who they are, what they want, and what they respect (Croucher, 2004). Reacting Akande (2002) notes that it is a crises of cultural confidence, combined with economic uncertainty and crime which global integration often brings.

Science and technology has brought so much innovation by developing many equipments and facilities that are gradually taking over some human activities as this has even made more unoccupied time available to the youths (Ogbuji, 2010). Omekwu (2006) observes that modernization and globalization through internet also allow cultural heritage of different tribes in Nigeria to be uploaded, downloaded, and accessed by other people in other countries thereby projecting the cultural identity of Nigeria.

The internet certainly offers the greatest opportunities for cultural exchange, causing more books, journal references and paper based information media and cultural artifacts to migrate to electronic format (Omekwu, 2003). The phrases: Information society, digitization, computer or information explosion, globalization, modernization, cyberspace and information superhighway have forced developed world to operate in a context of change which automatically distorts and affects the ways cultural heritage are documented, preserved and practiced (Nwegbu, Eze &

Asogwa, 2011). This confirms how the culture, folklore and heritage of Western countries have been brought to the doorsteps, reading tables, desktop, or laptop of Nigerians with just a press of the computer keyboard or a click of mouse. It goes a long way to discouraging the physical presence of people at festivals and ceremonies where art and religious objects are showcased, as a way of preserving and the value the people have for their traditions.

Eboh and Inyang (2004, p.107) note that "art objects in the traditional society are drums, gongs, flutes and town criers, and symbols used to transmit information are young palm leaves, plants with spikes, old torn baskets or bags". In recent times, the Nigerian society has witnessed advanced technology in media arts by use of electronic gadgets like telephone, magazines, television, radio and print media such as newspapers, and books. Nwonyeh (2007, p.273) notes that "with efforts made so far, technology has not actually yielded much fruits instead the nation is faced with series of problems ranging from abandonment of her music and culture to lack of man-power to replace the obsolete equipment".

The effect of technology on indigenous Nigerian music has corrupted the people's lives and music because it affects the minds and hearts and can be used to manipulate it for good or bad (Nwonyeh, 2007). For example, a youth who watch violent and sexually explicit lyrics of some rap/blues music is influenced and consciously or unconsciously express this attitude towards his opposite sex. It has been noted that people go for foreign artists and music thereby regarding the indigenous music as unsophisticated and out of date recording.

Nwonyeh (2007, p.275) observes that "the audience can no longer join in the singing as being aroused by the performers due to the restrictions and clear demarcation between audience and performer obtainable from Western style where the audience are purely good listeners". This goes to show that selection and use of costumes in indigenous music performers show elaborate elegance of artistry embedded in the people's culture. Further, the natural scenario are not taken into consideration because are not performed in open air as it used to be for the audience to participate either in dancing to the melodious sounds produced from the locally made musical instruments. Nigerian traditional music is now reserved for the cultural troupe for the entertainment of foreign dignitaries, and everywhere pop, reggae and high-life music predominate (Okoli, 1988).

Okengwu (2010) observes further that:

unhealthy media influences that glorify sex, drugs, gangs and violence are found among youth because the types of movies they watch, music they listen to and the books they read have a way of shaping thought patterns that eventually lead to habitual actions However, all these have made information transmission in Nigeria faster and simpler and have greatly reduced patronage of traditional objects except for some rural communities who still hold on to the practice. (p.107).

Okengwu (2010, p.171) notes that in the words of Colonel David Grossman, an American military instructor about Western media and role models, "few researchers bother any longer to dispute that bloodshed on television and in the movies has any effect on kids/youths who witness them".

Also, contributing to the negative impacts of modernization on traditional practices, Okwueze (2003) states thus:

Due to urbanization, Christianity and education, young men have abandoned their traditional functions in the villages, sacred duties like masquerading, moonlight plays, making shrines and huts for traditional groups, which help to emphasize group solidarity and moral responsibility are no longer performed. Again, able-bodied men who were normally interested in playing masquerades migrate to towns and cities in pursuit of modern life. (p.91).

Modernization makes the shrines, deities and oracles with their priest to be referred to as agents of darkness and people who patronize them are equally seen in the like manner (Agalamanyi, 2004). On the whole, Cole (1989, p.7) notes that "in our age of scientific technology and pragmatism, we lost sight of the symbolic function of much of the imagery of the past". This explains lack-luster attitude, negligence and pressure from within and outside of the traditional community to abandon the values inherent in artifacts and religious objects.

**Recommendations**

i.   Traditional recipes should be enshrined in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in a bid to balancing its importance with other predominant religions.

ii.  Traditional ethics, values and morals should be encouraged by every individual in the society.

iii. Artifacts and religious objects should be protected by individuals and government in the face of social change.

## Conclusion

In the face of social change which had disrupted many traditional institutions and practices, traditional ways of life was still valued, preserved and protected to a large extent from further decadence. In fact, in contemporary Nigerian society there has been a clarion call by researchers and scholars of great repute for the adoption of traditional morals, values, ethos in the Nigerian constitution as this would go a long way in correcting the ills, and vices in the society. The study highlighted the contributions made by western education and modernization/ technology, traditional education system, and the influence of western education, modernization/ technology on cultural preservation of artifacts and religious objects in Akwa Ibom State.

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