

Restoring The Lost Identity Of Ogba People: Problems And Prospects

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Abstract

This paper addressed the disadvantages entrenched by the western agents of change in Ogba land. It is not oblivious of the fact that other African tribes have suffered the same fate of western cultural clash as noted by many scholars, thus, the main highlight of the work was that it provided a solution on how to restore back the lost cultural identity of Ogba people vis-à-vis the socio-cultural predicaments posed by the turmoil of western civilization in Ogba land. It enjoined all Ogbas to come together in the spirit of “Ogba-hood” and censor what should be infused into the peoples’ culture. To that extent it advocates for a proper inculturation of the good aspects of western civilization, while dropping those aspects that may become detrimental to the people’s socio-cultural heritage.

Introduction

The coming of the western agents of change into Ogba land or African soil was applauded by many scholars in defence of western culture. Therefore many advantages were noted in the process. Nevertheless, it is obvious that there was a cultural clash posed by the coming of western culture into Ogba land or the African soil, hence, problems ensued in the socio-cultural settings of the people. For the Ogba people in particular, one of the problems was the destruction of the cultural identity of the people. The Ogba people are recognized through their language, dressing, eating habits, hospitality, brotherhood and many peculiar identities that are culturally Ogba. But today, those cultural identities have been eroded to a large extent as a result of the coming of western agents of change. It is therefore the aim of this work to provide a solution on how to restore back the lost cultural identity of Ogba people. The paper therefore intends to look at some of the advantages of the coming of western civilization in Ogba land, and wherever their presence has become disadvantageous or problematic, it is also the purpose of this research to proffer a solution to them.

Many Ogba people have been plunged into secularism, criminality, youth restiveness, financial misappropriations in the organized sectors, lack of moral rectitude etc without the government or any organized group providing a solution to these social maladies emanating from lack of respect for the peoples cultural values. It is therefore the fundamental objective of this paper to provide a panacea to the lost cultural identity of Ogba land using the oral interview and literature approach. It is hoped that this work will be of utmost benefit to the Ogbas or others who want to undertake a study on social change in Ogba land.

Ogba culture is intensely religious and ethically oriented and has been undergoing, changes. Some of the agents of change have been selected for discussion. They are Christianity, education, secularization and urbanization (Trimingham 1959:200).

Christianity

Among all the agents of change Christianity was the dominant factor, when Christianity came to Ogba, it was introduced without any aspect of inculturation theology, thus every aspect of Ogba traditional religion, Ogba philosophy, Ogba cosmology, Ogba theology, modes of festivals, concept of ancestorship, traditional dancing, kingship inheritance and other socio-cultural values like native or traditional system of marriage and sacrificial rites etc; were all condemned as fetish. What was therefore demonstrated in the spirit of evangelization was the replacement of most parts of the culture with western culture in disguise for Christianity. For example today for most Ogba people what qualifies a woman to be your wife is not just traditional marriage but that you complimented it with white wedding (interview: Agala 2009). This was not so in the pre-modern Ogba, then marriage completed by traditional rites only.

Western Education

Western education is “the acquisition of skills, knowledge, adaptations and exhibitions either by association, observation, learning in world-views, arts, science, philosophy which are technically of the occidental or western world origin” (John 2010:136). There is a wrong application of western education in Ogba land. Many, educated Ogba people are now indigenous agents of western culture. Ogba people has a system of greeting the people in a traditional forum that is mainly Ogba but today most of her educated ones

cannot greet in this traditional manner, rather they prefer to greet in the English style. In 1996 an educated Ogba was walked out from a forum because he greeted the forum in a grand western style. For the elders in the forum it was a let down of the peoples cultural heritage and lack of respect for the elders (interview: Igwe 2010).

Secularization

Secularization was another impact of western agents of change on the religious and cultural heritage of Ogba people. Secularization is “the process by which religious beliefs loses social significance and the peoples mundane activities is being carried out without reference to God (Hart 2010:19). Secularization as western agent of change on Ogba culture has devalued the attentions given to traditional religious institutions of Ogba people. This in no doubt is having uncovering consequences on the moral, ethical and life standard of Ogba people. Thus respect for the past ancestors and deities of the land is evidently lacking. Prior to the coming of western civilization hardly can you see any Ogba man, steal in the fish pond or farm land. It was the belief of the people that some of the spiritual beings acts as detectives to undected criminals, (interview: Ordu 2008). Today thus fear has reduced and criminally abound. Ogba culture no doubt offer a better life style in the pre-modern period because they acted according to the moral dictates of their religion. In our contemporary period secularization seems to have corrupted this ethical values, the younger generation now cherishes all that is modern and western system of life to the dwindling of their socio-cultural life (Vincent 2006:2006).

Industrialization And Urbanization

Industrialization refers to the act of bringing in modern technologies, companies, firms institutions, building of contemporary houses, machines etc. to a particular locality which may be termed as urban because of their presence (Peter 2006:16).

Industrialization and urbanization as an agents of western civilization drifted many Ogba youths, able bodied men and women to Port Harcourt, Owerri, Calabar Enugu Lagos, Abuja, Germany, Britain, China U.S.A, etc where they seek employment or maintain their business for living. In consequence, many are visionless on what goes on in their far away native land. To that extent the indigenous religion and many host of traditional concepts are

now lift in the hands of the few who also feel shy of themselves to practice the religion because they are not staying or measuring up in the urban center where many of their brothers and sisters have nationalized. My informant told me that he feel shy of himself staying at home because many of his peers in the secondary school days have migrated to the urban centres of the world, he also elaborated on the reason why he dropped the “Owhor” that is ancestral authority. As a carrier of ancestral authority it was mandatory for him to lead his clan during the new yann festivals to pour libations in the open ancestral gathering, but most of these his peers when they return home they snob him of this practice (Interview: Idu 2009).

The Lost Identity Of Ogba People

Research on Ogba peoples’ social life in modern time has shown enough substantial evidence that the religio-cultural life of the people which formed the identity of the Ogbas have been undergoing rapid changes which could be attributed to western agents of change (Evans 2005:38) whereas research upheld that the coming of western civilization into Ogba land had done the people good to some extent, it is also on note that we may not rule out completely that their was some selfish motives behind such humanitarian adventure in Ogba Land. In order words, whereas the coming of western civilization; has improved over forty percent of the peoples’ well-being, we find it difficult to state out right that their was no any iota of ulterior motive behind the overseas embarkment by the white gentle men. We are therefore tempted to say by scholarslic deduction or synthesis that the whole scenario may be likened to a capital market where the producer exports his products with the aim of making maximum profit from his consumers. Perhaps lord Lugard’s comment makes our submission clear. He said succinctly:

let it be admitted at the outset that European brains, capital and energy have not been, and never will be expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of pure philanthropy; Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes (Enwerem 2010:27)

Lugard’s unequivocal statement of mandate attests the motive behind the Uninculturative impediments behind the misapplications of the western agents of change on the African cultures. To decapitate or ruin a peoples religion or cultural identity with western

agents of change could also be tantamount to gassing the people with up to date or modern atomic missile. Both would do the same job, that of annihilating a race with the intention of colonizing the few survivors or assimilating them for slavery. This is indubitably obvious as Ogba race today has become slaves or a waste dumping ground for western components that are incompatibly Ogba. My informant's analysis is a case point that could be cited as an example. He observed lucidly: in the pre-modern Ogba period pornography, nudity, sexual obscenity, prurience and lasciviousness which are agents of prostitution were not invoke. If prostitution did exist then, it was in the barest minimum and was not seen openly. Today these immoral practices are displayed gallantly in Ogba land under the illusion of modern life style. The ugly sites could be seen in hope rising hotel Omoku, Vamptox guest house Ogbogu, also along some roads like Ahoada road, Nwagbogwe street etc all in Ogbaland (interview: Orji 2008).

The coming of western civilization, as we can see, in addition to developing the people is bedeviled with some loss of Ogba ethical values. Equally of note is the operation of two social cultures in Ogba territory some of which are economically irrelevant. For example today an Ogba man must bear two names, one is native and the other white name respectively. The same operates in burials by which the people must bury the deceased twice, the traditional and the church etc, thereby plunging the people into the financial burden of performing two different rites why pushing the people to perform two naming rites or burial rites? It is unnecessary, the best thing is to inculturate theirs into the system having observed that there was nothing devilish in it (Okoro 2009:120). Many expatriates have been in Ogba land but we have not seen any one among them that have taken to Ogba name in addition to his ethnic one. The reason behind this ambivalent character is because the western man has always viewed himself as the most inventive creature who ever lived and other peoples as unimaginative and backward by comparison. Constance, a western scholar spells this out:

Every study in depth of the historical background of technology in the western world becomes more and more apparent, difficult though it may be to believe, that indo-European are basically uninventive. And the same may be said with equal force of the African people, including the Arabs whose contribution to our civilization in the field of technology can be shown to have been that of "carriers" of the genius of other rather than innovator themselves. (Constance 2011:92).

It is pertinent to note, therefore that thought for cultural pride is also responsible while some good aspects of Ogba culture were not taken into cognizance. In Ogba today there is no definite cultural identity as we have observed. What is on ground is an admixture of two cultural identities in Ogba land, one is that of the Ogba and the other of the western world origin.

Language also stands to be the problem and infact one of the dominant factors necessitating the loss of cultural identity in Ogbaland. Only few educated ones in Ogbaland can communicate fluently in English language the situation is that the Ogba men who have been influenced by western agents of change would meet in the western world or else where and would be speaking to each other with English language, this is a wrong impression of Ogba culture. Needless to dilate further on the importance of language in developing ones culture, but let us observe Dominic. He wrote:

Actually, thinking is most mysterious, and by far the greatest light upon it that we have is thrown by the study of native language. This study shows that the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematization of his own culture. Advancement depends therefore on his native language (Dominic 2005:126).

It is therefore clear that there is need for Ogba people to develop their own native language instead of allowing it to die. Marshall has also observed that the first scientific knowledge expressed by a child is that which he has related or communicated to his parents in his ethnic language. For him native language is an inevitable component to develop ones potentials (Marshall 2007:6).

Research is not oblivious of what western scholars would want this paper delineate as the achievements of western agents of change. But suffice to note that, despite those much taunted universally acclaimed achievements of western agents of change which include massive conversion from the indigenous religion to Christianity, education, science, technological know-how, medicine, fast means of transportation, communication gadgets, industrialization etc (John 2010:20), what is still in vogue now is individualism, sordid life, political crisis, greed, violence, Niger Delta problems, youth restiveness, drug abuse, lack of ethics at all levels of professionalism, mass poverty in the midst of natural plenty,

gangsterism, associations for nepotism and favoritism, financial misappropriation and embezzlement etc are all on the increase in Ogba land, Niger Delta and the Federal Republic of Nigeria in general. Hence Ogba people remained under-developed today in the present of western culture, and Nigeria continue to answer a third world or under-developed country.

One factual account also is that most of the destructive tendencies of the western culture or inventions is borne out of the truth that the western man feels that he has no any assigned status in the universe, so whatever happens to others is non of his business. Robert's comment makes' this assertion Lucid:

The difficulty which civilized western man in the world today experiences is in convincing himself that he has any special assigned status in the universe, and upon the sense of instability which this uncertainty produces. Many of the psychological disorders, including the destructive inventions are, I believe, to be traced to this cause. (Robert 2003:12).

Delivering a public lecture on "Panacea to Niger Delta Youth restiveness" a scholar has also pointed out the negative impacts of secularism on the Ogba people of the Niger Delta, hence, he observed:

In Niger Delta today, secularism has overtaken the place of socio-cultural values. The region is today housing a crop of youth who would want societal values relegated to the background of our social systems, the dignity and amount of wealth have been substituted by some of these youths for the dignity and quality of human person. For some Niger Delta Youths today, it is no longer your personality, quality and virtues that count. It is the volume of wealth, no matter how dishonest and unjust is your wealth and the means of your livelihood. Ostentation life-style, lack of fear of indigenous concept of God is fast displacing the wisdom, the nobility and majesty of simplicity, and modesty. As more emphasis is laid on the material and on quantity the quality and meaning of life suffer set-backs. Hence, the emergence and creation of youth mediocrity, these hoodlums are known by various names under the guise of Niger Delta freedom fighters. Thus militarization, misuse of fire arms and dynamite, bombing of economic structures in strategic places, robbery, raping and kidnapping of foreigners and indigenes become an order of the day in the name of fighting for socio-political liberation and economic emancipation of the Niger Delta (Dike 2008:Unpublished lecture).

The idea of unity, harmony neighbourhood and family-hood is culturally an Ogba social identity which helps to sustain the trado-religious heritage of the people. These socio-cultural systems have all been eroded to a large extent by the sleight of western agents of change into western oriented Marxism. No doubt, capitalism thrives today among the Ogbas who have migrated into the urban centres as a result of the techno-scientific improvisation of the western culture. Hence, they no longer border themselves about Ogba brotherhood. We can continue on this enumeration, but that will on itself increase the pages of this work unnecessarily. Hence we are departing here for Panacea to restoring the lost cultural identities of Ogba people.

Restoring The Lost Identity Of Ogba People

We are happy that the ongoing inculturation theology is gathering momentum every day in the African region (Wilson 2007:18) adherents of Christianity in Ogba land should insist on “Ogba Christianity”. As Ogba people any religion which the people have chosen to practice should recognize the socio-cultural identity of the people. Ogba traditional concepts like descent dressing, language, marriage rites, burial rites, informal education, respect for the past and present ancestors, worship of the Supreme Being, brotherhood, self reliance and contentment, transparent life style etc are basic factors that are reconcilable and harmonizable with Christian ethnics. A proper fusion of Ogba religion-cultural norms with Christianity will ensure cultural rejuvenation, vitality, fruitfulness, peace and stability in Ogba land thereby leading to the recovery of Ogba cultural identity.

Those of Ogba sons and daughter who are knowledgeable in western culture should appreciate the fact that they are in a better position to speak the voice of Ogba people and protect her cultural identities. They should come together in the spirit of “Ogbahood” and develop the Ogba socio-cultural philosophy, Ogba home education, Ogba science which has to do with inventions, fabrications and manufacturing of locally made products in accordance to the cultures of the land. There is also the need to educate the people including foreigners on Ogba traditional religion, up to date there are no sacred writings like the holy bible or the Koran defining the position of Ogba religion. What is known about the religion so far, is derived from art forms from archaeological excavations, institutions like established customs and usages, Myths, proverbs, names etc (Metuh 1987:12-25).

A sacred writing or a holy document is the most profound instrument that speaks for the religion. Where a particular religion has become adulterated and misconceived by her adherents, its holy book speaks for itself in contradiction to the practitioners or adherents (Edwin 2007:16) for example a student asked his lecturer a question in the class room that why is it that the Christians are carrying matches and fire arms in retaliation against the Moslems in the north. To which the lecturer asked the student “do you have the holy bible”? The student said yes. The lecturer then answered “after this lectures read through your bible, if you discover any verse where Jesus carried ammunicions against any one, then you can understand that those fighters are Christians, but if not you may as well know that the actual cause of the war is politics and that those fighting, may be politicians. Therefore Ogba educated elites should develop a single document known as the “holy book of Ogba”. This may further clear off the misconception the early foreign missionaries have about Ogba God and the religion.

There is need for the generality of Ogba people to develop their own skills. We must appreciate the fact that Ogba’s past ancestors were able to establish their industries and were able to locally manufacture soaps, creams weaves, scaps, canoe for transportation shoes, food items like garri, yam, plantain etc if the modern Ogbas could add efforts to what has been achieved by their past ancestors in the field of industry, the sky would be their limit as they would be matching ground to ground with globalization. This also would solve the problem whereby urbanization had drifted many Ogbas in diaspora leaving the insignificant few to compare with avalanche of westernization.

There is also the urgent need for the federal government of Nigeria to address issues as it concerns Ogba people. An up to date statistics on crude oil and gas distribution in Nigeria, collected by Ile, was obvious that Ogba land is the largest producers of oil and gas in Nigeria (Ile 2007:11-245). This notwithstanding, the people have remained impoverished (David 2010:40) The government should compensate the people of Ogba land by way of industrializing the villages in Ogba land. The education system in Ogba land should be reformed. There should be subjects to teach Ogba language, Ogba religion, Ogba cultural identities in her primary and post primary schools Considering the economic contributions of Ogba land as stated by Ile, no compensation is too big and as such we advocate for a “Federal university of Ogba land” this university should be geared exclusively towards

awarding a degree based on Ogba cultural identities e.g B.A. B.Sc, M.A.M. Sc. Ph.D in Ogba language, Ogba religion, Ogba ethics, Ogba moral law, Ogba rites, Ogba history etc. these various disciplines, for sure would recover the cultural identities of Ogba people in addition to the advancement and civilization they would contribute to the world.

The elite council of Omoku (Eco) is an organization comprising intellectual gentlemen from Omoku. This organization was established in the early nineties for the purpose of promoting Ogba cultures. They should come together with the Ogba council of chiefs to censor what aspects of the western life style that will blossom the Ogba cultural identities. This is considered the most salutary for the repose and prosperity of Ogba culture. The good parts of western cultures should be emulated and enshrined into Ogba culture, in so far as, it has no adverse effect on the peoples' cultures.

Cultural censor becomes a necessary issue in Ogba land if her identities must be resuscitated. For Hegel dialectic, censor is the beginning of knowledge (Grant and Harold 1950:461). The Ogbas should be able to distinguish the good and bad aspects of western philosophy of life. Since the western forces of cultural change are still intransigent in Ogba land, censor of what is ethically practicable in the land is a necessary factor.

The Way Forward

Heraclitus, has asserted that there is no permanent reality to life. Every thing is becoming and changing be it matter or non matter, living or non living organism. (Onyewuenyi, 1994:174) Humanity must evolve. This evolution be it in religion, Economics, development politics or western civilization cannot be without the imputation of human errors and frailties. We make error today for better perfection tomorrow, thus the changes that have taken place in Ogba land, no matter what negative impacts some of them were is not enough for the Ogba people to dwell in the past or reject everything westernization. We hold that those changes ought to make a better tomorrow. Therefore changes today or in the future must be positive in its entirety, it must address the issues of immorality, rape, ill-health, poverty, irreligious and a host of others, some of which have already been tabulated on this paper under the lost identity of Ogba people. Where these changes today cannot address those issues, then it is not worth while, the more a man knows about his past and the present, the more secured must prove to be his judgment concerning his future advancement.

Therefore let Ogba people including all and Sunday utilize the benefits of our facts findings for a better society today and tomorrow.

Conclusion

This paper addressed the issue of many disadvantages recorded in Ogba land as a result of the presence of the western forces of cultural change. The most subliminal aspect of the paper was that it proffered a panacea to the recovery of the cultural identities of Ogba people which has been eroded to a large extent by the winds of change. The presence of these forcers of change which includes Christianity, education, secularization, industrialization where, seen to have improved the lives of over forty percent of Ogba people, while at the same time these forces where detrimental to the people in other aspects. Against this backdrop the researcher recommended that censor of what is ethically practicable in the land is a necessary factor. To that extent the educated elites of Ogba were called upon to come together with the Ogba council of chiefs in the spirit of “Ogbahood” to ensure a proper protection of Ogba cultural identities which is fast dying away in the modern time.

It was also noted that it has become so expedient to develop a book like the holy bible that should be known as “Holy book of Ogba” this would to a large extent shed light and clear off most of the misconceptions about Ogba God and the religion which has been misconceived by the early Christian missionaries and others. The book also stands to become a referent point at any particular period in history as, it becomes a mould of operandi of the religion like other sacred writings. The establishment of a federal university of Ogba land, reformations of the primary and post primary schools in Ogba land etc to suit the traditional structure were also recommended as a means of restoring the lost identities of Ogba people.

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