

Colonialism, African Worldview And Development In Edo Culture Of Nigeria

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Abstract: This paper examines the colonialism, African worldview and development in Edo culture of Nigeria. The thrust of the literature borders on the resultant effect colonialism has on the Edo culture. To achieve the objectives of the research, the writer adopts the historical, analytical comparative and phenomenological methodology. The writer discovers that the African culture in general and Edo culture in particular suffers some setback due to colonial interaction with the traditional values. Colonialism is the idea of one suppressing another in all aspects of life. It involves an overt and covert as well as subtle assertion of supremacy of the dominating people over the dominated, resulting to oppression and exploitation. This has been the case of the Edo nation as Africans. This literature opines that maintaining the African worldview, moral values, sense of communality, enhancement of indigenous language, most especially relationship with ancestors who are believed to be the custodian of ethical values would engender the necessary factor responsible for development in African. The paper concludes with recommendations that will enhance African worldview and enlighten the world-over the importance of these views as necessary instruments for progress in any society.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Pre-colonial African life revolves around religion. Religion is an aspect of the super structure of a society, deriving ultimately from the degree of control and understanding of the material world. Rodney (2009) opines that when man thinks in religious terms, he starts from the ideal rather than with the material world (which is beyond his comprehension) According to him also; this creates a non – scientific and metaphysical way of viewing the world. This before the coming of the” whites” religion pervaded all aspects of the African life. Ancestral belief and worship formed the central element of their social, political, economic and religious life.

Before the advent of the Europeans information on the traditional African religion was sometimes not easy to access as no documents were available. However the religion was passed from generation through oral tradition, legend, myths, and festivals and so on. Munemo (1994) reveals that these means could have been distorted in its documentation eventually done by non – African perspective usually by (Western) missionaries.

Munemo (1994) further submits that African tradition or culture has its own authentic institutions and pattern of behaviour and values, it holds cultural values such as honestly, hospitality, respect for elders respect for sacred life, communal life liberty, social justice, and consciousness of the divine with high esteem. Besides proverbs, pithy saying, parables and stories were taught to younger ones to direct them aright in the paths of life.

The African people in general and Edo nation in particular that was known for cultural dignity slid on the slippery ground of the so called civilization associated with colonialism. Colonialism, though expressed more often in political dimensions, it is at the background, a cultural process. According, Abogunrin (2005) “it is a cultural oppression that involves the imposition of the colonizer’ culture on the colonized. Hence, one finds that after its political aspects have been dismantled, its cultural vestiges remain. For example, the English language that we use in African today is a strong manifestation of our colonial past that suppressed the indigenous languages. Language is the most integral aspect of culture.

The gradual erosion of the indigenous language is the greatest jeopardy the researcher envisaged among the Edo people. For example in some situations when a young one would greet the elderly one “*kara*” *Obota* (local greetings) the elderly one at times reply, good evening my son. The elderly ones who ought to teach the younger ones are often absorbed into cultural alienation. Hence, stories proverbs and even traditional medicine are experiencing decadence. This is affecting the Edo nation in all ramifications of life.

Therefore the interest of this paper is a call for resuscitation of African values if Africans must develop ideally. Respect for human life, ancestors and indigenous language must resume their pride of place if African should boast of freedom from colonialism.

II. BACK GROUND TO TITLE

Adamo (2005) citing Bright (1981) argues that although there has been a unanimous agreement among eminent scholars (anthropologists, Egyptologists and Africanists) concerning the exact racial classifications of the people of Africa, Norman (1985) reveals that the fact that Africa is the cradle of one of the earliest and most spectacular civilizations of antiquity has been often accepted (cited in Bright 1981). On the basis of archeological and historical records it is discovered that in Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Greco – Roman World, Africans have shared these civilizations, either through military or trade interactions, the people of ancient world had come to know Africa. Thus Africa interactions with the people of the world were not as a result of colonialism.

The colonialists refused to understand the culture and religion of the Africans. Geertz (1973) defines culture as denoting “an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward, life.” Again, according to Geertz, religion is

(1) A system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long – lasting moods and motivations in men (3) by formulating conceptions of general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an area of factuality that (5) the moods and motivation seem uniquely realistic.

While worldview “is the picture the way things in sheer actuality are, the conception of nature, of self, of society. It contains the most comprehensive idea of order” (Geertz 1973). Ironically, according to Kato (1976) the colonialists, missionaries (both Muslims and Christians) and anthropologists gave derogative names to the African religion and culture such as animism, idolatry, paganism, heathenism, fetishism, witch craft among others. The inferior rating or classification of the religion and culture of the traditional group being ascribed a subordinate position by European, Arabs, Christian Missionaries and Muslims.

One would think that Nigeria independence in 1960 would change the ugly situation. In spite of the Pan – African struggle for decolonization from foreign detractors, social, economic and religious and cultural colonialization the case remains the same. Among the Edo nation the scope of this research civilization connotes westernization; in most cases alienating from indigenous worldview.

The researcher being a specialist in African Traditional Religion and Culture deems it fit to write on this subject matter “Colonialism Development and African Worldview using Edo nation as a case study. This is an attempt to showcase the qualities of African Traditional Religion and Culture (honesty, communal life, sense of brotherhood), and enhancement of indigenous language so as to promote development in Edo and Africa as a whole. The research had done several works on African religion and society in a bid to reawaken consciousness of her heritage. The researcher hopes that this work will be beneficial to Edo people and Africa as a whole. It would also join the Pan – African struggle for self independence and dignity rather than a political independence.

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