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CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF MODERN IRIA TRADITIONAL PRACTICE IN OKRIKA ETHNIC NATIONALITY OF RIVERS STATE.

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ABSTRACT: The study examined conflict of interest and the acceptance of modern Iria traditional practice in Okrika ethnic nationality of Rivers State. In Africa the shift from tradition to westernization is gradually crippling African tradition by making it Archaic, insignificant and of no repute. The study was guided by four research questions and four objectives, utilizing the Modernization Theory of Max Weber (1920), and Frans Uri Boas Cultural Relativism Theory (1942) as the Theoretical Framework. The research design that was adopted for the study is the descriptive qualitative research design that made use of both primary and secondary sources of data. The population of the study is 319,700 for Okrika and 108,300 for Ogu/ Bolo Local Government Areas respectively with the sample size 129 which was drawn from the two Okrika ethnic nationality (Okrika and Ogu/Bolo), using an interview schedule to elicit data from respondents. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Person Interview (KPI), and Participant Observation (PO) method was applied for data collection, purposive, accidental and snowballing sampling techniques were used to get to respondents, while gathered data was thematically analyzed. The following recommendations were put forward, to restructure or modify Iria from the original pattern by expunging rituals such as entering shrines and ancestral houses, pouring of libation, river bath, pond bath (cleansing) dancing with masquerade and being chased by masquerade, Culture and traditional practice/ ceremonies should be integrated fully into the school curriculum, African traditional method of conflict resolution as a tool should be employed by Indigenous Personalities such as clan heads, traditional leaders, chiefs, youths, age graded etc., Lastly, there is need to reclaim more lands around Okrika and Ogu/Bolo Local Government Areas, this will reduce the level of Urbanization and give this present generation a share in their own community.

Key word: Conflict of Interest, Tradition, Practice, Modernity, Culture

Introduction

Traditional practice is depicted by sociologists and anthropologists as agrarian, pre-scientific, rural, resistant to change and innovation and bound by perception to its past. In contrast, modern is characterized as scientific, innovative, future-oriented, culturally dynamic and industrial and urbanized. It is the alleged contrast that establishes the polarity between traditional and modern.

However, the contrast for Gyekye is based on some faulty assumptions (Constance & Soye, 2020). Historical investigations would show that although societies characterized as "traditional" a large proportion of beliefs and practices inherited from the past, they nevertheless experience various changes over time (Constance & Soye, 2020).

Though, modernity affects the African family, humanity, culture and Christians, it does not fully apply to the African

context. According to the (Giddens, 1999), modernity is characterized by capitalism, military power, surveillance systems and industrialization the dynamism of these modern institutions not only undermines traditional habits and customs worldwide, but also intrude into most personal and global aspect of human life. There are still certain traditional practices which are still consistent with African Christians, they hold and preserve even in the face of pervasive modernity, while some traditions cannot stand, and people will not hesitate to choose modernity and western educational reforms over them (Giddens, 1999).

In Africa, womanhood is essentially adored and revered. It is adored because of the positive values it projects and revered for its esoteric energy that transcends ordinary comprehension. It is very significant to understand the woman body as a procreative centre, in nurturing receptacle for new life and goes through a lot of transformation and pains to gain life. It is for this reason that in most cultures across Africa, steps are taken to engender social control to safe guard that procreative source that is so essential to human continuum. In Nigeria for instance, many examples abound, and they come by different names like 'coming of age', 'rite of passage from teenage to adulthood; from adolescent/girlhood to womanhood outing ceremony from the fattening room', 'maiden dance', 'coming-to-meet', etc. (Adinoyi-Ojo, 1996).

Culture varies from one society to another just as the Iria of the Ibanis are different from that of the Kalabaris and Okrikans, and even within the same group of people depending on certain factors such as modernity. This means that culture is not static but dynamic, and it is expressed in terms of human behaviours shared among a people, and it is learnt rather than inherited. One of the most pervasive global phenomena that affect human social life all over the world is modernity.

Statement of the Problem

Iria has been a prestigious female adolescent transitional traditional practice that usually promotes virginity and prepares female adolescent into womanhood making them physically, psychologically and emotionally ready for marriage, this traditional practice is gradually going extinct in Okrika ethnic nationality in Rivers State. Modernity is a dynamic phenomenon resulting from its elements of time-space, distraction, disembedding mechanisms and reflexivity impacts enormously the very personal and intimate lives of people influence not only the intimate and personal aspects of human lives, but also impacts social cultural, and religious traditions and institutions around the world (Ibrahim, 2017).

Though modernity affects the African family, humanity, culture and Christians, it does not fully apply to the African context. According to the (Giddens, 1999), modernity is characterized by capitalism, military power, surveillance systems and industrialization the dynamism of these modern institutions not only undermines traditional habits and customs worldwide, but also intrude into most personal and global aspect of human life. There are still certain traditional practices which are still consistent with African Christians, they hold and preserve even in the face of pervasive modernity, while some traditions cannot stand, and people will not hesitate to choose modernity and western educational reforms over them (Giddens, 1999).

Several studies have been conducted by different scholars on the issue of modernity and African Tradition. For instance, (Constance and Soye, 2020) examined the indigenous traditional practices of Ido people of Kalabari, an Ijaw tribe in Rivers State, Nigeria, with a view to identifying the pre-colonial management thoughts and practices embedded in them. The results of the study indicate that the Ido people were already utilizing indigenous management principles and practices before the advent of colonialism. It was concluded that there is urgent need for more investigations into the traditional practices of Africa and other developing economies to discover indigenous management theories and practices of these geographies that will take cognizance of their contextual nuances and environmental peculiarities in order to proffer solutions to their peculiar challenges.

However, with the existence of these and other related studies, it was discovered to our limited knowledge that there is no existing study on Conflict of Interest and Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional practice in Okrika

Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State, it is against this backdrop that the study has evolved to determine how Religion affected the acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality. The overriding objective is to determine how modern Iria will be accepted amidst conflict of interest for the purpose of maximum participation and continuity. Thus, this study aims to fill the gap in Knowledge by studying Conflict of Interest and acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice of Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State.

Research Questions

To guide this study scientifically, the following research questions were proposed:

i. How has Religion affected the acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

ii. In what way (s) has Education affected the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

iii. How has Poverty impacted on the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality Rivers State?

iv. In what way (s) has Urbanization affected the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality Rivers State?

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine how Conflict of Interest has affected the acceptance of modern Iria traditional practice, to achieve the above objective of study, the following specific objectives were stated:

i. To examine how Religion has affected the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

ii. To investigate in what way (s) Education has affected the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

iii To determine how Poverty has impacted on the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

iii. To ascertain how urbanization has affected the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State?

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Modernization and Cultural Relativism theory. Modernization theory originated from the ideas of German Sociologist Max Weber, (1864-1920), who provided the basis for the modernization paradigm developed by Harvard Sociologist Talcott Parsons (1902-1979). Modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian and African continents respectively (Armer & Katsillis, 2000). Cultural Relativism theory by Franz Uri Boas(1858-1942), a German-American anthropologist and a pioneer of modern anthropology who has been called the "Father of American Anthropology" His work is associated with the movements known as historical particularism and cultural relativism. Cultural relativism according to (Miller, 2007) is the ability to understand a culture on its own terms and not to make judgments using the standards of one's own culture. The goal of this is promote understanding of cultural practices that are not typically part of one's own culture. Using the perspective of cultural relativism leads to the view that no one culture is superior to another culture when compared to systems of morality, law, politics etc. The study is based on both types of cultural relativism, the Okrika ethnic group should accept the Iria culture that has existed since the 16thcentury and rejuvenate it for continuity. Critically, Iria traditional practice is an infringement on human right of the Iria maidens, some of them are compelled to participate in the ritual and ceremonies not necessarily against their will, but because tradition has taken that decision for them.

Literature Review

Eko, (2020) investigated The Impact of Religion, Culture and Worldview of the People of Cross River State on the

spread of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cross River State. To realize this, three (3) point purpose of the study was considered, data were collected from the fieldwork and the study employed statistical, sociological, historical and theological methods in analysing its data. From the investigation conducted on this study, it is apparent that the following are the major factors impacted on the slow growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cross River State, namely: Religio-Cultural Factors and Church Growth; Socio-Economic Factor and Church Growth, and Religious Factors and Church Growth. The study recommended church organization can be understood through the adoption of the under-listed mission- logical approaches: Incarnation, Enculturation, and Contextualization of the gospel, in addition to Inclusive Community Paradigm in reaching out to the people of Cross River State.

On her study, Onyejiuwa, (2009) assessed the Harmful Cultural Practices Affecting Rural Women's Health. The study of used community-based women organisations in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Among her major findings shows that majority of the respondents (affected women) were educationally disadvantaged. The study also confirmed that early marriage, female genital mutilation, widowhood practices and nutritional taboos existed and practiced in different locations. The respondents' opinions to the questionnaire were similar to those of the discussants during the (FGD) sessions.

Similarly, Ine-Ere, (2021) examined Iria Costumes as Cultural Identity in The Port-Harcourt Carnival, Rivers State. She noted that many cultures or people in the world have been able to express their cultural values by the use of dresses or costumes at one occasion or another. The objectives in her study are to identify the symbolic importance of Iria costumes and to ascertain its essence as a social force and cultural identity. The methodology of her study was based on qualitative research procedures which draw on both the descriptive and illustrative approaches. Most of the traditional dress patterns are held in very high esteem among various traditional societies. Africans use indigenous dress patterns and textiles as an expression of cultural heritage in many occasions to promote and preserve the traditional culture. Textiles serve as enabling materials in the hands of Textile and fashion designers who use them to create various dresses, costumes and ornamentals in the Port-Harcourt Carnival. The Iria cultural troupes display a lot of dress patterns with ornamentals in their performances with music and dance. The Iria dance serves as a cultural folklore with dignified steps that are breath-taking in any occasion. It is a special ceremony in womenfolk as it pertains to the rites of womanhood and cultural identity. However, there is no research that focused on the Iria costumes as cultural identity in the Port-Harcourt Carnival.

Methodology

The Population of Okrika Local Government Area is 319, 700 (projected 2022, National Bureau of Statistic).While that of Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area is 108,300, (projected 2022, National Bureau of Statistic). Data saturation was proposed since the study is anthropological (ethnographical) research but after the field work was completed, a sample size of 129 was arrived at from both Local Government Areas, 98 for Okrika local Government Area and 31 from Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area. The respondents comprises of Chiefs from Iria organizing clans, that is from Kirike, Ogoloma, Ibaka, Ogbogbo, Isaka, and Bolo clans, then, also Chiefs from Okochiri and Koni-Ama Kingdom which happen to be the only Kingdom still taking part in Iria traditional practice consistently for Ten years now (jointly), other respondents were formed from the women of purity (Egbele- Ereme) these are selected elderly women specialized in pregnancy and child delivery, saddled with the responsibility of pregnancy testing of the Iriapu (maidens) locally, elders from various communities, young adolescent females. The 31 respondents from Ogu/ Bolo are Chiefs' elders, and young adolescent females. The respondents were engaged differently with the aid of an interview guide (schedule) structured with open ended question. Data was gathered differently through Key Persons Interview (KPIs), and Focus Group (FGDs).

The study adopted purposive sampling, accidental and snowballing techniques in reaching out to the respondents,

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this is to enable the researcher to purposively choose respondents from both Okrika and Ogu local government areas respectively. Purposive sampling is one of the most common sampling strategies for group participant that is used to purposively select respondents, which forms the Sample sizes that may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depending on the resources and time available, as well as the study's objectives. Snowballing also known as chain referral sampling was well utilized to get to respondents from the two Local Government Areas. Snowball sampling is often used to find and recruit "hidden populations," that is, groups not easily accessible to researchers through other sampling strategies (Natasha et al. 2005).

The method of data analysis employed by the researcher was the use of Thematic Analysis to analyse the qualitative data which was retrieved from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Person Interviews (KPIs) and Participant Observation.

Table 1: Showing numbers of Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Key Persons Interview (KPIs)

Iria Participating Clans in Okrika Ethnic Nationality	FGD Done Participants/Sessions	KPI Done Participants/Session	Total No. of Respondents
❖ Ogoloma Clan	Two (2) FGD Sessions with: Men Five (5) Women Five (5) Youth Four (4)	Chiefs Two (2) Male Two (2) Egbelereme One (1)	19
❖ Ogbogbo Clan	Two (2) FGD Sessions with: Men Five (5) Women Five (5)	Chiefs Two (2) ManOne (1) Youth Two (2) Iriabo (1)	16
❖ Ibaka Clan	Two (2) FGD Sessions with: Men & Women (misted) Four (4) Youth Four (4)	Chiefs Two (2) Men 3 (3) Iriabo (1)	14
❖ Isaka Clan	One (1) FGD Session done together with the following: Chiefs Two (2), Elders Two (2), Women Two (2) and Youth Three (3)	Egbelereme One (1) Youth Two (2) Men Three (3)	15
❖ Ogu Clan	Two (2) FGD Session with: Elders Six (6) Women Six (6)	Egbelereme Three (3) Chief Two (2) Iriabo (2)	19
❖ Bolo Clan	Two (2) FGD Session with: Chiefs Four (4) Elders Three (3) Men Two (2)	Youth One (1) Man One (1) Iriabo One (1)	12

❖ KoniAma/ Okochiri Kingdom	Four (4) FGD Sessions with: Chiefs Five (5) Egbelereme Five (5) Elders Six (6) Men Six (6)	Youth Three (3) Iriapu Seven (7) differently Women and Men mist Two (2)	34
Total	**Fourteen (15) FGDs Sessions with 84 Participants**	**Twenty –two (22) KPIs Sessions with 45 Participants**	**129**

Source: Researchers field work, 2023.

From the above, table 1 reflects the analysis from Focus Group Discussions and Key Person Interviews Data; it shows that the study recorded a total of 15 (FGDs) sessions with 84 participants and 22 (KPIs) sessions with 45 participants. Subsequently, the table reveals that: a total of 19 Chiefs Participated in the ethnographic study, 10 Egbeleremes, 17 Elders, 52 Men and Women, 19 Youths and 12 Iriapu (old & new).

Furthermore, the table also revealed that the study was conducted in the 6 Iria participating clans in Okrika ethnic nationality in Rivers State. The study purposively selected the number of respondents from these clans, Koni-Ama /Okochiri Kingdom was studied more than others, because that is the only Kingdom that has been consistent with Iria traditional practice for a period of Ten (10) years though with low participation of maidens, see Table 2 (page 168). Secondly, Koni-Ama/Okochiri Kingdom was studied more since it happened to be the Kingdom that the researcher participated and observed closely (PO).

Thematic Analysis of Data

This section discusses findings from the Focus Group Discussions and Key Person Interviews Thematically.

Theme One (1): Conflict of interest and the acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice

Theme 1.1 The Origin of Iria in Okrika Ethnic Nationality.

The Iria ceremony is one of the oldest and most popular traditions among the people of Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers state. The historical origin of Iria traditional practice in Okrika dates to the 16th century through Seminaro, the first Lady of Ancient Okrika Ethnic Nationality. According to (Abam, 2012) the practice is rooted in the belief system of the people, the *Amakiri deity* (Earth goddess) is the protector of virginity. The nature of Iria ceremony is in the different stages and like drama with all its trappings of fun, amusement and fanfare. It's an annual event close to the end of each year specifically in December, the ceremony is like a carnival of youths and elderly people alike flocking into the town square from far and near to watch and admire.Iria by nature is a joyous traditional practice of the Okrikans that welcomes the girl child into womanhood, showcasing her ready for marriage before eligible suitors (Abam, 2012).

Originally, nine traditional towns constitute the Okrika Kingdom before (1913), these towns are Kirike, Ogoloma, Ogu, Bolo, Ogbogbo, Ibaka, Ele, Isaka and Abuloma. Most of these traditional towns also have satellite villages. There is an additional town which is Koniju Town (Koni-ama). But currently, Ogu, Bolo, Ele and Abuloma are gone, Abuloma joining Port Harcourt City Local Government while, Ogu, Bolo and Ele formed the second Okrika ethnic nationality (LGA), which happens to be, Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area. There are46 satellite villages and towns in Okrika Local Government Area (Abam, 2012).

Currently, Okrika has six towns presently with 8 Kings (both Government recognized and unrecognized). The Iria, which is in various stages includes; Entering of maidens into Fattening Room (*Wari soo*), Shaving of hair, (*Tibisein)* Ticketing and virginity testing, Bronze anklet ring ceremony (*Impala chua*), Indigo design day (*Burumomie*), Early Morning River-Bath, Outing 1 & 2 (Chiri-paka) others are Osokolomangi (masquerade chase), Toru oki, visit to ancestral houses and shrines to seek blessings, Iria maidens dance with masquerade, pond

bath for cleansing, visit to the forest, stoning of the Iriapu with orange balls by Ngbilla masquerade and other rituals and activities involved. Though, the ritual and activities vary from clan to clan (Abam, 2012).

Theme 1.2: Nature of Iria in the Different Clans of Okirika Ethnic Nationality

It will be pertinent to also see from secondary sources the nature of Iria which lies in their various stages as exhibited by the various clans in Okrika ethnic nationality. The conflict of Interest and inability to accept modern Iria is because every clan in Okrika ethnic nationality has its own pattern that is followed during the celebration of Iria that is why the Conflict seems unresolute.

The Nature of Iria in Ogoloma Clan

Iria in Ogoloma clan is peculiar as the young girls are made to bath at night by special people it is called Iria *Sikiri* (ablution) of the Iria maiden. This was introduced in Ogoloma by Iria-aro-egbelegbe, sister of Opuogulaya.

On appointed night after the putting on of the spiral rings: all the Iriapu are called to go to a secluded river pond for cleansing bath, where they stand breast deep in the river, singing, calling all the known gods of the land, mermaids of the water, and the ancestors to witness that they are no longer sisters of the men they were going to marry, but wives. After about an hour in the water, all the intended husbands go into the water and each carries his own spouse shoulder high to the common gathering square. They are set in thrones prepared for this purpose (Opuogulaya, 1975).

They are washed with dozens of highly perfumed assorted toilet soaps with warm water. Their bodies are then rubbed with expensive cream. This ablution symbolizes the washing away of the maidens (Iriapu) relationship with their men relation in order that they could marry safely (Obuoforibo, 2012).

Theme 1.3: The Significance of Iria Traditional Practice in Okirika Ethnic Nationality

Extract on the significance of Iria traditional practice, Mr. Akuro Emmanuel on Key person Interview (KPI) said:

Iria from inception, Iria has usually been to induce chastity on the part of girls until they are duly licensed through this ceremony to be married. It was commonly believed that any child born by women who allowed their virginity to be fouled before undergoing the rite of Iria ceremony must die, unless they pacified the Amakiri (God of the settled Earth). Therefore, Iria was a criteria for marriage in the ancient days, and this is gradually phasing out by modernity, this is because the nature of the Iria traditional practice is no longer consistent with the reality of the present time, this is Conflict of Interest ***(Male KPI, 62 years)***.

Majority of the activities that heralds the Iria traditional practice are no longer acceptable in present day reality activities such as: Fattening Room experience, Shaving of hair, Entering shrines/ pouring of Libation/ other acts of Fetishism, Early Morning River Bath etc.

Theme 2: Religion and the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okirika Ethnic Nationality

Religion: Historically, the Okrika people of old were polytheist believing in several gods and deities. Others where animist who believed in many spirits including marine spirits and in the spirits of their ancestors. Finibeso was considered the chief god of the ancient Okrika people and his priest where most reverend among other priests. The Fenibeso shrine was most sacred and divine. Traditionally, no restrictions were imposed on the worship of any god. In modern Okrika, Christian religion has emerged as the dominant religion and the St. Peters Cathedral is the most prominent religious building in Okrika. Traditional religion however still exists side by side with Christianity. There are several Christian denominations in Okrika today. Some of the Christian

denominations in Okrika are as follows: The Anglican Church, First African Church (FAC), Roman Catholic Church, Christ Army Church (CAC), The Assemblies of God Church, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Three Cross, Apostolic Church, Deeper Life, Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Greater Evangelism, El Shaidai Bible Church, Church Of God Mission, Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), Christ Embassy, Cherubim and Seraphim, Salvation Ministries etc. (Obuoforibo, 2009). The advent of these two crippled Iria traditional practice in Okrika ethnic nationality. The present reality (modified system) has impacted negatively on Iria traditional practice.

From a Focus Group Discussion, an interviewee spoke;

On Religion and acceptance of modern Iria, a KPI section with an Ogu Chief from Ogu/Bolo ; Reiterated the same thing, that the Iria maidens and their families, friends, well-wishers after a successful outing goes to St Martin's Anglican Church Ogu Town in Ogu/Bolo to also thank God for seeing them through the traditional Practice. They are not also treated with disdain by follow church members because it is a traditional obligation that is meant to be fulfilled. But much later, there was conflict of interest in views and opinion. And this disagreement led to the off-shoot of a Christian Version of the traditional practice called **"Tamuno Iria"** meaning Godly or Christian Iria which was followed by the believers of Christ. In this Christian Iria, a lot of activities in antagonist with the Christian Faith was expunged and the maidens wear dress to cover the breast, but this was later rejected by the Chiefs and Traditional Rulers, with the reason that it was not traditional, and the Christian Iria was exterminated since it was not recognised traditional and no issuance of certificate. **(Male FGD, 69 years).**

Another interviewee from Focus Group Discussion Added;

That it was the advent of modern churches formally called the Pentecostal Churches that widened the gap between culture and Religion, he said the new generation churches have indoctrinated its members by discouraging them saying Iria traditional practice is Satanic and morally wrong to Open Breast, dance with Masquerade, enter into Shrines and Ancestral Houses to seek Blessing, Pour Libation, being Chased or Stoned by Masquerade etc. Therefore, Iria traditional practice got affected by Religion. **(Female FGD, 55 years).**

Theme 3: Education and the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okirika Ethnic Nationality

Western Education in Okrika: The revival of education in Okrika started with St. Peter's School, Okrika and Okrika Grammar School, Okrika, which were the forerunners of primary and secondary schools respectively in Wakirike land in (1920). Both were established through the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), the dominant Christian mission in Kirike se at the time, western education began to spread in Okrika till date to the detriment of most cultural practices. Currently education has spread like a wide fire in Okrika Local Government Area alone; there are 8 Government secondary and 46 primary Schools, and several Private Nursery, Primary and Secondary Schools presently, and more in Ogu/Bolo Local Government Area. Western Education and culture and science and technology bring about changes, adaptations in cultural practices in the modern times, while certain aspects are still stable (Obuoforibo, 2009).

From a Focus Group Discussion, an interviewee contributed;

Chief Kele of Ibaka in Okrika Local Government Area in a KPI Session said the coming of the Missionaries with Western Education in to Okrika brought about a fall in tradition, their way and pattern of learning affected the Iria traditional ceremony a great deal. He added that, the Iria age which was between 13-19 years was also the age of serious education which falls into the secondary school category, where a Certificate is acquired, losing out 3 Months just to take part in Iria traditional practice was a conflict situation that making a decision requires, and many parents and guidance choose education against the traditional practice, this affected Iria participation by maidens. **(Male FGD, 65 years).**

Still on interview with Focus Group Discussion'

Chief Opuade Daniel said education is not supposed to affect Iria because it is normally done during the Christmas Holiday; the ceremony is timely and does not stop the

maidens from attending school, in his view, Education has portrayed Iria traditional practice aa uncivilized and Archaic, people see Iria as ceremony for the unlearned and illiterates, a complete waste of time and for traditionalist alone. Culture is not treated as part of a people but segregated to a particular set of people. **(Male FGD, 65 years).**

Theme 4: Poverty and the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okirika Ethnic Nationality

Iria traditional practice is very expensive to fund. From the Costumes require to the Food to be consumed by the fattening room maiden, preparation for dance training, Burumo Designers on the body, tieing of Ogbudu are all financial intensive. The Costume, wrapper precisely are 'Feni Bite' which happened to the highest traditional wrapper for the Okrikans, it is very expensive and according to the Design, the Highest form is the 'Nama Tibi' Design which goes for 18,000 per yard while other fall within the ranges of 15,000 and several yards is required to round up the Ogbudu on the maiden.. The next is the 'Popo Wrapper which is the second traditional wrapper of the the Okrikans, it cost is about 40,000 to 45,000 for the two waste. 'Ikpo' Bite is another very important wrapper used by the Iria maidens it has also increased to 10,000 for two waists, 'Injiri' Bite is another wrapper frequently used by the maidens both to sit at home and for outing purposes.

Food is another very expensive aspect of the Iria, fattening room requires different kinds of food to be available. Maidens are put in the fattening room for a period of 3 Months. For this reason they are to be fed with sumptuous meal so that they appear plump and fleshy, the rationale behind the fattening room concept is for the maiden to be robust and attractive before their would be suitors/ husband. They are treated to a special native Dish called 'Temi Buru' (a combination of Yam and overripe plantain pounded together laced with palm oil). This delicacy is eaten with 'Fresh Fish Pepper Soup'. The Soup the maidens eat are also very nutritious and always specially prepared with Sea foods such as Isam, Ngolo, Oporo, Ngbe, Ofingo with either Meat or Fish and all these are very expensive since some of them are already going extinct and expensive to afford.

In a KPI interview with a maidens Mother, she lamented how it was difficult for her to get her daughter ready for the traditional practice, the financial implication was a serious challenge, but she has to struggle to bring in her daughter who was very much interested with the traditional practice, she said the organizers saw her interest and supported her financially to front the child. She said some family member find it difficult to give out their expensive wrappers for the practice seeing how the wrappers are being folded and pinned, rolled on the ground in some cases. **(Female KPI, 51 years).**

Another KPI interviewee Barr. Mrs Iruayenama spoke;

Saying times are hard but that does not mean we allow our traditional practice and culture to extinct. She said people could rent or hire costumes within the family circle for those that don't have, then for the food , it is normal, with or without Iria these girls would always eat, so it shouldn't be an issue to feed the maidens for the period of time. Barr is of the view that we should forget about complains and support our dying culture, she said she had come to support her niece that is participating in the 2022 Joint Koni-Ama/ Okochiri Iria. **(Female KPI, 50 years).**

Theme 5: Urbanization and the Acceptance of Modern Iria Traditional Practice in Okirika Ethnic Nationality.

Urbanization is process of formation and growth of a city, it entails a change in a region when its population migrates from rural to urban areas. The Land of Okrika has always remained the way it has been since inception, but the population kept increasing. It is a rural area without much social development by way of land extension and reclamation urbanization is as a result of this population growth, other reasons are environmental pollution, noise, water, land and even air. These factors have triggered urbanization exponentially; people have left their home towns to reside in the urban cities where living conditions are not too harsh. This has affected the Iria traditional

practice alongside other practices. When there are not much males in the families to attend family meetings even if they do deliberations are on serious matters of concern, Iria is least of all issues to be given attention and gradually it is phasing out. As it is Iria needs time and financial arrangement for organization and the ones to spear head are all resident in the cities. This has brought a huge set back at modification and organizing of the traditional practice for continuity.

And interviewee from a Focus Group Discussion contributed that;

Some many people have left the town in search of greener pastures, their priority is on how to make ends meet, and giving their family members a better life, organizing Iria is least in the mind and Agenda of people, he added that those in the town should try and come together and see how they can revive Iria traditional practice since lack of interest has added to urbanization to cripple the practice. **(Male FGD, 65 years).**

Discussion of findings

Iria is an all-female adolescent rite of passage ceremony into womanhood, a ceremony performed by a chaste girl of adolescent age (14-19). It is an initiation into womanhood a celebration that welcomes the maturity of a woman. It was also gathered that Iria traditional practice promotes chastity amongst adolescents, and encourages early marriages, though some of the activities of the practice are found to be archaic compared to the realities of the present time.

It was also discovered that the Conflict of Interest is in the nature of Iria traditional practice, which involves a lot of traditional activities that is perceived as ungodly, uncivilized and archaic, these activities range from elongated fattening room period to shaving of hair to show scalp. Other activities are going to the river for bath very early in the morning when no one will see them irrespective of the weather or river condition, visiting/entering of shrines to seek ancestral blessings, being chased by *Osokolo* masquerade, dancing with *Nkoro* masquerade, pond cleansing bath, forest visit to be stoned with an orange by a masquerade, walking bare footed all through the stipulated period and opening of the breast, etc. are all activities heralding Iria traditional practice of the Okrika ethnic nationality.

Still from findings, there is a slight modification on the fattening room period from 3months to 1 month, no entering into shrines or pouring of libation or any form of rituals for the 2 consistent towns (Ogu and Koniju / Okochiri Kingdom). But for the other 6 clans that have stopped participating in Iria traditional practice, these ritual and activities were still operational before the sudden annihilation. Nevertheless, early morning River bath by the Iriapu (maidens), dancing with a masquerade (Nkoro) is still practiced by the two (2) towns, Koniju-Ama /Okochiri Kingdom, they still appear bare chested, but in Ogu town, breast opening is optional, even though the breast opening supersedes covering breast. As at 2022, Ogu had only three (3) participants, while Koni-Ama /Okochiri Kingdom had seven (7) participants, making a total of (10) Iriapu (maidens) in the whole Okrika ethnic nationality and this is so because of the slight modification on activities and rituals.

Also from findings, Iria has gone extinct in six clans, most of the towns that are known for organization of Iria ceremony annually have stopped taking part in Iria, towns like Kirike, Ogoloma, Ogbogbo, Ibaka, Isaka, and Bolo. Other factors responsible for this extinction of clans are as follows: Financial implications in organizing the Iria ceremony, Divergent views of Traditional leaders (disagreements), Chieftaincy tussles and divisions within traditional stools, Lack of Awareness on the importance of Culture, Disinterest in traditional practices, and lack of transmission culture syndrome.

Conclusion

In Africa there are still certain traditional practices which are still consistent with African Christianity, they hold and preserve them even in the face of pervasive modernity, while some traditions cannot stand, and people will not hesitate to choose modernity and western educational reforms over them (Giddens, 1999). In Africa, womanhood is essentially revered and adored. It is adored because the positive value it projects and revered for its

esoteric energy that transcends ordinary comprehension. Iria traditional practice of the Okrika ethnic Nationality in Rivers State is one of such revered traditions.

The study investigated how Conflict of Interest has affected the acceptance of modern Iria traditional practice and how modern Iria traditional practice can be accepted amidst Conflict of Interest. This is achievable only by the introduction of African Traditional Method of Conflict Resolution in other to arrive at a Unified Nature of Iria Traditional practice in Okrika Ethnic Nationality of Rivers State. And lastly Dialogue is a key tool to be applied to foster continuity and maximum participation of both Towns /clans and maidens alike.

The study concludes that there is need for cultural modification, since culture is a critical aspect of social life. Iria of Okrika ethnic nationality should take a new form/ pattern.

Recommendations

Given the above findings from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1.
o restructure or modify Iria from the original pattern by expunging rituals such as entering shrines and ancestral houses, pouring of libation, River bath, pond bath (cleansing) dancing with masquerade and being chased by masquerade, fattening room activities, shaving of hair, forest trip, breast opening etc. Culture is dynamic.

2. Culture and traditional practice/ ceremonies should be integrated fully into the school curriculum and be made a subject on its own, it will increase the zeal to partake in traditional practices outside school environment.

3. Dialogue as a Conflict Resolution tool should be employed by Indigenous Personalities such as clan heads, traditional leaders, chiefs, youths, age graded etc. to advocates for modern Iria and invariably terminating conflict of interest.

4. Lastly, there is need to reclaim more lands around Okrika and Ogu/Bolo Local Government Areas, this will reduce the level of Urbanization and give this present generation a share in their own community, access route, roads, bridges to communities is also required, to ease harsh transport system.

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