

EFIK CULTURE AND ENDANGERMENT: WHAT ROLE FOR THE MONARCHY?

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Prologue

I want to begin by expressing my profound appreciation for the opportunity given to me to deliver this lecture, especially on the occasion of our Edidem's 70th birthday celebration. This lecture aims to proffer solutions to certain issues plaguing our kingdom. Hence, this should be seen as my own modest contribution to enhancing the development of the Efik Kingdom and ensuring its survival.

Introduction

History is not just a study of human's past events but such past as it relates to the relationship between the human and her society. This is because no human, community or group within a defined territory can exist in isolation. They are shaped by their society and they shape their society. Thus, throughout the annals of history, people have often defined themselves by their affiliation with a group--what is known as cultural identity--and such elements that constitute that culture such as language, religion, traditions and history.

While other cultures of the world struggle for dominance, minority cultures are going into extinction. Data from UNESCO has indicated that as many as half of the world's languages will be extinct by the end of the 21st century, with one language dying every 14 days.³ UNESCO also ~~admits that millions of people have lost their uniqueness, local culture and identity to the forces of globalization~~ – a situation which has necessitated its designation of about 1000 heritage and 500 biosphere reserves, across the globe.¹ The trend is so appalling that “about 97% of the world's people speak about 4% of the world's languages”.² Nigeria is not exempted from this cultural threat which is most glaring by the extermination of languages, as a source of identity. In fact, statistics from *Ethnologue* is represented thus:

The number of individual languages listed for Nigeria is 525. Of these, 517 are living and 8 are extinct. Of the living languages, 507 are indigenous and 10 are non-indigenous. Furthermore, 19 are institutional, 76 are developing, 229 are vigorous, 81 are in trouble and 42 are dying.³

That stated, it must be noted that cultural identity is highly valuable and constitutes one of the prerequisites of Abraham Maslow's love/belonging, esteem and self-actualization hierarchies of

¹ UNESCO, “Culture for Sustainable Development”

<http://www.unesco.org/new/culture/themes/culture-and-development/the-future-we-want-the-role-of-culture/the-unesco-cultural-conventions/> Accessed 19/09/2019.

² UNESCO, “Language Vitality and Endangerment” Document submitted to the *International Expert Meeting on UNESCO Programme Safeguarding of Endangered Languages*, Paris, 10-12 March, 2003. p.2.

³ David Eberhard; Gary Simons & Charles Fennig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. (22nd edition).

human needs satisfaction.⁴ This is more so as identity, UNESCO reaffirms, enhances the sense of self (by addressing those innermost questions of “Who I am?” and “How do I fit in?”), improves self-confidence, direction, and focus, stimulates a sense of pride and achievement, and develops self-esteem, self-worth and dignity.⁵ This is why some cultures, such as the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, have devised several means and taken swift action in order to preserve what is left of their threatened heritage. For instance, the Yoruba language has been made compulsory for both indigenes and non-indigenes alike, and its study is gaining momentum in tertiary institutions, thus not just ensuring the survival of the language, but most importantly, its continued development. Indeed, the Lagos state government most recently adopted Yoruba as the language of the Parliament just as Ekiti similarly outlawed the use of English in traditional functions.

Conversely, there is no disputing that the Efik culture and language is seriously threatened from within and without. If we are to gauge by UNESCO’s indicators that a language or culture is threatened when its usage or practice is restricted to certain domains and is endangered when it “is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home” or “is spoken only by grandparents and older generations”, then there is cause for alarm.⁷ The Efik civilization, and all that defines it, is at a precarious moment in its history and seeks salvation from all its citizens. That stated, this presentation focuses on the role of the Crown in the preservation and revitalization of the threatened Efik civilization with emphasis on the language. The presentation has been structured such that it, firstly, provides a synopsis of the Efik civilization and analyzes the origins of the endangerment of the Efik civilization and secondly, examines the role of the Monarch in the preservation and rejuvenation of the Efik civilization.

Efik Civilization: Globalization and the Origins of Cultural Endangerment

The Efik civilization has been renowned for several aspects of its culture. For one, the Efik people had developed a language identity several centuries ago for communication purposes. Known as the Efik language, it possessed a unique orthography with 25 (capital/small) letters, 9 single vowels, 12 double vowels, 16 single consonants, 5 double consonants, 8 parts of speech, and 5 tone marks.⁶ Indeed, there was a strong literacy culture and a passion for formal and informal education as depicted by the early adoption of communication scripts such as *Nsibidi* and Alpha-numerals, and by the wide-spread of rich fables, myths, legends, poetry (*uto*) fictions and subsequent dramas such as *Asibong Edem*, *Sidibe*, *Mutanda Oyom Namondo*, etc. Similarly, the Artistic culture of the Efik was incontestable as the Efik passion for arts and crafts, with great finesse in calabash designs, velvets, beads, embroidery, bags, shoes, shirts, etc., could only be outmatched by their esprit de corps as they proudly wore and flaunted these attires. That stated, it

⁴ Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (English ed.). Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1970.

⁵ UNESCO, *Measuring Cultural Participation*. Quebec: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012. p.18.

⁶ See E. U. Aye, *A Learner's Dictionary of the Efik Language* (Vol. 1. Efik - English). Ibadan: Evans Brother (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, 1991, pp.iv-v; *Modern Efik Orthography*. Calabar: Wusen Publishers, 2002. p.3.

⁷ UNESCO, “Language Vitality and Endangerment” pp.7-8.

is important to note that this pride in the various aspects of the Efik culture was first rooted in the pride of language (a shared language), a child's first entry point into any culture and the substance that holds the foundations of any society and ultimately leads to its expansion. Indeed, it was with the lithographic documentation of the Efik language in 1846 by the Presbyterian missionaries, and later by political agents, that Efik became not just a language of trade and literature but a language for liturgy across the Cross River region and beyond. Similarly, it was the interaction between the Efik and the European traders, missionaries and political agents, and a subsequent lust for and misguided view of prestige in European culture, particularly their language, that marked the beginning of a corrupted Efik identity and the erosion of Efik culture.

The Efik language was one of the earliest threatened aspects of Efik culture. Though the learning of European languages was necessary for the 18th-century international trade, taking pride in them was what marked the beginning of the decay of the Efik language as children and adults alike soon developed the misguided belief that the ability to speak, read and write in a European language was the only indicator of literacy. This belief meant that people began to relegate the Efik language—a trend which has continued and even become more rampant today. Unlike the Chinese who welcomed trade and rejected Westernization, the Efik also welcomed the corruption of their ancestral names by missionaries such that Okon became Hogan, Ekpenyong became Young, Ansa became Henshaw, Akabom became Cobham, Asibon became Archibong, Abasi became Bassey, and so on. Today, a significant number of words are gradually disappearing in the Efik lexicon, young ones can barely string a complete sentence using only Efik and what is left of Efik literacy and artistic cultures are now Europeanized, further enabling the language's descent into extinction.

The Role of the Crown in the Preservation of Efik Culture

It is an undeniable fact that the Monarch is conventionally the first custodian of any culture. They live for and by the culture and are sworn to sustain it and by extension, the civilization it represents. Hence, if the culture is threatened, the Crown is threatened and the Monarch must do all within its power to preserve and revive that culture, and lead its citizens to do same.

It is, of course, evident and understandable that there is a limit to which the Crown can drive its desire; there are constitutional constraints and limitations in this present reality. However, many of what is accepted today as the norm were once also limitations. Consequently, there is no hindering the determination and persistence of a first-class and treaty king of the prestigious Calabar in order to protect and rejuvenate the threatened culture. The following suggestions are possible opportunities for the Crown to address the impending erosion of the Efik cultural identity:

☛ Promoting and Building Capacities for Studies and Research into Efik Heritage by:

- a) Awarding scholarships to students who are passionate about the study of Efik culture (with regards to the language, history, arts and crafts), and those in unique fields of study in science and technology;
- b) Identifying unemployed Efik tutors and work with the State's Ministry of Education to ensure that these tutors are employed and distributed across the Efik LGAs;
- c) Facilitating the revival of radio and television programs showcasing the Efik language, drama, music, etc.;
- d) Organizing Efik essays, quizzes, debates and other literary competitions, as well as cultural competitions (involving the revival and showcase of Efik foods, arts and crafts, boat regatta, etc)--all aimed at the preservation and promotion of Efik culture--for students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions;
- e) Encouraging and promoting the writing of Efik literary works (both academic and creative) as well as the translation of literary works into Efik language to promote readership in Efik;

☛ Establishing and Transforming Promotional and Conservational Institutions:

- a) Transforming existing historical sites, e.g. the popular *Esuk Mba* slave market could be transformed into a magnificent tourist site, in partnership with NGOs and international organizations such as UNESCO;
- b) Hosting of an online repository of resources on the history and heritage of the Efik civilization;
- c) Encouraging well-placed Efik citizens to establish a sole Efik radio and TV station that runs Efik literacy programmes, playlets, music, documentaries, discusses history, displays arts and crafts, and engineer audience participation through teasers, games, quizzes and Efik proficiency tests;

☛ Building Blocks for Peace and Collaborations

- a) Coordinating projects that are implemented in Efik land, but unite Efik citizens from all over the world;
- b) Promoting and collaborating with pro-Efik NGOs on developmental projects in Efik land;

☛ Advocating and Lobbying for Enabling Laws at the State and National Levels that Would:

- a) Make the study of Efik completely compulsory to schools (primary, secondary and tertiary) that reside in predominantly Efik territory;
- b) Permanent re-enlistment of the Efik language in WASSCE and NECO;
- c) Encourage the institution of Efik (with assistance from the religious hierarchy) as a language of liturgy for at least one service/mass for churches and other worship centres within the Efik territory;

- d) Partnering with necessary agencies to ensure that scholars of Efik heritage are gainfully employed after graduation;

Conclusion

We gather here today because we still have a throne to celebrate; we still have a king; we still have an identity; we still have a language; we still have a history; we gather because we have survived the cold hands of globalization. It is, therefore, our responsibility to ensure that we still have the light of our civilization to pass on to our succeeding generation. If we fail to do something while the fortune of our culture is dwindling, then we have failed as a generation and have deprived our succeeding generation of the pride and dignity that comes with identity. The rejuvenation of our civilization is a task that we must all play active roles in, as parents, teachers, philanthropists, lawmakers, whatever the capacity, and all this must be heralded by the custodian of our culture – the Monarch of the Efik Kingdom.

Epilogue

On a final note, I wish to thank his Eminence, the Obong of Calabar, Edidem Ekpo Okon Abasi Otu V and the Obong's Council for giving me the opportunity to deliver this lecture. I feel highly honoured and elated to be a part of this event and I wish our royal father many more years of God's blessings.