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Inculcating True African Spirit: A Panacea for the Liberation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria

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Abstract

The work titled "Inculcating True African Spirit: A Panacea for the Liberation of the Niger Delta People of Nigeria". The work examined the conflict situation among the people of Niger Delta; the situation in this part of the country had been on for years. The problem has affected lives and properties, disrupted sources of livelihood of people and destabilized the entire region- economically, politically and socially. Government actions through deployment of military personnel and lots more seem to have failed in resolving the problem. The need to employ other means to deal with the situation has necessitated this topic, which explores " how inculcating true African Spirit can be a panacea to the peace of the region. The work is based on the "deprivation and Recognition" theories of Hegel and Honneth. The work adopted mixed method of research (qualitative and quantitative). Being empirical in nature, a survey of African spirituality impact was conducted among the Niger delta people, with special reference to aged 16-64 years. The Data was collected and documented since the 1940's. These were however, limited to specific population groups that have small sample sizes. The diverse geographical

spread of the people, the ethnic diversity and the rural-urban variations was considered. A cross-sectional survey of the African spirituality impact to sustainable development was conducted among the Niger Delta Region's people, aged 15-64 years and spread across the 6 States of the South-South geopolitical zone. Models of conflict resolution were also adopted. Approaches and foci of historical and cultural identity measures were considered to vary across this divide with considerations for the socio-cultural norms for its influences on the conflict and struggle. Random sampling methods of survey were used for data collection and interpretation. The finding shows that true spirituality is a Panacea to the liberation of the Niger Delta people from crisis that impedes peaceful resolution. Cultural identity issues include African spirituality; and this is original and should be given a pride of place while dealing with the people. The work recommends that inculcating the true African spirit in conflict resolution will bring about peace in the Niger Delta Region.

Keywords: Inculcating True African Spirit, Panacea for Liberation, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

When petroleum (oil and gas) were discovered in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta Region in 1958, it came with hope and joy; this is because the indigenes believed that the incident would enhance the regions sustainable socio-economic development. Their thinking was that the oil and gas discovery will give them access to basic amenities, such as portable water, steady power supply, functional health care facilities, good road networks, affordable educational infrastructures, as well as employment opportunities. They had hoped that the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Multinational Oil Companies (MOC) were going to plough back some of the profits into the communities as part of their Cooperate social responsibilities. However, about sixty years down the line, these expectations appear to be totally or partly dashed, thus the persistent conflict in the region, over marginalization, deprivation, obnoxious legislation by the Nigerian State. Government has responded to these through the establishment of intervention agencies like the NDDB, OMPADEC and NDDC. The latest was the granting of amnesty to repentant Niger Delta militants in the year 2009 which has not brought the crisis to an end. This paper seeks for solution to end the crises. The study provides information on how a true African spirit can be a Panacea to the liberation of the region, and will evoke the empathy of the Federal Government and other concerned bodies in addressing the anomaly and engender sustainable peace in the region.

Prior to oil discovery, Niger Delta flourished in agriculture and fishing, the region served as an important arena for Afro-European trade relations. The production of palm oil and timber made this region strategic to both domestic and international trade, with some implications for the socio-economic and political lives of the people. Oil prospecting activities have changed these nomenclatures and created a platform for an unending conflict in the region with different armed groups agitating for their assumed rights, with instance of destructions and disruptions. The question is whether lasting peace can be restored to the region. Analyses of the role played by the stakeholders in the situation and how they can pull resources together to end

the crisis are the main thrust of this research. Assessing the Niger Delta as a Region before the discovery of oil in commercial quantity, Examine how discovery of oil brought about militancy and insecurity in the region, Analyse the different approaches adopted by the stakeholders to curb the conflict in the Niger Delta region, Suggest alternative approaches needed to bring about peace in the region. Does history and cultural identity issues have any relationship with militancy in Nigeria? Does militancy pose any threat to lives and property in Nigeria? Does a cultural identity issue contribute to cultism and militancy in Nigeria?

The theology of liberation is global because its message is universal, its historical roots can be traced to Latin America, north America, with its ripples spread all over the world and expressed in a variety of ways. This is the more reason global liberation is important. The "injustice" is all over the human environment as a result of class structures, which gives rise to segregation. The Christian theology "the gospel" of Christ being a global message seeks to liberate the people of the world from poverty and suppression. In Isaiah 61; 1-3 was a prophecy of the messiah fulfilled in Christ. The spirit of the lord God is upon me, because the lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the lord and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn... (Isaiah. 61:1-3). The concept of liberation theology, being that of the oppressed seeks to redress all oppression, which relates to physical, economic, psychological repression, which characterizes the whole environment. This is the message that results in his practical involvement in the salvation of the total man; soul, body and spirit and in every part of the world.

The Roman Catholic pope is said to have persistently decried the economic and social injustices created by modern industrial society and consequently propose remedies for them. According to him, the church have denounced nuclear warfare, repeatedly and urged an end to the arms race; but the capitalist have sought the continued exploitation of the poor nations by rich ones (Boff, online). One can infer from above assertion that, the protection and promotion of basic human rights in the social, economical and political realms becomes central to the church pronouncement. The reflection of the Latin American situation found justification in the Marxist concept and this is a global experience for all the oppressed and exploited people of which Nigeria is no exception. Liberation theology stirs up Christians to take seriously the social and political impact of Jesus' uniqueness in the reality of his deity. Therefore Jesus is the climax of his vicarious identification with suffering mankind rather than a substitutionary death offered on our behalf to turn away the wrath of God and triumph over sin, death and the evil.

Edward A. Lynch cites Gutierrez as saying: Liberation expresses the aspiration of oppressed classes and people, 'underlining' the conflict aspect of the social economic and political process (18-19) Juan L. Segundo (21) exhorted his reader to undertake conscientization of the poor, which he described as social mobilization that seeks to inculcate an awareness of real interests especially class interest at work in the society. Spenser Discala views world revolution in the international dimension opposing capitalist. Stalin in the 1920's interpreted Russia's isolation as encirclement by the capitalist powers. He claimed that, a defence of the communist revolution could be only by forming socialist countries fatherland; these are some

ways of global liberation has occurred. In the 21st century many environment, social and economic issues becloud the countries of the world such as; dept burden, unfair trade tariff, war among nations, racism, inadequate technological appreciation of science in the African society, sub-standard education, inferior export products to the third world countries and the new colonialism and many others needs the impact of global liberation which will lead to the addressing of the so much oppression, trafficking and drug pushing are prevalent in the world and subsequently calls for actions to address the menace as experienced during the era of National colonization of Nigeria.

Situation of National Colonization

The colonization of Africa and Nigeria in particular was a great drain to the African economy. The capitalist exploited the land and labour of Africans only for their selfish social advancement, leaving Africa underdeveloped as a result. Walter Rodney avers that colonisation was not merely a system of exploitation but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profit to the so called mother country (280). This act was a consistent expatriation of surplus produced of African labour and resources. The exercise impacted negatively on the African labour. The wages of the African labour were insufficient to keep the workers physically alive; more so, the colonial period brought great depression to African such that they had a very low standard of living even when there were ample opportunities to raise the living standard of the people.

Another offensive situation was the discrimination against African in the job market. Rodney discovered that in the period before the Second World War, European civil servants in the Gold Coast received an average of 40 pounds per month, with quarter and other privileges, Africans got an average of 4 pounds only. According to the source, there were instances where one European in an establishment earned as much as his twenty-five African assistance put together. That was gross injustice. The study further shows that in 1934, forty-one Africans were killed in a gold mine disaster in the Gold Coast, and the capitalist company could only offer 3 pounds to the dependants of each of the men as compensation. The action of the French president to the recent kidnapping of children from Chad signifies an attitude of colonialism towards its former colony. (Rodney, 170)

Economic Marginalization

The state of the African economy had suffered great depression, in terms of economic growth, for instance, trading companies who owned their means of transportation had to transfer the burden of transport cost to the peasant Africans in spite of high taxes the capitalist companies hold the Africans in a double squeeze, controlling both the prizes of the farm produce and the imported goods such as tools, clothing, and other materials, which peasant aspire to have due to the hash economy situation. The profit margin was kept as high as possible that the trading firms find it convenient, that fix the prize to be paid to African workers and this to the bear-rest minimum at the detriment of the African economy. Nigerian banks and companies are not left out in the use of these intrigues to declare high profit after tax on the poor citizens, who earn so low in their income.

The capitalist enterprises such as the; C.F.A.O and U. A. C. controlled whole sale and retail trade, they owned butter factories sawmills, cold storage plant, monopolized, marginalized and exploited directly the African economy. However the situation became so dramatic and attracted the attention of the outside world when Africans resorted to violence, using the Marxist principles and the economy began to grow in a very slow pace. The shipping and banking service is yet another channel for the exploitation of the African economy. The African peasant has absolutely no control over the freight rates. They pay much more than citizens in other lands. Study shows that between 1929 and 1931 the U. A. C. supported Unilever and engaged in the economic war, with the West African line company. This brought victory over the shipping monopoly but African peasant suffered great losses, because both traders and shippers had to adjust their difference by lowering prices of primary product paid to Africans. In the banking sector, African peasant had no direct access to bank loans for lack of securities. Other form of economic oppression notably includes their involvement in economic developmental loans that carried high interest rate, which the African peasant had little ability to defray. This lowers the standing of African economy in the international market hence the quest for debt cancellation, which would have positive impact on the African economy (Rodney, 171-172).

In a study of economic growth and financial crises, statistics has shown that more democracy positively correlates with a higher gross domestic product (GDP) per capital. However they have been disagreement regarding how much credit democracy system can take for this. It has been observed that democracy became widespread only after the industrial revolution of the introduction of capitalism. 'The industrial revolution started in England which was one of the most democratic nations for its time within its own borders' except that it was limited and did not extend or apply to the colonies which contributed significantly to wealth. Several statistical studies support the democratic peace theory that more capitalism, increases economic growth and in turn increases general prosperity. For example India, which is known to be democratic but arguably not prosperous, another is Brunei, who is known to have a high GDP but has never been democratic. Other studies suggest that more democracy. Increases economic freedom, although a few others do not, due to the rule of law, strong property right and, few restrictions against free trade has effect on economic growth. Some has aged that the index of economic freedom and other methods used does not measure the degree of capitalism. Some scholars argue that economic growth is attended due to the empowerment of citizens which ensure transition in a country such as china. However, others are of the opinion that even if economic growth has caused democratization in the past, it may not do so in the future because dedication may now have learned how to have economic growth without allowing political freedom for African nation.

It is an irony that the history and evolution of the third world including Africa are comparatively and richest in terms of natural resources, Africans are depressingly made poor. They still remain the most underdeveloped region of the world, having an uncontested monopoly of poverty in all ramifications. Rodney has revealed that the under development of Africans is characterised by man illiteracy, low level of political awareness and consciousness, liberalism, mass poverty amidst its natural plenty. Inappropriate application of mechanisation and the gross neglect of the agriculture sector have resulted in over dependence on crude

petroleum, as the Nigerian situation typifies. There is unhealthy dependence on forging manufactured goods, difficult and inadequate comprehension of technology, and couple with the sophisticated modern scheming and exploitative manoeuvres of some multinational establishment who collude with their local collaborators. Siphoning and embezzlement of public funds by the elite only compounded the agony. Infrastructure such as road and rail network were provided were only to smoothen import and export activities and in most cases to move troops and make conquest operation easier as highlighted by Rodney.

That is why M. Bonino advocated for a revolution, option of change. Today we still have new faces of colonial power and influence on the African nation in spite of national independence as exemplified in the Niger Delta they are rampant plane crashes today as a result of inability of the operator to acquire new aircraft thereby risking the lives of the air travellers in Nigeria. This situation is also common in many other third World countries. Racism means racial prejudices and discrimination as form of oppressive system. Racism is close brother of tribalism apartheid since their end result is often segregations and discrimination. Examining this thought politically, economically, socially or even religiously, it connotes the exaltation of a particular race over others, racism has been notably a long-standing problem especially in U.S.A, Europe and South African during apartheid year's western Christian theology has not given any responsible solution to racial problems. Western theology instead tends to practice racism in place like South Africa, USA.

The minority white Christians in South Africa is typical examples of this absurd schism in theory and practice. A typical manifestation of racism can be found even in Christ's paintings, in which his image is presented as white, while on the other hand the evil images were painted black, signifying Africans as Satan. This to the Africans amounts to dehumanization, so engineered the reaction of Africans; an action that brought about liberation theology, struggling against the problem of racism, leading to the slogan black is beautiful; the golden black stool of ashantehere.

Ethnicity:

The ethnological system of the Nigerians is that of tribal kinship and ancient empires with a variety of cultures, customs and languages. Traits are mostly distinguished and identified by these traits of oneness as pictured above. As a result of this difference among Nigerians, there is often found among us, oppression due to customs and traditional beliefs. Loyalty to the tribe is highly valued as to a fellow African. Nigerians in no way take pleasure in the disrespect of their belief and traditional systems. For example one tribe can be discriminated against because of the bad action of one person in the community. The offense of one man is often extended to the entire tribe, and can affect marriage between children in future generations. The same problems are found in the Niger delta religion because many Nigerian leaders are opposed to the struggle of right of claims of the oil wells by the Niger delta states. Hence the on-shore oil dichotomy to make national claims on the oil, at the detriment of the Niger delta people.

In Africa, and indeed globally, history has shown that many states are not culturally and ethnically homogenous. There are sharp ethics, linguistic, religious and cultural diversities. The situation is worse in a state without universal suffrage like the former apartheid South Africa and in Nazi, Germany. Sudan today is inclusive as there is distrust in their national

identity, hence the Darfur crisis which has lasted for about four years now. Nigeria is not exempted by the cultural and ethical factors which affects the society.

Cultural and Religious Oppression

James H. Cone (1986) has said that the concept of black culture is closely related to black experience can be seen from the concept of black history. Hence Black experience can be seen as what blacks feels existing in a dehumanized white's society. He calls this "black soul", the pain and the joy of reacting to whiteness and affirming blackness. According to cone, black history is the record of joy and pain. By implication, the African culture has been highly bastardised by the whites in their trying to condemn African mystical and inherent power. It is a known fact Africans are notoriously religious people, hence the use of religious structures that gives no answers to the existential problems of the black people such as polygamy, sorcery, dreams, devil, spirituality, and the place of ancestor, and problems associated with sacrifices. Such application of unfamiliar practices on the Black people's culture becomes oppressive, subjecting them to salves and suggesting that the status quo remains the lot of Africans. This is what liberation theology seeks to address, to regain for Africa her lost glory. Liberation theology reinterprets the scripture, critiques western theology and demand action and social involvement as an expression of faith. Cultural and religious oppression is quite prominent in the African society as there are various cultures and religious bodies among the people.

Dien revealed that the problems of Africans and Nigeria in particular is, not much of economic or racial, but cultic enslavement. In southern Nigeria there are several secrets societies, which includes; *Ekpo, Obon, Obam, Ibiritam, Ndem, Mfam, Okpinon, Ekpe*, witchcraft and many others. These cults have some level of secrecy, which is their strongest weapon. These indigenous cults are traditional and they have public ritual festivals. Oath takings invitation symbols and rituals form part of these societies. These societies have strong attachment to African religious life. The initiates often dominate the non-members and so see them as enemies. This is oppressive in any social environment. The witches and other wicked secret societies are often a threat and a challenge to the wider society. These cults do cause underdevelopment and injustice as a result of death caused by it to humans, whose life would have help solve the problem of underdevelopment in Africa. According to Dien, cited Mbiti as saying that witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical powers, generally in a secret fashion. (78-96).

African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, evil eye and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belongings. Generally, the same person is employed to designate the harmful employment of mystical power in all its different manifestations (Dien, 85). This situation is found among the secret societies, such that it imprisons the soul of non-initiates into bondage that only Jesus Christ the liberator can deliver, J. Mbiti further says that; witchcraft is said to eat away the health and souls of victims, to attack people to cause misfortunes and make life uncomfortable (Dien, 88). In this way Africans oppressed one another and the entire society as whole. Therefore the African oppressive practices, by secret societies in Africa should be stamped out completely since they perpetuate a lot of oppression and injustice in the society.

However, there are useful cases of secrecy in government meant for security reasons, such as in state security service, criminal investigation department and economic and financial crime commission. The fact that issues of cultism in all its ramifications is evil, Transparency, being a mark of freedom should be encouraged in all organizations and government. No wonder the involvement of the "assignment churches" those are occultic in nature, which are organized in the form of the church of Jesus Christ, to perform cultic practices; even though they give temporary succour to most African problems.

In the political sphere, the retired military leaders have gang themselves, into the cults of generals, who must handle and dictate the affairs of the nation in terms of power and economic control. With this occultic power, innocent Africans who oppose them by fighting for their freedom are often killed, mysteriously. Dictatorship in Nigerian leadership system by former military Presidents have over the years witnessed prosecution and silent extermination of citizens who tend to struggle for their rights. They are often regarded as opposition to the government as experienced in the present day government. This is a bundle of injustice that is quiet peculiar to the Nigerian situation. Superstitious belief is one of the ways through which Africans are enslaved by their culture and a religious heritage. The African practices are tied to the belief in magic and witchcraft among others. This creates irrational fear of what could not be properly defined by Africans and are often viewed as mysterious, and attributable to the gods. A good example, of such influence that infringed on African rights and freedom, was the rejection, and killing of twin children and their mothers being sent to the evil forest as an outcast to die there. But today, twin children, live among the society and proves very useful.

According to Dien "all evil in Africa such as division, tribalism, discord, quarrelling, immorality hatred, occultism, embezzlement of public funds and so on occurs by satanic power, and demonic influence since all evil is attribute to satanic, and demonic influence (94-96). Study further reveals that the fear of superstitious beliefs has effect on people, these fears, and leads to their further engagement into more bondage, as they got initiated into secret societies for protection. The new-testament has presented the devil's influence as a counter force against Christ work of freedom and redemption. This conveys strongly the relevance of the liberation theology as the message of Christ salvation to all.

Political Suppression

Study has revealed that the colonial period left no better situation for the African colonized territories including Nigeria. There were no social services for the Africans until after the 2nd World War that social service was made into policy. Still, little was made only for the benefits of the colonialist. Hence the statement of **FRELIMO** in (*Mozambique liberation front*) Department of education and culture says; in the colonial society education is such that it serves the colonialist, in a regime of slavery, education was but one institution for forming slaves (online) In colonise like Algeria, Kenya, and South Africa, study shows that whites created infrastructures to afford themselves leisurely enjoyable lives. The government policies where so unfavourable that in the Nigerian case, for instance, Ibadan, one of the most heavily populated cities in Africa which had only about fifty Europeans before the Second World War, had a segregated hospital service, with eleven beds in well furnished environment were provided for the whites. While on the other hand, there were only thirty four beds, provided for

the half a million blacks in the city, (Rodney, 225). Today, the same situation exists among political parties and opposition in Nigeria who pilot political affairs, to the detriment of other fellow citizens in the opposition party, this amount to injustice in the political sphere.

Capitalism

One of the greatest problems of the oppressed poor is capitalism; its existence creates a gap between the developed and developing countries. It was revealed that from 1960 to 1970 the developed nations maximized their wealth by fifty percent (50%) at the detriment of the developing countries, while two third of the world's population continues to struggle in poverty and frustration. Capitalism itself is the state of exploitation and oppression and dependence of the poor and marginalized on the privileged powerful. Cardoso asserted that; the relationships of dependence presuppose the insertion of specifically unequal structures.

The growth of the world market created relationships of dependences and domination among nations. Franz Hinkelammert said that; these are authors who live in centers of the capitalist world, and who deal with the problem of imperialism from the point of these centers. By implication, they experience the expensive strength of capitalism in these centers and they also experience the economy crises of the centres in all ramifications. Capitalism creates the imbalance between the developed and underdeveloped countries-this is caused by the dependence relationship. Capitalism is a refined form of slavery, the exploitation of man by man, a situation where the developed nations control production and trade, then uses the underdeveloped nation to create their wealth at their expense. This is the master-slave relationship, a class structure. However, the capitalist itself is a self-destructive system because it contains within itself the very seed of its own destruction. As the capitalist creates the exploited, it's at the same time creates conflicts, and thus sow the seed of its own destruction. As the oppressed realizes his position of inhuman treatment, he must struggle for a change. Marx according to Dzurgba maintained that conflict is the universal law of process. He also quoted Heraclitus and Hegel who considered war as means to break out of this impoverished conditions.

Situation and the True African Spirit

Asamoah-Gyagu in describing African spirituality made a discourse of the spirit world in African thoughts systems and practices; he showed that the religious traditions and beliefs of the African peoples have enough differences to merit a study of each in its own right. Nevertheless, they also display enough fairy resemblances for us to be able to delineate their main features and to a very reasonable extent fall on them to represent the whole. The religious traditions and practices discussed below are informed by African beliefs in the reality of the spirit world and ardent desire to engage with it for the purposes of human survival, health, fruitfulness, and longevity. Not only are spirits real but also evil is hyperactive and much religious activity and energy goes into restraining sources of supernatural evil and their influence on human life. The continuities between African beliefs in mystical casualty and the attractions to pneumatic forms of Christian piety are therefore not too difficult to find. If Western mission Christianity dismissed African beliefs in the evils of witchcraft as nonsensical,

African initiated Christianity of the pneumatic type affirmed such belief and provided alternative rituals for dealing with them within a Christian context

Conclusion

The study provides information on how a historical and cultural identity issue contributes to the conflict and will evoke the empathy of the Federal Government and other concerned bodies in addressing the anomaly. This will engender sustainable peace in the region. Where case of non influence of historical and cultural identity issues is obtained, this useful information will aid the Government, NGOs, Multinational Companies and the people of the region, to devise appropriate strategies to address the conflict rather than secession of region from Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Cultural identity issues bothering African spirituality and identity should be given a pride of place while dealing with the Niger Delta peoples.
2. The work also recommends that government and her agencies in charge of mediating the crisis of the region should encourage parties to conflict to inculcate the true African spirit during the process of conflict resolution; this will bring about peace in the Niger Delta Region.

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Up-Coming.....

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