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The deification of the Ancestors as a catalyst for the promotion of Patriotism among Nigerians: A case study of Esan people of Edo state

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Abstract

Africans and Esan people in particular deify their ancestors, they attribute supernatural powers to them, irrespective of the kind of life they lived while on earth, they are known to effect moral sanctions on those that violates communal morality and reward those that conformed to acceptable norms of the community, that is why they are referred to as 'Moral Paragon'. However, the veneration of the ancestors in Africa and among Esan people has diminished significantly, as a result of the evangelical activities of the proselytizing religion of Islam, Christianity and the neo-religious movement, coupled with urbanization and globalization. The paper interrogates how the veneration of the ancestors can resonates patriotism in contemporary era, It further, examines the modern ways of deification and show the critique posed against the practice by adherents of modern religion. Data is gathered through historical analytical approach, while ethnographic research method is adopted for its theoretical frame work. Findings show that the deification of the ancestors can mitigate injustice, victimization, oppression and corruption perpetrated by the state political and economic actors, because it promotes the philosophical input that states thus, a good name is better than silver and gold, as well as, good name lives after the demised of an individual.

Keywords: Deification, Veneration, Ancestors, proselytizing and moral paragon.

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Introduction

Religion plays a pivotal role in the life of an individual or group of individuals. It is at the root of the culture of a people and a determinant of the relationship between the people and the divine, ultimately, there are no set of people that exist without religion, as such the Africans are engrossed in the indigenous religious tradition they inherited from their forebears, through it they acknowledged, respect, venerate their ancestors and connect to the supreme deity. Ancestral veneration is relevant to the Africans in general and Esan people in particular, to the extent that it serves as a veritable link between them and the spirit world. Remarkably, African traditional religion has no sacred book, like bible, Vedas, Quran and gigantic sacred structures like temple, churches, cathedral, mosques and pagodas. But it influences the ethics, cultural milieu and the world view of the people. Thus, Africans are religious from the very beginning of time, they started with the religion, because they are born into it, live with it, sleep, wake, play, work, grow, celebrate, marry, die and transcend with the religion. Africans have a high connection with the super sensible world, this is demonstrated through their relationship with the spirit world, that enable they to link with their ancestors, who promotes, sustain and reinforces the moral sanctity that the Africans are known for, however, this has now been down played by the Africans as a result of avarice, materialism, selfish interest, the incursion of proselytizing religions and the alluring strings of globalization. The Africa ancestors are moral paragon, they are the champions of morality, hence, the moral prowess of the Africans, which makes them unique, discipline and a people to reckon with. Hence, the Africans will do everything possible to check on the behavioural disposition of any of their own, that could infringe on lay down laws and use it to rob on his/her entire family members, the attempt to avert such impediment warrants Africans to guide and watch the back of one another. Thus, if a member of a family is caught stealing, it will be concluded that stealing runs in the blood of the entire family. Prospective suitors will run far from such family, so as not to give birth to off springs that will exhibit similar trait, that is why the upbringing of a child is the responsibility of the entire family members, not the biological parents alone. The veneration of the ancestors birthed some social restrictions among the Africans, such social legislations are referred to as taboos, for instance, a married woman is forbidden from shaking hands with a man, see the nakedness of a man, stay in a room alone with a man, borrow/collect money from a man. Among Esan people all these and many more are classified as adultery and it could incur the volatile wrath of the watchful ancestors. However, the westernization of the Africans has made many Africans to jettison their religious heritage for the migrating western culture and civilization. Consequently, the practice and ethos of African traditional religion has being greatly diminished, relegated and down played that many Africans secretly associates with their religious tradition, the implication is that many young boys, girls, men and women are dying carelessly, because when it has to do with the sanctions of the ancestors, ignorance is not an excuse, Africans should return home to their ancestors like prodigal children. It is only when all Africans wished to be venerated like their ancestors after their earth life that they can begin to do the right thing, become patriotic and truly nationalistic.

Methodology

The researcher deployed ethnographic research method, in this case the researcher declared his motive and identity to the people under investigation, this method is referred to as overt observation

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method, the study population of this work is drawn from ten versatile elders representing the five local government area that comprise Esan land, valuable information were carefully extracted from them through a well-grounded unstructured interview, the research design is highly descriptive, as such it depends largely on non-numerical findings that the researcher gathered from interviews, participatory observation, written noted and other secondary sources.

Theoretical frame work

This work is framed on the fundamentals of Emile Durkheim 19th century functional theory, which was developed by American sociologist Talcott Persons in the 20th century and it became the predominant theoretical perspective in sociology in the 1940s and 1950s. The theory states that society function effectively as a result of the activities of its interrelated parts (Haralambos, Holborn, Champman etal 2013) this is similar to the way the organs of the body function in unity to keep the entire body active and functional. Thus, there are ways that people are expected to behave, (rules). There are specific guides to action/behaviour (norms) and there are yardsticks to evaluate good and bad actions (values). These accentuated into functional prerequisites which imply that society need certain basic requirement for survival. Hence, the religious conviction of the people that enabled the society to compel individuals to behave in ways that are in conformity with the expectations of the society, these includes love, empathy, sincerity, humility, obedient to civil rules and regulations, invariably, the deification of the ancestors contributes to the sustenance of social order and collective morality of the people, which are the bases of patriotism, patriotism is first learned by an individual at the communal setting and could be demonstrated at the national scale with the passage of time.

Statement of problem

Existing scholars like Idowu (1973) Awolalu (1979) Quarcoopome (1987) Namawu (2017) Danoye (2006) Okojie (1994) Beryers (2010) and Ezenweke (2013) stated that the deification of ancestors enable the people to venerate/reverence the ancestors as part of their families, which is the bases of the social structure of Esan people, the aforementioned scholars agreed that the ancestors bless those that conformed to the norms of the society and sanction those that violates social order. However, they can be pacified through the offering of sacrifice, the joy of the people depends largely on how they obey their ancestors and the reverence of the ancestors sponged the promotion of collective morality and communal order. Meanwhile, in Nigeria today, political apathy, corruption, ethnicity, weak social cohesion and religious intolerance in a highly pluralistic Nigeria state, has led to a sharp decline in patriotism.

The deification of the ancestors is underpinned to adaptive moral transformation and conformity of the people to communal norms, sadly, there is no in-depth studies that present ancestral deification as a bases to highlight civic responsibility, ethical leadership and apparent integration of patriotic consciousness of the people at the community to national spectrum, this is the disturbing gap in scholarship that this paper is set to fill.

The Ancestors

Africans in general perceived God to be too mighty, powerful and incomprehensible that they cannot approach him directly, as such they contact him through elinmin-ancestors who serve as an intermediary, through which, they are protected from the greatness and limitless powers of God. (Mbiti, 1978) he added that the ancestors are bilingual, they speak the language of mortals and that of the immortals, Mbiti holds that they have direct physical relationship with the living, he referred to those that died recently as living dead, because they can be remembered by their living relatives and those that died long ago, he designated as ghost because they must have being forgotten by their living relatives (Mbiti, 1978) Ndemanu is of the view that the ancestors are regarded as angels, though, they have died, but are somewhere watching over their relatives that they left behind. (Ndemanu, 2018). For (Ademo, 2008) the ancestors are perceived as symbol of peace, unity and prosperity in the family, as such they are always acknowledged in every family gathering. While, (Idowu, 1973) opined that the ancestors are the departed members of the families on earth. (Awolalu, 1979, 63) asserted that the ancestors are the deceased spirits that are close to families but with enhanced prestige. (Quarcoopome, 1987), posited that the ancestors are men and women of various tribes that are believed to possess extra human powers in the spirit world and can intervene in the lives and activities of the living members of the community, they are the unseen chairperson at family or communal gatherings and perform the duties of the guardian and custodian of morality in the lives of individuals, families and clans, Conformity to social norms attracts their reward, which could be in form of good health, bountiful harvest, prosperity, boom in business, fertility in marriage, protection, general progress and peace among the people in the community, while those that violated acceptable norms are punished by the ancestors, these could manifest in crop failure, draught, sicknesses, misfortune, general retrogression and even death. These claims were corroborated by Edward Norbeck quoted by (Obengo, 1997) who stated that the ancestors are persons who while in the world held positions of importance, such as heads of families, lineages, clans, tribes, kingdoms and other social group, coupled with parenthood. Notwithstanding, they are departed spirits that are honoured as a result of their long good, spectacular and extra-ordinary lives on earth, according to (Ukwamedua, 2023) the dead are venerated, among Africans in general and Esan people in particular.

Among Esan communities, the ancestors act as spy police, no matter how discreet, shameful or disgraceful an act might be, it cannot be hidden from their watchful eyes. Thus, holds that they are very close to their living relatives and are separated from the physical world with just a tiny veil.

Some Deified Ancestors among Esan People

Deified ancestors are men that have died, but are accorded supernatural powers by members of the family and community that they left behind. The reverence Esan people accorded their departed ancestors and the effects of their sanctions on the people accounts for their place in the socio-cultural-religious space of the people. Esan people regard their ancestors as their ambassadors in the spirit realm that serves as a channel through which they communicate with God. Thus, (Etuk, 2002) reported that their departed ancestors' functions ultimately in the shaping of their custom, moral code and general law of ordered life. Hence, an ancestor could be connected to a family, clan or the entire community before departing the world, a particularly point of reference are individuals that sacrifice themselves for their people during communal war with neigbouring community, somebody that began a settlement or an individual that performed great act in

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their life time, people that have children and died at reap old age. These set of people are deified/reverence after their demise by members of the community and their children and relatives that they left behind.

Some deified ancestors among Esan people are as follows;

Uda the great (1485-1515)

According to (Okojie, 1994) Uda the great was deified by the people of Ekpoma. He noted that Uda was the son of Oghale the king-Onojie of Ekpoma who went to Benin kingdom to pay homage to Ozolua the blood thirsty warrior and newly crowned king-oba of Benin. Okojie further added that while in Benin, the obas' son challenged the Ekpoma prince to a wrestling contest, in the course of the bout, the Benin prince was killed, in a fierce reaction, king Ozolua traced the prince to Ekpoma, where he killed the king, all his children, some of his servants, while others managed to escape to Ene a neigbouring community, he stated that a grandson of the deceased king that was taken as captive to Benin, turned out to be very strong, gallant and fearless, Okojie reported that he was greatly admired by Oba Ozolua for his recorded successes in the annual wrestling festival. He hinted that the Oba later regretted his battle of vengeance and extinction of the royal house of Ekpoma. However, in 1845, Ozolua assisted Uda with human and material resources to go and rebuild Ekpoma royal dynasty, he reinforces that after the death of the king of Ekpoma, a faithful servant named Uase built houses and made provisions for his late master's harem of wives and kept to himself for five consecutive years. So when Uda returned to establish the second dynasty of Ekpoma and uncover the alloyed faithfulness of Uase. He rewarded him with part of the kingdom. While, Uda took charge of Eguare, Ene and Emando, Uase the loyal slave ruled over Ihonmudumun, Iruekpen and Ujemen, Emuhi. Okojie summed that Uda's reign was successful and peaceful. He was deified by his people and venerated in appreciation for his political, economic prowess and peaceful disposition.

Ujosanlen in Opoji, Deified Ojienondiaesan

(Okojie 1994), affirmed that Ujosanlen is a settlement in Opoji, under Ekpoma and added that it was founded by a Benin warrior, named Uzagbomi, who was known as Ojienondiaesan. After his demised he was deified as the first king-Ojie of the land. Annual festival is usually celebrated in his honour. The priests of his shrine are referred to as Ezomo of Opoji.

Eidenu people (1474-3099) deified their founders

(Okojie, 1994) asserted that Eidenu a popular settlement in Irrua, Esan central local Government Area, was founded by three powerful warriors, known as Unobi, Aighe and Omoruare, he noted that as time progresses, the settlement of Unobi were known as Idunobi. The community of Aighe was known as Eidenu-na-ato, while, the descendants of Omoruare were later known as Udowo. These three warriors were later venerated by the people of Eidenu.

Unogbo people deified Amase

The historicity of Esan people by (Okojie, 1994) revealed that Unogbo people migrated from Ohe in Benin. He stated that the first king of Irrua, Ekpereijie had two sons. The first was Etaghaifi, while, the second was named Amase, who was a personification of evil. When the king sensed that his second son will be a serious problem to the heir apparent after his demise. He gave the troublesome Amase, Ada and Ebelon, i.e staff of office, riches and slaves, after which he instructed Amase to go and settle in faraway Unogbo, that is why the people of Unogbo are regarded as the direct descendants of the terror prince Amase. He was deified in appreciation of his untimely death and liberation of his brother from his repulsive actions. He was labeled as Avan - the god of the storm.

Ikhirimo was deified by the people of Ebohiyi

Ikhirimo was an indomitable warrior, who told his wife to prepare pounded yam for him while, he rushed out to honour an invitation from his war commander, his war commander instructed him to go and prepare for battle against Oba Ozolua of Benin, he went back home and was disappointed that his wife did not prepare the food for him. He boiled and ate the yams and declared that if he returned from the battle, he will dissolve the marriage but if he died, none of his children should venerate him with food prepared by a woman if they wanta his blessing and attention. Unfortunately, he did not return. However, he was deified with uncooked food. (Okojie, 1994)

Uromi deified Agba N' Ojie (1488-1504)

According to (Okojie, 1994) Agba the son of Ichesan, the second king of Uromi, was a fearless, brave ruler that determined to deliver his people from the oppressive Benin king. Agba stopped the tribute sent from Uromi to Benin every year and made mockery of other Esan kings that pays yearly homage to Ozolua the king of Benin, in 1502, Ozolua came to Uromi, killed the king of Uzea and severe his head, for resisting the Benin Monarch, he took the head to Benin and casted it in a brass like a trophy. When Agba heard the news, he summoned his warrior, so that they can go and confront the blood thirsty Ozolua. Agba went to Amalu-Ugboha for refuge but came back to Uromi after some time, while, king Ozolua turned Uzea to his base, from there he launched aggressive attack against Agba, the king of Uromi. Omogberale enacted that the followings were the effects of the war on the people:

i. There was no farming activity in Uromi for a year.
ii. young men deserted their homes for the jungle.
iii. Agba warriors starved, some died of diseases, while Ozolua could no longer maintain his supply line from Benin.
iv. The warriors of Ozolua exhausted foods from the farms and homes in Uromi and started dying like animals.

The warriors of the two kings got exhausted of fighting one another and decided to stop the war. Meanwhile, the two kings were busy hunting for the throat of each other. At the apex of the fight, the warriors of both parties held a secret meeting and took the following decisions:

i. They are exhausted from the fight.
ii. Their enemies were king Ozolua and king Agba of Uromi.
iii. They should kill the two kings and end the war.
iv. Both parties should choose four trusted men that will execute their decision.
v. Oaths were taking to ensure that both sides carried out his assignment.

The Benins were extremely tired of the war, so they connived with the solders of Uzea and killed their king the very day the agreement was reached. After killing him, they buried him in Uzea, but took his severed head to Benin. Soldiers that were stationed to guard the grave later founded Otokhimin in Ugboha. Immediately the news

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reached Uromi soldiers, they arrested their king, tired his hands and feet, he was later killed by left-handed man - Agobo, who fled to Ugboha through Uzea. He later founded Idasun of Idinegbon, in Ugboha. Uromi soldiers kept the circumstances that led to the death of the king a secret and responded to enquiry about their king from their people with 'O, vade - He is coming. Thereafter, there was relative peace in the land. Benin warriors returned to Benin while, Uromi soldiers returned to their villages. King Agba of Uromi was later given a befitting burial by Uromi people, he was deified and venerated by all Uromi people. His priest is from Ubierumum, the veneration is done on every local Uromi market day.

Oghomighon was deified by the people of Ubiaja.

In explaining the customary practice of Esan people (Okojie, 1994) stated that King Oghomighon of Ubiaja desired to quench his thirst. Meanwhile the road to the river Niger was an impenetrable 64km away. Oghomighon staged men from his palace to the Niger River each man passed a cup full of water to the next without moving from their standing position. He was also the king that displayed wealth to prove that he is the richest king in the entire Esan land by tying coils round a palm tree beginning from the bottom to the top. Unfortunately, he died before getting to the half of the tree. The people of Ubiaja deified and venerate him, because they were impressed with his action and personality.

The people of Idasun of Ugboha deified Agobo

Okojie affirmed that Agobo was originally from Idumuagbala in Uromi, he actively participated in the war of liberation and supremacy between king Ozolua of Benin kingdom and king Agba of Uromi, he later moved from Uromi to settle at Idasun for fear of being exposed for killing Agba, the king of Uromi. However, the death of the king, averted attack on Uromi people by the Benin soldiers. After the death of Agobo, he was deified by his people. He was venerated through the feast of Isu Efale, usually performed on the first day of the new moon. The people of Idasun are known for their honesty and for doing things with their left hands. (Okojie, 1994)

Unoko of Idumebo in Irrua

Unoko - Iroko tree, in Idumebo two Iroko tree grow side by side, which was unusual, this fascinated the people who cleared round them and turn the spot to their village square - Ughele because of the shade it provided. (Okojie, 1994) Okojie added that there was a powerful diviner called Arabonikpo who was the leader of the settlement; he was often consulted by Osemwede the Oba of Benin who reign between 1816 -1848. The Oba always called on Arabonikpo whenever there are serious problems in his kingdom. Meanwhile, after consulting diviners, the Oba would kill them, despite being aware of this Arabonikpo went to Benin to work for the Oba. He spent three years fortifying Oba Osemwede, after which he informed the Oba of his intention to return home. The Oba laughed and gave him his reward, as he made arrangement to leave the palace. The Oba arranged for seven groups of armed men to guard the roads to Esan land, so that Arabonikpo will not be able to escape death, Okojie further reported that on the appointed day. Arabonikpo requested for a day old chick, skinned it and made a feather bag -- Ekpa asin-okhunhun and hung it round his neck, he also demanded for the head of a weightless sea bird- Apin-pien and declared that once this bird cry, it flies off, He lay hands on a single Okede -- the diviners drum which is usually in pairs, he also tied it round his head, shook hands with all that were presence, he beat the drum and walked into his room, he beat the drum till the king-Oba and his high chiefs dozed off, when they woke up, they did not hear the sound of the drum again, all the seven waiting points were checked, but no one saw Arabonikpo. On a fateful Edizele -- native Sunday, the people of Idumedo heard a strange Okede sound from the top of the Unoko tree, the people brought out their own Okede and started beating and singing Oboh he ohkun oran, ruenre, ruenreo ruenre. The doctor on the tree, please come down. Suddenly, they heard a voice from the top of the tree commanding them to turn their back against the tree, they all obeyed, except a girl who from a vintage position in her father's house saw a man coming down from the top of the Unoko tree. He greeted everybody that were present and told them his experiences in Benin. But his brothers were afraid because they had inherited his wives thinking that he was death and gone. However, he sacrificed a goat on his ancestral shrine and re-inherited his wives. The next Idizele - native Sunday, the people of Idumebo gathered to hear Arabonikpo's escape story from the Oba of Benin. Thereafter, he danced with the half-naked girl that saw him to the palace of the king of Irrua.

This occasion is commemorated with the yearly worship of the Unoko and traditional Inukpukpe-procession of all young and unmarried naked girls to the palace of the king of Irrua to express their joy and innocence. This justified why all diviners in Esan land mostly Idumebo Irrua, open their divination process with thus, A ra obo nan Arabonikpo, ne ebolo bha hie - let us honor Arabonikpo who never met disgrace with his divination, he is honored through this process till this day. In contemporary time, the process has been carefully modified, the people offer sacrifice and acknowledged him and recall the event, but girls no longer dance naked to the Oba palace at Eguare.

Modern ways of deification

If great men were deified long ago, in contemporary time, men that accomplished great achievement for themselves, community and nation are no longer venerated but are remembered by decorating them with national honour like officer of the order of the federal republic (OFR) which is accorded on outstanding civilians, the highest is the member of the order of the Niger (OON), the second is the Member of the order of the federal republic of Nigeria (MFR). The third is Member of the order of the Niger (MON). These honours were instituted by the National honours act N05 of 1964 in the first republic of Nigeria to honour Nigerians that have rendered services that benefited the Nation. According to (Ezeocha, 2015) others are set of people that were named after federal, state institutions and streets. Some examples are as follows:

i. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University. Bauchi, founded in 1980.
ii. Adekunle Ajasin University in Ondo State, founded in 1999.
iii. Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Kaduna state, founded in 1962.
iv. Ajayi Crowther University, in Oyo State, founded in 2005
v. Ambrose Alli University Ekpoma, Edo state, founded in 1981.
vi. Bayero University, Kano state, founded in 1977
vii. Benson Idahosa University in Benin City, Edo State Founded in 2002 and so on.

Dr, Aliyu Modibbo Umar a formal minister of the federal capital territory revealed that the federal government of Nigeria renamed

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83 streets, roads and buildings in the federal capital territory after some prominent Nigeria politicians, sport men and women. This included death and living Nigeria Ancestors. These personalities were carefully selected to reflect the spirit of Nigeria unity in diversity.

Qualification of an individual to become an ancestor in a traditional setting;

Among Esan people an individual must possess the following to become an ancestor:

i. The individual must live a life that is worthy of emulation, but (Okojie, 1994) hinted that Esan people respect and venerate an ancestor even when they know that the individual lived an unjust and riotous life while on earth.
ii. The individual must have lived into ripe old age.
iii. The person must have been married and have children that will continue his linage. According to Eromosele among Esan people, when an individual died without biological children, his godson - oruo will play the role of a son, he will conduct the burial rites of the deceased and inherit his properties.
iv. According to. (Ehimare, 2000) the fellow must die a good death, which implies that, he must not have died of witchcraft, suicide, accident, unclean diseases, like lunacy, dropsy, Leprosy and epilepsy. Meanwhile, bad death also includes those that died through wickedness, during pregnancy, according to (Ehimare, 2000), such people will not be admitted into the abode of the ancestors, their spirit will haunt trees, rocks, river and water courses till they repent and are reborn into disable bodies. This lay credence to the belief in reincarnation among Esan people and Africans in general.
v. Eromosele posited that the individual must be given proper burial rites, Itodede/itolomin. He added that an ancestor that is not given complete burial rites will not be admitted into the guile of the ancestors and such person will become a wondering spirit. He submitted that at the spirit realm the ancestors enjoy dual existence and are endowed with power.

Functions of the ancestors

According to Ehimen the functions of the ancestors include the following:

i. He asserted that the ancestors guard and guide family and community that they left behind on earth. They therefore function as invisible police men in families and in communities.
ii. These ancestors serve as the intermediaries between the divinities and man, because it is believed that they have direct communication with the divine beings.
iii. The ancestors are the invisible police in the community and the unseen chairperson in family gatherings.
iv. They have delegated authority from God. But are independent of God with regards to the imposition of sanction and rewarding individuals, a tribe, clan, linage/families.
v. They accept sacrifices for appeasement to grant prayers for fertility, healing, prosperity, peace, bountiful harvest and so on.
vi. They are given special place in the conduct of rituals and festivals in Esan land.
vii. They are formidable sources of socio-cultural cohesion among families.
viii. The veneration of the ancestors among Esan people in particular and Africans in general give meaning to culture and custom of the Africans.

Esan people venerate their ancestors for the following reasons:

i. According to Ofemun Africans in general and Esan people in particular believe that all the inhabitants of the supersensible world can see what is happening on earth.
ii. Esan people hold that their departed ancestors can direct and discipline the children and relatives they left behind.
iii. He added that Esan people believe that all dead people can see and communicate with God.
iv. The ancestors are the custodian of morality; thus, they can impose sanctions on those that violates communal norms.
v. Esan people fear to offend/go contrary to the instructions of the ancestors. This reverential fear cemented goodwill, promote peace and unity within family fold and the entire community.
vi. The veneration of the ancestors by Esan people keeps the hope of the people alive; moreover, the practice is accommodated by the cultural of the people.
vii. Esan people communicate with their ancestors through the process of divination.
viii. Among Esan people, the watchful eyes of the ancestor deter married women from committing adultery and others from heinous crime.

Critique of ancestral veneration among Esan people

The migration of Christianity and Islam into Africa and their settlement in Esan land has changed the religious landscape of the people. Converts now see the religion they are born into from a different perspective; as such they criticized ancestral veneration as follows:

i. Isesele is of the view that majority of the ancestors are not kind to the relatives that they left behind on earth, their judgment is always harsh and devoid of a human face.
ii. He also stated that some of the ancestors that are venerated by the people were morally bankrupt in their life time; as such they don't deserve the veneration given to them.
iii. For Omogberale Esan people are faced with plethora of challenges, if their ancestors are truly functional and effective, they supposed to have sanction perpetrators of these challenges.
iv. Imosele enacted that in contemporary era, human beings have taken the position of the ancestors. He posited that oracles are no longer consulted to know the decision of the ancestors. He further stated that money is rather used to influence the stance of the elders in the community. Imosele noted that if the ancestors of the Esan people are truly the living dead that sanction injustice among the people, they are supposed to act now that the situation is getting worse, he asserted that it is possible that they too are crying for justice and restoration where ever they maybe at the moment.

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v. Apoli holds that the ancestors are created from the figments of man's imagination and should therefore be allowed to rest in peace. He added that their recognition and veneration is as a result of forceful indoctrination of the people by those that adhere to the traditional religious practice of the land.
vi. Oboh stated that the ancestors are dead and gone, venerating them is a mere waste of precious time, in fact, for him their veneration is tantamount to respect accorded to dead heroes/heroines, he further retorted that the practice simply amounts to the reverence of a dead grandfather/grandmother, Oboh summed that Christians claim that such veneration is the acknowledgment of demonic forces that are supposed to be cast into abyss of fire.
vii. Oboh reaffirmed that the appeasement of the ancestral spirit with the blood of goat negates modern civilization and this is not ethical, he further noted that many people have being defrauded by fraudsters with esoteric knowledge through ancestral veneration. He concluded that this is possible because everything about ancestral veneration is shrouded in secrecy, which ought not to be.

While examining the role of the ancestors in relation to the challenges facing the Esan man in particular and the Africans in general, one will be forced to toll the stance of (Ukwamedua, 2023) who asserted that the ancestors are dead and gone they should be forgotten and be allowed to rest in perpetual peace.

Ways ancestral veneration promotes patriotism among Esan people

According to (Ehimare, 2000) patriotism means to seek the highest good for one's nation, tribe, clan or family. An Esan person sees himself as a man of the people; such person will want to affect the entire community in a positive way, he could grant scholarship to indigent students, provide pipe born water for the community, construct roads, provide street light etc.

According to (Ayantayo, 2009) Morality is the character of being in accord with the standard of right conduct, it refers to what act or behaviour is acceptable as normal or usual. specifically, virtue in sexual conduct, for instance, among Esan people adultery is a taboo and it is sanctioned by the ancestors, nobody wants to be sanctioned by the supernatural forces, thus, everybody is expected to live an upright life. Hence, people are guided to do the right thing by members of their family and community.

Justice is the fair treatment of others in the society/community. (Ayantayo, 2009) stated that justice is giving to every person what is due to him/her, it pertains to liberty, freedom, equality and fair play, he added that Justice implies that we must try to defend innocence and promote the truth among mankind. Esan culture promotes truth, justice and fairness, offence against an individual is considered as an offence against the community. The pursuant of justice is the responsibility of all in the community, which implies that it is the collective responsibility of the people and the elders in the Community to maintain justice, because the elders serve as the representatives of the ancestors, at this level justice is not sold as obtainable in our contemporary society.

According to Okolo the fear of the sanctions of the ancestors and the imposition of punishment by the communal elder's prompt Esan people to do the right thing all the time, like obedience to authority, cooperating with other members of the community, promotes hard work, hospitality and generosity. These usually lead to accountability and responsibility which is needed for the overall development of the nation. When all Nigerians see themselves as part of the big family called Nigeria, corruption, embezzlement and stealing from the national treasury for personal use will be a thing of the pass and then the wealth of the nation will be used for the development of the people and the country.

However, This virtues can be translated to our national scene when it is passed into law by the national assembly that oath of office, witnesses in the court of law and Judges in all the courts in Nigeria should take an oath in the name of a local deities to act and tell the truth always, the potential fear of doing the opposite and the consequences will force Nigerians to stand and defend the truth always, this will be a step in the right direction, because African traditional religion is the indigenous religion of Nigerians, its impressible formula should be harness to promote patriotism that will paved way for national development.

Researching findings

i. Believe in the ancestors enhance adherence to the norms of the community this makes an individual accountable to his family, community and the society.
ii. Among Esan people ancestral deification is highly institutionalized and their sanction is feared, hence the people conformed to social legislation. These impact greatly on them, hence the reflection of patriotic characteristic in the daily endeavour of the people.
iii. The practice and belief system of the people enable them to internalized societal norms, which is beneficial to the community and the society. Hence, Okojie reported that the elders can judge a case and can impose fine, ostracized or banished an individual from the community.
iv. Ancestral veneration gives ember to cultural continuity as well as the reinforcement of traditional values, which will make an individual to behave in ways that will not soil his good name and family reputation. Thus, Enabiofo hinted that the general behaviourial disposition of the people accounted for their collective identity.
v. It shows that indigenous religious practice can truly affect the civic behavior, mentality and morality of an individual, particularly when the person finds him/herself in the highest level of state affairs or Governance; this in a nutshell is the highlight of the application of Emile Durkheim functional theory.

Recommendations

i. Traditional practices all over the country should not be jettisoned completely else it will amount to throwing away the baby and the bath water. Some ingredients of indigenous practices should be conscious preserved by those that are in charge of the affairs of traditional institution in the country.
ii. Indigenous practices should be documented this will bring it to public domain in the process it will be devoid of the secrecy and esoteric strings around it.
iii. Indigenous religion should be taught in schools across Nigeria, because it will equip the people and make it possible for them to avoid pitfalls that could lead to serious problems for the individual and community.

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iv. People in position of power and authority should legislate and passed enabling laws that will make the practice of indigenous religion and culture part of our daily lives. Rather than the isolated application it is subjected to in contemporary era.
v. Traditional religion should be recognized and be accorded a national holiday in ways that are similar to Christians and Islamic religion in Nigeria.
vi. Finally, all the diviners and herbal practitioners in the country should be brought under one umbrella body, just like the Christian association of Nigeria (CAN) and Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA), this will enable the concerned authority to profile them and come up with codes of conduct. If this is done, ritual practices, yahoo plus, ritual money or spiritually activated wealth will be a thing of the past in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The greatest deficit in Nigeria today is the problem of trust. People are no more reliable, deceit, lies and fraud are the other of the day. Humans are now so fake that one begins to wonder if fake humans have been manufactured to join the original ones. Hence, we have yahoo-yahoo, yahoo plus, obtaining by trick (OBT), ritual killings, human trafficking, kidnapping, banditry, impersonation, arm robbery, stealing, abortion, drug trafficking, divorce, corruption, mismanagement of public resources, the appropriation of public wealth to private pockets and so on. However, checks can be put to all these, if a system of reward and punishment is institutionalized. Perpetrators should be made to know that their action on earth transcend earth life, this could promote self-discipline as well as make it easy to control them. The people could begin to make conscious efforts to live the good life, believing that honour or punishment awaits them after their earth life depending on the way they live on earth and bearing in mind that good name is better than silver and gold. However, this great feat can be attained within the present set of leaders, if a leadership training institution and a system of integrity test is put in place to train and orientate leaders before they occupy position of authority. The institution can be tagged leadership training academy of Nigeria. It will serve as a preparatory school for leaders. This will equip them and will make them to be selfless and put an end to the primitive accumulation of wealth that is prevalent in the country.

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Interviewees

1. Ehidiamen, Samson Idialu, 60yrs old farmer, a residence of Odughele Idumabi in Esan central LGA, interview was conducted on the 19th August 2024
2. Okolo Saturday Odia, 62yrs old retired teacher, a residence of Idimun- Ewakon Idumebo in Esan central LGA of Edo state. Interview was conducted on the 19th of August 2024
3. Eromosele John Imole, 61yrs old trader a residence of Egware – Ekpoma in Esan west LGA. Interview was conducted on the 20th of August 2024

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4. Ehimen, O. A. A 63yrs old farmer, resident of Iki in Opoji Ekpoma. Esan west local govt area. Interview conducted on the 20th of August 2024
5. Ofemun Gabriel Imole, 65yrs old civil servant, a residence of Ugbenin – Ubiaja in Esan South East LGA, interview was conducted on the 22nd of August 2024
6. Imosele Emmanuel Aramude, 66yrs old wine tapper, a residence of Idumu-Owemen in Ubiaja in Esan South East LGA, interview was conducted on the 24TH of August 2024
7. Omogberale Timothy Sabo., 68yrs of farmer, a residence of Uzeneman – Arue Uromi in Esan North East LGA OF Edo state, interview was conducted on the 24th of August 2024
8. Isesele keneth Usifo, 63yrs old farmer, a residence of Eguare Uromi in Esan North East LGA, interview was conducted on the 24th of August 2024
9. Apoli Samson Uwezele, 60yrs old farmer, a residence of Idumoka in Igueben LGA of Edo State, interview was conducted on the 27th of August 2024
10. Oboh Bernard Briamoh, 63yrs old hunter, residence of Idumuomon in Igueben LGA of Edo State, interview was conducted on the 27th of August 2024

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