

THE INFLUENCE OF URBANIZATION AND MODERNITY ON NEMBE CULTURE

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Abstract

This research work is based on the ancient cultural practices of Nembe people of present day Bayelsa State. This paper is propelled by the need to document and highlight established behavioural patterns and skills displayed by these people since the 19th century which seem to be going into extinction. The focal point is the effect of rural- urban migration on these traditions in Nembe kingdom. Standard questionnaire and structured interviews are the primary source of data collection. Randomly selected five communities formed the population which include Ogbolomabiri, Bassambiri, Dougo-ama, Odioma, Twon and Okpoama. Opinion polls were verified by prominent chiefs of sixty years and above resident in the sample communities. As expected, the younger generation are oblivious of the existence of these cultural facets and traditions which this research has brought to limelight. Result shows tremendous loss of cultural heritages as a result of interplay of cultures and tradition occasioned by the presence of 'foreign dwellers' and migration to urban cities. A detailed outline or list of the lost traditions, existing ones and modification when this study was carried out under the prism of Occupation; marriage; language; house rule; death/ burial rites and common taboos, were examined with possible recommendations.

Keywords: African, Culture, Tradition, Nembe, Values, Norms

Introduction

The Nembe Kingdom in Bayelsa State (South-South Nigeria) is occupied by people of the 'Izon' ethnic nationality. Today, they spread across two (2) Local Government Areas of Nembe and Brass Local Government Areas respectively. The area is hidden among a number of creeks east of Rivers Brass and St. Nicholas; 300 miles from the sea. The people call their capital city Nembe. The town Nembe is divided into two sections, Ogbolomabiri and Basambiri by a small creek 50 yards apart. It also has Suburban settlements– Oromabiri, Okipiri and Tubopiri. The Brass town also called “twon” comprises of a cluster of towns. The order in her language distribution include sixteen (16) towns counted in 1895: 1. Ogbolomabiri, 2. Bassambiri, 3. Okpoama (fish town), 4. Twon Brass, 5. Odioma, 6. Obioku, 7. Diema, 8. Fantuo, 9. Ewelesuo, 10. Beletiem, 11. Egwema, 12. Liama, 13. Egenelogo, 14. Sagbaturu, 15. Etiema, 16. Kiripogo.

Nembe as a people occupy the Atlantic fringe of the east senatorial district of Bayelsa State.

According to Alagoa (2009), the effectiveness of the dealings with the early white traders with Nembe coastal communities was largely due to the cohesiveness of the social organization, the basis of this organization was the House (wari) classification of relatives. The house rule was the basis of the entire social, political and economic organization of these people of the Niger Delta located in the present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

Occupation of the Nembe People

The geographical definition of the communities of Nembe compels them to be majorly fishermen. Farming activities are usually minimal or mostly done only for subsistence purposes. Izon men and women employ different methods to catch fishes as fishing equipments are used differently by men and women depending on types of aquatic animal in demand.

Anderson (2002) further adds that apart from fishing, which is the main occupation of the people of Nembe, other activities are closely clustered along canoeing and water craft production as well as caving of canoes. The earliest trading activities of the 19th century were slave trade and the buying and selling of palm fruit before the discovery of crude oil in the area.

House System of Leadership

According to De Cardi's description, a House in a tribe is made up of a head chief and number of chiefs. Each chief has a number of petty chiefs under him. This petty or deputy chiefs are influential men who own slaves and a few canoes of their own. These petty chiefs pay tributes to their head chief after trade with the white men and this cluster of a head chief and some deputy chief make up a house (compound). There existed, specific living quarters of each house which usually describe relationships with one another. Although these quarters still exist today in the cities and towns, but the forces of migration and emigration of population have brought about random location of house members.

Alagoa (2009) aptly gives a description of the House (Wari) rule.

- The house Rule measures were passed after the abolition of slave trade in 1901.
- Native costume for members to contract out the house on the condition that they forfeit every benefit.
- The house is a corporate and mutual organization in which every individual has a right to succeed to the headship.
- The head chief is always accompanied by petty chiefs and young men for ogele function which makes up the gig (Warboat).
- Men in every community are arranged into four classes viz; the head, sub head, the primary members and ordinary members.
- The heads of communities are bound to give every member of their community's

goods and money to trade for themselves.

- When the original head of a community dies, the cleverest and most ambitious amongst them becomes the heir apparent.
- Nembe traditional leadership system is known as the House Rule (Wari) (Alagoa 2009). The house rule, small groups of blood relatives nominated and chalked by the king are the representatives in the chieftaincy council. Certain qualities and characteristics are expected of this prospective chief elect at the era of slave trade. A head chief must possess a war boat, some slaves and petting chief or deputies under him.
- This small unit of House and its chief may own fishing camps, settlements and even farms. These requirements are however streamlined to be interpreted today as 'a chief must possess a house of his own, be married and be able to fund his chieftaincy nomination which is quantified in millions of Nigerian naira. A woman cannot be a chief in Nembe Kingdom, neither can she access traditional leadership role that involves men.

Traditional Religion In Nembe

Ogidiga (Python Worship)

According to the Nembe tradition, the python (Ogidiga) is their major deity. Therefore, any person that kills this deity knowingly or unknowingly (mistakenly) is bound to die unless certain important rituals are carried out without delay. This python otherwise known as OGIDIGA is believed by the people to be a warrior from the spirit world providing the people of Nembe the power and strength to conquer in all their battles with neighbouring enemy powers or foreign invaders. Nembe kingdom has an Ark of inquiry called "Ebebege". It is a bamboo ladder tied with two tortoise (Ikage) on poles. This medium acting as an oracle, affirms information through its backward and forward movement (oscillation). Alagoa (2009) opines that the spirit world and the supernatural constitute an extension of the world of nature but outside the direct experience of men and women.

To this, Ozob (2014) adds that Ijaw in contrast to the other neighboring societies believe in the feminist nature of God (our mother). Wonyingi and Temearau theory is also observed in Nembe tradition as they called the mother God Wa Nyingi according to Angba (2017).

Family System:

Family system in Nembe is unique and peculiar as this is the only aspect of Nembe culture that is centered on the female gender. Nembe is a matrilineal Society. This simply means that a mother owns the child and the nieces and nephews of a man have more authority over the property than the biological children of the man. Children are trained as they grow in their mother's family house as women were flavoured as their sons and daughters increase the house membership.

Property Ownership

Nembe tradition does not allow a man to own a land. Properties are owned by the wari, which allows portions for wealthy family member(s) to build houses accordingly. Houses are built to accommodate everyone that needs shelter. This is evident in the huge ancient structures of the 19th Century present till date in all the ancient Nembe cities like Ogbolomabiri, Bassambiri, Twon, Okpoama, Akassa and other notable eleven prehistoric towns in the ancient Nembe Kingdom.

Equity In Nembe Property Sharing

Another notable traditional practice in Nembe land is the equality of male and female children in the sharing of properties. Male and female children have equal rights in the participation of any burial rites. As earlier stated, Nembe Kingdom practices matrilineal system where mothers have more right of control over children though they bear their fathers name. At death, the mother's family oversees burial rites, rituals and proceeds. The mother's family claims ownership and take possession of the corpse of the deceased and organize the funeral. The acquisitions or earnings of every member of the community belongs to the whole community. There is this saying “*Imgba me wa derigha*” (the bone must get back to the owner). The bones of the dead must be brought back to the mother's community. This tradition contradicts the general norms that when a woman marries, she becomes her husband's property and therefore would be buried at her husband's village/house. Ownership of the corpse is a rule that cannot be altered in Nembe tradition. Male or female corpses must be brought back to the mother's house to be buried in Nembe. There is another burial rite in the Nembe tradition known as communal burial. Immediately a person dies, the mother's family members gather to contribute money for the bololo wari (burial cook right). This is seven days for male and 3 days for female. There must be cooking and drinking for some specific number of days at a designated family house. Visitors come to commiserate with the bereaved family at this place. On completion of the Gbololo wari, a date is fixed for the burial and every one disperses to return on the said agreed day for the commencement of full burial rites and funeral.

Since burial ceremony in Nembe is the responsibility of every member of the community, all night wake keep and a day time contribution called “Tiripaga” are performed. By this practice, every adult member of Nembe is expected to join the queue and donate his own quota of the burial expenses in financial or material form. Usually, after the contributions, the total sum raised is announced while the nuclear family members sit and greet everyone that contributed “Onua ooo” meaning “thank you”. The head chief and deputy chief of the deceased are responsible for this fund raising ceremony. Afterward, the following day at the family mausoleum, the chief returns burial expenses of the nuclear family, and give the children some amount to ease or serve as a relief to the headship caused by the absence of the deceased.

Burial Rites For The King In Nembe Kingdom

Prior to the introduction of mortuary services in Nembe land, the kings are the only person embalmed for three days in a traditional way, followed by a prolonged lamentation, the body is treated with aromatic liquor just to enable head chiefs and subjects from various communities under this kingdom to attend the ceremony. Gungs are fired day and night. The elaborately

decorated graves of about forty feet by twenty-five feet with sixteen feet deep is built at the king's palace or compound. A war dance "Peritoi is usually performed for a king or priest that is no more. The dance represents the act of war captive and it depicts the place of sacrifice by cutting off the victim's head, performed by the eldest son or nearest ally or relative. On the seventh day after burial, one of the sons will be led to the waterside (opupogu) shouting the king's name; he will then run quickly homewards. This marks the end of the ceremony but until the ceremony is declared over, no work was permitted. Boat regatta display of all community and houses are expected as part of the ceremony and signs of last honour and respect for the late king.

Urbanization, Migration and Civilization

Urbanization or rural/urban migration is defined by Hussan (2018) as the city centered culture. A phenomenon that has affected Nembe's indigenous traditions and culture including the whole of Africa adversely. Urban centre and societies are over populated by the movement from most communities with diverse ethnicity. The diverse ethnicity or perspective brought indoctrination and infusion of other cultures to the people's original ways of life.

Civilization is the mother of urbanization and modernity which in turn gives birth to transformation and seeming development. The major factors of this urbanization are population growth and quest for white collar jobs or juicy political/government opportunities in the urban cities.

According to Alagoa (2009) Nembe people are one of the foremost Nigerians to interact with the white explorers during the slave trade era through the Atlantic oceans at the Brass sea. This slave trade and the eventual oil palm trade gave way and opportunity to foreign infusion and change of patterns of settlements. Migrations at earliest times were mostly the result of wars or communal clashes which are rarely the case today.

Urbanization or modernity is innate now with rural dwellers struggling to access basic comfort and profitable ventures in cities. Another noticeable reason for urbanization and modernity amongst the people of Nembe is environmental degradation consequent upon the discovery of crude oil in the inter-creeks. This has brought more destruction and pollution of the ecosystem and the environment more than bringing the so called development. This is obvious on the effect of aquatic lives considering the geophysical activities on the water ways. Hence the main occupation of the Nembe people can no longer sustain them as the fishes are further endangered by the carbons and emitted gases as well as oil spillages that abound in the area. Young men and women have left their villages and fish camps for larger societies in quest of education, white collar jobs, greener pastures and other attractive opportunities in urban centres or cities.

Taboos in Nembe Land

1. No killing or eating of python and snake generally.
2. No sales of periwinkles (isem) harvested from any part of Nembe Community by Nembe indigens.
3. Nembe do not grow yam on the land because it attracts snake.

4. Men and women do not share personal items like bath bucket or towels because the woman is unclean because of her menstrual circle.
5. Women are not allowed to walk across the grave because they may not identify the male grave. This is because the females are not supposed to walk across a man whether dead or alive.
6. Nembe men cannot be intimate with women during their menstrual period. This is why there are designated places for women during the period of their menstrual period otherwise known as “Siema tetion kubu bio”.
7. Nembe men do not pass under the rope used for the drying of wet or washed cloths.
8. Nembe people do not flog a human being with broom.
9. Nembe people are not allowed to make love or have sex on the bare floor.

Problems

The research problem stems from the critical assessment of traditional culture arising from the growth of rural centres through urbanisation and modernity in the Nembe society. Village or rural area is characterized by common bloodline living together (communal behavior), while urbanisation is the influence by competitive, distant or unfamiliar relatives. The unprecedented movement of people from rural to urban centres is a phenomenon that affects developing countries like Nigeria. This influences large cities making them have enormous negative effects on the way of life of its citizens. Examples of such factors are unemployment, poverty, inefficient housing and transport system, increased cost of living, environmental degradation and culture loss which are major concerns for the African and the Nigerian society in particular.

Mbiti (1971) in line with the research observation says that the mistake of the early missionaries was not the preaching of the gospel through culture that they were familiar with but that they first discredited the African culture before preaching the gospel. This portrayed our rich African culture as barbaric and evil, thus degrading the values of Afriacan traditional practice including that of Nembe.

Research Questions

1. Do these traditions still exit in Nembe kingdom today?
2. Are there obvious or manifest alterations of these traditions?
3. How much of these traditional practices are lost through urbanization and modernity?

Objectives

This paper attempts to identify the extent of culture loss through urbanization and modernity in the villages of Nembe Kingdom turning the rural areas into city centres and possible proposed solutions to positive culture preservation in Nembe communities with specific objectives as follows:-

1. To find out historic ancient/traditional practices of the people under study.

2. To figure out aspect of these traditional practices that are going into extinction.
3. To highlight the effect of urbanization and modernity on these cultural practices and recommend possible solutions.

Research Methodology

Design

The descriptive-survey research design was used for this study because it suits the study. According to Anikpo (1986), descriptive research design tries to find out and explain prevailing practices, beliefs or attitudes, methods and approaches on ground over peculiar phenomena with a view to analyzing and interpreting them contextually.

Population and Data Collection

A standard questionnaire was designed and structured interviews were adopted as primary sources of data collection. Questionnaires were distributed amongst randomly selected members of the communities that make up the population under study. The study area is Nembe Kingdom and it is made up of 16 major towns and numerous fishing camps bearing in mind that more are created annually.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Christian and Traditional Religious Practitioners

Name of Town Practitioners	Christians	Traditional Religious
Ogbolomabiri	70%	30%
Bassambiri	50%	50%
Bougo-Ama	60%	40%
Igbela-ama	50%	50%
Odioma	70%	30%
Okpoama	50%	50%
Twon Brass	50%	50%

Percentage Distribution Of Questionnaire

S/N	Name of Town	No of Q. Given	No. of Retrieved
1	Ogbolomabiri	20	20
2	Bassambiri	15	10
3	Bougo-Ama	10	5
4	Igbeta-ama	5	5
5	Odioma	15	12
6	Okpoama	20	18
7	Twon Brass	15	15

Table 3: Do these traditions exist in Nembe Culture?

S/N	TRADITIONS	SD	D	AG	SA
1	Worship of the Python Snake	-	2	72	11
2	Periwinkle Sales	-	-	60	25
3	Matrilined Rites	-	-	43	30
4	Burial rites and ceremony	-	-	60	25
5	Will execution	11	10	20	24
6	Ownership of properties	30	20	20	15
7	Taboos practices	-	2	13	70

Table 4: Are there manifest alterations to these Taboos in Nembe Culture

S/N	TRADITIONS	SD	D	AG	SA
1	Python snake worship is going extinct	14	11	20	40
2	Periwinkle is now sales	70	25	10	0
3	Matrilineal family system has been abolished	25	42	15	10
4	(Gbololo wari) Burial rights and ceremony has been shortened	5	25	17	50
5	Execution of Will	10	33	35	14
6	Ownership of lands and properties	30	17	26	12
7	Taboos practices almost extinct	2	30	27	24

Table 5: Has Urbanization and modernity Affected the practice of these taboos?

S/N	Effect of Urbanization and modernity	SA	A	DA	SD
1	No periwinkle sales	0	0	35	40
2	Python Worship	10	17	30	23
3	Men do not pass under drying ropes	16	13	30	26
4	Men and women don't share personal items like bath buckets	21	17	20	22
5	Separation of drinking and bathing materials	18	30	12	15
6	Men do not have sex with women during menstrual periods	20	25	20	20
7	No mating/ having sex on bare floor	20	20	25	20
8	Women do not allow to walk across graves	43	22	15	5

Results

Urbanization/modernity which manifests in the internal migration of rural dwellers to urban centers for better economic opportunities has affected Nembe tradition and Culture in the following aspects.

Judicial System

In the traditional Nembe land, the judicial system was piloted by the Ibidi kiri Cult'. These were warriors isolated to function as magistrates in a designated land, area or location. When a case was brought before them, those found culpable were killed and eaten by the members of the cult. Today, this practice had been abolished by King Mien when he had a case and was suspicious of the outcome. After that era came other kings, throne chiefs and then sekiapu group. Then the 20th century witnessed the creation of Local Government system in Nembe kingdom and the creation of different kinds of courts at every council. Today aggrieved persons can access justice through the various courts, customary, appeal, High and Supreme Court.

Language

The original Nembe language that was then used and which was popular among eastern Bayelsans in the 19th century has been adulterated/corrupted by the English language syndrome which is prevalent among the people. A factor of the interaction with foreign residents and the migration of Nembe people to the urban centres and cities. Majority of the words are fast going into extinction. The present generation of Nembe does not know the use of certain words used in the olden days. Such words include, bowl, now boule in Nembe; church is churchi; cat is possy. These objects before now used to have their native words for them.

Baptist tradition states that Nembe migrated from Itsekiri in Benin. *Evidence of this is a letter of invitation to Rev. A. O. Ockiya by the Nana of Itsekiri at his coronation which was delivered at a court Hall meeting of Nembe chiefs on the 11th of September, 1939.*

Education and Vocation

Urbanization and Modernity have affected the riverine trades and educational system in Nembe kingdom. The earliest Nembe had informal system of education where family vocations like canoe building, net weaving and fishing skills were taught children and the young. Today Nembe indigenes buy ice fish to substitute their fish and protein needs. Formal education has come to stay and as the youths today do not care about the trades and economic components of their fore-fathers.

Religion

Nembe people were Traditional religious practitioners reverencing the python in their worship of 'ogidiga' before the invasion of Christianity in the land. Today, Nembe people are 80% Christians, denouncing every affiliation with any form of traditional worship or practices.

Burial Rites

The Gbololo wari “burial rites” as earlier stated still exist but in reduced form. This tradition of cooking and merriments after the death of an indigene has been reduced to one day for both male and female because of urbanization and Modernity. This is mostly because people come from urban centres to villages for burial and return to the stations same day. The burial known as “Iworoko” where every woman of Nembe community is expected to tie two wrappers while joining others to dance all night as service to humanity, is almost abolished as Christian services of songs during the day is the norm today. Another conspicuous tradition is the keeping of the dead for months and years in the mortuary which was not the case before urbanization and Modernity. Corpses were usually embalmed using local concoctions and methods allowing the bereaved families not more than 3 days to bury the deceased. This is no longer the practice today consequent upon the advent of modern technology, urbanization and modernity.

Family System

Matrilinal laws and system have been abolished by the Mingi XII who believed some of the traditional laws and practices are no longer necessary. Every man has the right to be buried at his choice of place. Traditional marriage is also being replaced by white wedding because it is more acceptable and proclaimed important as preached by the new religious practices operating in Nembe land, giving rise to more white weddings and marriage celebrations.

Taboos

Although this area has not changed significantly as a result of urbanization and modernity, the city dwellers have not been able to educate their children on these taboos, making the urban children ignorant of these traditions and by extension making them faulting urbanization and its attendant weaknesses which have fused them into traditional life style.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Finally, urbanization and modernity have been the pivot of civilization. Yet, it is path to cultural extinction and losses. In conclusion therefore, important traditional practices ought and should be documented and made handy for members of Nembe kingdom nay African Society for their cultural preservation and for the proper education of the generations to come.

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