

THE EFFECTS OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PRACTICES ON MODERN DEVELOPMENT: A CASE OF JOPADHOLA IN TORORO- DISTRICT, UGANDA

George Olowo

School of Social Sciences

Nkumba University, P O Box 237 Entebbe

ABSTRACT

This article is a case study examining the effects of traditional cultural practices on modern development among the Jopadhola community of Eastern Uganda. Cultural traditional practices are ontological in the existence of the African people. Consultation with cultural traditional leaders and understanding of different traditions in the society has been found out to be very good for policy making in modern development. An assessment is made and the article concludes by pointing out the positive effects of cultural traditional practices on modern development. It also exposes the negative effects and their consequences on development as well.

Keywords: Culture, community, development, underdevelopment, community development, practices, traditions

Introduction

As stated by Howard .H. (2009:60), that “ultimately, most people’s normative evaluations of religious roles in politics are influenced whether, that religion’s activity furthers the goals and policies the observers believe in”, it also applies to the traditional cultural practices, questionable whether they enhance the modern development trends in the third world or poor countries which still suffer from its commonality aspects of political, economic or social under development.

Sociologically, all people in different parts of the world emerged to be what they are because of their behavior characterized by their cultural activities. The issue at hand then, is why African traditional culture is said to be primitive and responsible for the under development of third world communities such as the *Jopadhola*? On the contrary Mbakogu, I. (2004) stated that, development cannot be separated from man's culture, for culture makes a man, and man cannot be developed in a vacuum. What are the characteristics of modern development trends as opposed to under development? In this paper, development trends are described by the modernization theory, the relevance between the Domestic Relations Bill in Uganda with modern development and cultural traditional cultural practices.

Modern development trends

This is judged through the aspects of political, economic and social under development. The tribal-based politics contributed for ethnically divided nations or countries opposed to the developed democracies of personal merit, competitive elections and accountability. The continuous poverty due to poor economic product exhibited by unequal distribution of income, poor infrastructure among others is characteristic of economic under development. Third world poverty tends to correlate with poor social conditions such as high infant mortality and low literacy rates, which in-turn narrow opportunities for human development hence social underdevelopment. Where-as living up to the standard or style up to the status of developed nations which include depending on the bio-chemical medicines, living and changing the rural environment to urban environment through use of technology, availability of safe and clean water, information communication technology access to transport, industrialization, observance of human rights and gender awareness, good governance and democracy are some of the aspects of modern development.

Theories/Trends of modern development

There are controversies surrounding development in third world countries being mounted by modernization theory which originated in United States of America vs. Dependency theory which originated in Latin America. Despite the decolonization process which dominated the 1960s resulting into the independence of most of the African countries, development approach was also started in the same period in the United States of America by Palambora, Powell and others purportedly to show third world countries a direction whether to go West or East. According to them development in third world should take a western model and poverty in third world is aligned to heavy dependence of the third world countries upon the developed ones. It is added that even development theories attribute third world political unrest or economic backwardness to traditional cultural values, but culture is also said to have contributed to development in Western Europe during the Middle ages of the 11th, 12th and the 13th centuries which brought about great social and political change from the proceeding era.

What is challenging about the modernization theory is that the proponents did not give the possible way and origin of development in the great developed nations such as United States of America, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Netherlands among others. What is therefore complicated to understand is how the scope of transforming the traditional cultural values to fit that of the developed world as pointed out by Howard H. (2004:14), which was seen as the first and by most accounts most crucial in modernization process. This was contested by Max Weber and Talcott Parson in their social development theory. They distinguished between “traditional” and “modern” values. They said traditional, political and economic values as being irrational, or at least unscientific. They further asserted that modernity is judged by universalistic standards, like evaluating people basing on their ability rather than family or ethnic

origins. This is seen to be a positivist's idea except it may be difficult to substantiate the scope of this ability, and whether it is possible to take place unless given time, or what can be some of the development trends in a third world that can be applied to re-shape the destiny of a traditional society like that of the *Jopadhola* of East Uganda.

Domestic Relations Bill-Uganda's case

Domestic Relations Bill in Uganda is within the elements of Traditional cultural practices such as marriage among the *Jopadhola*. It also cuts across almost all tribes in Uganda and specifically among the African people. Domestic Relations Bill (DRB) seeks to address the issue of paying dowry/bride-price as a way through which a man can get a wife for marriage. It also seeks to address the issue of women to own or inherit property where they are married. It is presumably ascertained that the major cause for the rise of this bill in the parliament was from complaints of women upon grievous domestic based violence instituted upon them by men and is totally addressing gender inequality between men and women in Uganda.

Although gender is not necessarily about women only, it so happened we are in a patriarchal society and therefore men could be held responsible for the suffering and underdevelopment of women. Black, J.K (1991) noted that 70% of the world's agricultural resources are produced by women. This was supported by Endroma (2006) that women are resource gatherers and are people who are in touch with the environment. Hence Domestic Relations Bill is a development phenomenon aimed at creating a policy in the society that may either be for the bad or good of the people. Since domestic relations bill is about marriage and bride-price, it is a cultural practice in the traditional sense but has got modern development trends. like among any other tribes in Uganda and Africa at large, it is believed that the more girls produced, the more wealth as many cows,

goats and other valuable items shall be given in exchange for the girls.

Domestic Relations Bill touches areas of modern development because wealth is achieved, by which household problems can be solved or even more wealth generated. To some extent this fulfills the three core values of development described by Todaro (1992:98-102), as being life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom from servitude. Because underdevelopment in Africa is perpetuated by poverty, dowry or bride-price is one of the sources of fighting poverty to achieve wellbeing, social development and even political development. On the other hand if it cannot fulfill the three core values of development mentioned by Todaro, then it is underdevelopment.

Cultural traditional practices

Cultural Traditional Practices are very important entities in development. They portray how exactly the world began and in this case they are the foundation of development. These cultural practices are part and parcel of man Mbakogu, I. (2004). African religion has been condemned as superstitious, satanic, devilish and hellish and they went on to say that in spite of all these attacks, traditional religions have survived. They dominate the background of African peoples and must be reckoned even within the middle of modern changes (Mbiti, 2002). Since African religion and traditional cultural practices are inseparable, they officiate the statements that cultural practices are important entity in development. They incorporate people's behavior in the society and in sociological terms, it is also very important to study man's behavior in the society. It is people's behavior that determines whether they are developmental or not.

Behavior guides people and activities in the society. Hence without these traditional cultural practices it could have been very difficult to understand the world. All along it has been noted that the world today

evolved from the behavior that people in the Western world link it with primitiveness. This assumption from the word “primitive” is ambiguous because without the background of anything its forward movement may not be realized. Without considering the effects of traditional cultural practices on development, cultural practices like making sacrifice among the *Jopadhola* have made these people known to be existing in the Eastern Uganda. It is because of the so called primitive cultures of the African people that have on several occasions been praised by the western culture as being rich.

Like African proverbs and sayings, traditional cultural practices have something of philosophical value which deserves to be taken seriously and studied accordingly. It is through these cultural practices that the western world came to know and probably understand Africa. Since there are no machinery and bio-chemical medicine in Africa, at least it is with the traditional cultural practices that the Western world had to compare Africa with. Hence making it a value, upon which tourists visit African. Traditional cultural practices and African religion are not universal. Different tribes, groups, villages or even individuals are affected differently. The fact that it cannot be transferred from person to person or community to community, studying it helps lay down policy strategies as cultural background is the foundation of policy making. Mbiti also notes that these traditions have been handed down from fore fathers and each generation takes them up with modifications suitable to its own historical situation needs. In no doubt, this confirms that traditional cultural practices are the sources of information upon which development can be planned. Studying it means understanding the origin of man and society which is basically sociological in nature and since there were no sacred scriptures or any written record about traditional cultural practices.

COMMON CULTURAL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES ACROSS AFRICA

Marriage event

It is believed in many African societies that from the very beginning of human life, God commanded or taught people to get married and bear children. Therefore marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Failure to do so means in effect stopping the flow of life through the individual and hence diminishing of mankind on earth obligation and the process from childhood makes them think about marriage. Marriage is the root for establishment of procreation that neutralizes the effect of death hence in marriage there is child bearing through which human life is preserved, propagated and perpetuated. There are as many marriage pattern engagements, wedding, and husband and wife relationships among others. According to Mbiti, African peoples look at marriage with several purposes and meanings in terms of obligation to bear children as a unifying link in the rhythm of life, the building of a family, regaining a lost immortality, bringing people together, giving a status in society among others. The traditional culture of the African people does not restrict men to marry more than one wife.

Death event

Circumstances surrounding death have been mysterious, and until today different ethnic groups in Africa have different views on what death is and what caused it, different from what the Bible and Quran mentions about the origin and the cause of death. Both the Biblical belief and the African tradition about death is that it is only the flesh that dies but the spirit does not, hence the view on the existence of the living dead. Since the belief about the living dead reigns, the African people always pay a lot of respect to the dead, and at times fear hence the dead person must

always be given good burial or else it can revenge on the people. It would certainly be that because of different versions about death that is why there are different ways, styles and beliefs of handling and burying the dead.

People also believe that every time a person dies, this death is caused either through sorcery, by spirits, by curse and-the belief that God may call on older people to leave this life, but this is controversial because even younger people die. Death is sorrowful but also important. There are therefore many and even complex and long rituals. In every African society people are very sensitive to what is done when there is death in the family, Mbiti (1991:119). To these effect rituals like disposal of body, burial of belonging with the body, feasting and songs of mourning take a careful observance of the family, the close relatives and friends and the clan. The *Jopadhola* are not an exception. They pay great respect to the dead by giving it at least four series of burials. The physical burial of the body, *mwengemapigiwanjijo* (a ceremony of wiping out the tears), *NekoKasikikodijowoburu* (ceremony of removing away the fire place in the compound and *Lumbe* (last funeral rites).

Harvest event

Since most African peoples live by farming, stock-keeping, hunting and fishing among others, these activities are accompanied by bad or good omen. Hence rituals start from making new fields, planting, harvesting. These are carried out differently by different tribes in Africa. The belief that the gods have a role to play in the success of these activities makes it vital to think that if the gods are not happy no good yield should be expected. Even in a case where there are long droughts, some peoples in Africa have special people to consult because at the end of it all people will rejoice if a bumper harvest is achieved. Poor harvest causes gloominess and reduces peoples' hopes for the future. Mbiti (1991:136) described

that harvests are marked with a lot of festivals when people relax and begin to enjoy the fruit of their labours in the fields. They dance, they eat, they take it easy and they rest from working so hard, which also gives the fields an opportunity to rest. In addition they have time to do other things while waiting for the next season. If it thus happens, then this cultural traditional practice has got a connotation with Todaro's three core values of development. The also mark the harvesting event by making rituals. These rituals include the ceremony of eating the new millet popularly known as *misia*. In *misi* pieces of millet, meat and chicken is also taken to the shrine or grave yard purportedly to please the living dead and the gods of the home.

Circumcision event

This paper also looked at circumcision, the cultural practice of the neighbouring Gisu tribe. This is one of the main initiation rites practiced in many parts of Africa and some other parts of the world. Circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls, although the latter is now receiving a lot of negative campaign. Traditionally they are all aimed at preparing the young people for adulthood. Where the custom is practiced in Bugisu region in East Uganda, no body escapes forever without undergoing through it. They even confess to circumcise a dead body. Some people do it every year while others do it after every two years. It becomes a community or public affair that everybody feels proud to discuss the event. The candidates are informed in time and they wait for the day with curiosity.

The practice is beyond just to cross from boyhood/childhood to manhood because it entails many more things like sharing local brews with the elders, sharing conversations or giving one's views where parents are, to be able to be sustainable or stand for oneself, cleanliness and to be able to marry, build and found a family. That is why the *Omusinde* (uncircumcised

male) is exposed to a lot of rituals that he must withstand since he is crossing from childhood to manhood. Songs about sexual-intercourse accompanied by the dance of young girls around him, while the young energetic *abasani*(circumcised male) shout, intimidate and force the *omusindet*o travel miles testing and giving practice to make him strong.

Towards the circumcision season, the elders give the *omusindet* the last word as he makes the last confession. Some families call a religious leader to pray to God to bless the occasion, or at times *embaluhas* got traditional spirit/god attachment. Namwendi Malik of Napuri village in Mbale district (Mushebi) stated that every circumcision year must be dedicated to the ancestors whose spirits blesses the circumcision year to continue or not, the discovery magazine (2012). Among the Luhya, Masai and Nandi of Kenya the exercise is termed to be holy and the circumcision year also referred to be a holy year. The circumcision event is highly respected and it gathers people of all walks of life.

Development of perspectives of cultural traditional practices among the Jopadhola

The marriage event has got some development perspectives which are socio-economic. With dowry received as wealth; a family is able to improve their lives socially and economically. It also creates social solidarity, referred to by the *Jopadholaas*, “*ori-agiknono* (an in-law is the end of the clan)”. Through dowry many families have achieved sustainable life because they are able to support themselves as far as their household needs are concerned. They have also gained self-esteem-the case where members of the family have achieved high status of education and are working to benefit their families. Bride wealth also makes the *Jopadhola* gain freedom from servitude. Those who are being enslaved by poverty and have benefited from this cultural traditional practice are free from this enslavement. Since these are the three core values of

development described by Todaro (1991:98-102); it therefore ascertains that cultural traditional practices have got development perspectives. Featuring into the death event, it also creates solidarity because people come together to console the bereaved family among the *Jopadhola*.

The women in the village make a contribution of food stuffs such as millet/cassava flour, raw cassava or sweet potatoes, firewood and the men erect shelters for sheds. Books are opened for condolences from the in-laws, other relatives and for the community where the deceased resided. Entirely these contributions are meant to help the mourners and the bereaved family. It is out of social solidarity that this is possible.

On the other hand within the traditional cultural practice, there are various customs associated with death; the dead is buried after three days if male and after four days if female. There are about four burial processes as have already been explained earlier. Some of the series of burial processes have got developmental perspective especially the *lumbe* which gathers all relatives, and all other people who wish to attend. In this ceremony, there is a lot of eating and drinking local brews and knowing one another, a way of promoting social solidarity.

During harvest event there is a ceremony of eating the first millet-millet bread (*misia*) is prepared with sim-sim and meat, eaten by members of the family and other well-wishers. This is meant to please the gods who blessed them with a bumper harvest. Africans cherish and have the spirit of togetherness and this is a development perspective. This unity is an aspect of development. Generally if a yield of crops is achieved, enough will be eaten to gain health and strength and the surplus will be sold for money thus improving on the social and economic development of the community, and the entire nation.

CRITIQUE OF THE EXPOSITIONS

Modern development: it ignores cultural traditional practices which are the foundation of policy making. It is inclined to machinery and bio-chemical medicine ignoring the sociology of the people yet people's behavior is a very important aspect in planning strategies. The term modernity itself is ambiguous. In this case GDP-Gross Domestic Product may not be the overall determinant for development because it looks at the capital base of the country only, apart from Brazil, the Asian tigers, and South Korea that have received remarkable economic growth.

In as far as Domestic Relations Billis concerned, it is absurd that one of the major reasons given for (DRB) is to fight against domestic violence so that there should be equality between men and women. This makes the bill biased because emphasis is put only on the freedom of women and children. The African patriarchal society is being ignored. The passing of this bill will meant that the parliament of Uganda is creating a new society different from what it has originally been. One of the provisions that there should be no dowry in exchange for a girl/woman really contravenes with the natural law of social justice and order of society.

Traditionally if a girl was born the parents know that one day they would get something of value and the girl knew she was going to get married, an institution that is very highly respected by the society. Parents educated their daughters for a value. This encouraged people to take their daughters to school. Now that the bill states that there should be no dowry. How will the situation be in as far as marriage institution is concerned? Marriage has been a controlling factor in people's behavior because the majority of the members of the society do not study to the level of getting a job, and marriage is the only institution that accommodates them all. This means

the majority of the members of our society especially women will resort to subversive activities like prostitution.

The same applies to women owning property where they are married, it will make women to only target property and this will cause insecurity in the homes and society. Without marriage institutions there may be no political institutions that make the state. This means that the said misconduct in the marriage institution by few characters should not be used to ban the practice of dowry (*Nywom*). The issue of domestic violence should not be centered only on bad relationship between husband and wife and does not take place only because of *nywom*). There are factors contributing to wards domestic violence and could be checked by legal means. Neither the Quran nor the Bible protests giving dowry.

Cultural traditional practice of the Jopadhola

There are several cultural traditional practices among the *Jopadhola*. This paper considered marriage event, death event and harvest event only. On the marriage event, the *Jopadhola* extraordinarily practice it to the extent of it being misunderstood as enslavement. A woman has to over work herself in the fields to compensate for the cows given to her parents as bride price. Agreement must be transacted between the two families when marriage takes place, and once there is divorce, the girls' parents have to vomit back the cows. At times the girls' parents were imprisoned. This kind of violent action should stop and the returning of the cows should be disbanded because the girl/woman has produced children and even if she did not she has labored in the fields and contributed to the development of husband's home.

Indeed, death is inevitable and the most disrupting in all societies. Mbiti (1991:149) describes death as something that concerns everybody, partly because it brings loss and sorrows to every family and community and sooner or later everyone must personally face it. In other words, death is

an obvious thing. The four series of the burial of a dead person among the Japadhola seems to be resource and time consuming. A lot of the family's resources are spent on the mourners who take long to leave the deceased's home.

Comparing this with other tribes like Baganda and Basoga who at times make the funeral rites immediately after burial, the Japadhola use a lot of resources on many series of burial. The orphans and the deceased's family are left with economic problems and bankruptcy. As far as the harvest event is concerned it is very much associated with the spirits of the underworld which provoke fear among some residents. Generally there is a lot of extravagance when the new yield comes and within a short time people run short of food and get back into suffering once again. This is form of underdevelopment.

Conclusion

Cultural Traditional Practice can be used to usher in modern development. It can be used for mobilization purposes where the government wants to implement modern development programmes. This is in respect of the nature of African solidarity. Cultural Traditional Practices give the historical background of the place and the people that if followed it can be used as a planning strategy for modern development. Traditional cultural practices should be appreciated because they have enabled the developed world to assess the situation and probably they would have not known where Africa is. Most importantly, cultural traditional practices such as social solidarity can be used in promoting economic development in the country. The more people are united, the more they can be mobilized to accept government policies, for example on agriculture and this will increase participation to aid production. If this is applied in NAADs, production can contribute to economic development of the community and the entire country.

Since cultural practices are not universal it can be used to study the behavior of different tribes and come out with one social policy strategy. On the other hand, cultural traditional practices undermine the use of modern medicines. It promotes indigenous technical knowledge which is not scientific. Cultural traditional practices are mainly associated with the poor, the uneducated and the unwanted that the modern people the (educated elites) do not want to associate with. Cultural traditional practice encourage progress for modern development, for example most families do not either take their daughters to school or educate them half-hazardly in order to marry them off as early as possible. This tendency has promoted primitivity in the traditional communities. Yet believing or following cultural traditional practices may not mean being primitive either, similar to what Nyerere observed that, one could be a socialist even when one is an African. But this is different from French assimilation policy that existed in Northern Africa, where one could turn into French even if one was in a black skin. These are some of the hurdles in overcoming development challenges in Africa.

The following recommendations have been made to that effect;

The government should use cultural traditional leaders to mobilize people in the process of implementing and disseminating policies. This will give them a softer landing. The period for which the policy is supposed to make an impact on the recipients will take a shorter time.

Historical background of cultural traditional practices of the people should be used to evaluate the current situation in order to pave way for new development strategies.

Government should use traditional cultural practices in conjunction with the modern laws for positive transformation of society, rather than banning or condemning the traditional cultural practices, a case for the marriage event in the domestic relations' bill.

Consultation with cultural leaders and people with prior knowledge about culture is necessary, since cultural tradition is a good foundation for policy conception.

For a matter of modern development and transparency cultural traditional practices should not give more priority to men than women. This is one of cultural transformations needed in harmonizing the traditional cultural practices in Ugandan societies and elsewhere in Africa, and so on.

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