



TRADITIONAL IGBO HIEROPHANIES IN A GLOBALIZING WORLD: A FOCUS ON SHRINES

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Abstract

This work examines the impact of globalization on the traditional Igbo hierophanies. The study adopts the philosophical methods of analysis and hermeneutics as the investigation deals with traditional cultural elements and symbols of a given locality in Africa. The focus is on sacred places particularly traditional shrines. The shrine serves as the community center that houses the tutelary deities. Given their hierophanic status, the shrines are believed to serve as avenue or link to Transcendence; a means of sacralization of the cosmos; spiritual and ontological energizer for the worshippers. They are places of worship, sacrifices, festivities and administration of oaths. On the social aspect, the activities in the shrines serve as cohesive means of bringing together members of the community. The phenomenon of globalization which is an inevitable two-way traffic and process in the ongoing human evolution and integration comes with twofold impact on the traditional hierophanies, one positive, and the other, negative. The encounter with the outside world especially Christianity exposes Igbo culture to foreign forms of hierophanies with attendant religious pluralism including religious hybridization, thus dismantling the monopoly of traditional hierophanies. Traditional morality, values and ideals are enhanced. But these are not without some severe repercussions. Yet the resilience of the traditional hierophanies persists. The positive elements therein should therefore be preserved even as the good aspect of foreign hierophanies and cultures appropriated and possibly harmonized with the local ones.

Keywords: hierophanies, shrines, globalization, pluralism and resilience.

Introduction

The present work investigates the dialectics between the traditional Igbo hierophanies and the phenomenon of globalization. The focus is on the traditional shrines. References are therefore made to some of the known shrines in Igbo land. The work examines the concept of hierophany which simply means the manifestation or revelation of divine presence in natural objects, places, periods, etc. Hierophanic occurrence gives rise to radical ontological change. Ironically, the change does not so much affect the accidental features of the objects or realities that are ontologically reconfigured. The reverence given to hierophanic objects is as a result of the new ontological status the objects have assumed. It is believed that on the vertical dimension, the shrines create avenue for cult that gives glory



and worship to God and other spiritual beings while at the same time enriching the human person spiritually. Horizontally, the hierophanic places are foundations and custodians of socio-cultural, moral and spiritual values that enhance human relationship in the community; serving as cohesive of the community.

The work further x-rays the phenomenon of globalization and its dialectics with the traditional hierophanies, particularly the shrines. The paper highlights both the positive and negative impacts of globalization on the hierophanies. Culture change is a major consequence of globalization and the hierophanic realities in a culture not excluded. The negative effects of globalization notwithstanding, the traditional hierophanies continue to thrive. It is suggested that the positive elements of the traditional hierophanies be preserved whereas foreign influence be filtered and the good therein be appropriated.

Hierophany: Analysis of Concept

According to Fernando Maselli, "The word "hierophany" was coined by the philosopher Mircea Eliade in his work *Treatise on the History of Religions*, to refer to an awareness of the sacred when it manifests itself through various parts of our regular cosmos: a mountain, a forest, a river, etc" (Maselli). He further states that "It is always the same mysterious act: the manifestation of something completely different, of a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that form an integral part of our normal world" (Maselli). The term "hierophany" derives from two Greek roots "ἱερός" (hieros), meaning "sacred" or "holy," and "φαίνειν" (phainein) meaning "to reveal" or "to bring to light". Hierophany therefore signifies a manifestation of the sacred. Bowker John in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* echoes the same opinion thus, "hierophany is the manifestation of the divine or the sacred, especially in a sacred place, object, or occasion" (Bowker). Manifestations of some particular aspect may be named after the aspect revealed, e.g. theophany (of divinity), kratophany (of power). Our analysis of the concept of hierophany leans heavily on Mircea Eliade who avers that:

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term hierophany. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content... it could be said that the history of religions-from the most primitive to the most highly developed-is constituted by a great number of hierophanies, by manifestations of sacred realities. (11)

The phenomenon of hierophany presents one with three key players. First of all there is the divine being or reality who is the primary actor and who manifests itself. Secondly, there is the human person who observes the manifestation and possibly reacts. Thirdly, there is the medium or the object or being through which the manifestation is done or carried out. Hierophany involves the intervention of the divine in human affair, of the sacred in the profane. The awe-inspiring supernatural being or reality, the *ganz andere* condescends or



stoops in order for hierophany to occur. “The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from "natural" realities. It is true that human language naively expresses the *tremendum*, or the *mysterium fascinans* by terms borrowed from the world of nature or from man's secular mental life” (Eliade 10). Inasmuch as the issues relating to hierophany are divine issues or mysteries yet we must have to employ anthropomorphic language to carry out any discourse on them.

The Cosmic Dimensions of the Sacred and the Profane and Implication of Hierophanic Change

A comparative analysis of the two cosmic modes of existence in the world broadens our understanding of hierophany. To buttress the import of hierophany, Eliade employs the cosmic dualism of the sacred and the profane. He states that “the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane” (Eliade 10). He further affirms that

Sacred and profane are two modes of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man in the course of his history....the sacred and profane modes of being depend upon the different positions that man has conquered in the cosmos; hence they are of concern both to the philosopher and to anyone seeking to discover the possible dimensions of human existence. (14)

The sacred realm is the realm of the holy, pure and undefiled whereas the profane is believed to be the realm of the mundane. The two words “sacred” and “profane” trace their origin to the Latin *sacrum* and *profanus* (Jones 7954). “To the Roman, *sacrum* meant what belonged to the gods or was in their power...or was primarily concerned with the temple and the rites performed in and around it” (Jones 7964). One can say that, the two concepts of sacred and profane are opposites that predominantly feature in the discourse on hierophany. The two terms could be understood as mutually exclusive or as a distinction between two aspects of a given reality. However, the coming together and the harmonization of these polar concepts in the analysis of hierophany underscores the cosmic implication of hierophany. In other words, it is via hierophany that the profane becomes sacred, the unknown becomes known, the latent becomes apparent, and the supernatural becomes natural and vice versa. Referring to this ambivalence or paradox, Eliade concludes that “It is impossible to overemphasize the paradox represented by every hierophany even the most elementary” (Eliade 11).

What then are the possible implications of hierophanies? It is often said that great things happen when God meets with man. This assertion is optimally actualized in the phenomenon of hierophany. The object of hierophany undergoes ontological change or what one may describe as *transubstantiation* in the language of Aristotelian metaphysics. This is the situation whereby a being or a reality undergoes a metaphysical change while at the same time all that is accessible to the senses (the outward appearances) remain unchanged. What remains unaltered is also referred to as the accidents. Sequel to the above transformation, the hierophanic object



commands worship or adoration by the believers. The reverence accorded to the object is as a result of the new ontological status it has assumed. On this note Eliade remarks that, “The sacred tree, the sacred stone are not adored as stone or tree; they are worshipped precisely because they are hierophies, because they show something that is no longer stone or tree but the sacred, the *ganz andere*” (Eliade 12). The same applies to sacred space. “When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the non-reality of the vast surrounding expanse. The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world” (Eliade 12).

Another primary effect of hierophany is that it is believed to sacralize the cosmos. This is brought about by the Supernatural humbling itself to share in the natural so as to enable the natural to participate in the supernatural. In other words, the sacred condescends to share in the profane so as to enable the profane to share in the sacred. Hierophany functions to sacralize the world or the object or space thus detaching a territory or object from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different (Eliade 26). Sequel to the above, the hierophanic object, place or person becomes paradoxically a melting-pot of the human and divine, natural and supernatural. The mere presence of hierophanies evokes an aura of the presence of the divine for the religious man. Chinua Achebe succinctly captures the paradoxical or ambivalence nature of hierophany in the novel *Arrow of God*, when through one of the key characters (Akuehue) he labels Ezeulu (the priest of *Ulu*) half-man, half-spirit (Achebe 133).

The hierophanic object therefore, could be likened to a symbol that manifests something other than itself. This calls to mind Martin Heidegger’s discourse on the work of art as symbol. Heidegger remarks that

The art work is, to be sure, a thing that is made, but it says something other than itself... makes public something other than itself; it manifests something other; it is an allegory. In the work of art, something is brought together with the thing that is made. To bring together is in Greek *sumballein*....It seems almost as though the thingly element in the art work is like the substructure into and upon which the other, authentic element is built. (19)

Here one observes that the hierophanic object is a natural object but has supernatural symbolism.

The co-relation that exists among phenomena of hierophany, festival and art is quite captivating. The underlying element in these three phenomena is the presence of God/god. Indeed, hierophany is all about the manifestation of the presence of God/god. Similarly, “a festival without gods is a non-concept, is inconceivable,” Josef Pieper avers (26). Okafor Simon equally re-echoes this truth by asserting that ‘there is a logical or metaphysical connection between festivity and the presence of the gods’ (62). The reason for the necessary connection between festivity and the gods is not far-fetched. According to Pieper,



“affirmation is the heart of festivity and, there can be no more radical assent to the world than the praise of God, the lauding of the creator of this same world” (26). In fact, for Plato, feasts are gifts from the gods. This also applies to the arts. Both the festivals, divine presence and the arts, for Plato, are gifts from the gods. He articulates it thus:

And the Gods, pitying the toils which our race is born to undergo, have appointed holy festivals, wherein men alternate rest with labour; and have given them the Muses and Apollo, the leader of the Muses, and Dionysus, to be companions in their revels, that they may improve their education by taking part in the festivals of the Gods, and with their help... the Gods, who, as we say, have been appointed to be our companions in the dance, have given the pleasurable sense of harmony and rhythm; and so they stir us into life, and we follow them, joining hands together in dances and songs; and these they call choruses, which is a term naturally expressive of cheerfulness.²⁰

In the above citation, one can easily deduce elements of arts and creativity as portrayed in the assertion: “sense of harmony and rhythm” and “chorus, dance and song”. It calls for further research to x-ray the intersections among the phenomena of festival and holidays, divine presence, the arts and creativity. This is beyond the scope of the present work.

Traditional Igbo Hierophanies: Shrines

Igbo people are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They inhabit the South Eastern part of Nigeria. According to Ekwunife Anthony

The Igbo occupy the southern part of Nigeria between the latitudes of 5 and 7 degrees northward and longitudes 6 and 8 degrees eastward. The land mass stretches up to 15,800 square miles. The Igbo are bordered by the Igala and Idoma people to the north, the Ijaw and Ogoni people to the south, the Yako and Ibibio people to the east, and the Bini and Warri people to the west. Among the principal rivers are the Niger, Imo, Anambra and Ulasi rivers. (2)

The Igbo man strives to establish harmony with the spiritual beings that overlook the world and further with his fellow man (and woman) and other existing beings in the Igbo world. Accordingly, the hierophanies serve to create an avenue or link to the Transcendence; serving as a means of sacralization of the cosmos and spiritual energizing for the Igbo man. They create avenues for cult that gives glory and worship to spiritual beings. Horizontally hierophanies are foundations and custodians of socio-cultural, moral and spiritual values that enhance human relationship in the Igbo society where communalism is highly cherished and upheld. Examples of hierophanies in Igbo culture include: shrines, *ofo* (symbol of power and authority that connects with the ancestors), and certain potent trees such as cotton and iroko; some animals, birds and reptiles, etc. The traditional hierophanies particularly the shrines therefore serve as cohesive of the community.



A shrine is a sacred place. “A sacred place is first of all a defined place, a space distinguished from other spaces. The rituals that a people either practice at a place or direct toward it mark its sacredness and differentiate it from other defined spaces” (Jones 1978). A Shrine houses a given deity, oracle or their symbols. The delineated spaces that serve as shrines could be small or big; with physical structure or open air. The shrine could be located in public places like village square, market places, etc. It can as well be housed within private places like family house or compound. The place could be secluded or non-secluded places like thick forests, rivers, mountains etc. The shrine is an abode for a deity and as such remains a locus for divine power. One may say that for the observers or adherents of Igbo traditional religion, most shrines have the power to evoke an effective response. The shrines are pervaded by some form of aura. The problem of localization *vis-à-vis* universality of God has been a perennial problem. Unlike Islam which strongly resists localization or visible symbols of divinity” (Jones 1981), Igbo traditional religion is replete with symbols and symbolism that serve to register or depict the moral presence of the deity or deities.

The shrine radiates with purity. This truth is affirmed by *The Encyclopedia of Religion* thus: “As a place of communication with divinity, a sacred space is typically a place of purity because purity enables people to come in contact with the gods” (Jones 1980). The classical adage, *sanctae sanctae tractate sunt* (holy things should be kept holy) also applies to traditional shrines in Igbo land. Hence the reverence with which the shrines are approached. In some cases, the traditional priest who ministers at the shrine have to abstain from sexual intercourse in view of the ministry he would exercise in the shrine before the deity. The effort is all geared towards self-purification in view of exercising the priestly ministry at the shrine. There is also profuse use of white chalk (*nzu*) in the shrine, nay a symbol of purity and innocence in Igbo culture.

Founding a Shrine: Choice of Location and Construction/Consecration

The choice of location and construction or consecration of a shrine in most cases involves elaborate rituals and are often informed by mysterious signs and omens. When no sign is apparent or manifest, it could be provoked with the help of some evocations. This is to say that men are not entirely free to choose rather they seek for it and find it. Places like the *Obi* of some categories of elders in Igboland such as househeads and traditional priests house a shrine. This is *sui generis*. In the novel *Arrow of God*, Chinua Achebe writes, “His [Ezeulu’s] *obi* was built differently from other men’s huts and this houses the household shrine too” (1). Finally, some of the signs or omens that could inform the choice of location for a shrine include presence of some animals, water, certain trees such as the *iroko*, *Ogbu*, *Ngwu*, *Akpu*, etc. Most of the above named trees are naturally regarded as sacred trees in Igbo land and they are potent.

Choice of location could also be deciphered via consultation with the gods or the ancestors through divination. The veracity of divination could be subjected to questioning by many philosophers or critically minded individuals, yet for believers, divination remains one of



the authentic sources of knowledge. It affords the believers the means of discerning the mind of the deity on any issue. In moments of doubt and uncertainty, people resort to divination to unravel the truth.

One cannot exclude the fact of historicity and *Sitz in Leben* in the consideration of the location and consecration of shrines. It is generally said that grace builds on nature. History, topography and life situations influence the choice of location of a given shrine. For the people from northern axis of Igbo land, mountainous region, the mountains and the environs have much hierophanic import. Most people that inhabit the riverine areas tend to be inclined to water deities whose shrines may be either very close to the water or right inside the water itself. The agrarian communities have much to do with the land goddess and the Mother Earth. The Great *Ama-Aro* Shrine in Ifitedunu, Dunukofia Local Government Area of Anambra State from where the present researcher comes, lies *in situ* on exactly the very parcel of land formerly inhabited by the great progenitor of the kindred. Divine grace indeed builds on nature. Eliade affirms that “Every hierophany we look at is also an historical fact. Every manifestation of the sacred takes place in some historical situation. Even the most personal and transcendent mystical experiences are affected by the age in which they occur” (2). With exception of a few deities and their shrines, most deities in traditional Igbo society are localized and the areas or boundaries of operation delineated.

Functions of the Shrine

The roles of sacred places are lucidly summed up in these words: “First, sacred space is a means of communication with the gods and about the gods. Second, it is a place of divine power. And third, it serves as a visible icon of the world and thereby imparts a form to it and an organization to its inhabitants.”²⁷ Accordingly, the shrine serves as a gateway between the divine and the human. The shrine is a unique space and *fons* of spiritual enrichment. The hierophanic occurrence consecrates the shrine to become a kind of gateway for trafficking between the human and the divine. First, as enunciated above, sacred spaces are places of communication with divinity, places where people go to meet the gods. This function is often indicated by symbols that represent a link between the world of humans and transcendent realms” (Jones 1980). As seen in various religions of the world, the shrine serves as a place of sacrifice in Igbo traditional religion. Ogbukagu affirms that “In general terms, sacrifices to major and minor divinities are carried out by way of shrines (*alusi*), which are regular places (altars) for traditional worships” (341). However, some unique sacrifices which are *sui generis*, are carried out at some specific or strategic places such as at the cross-roads, beside a river or stream, etc.

The shrine performs the spiritual function of sacralization of the cosmos. *Agere sequitur esse*, (action follows from being). The above metaphysical principle applies even to hierophanies, particularly the shrines. Here the divine interrupts and not only creating a fixed point qualitatively different from the rest of the surroundings but also impacts spiritually on



the surroundings. Hence, “The sacred place may be a heaven on earth, which transposes the eternal and sanctified order of heaven onto the plane of earth” (Jones 7983).

The shrines create an avenue for the satisfaction of the ontological thirst for the divine. The religious man has the ontological thirst to be closer to the gods, to live in the pure and holy cosmos, to be in touch with the real, the efficacious and the powerful, source of life and fecundity. Through this process one’s vital or spiritual power is all the more energized. The above encounter is facilitated all the more by the moral presence of the divine beings in form of symbols or images. Jones avers, “Another way of joining gods and humans is through symbols of the gods. A sacred place may include images of the gods or other tokens that make their presence manifest” (7980). The shrine opens an avenue of communication between two planes, that is, communication with the Transcendent.

One of the significant functions of the traditional shrines in Igboland is that it serves as the place where oaths are administered. Most controversial cases or conflicts are brought to the shrine to be resolved. Here, the parties to the disputes are meant to swear and people generally believe in the efficacy of the oath taken in the shrine more than the one administered by the ministers of Christian religion. One of Achebe’s characters Ezeulu remarks that “*Eru* (the great deity) only harms those who swear falsely before his shrine” (Achebe 9). For all the disorganizing effects which Christianity has had on indigenous traditional culture, the Christian Bible and other sacramentals are still only second in importance to shrines as far as administering of oaths is concerned. The people generally believe that the oath taken at the shrine is more efficacious.

In the social realm shrines serve as cohesive of the community. Important events in and around the community: festivals, title-taking, funerals of title men, outing dance, outing masquerade etc, often have their point of departure and culmination point at the shrine. “In their form or function, sacred places organize human life and activity” (Jones 7984). The timing of the major activities in the traditional Igbo society is often guided by the rites performed in the shrine. The rituals and other activities enacted at the shrines guarantees the orderly progression of cycles of time. They also regulate the movement of time and events that take place in the community.

Globalization: Globalization is the process of creating more interdependent world and relationships - economic, political, cultural etc. A good number of people in Africa tend to view globalization with grain of salt. In other words they are skeptical about globalization and what it portends. This fear is not unconnected with previous experiences or antecedents of encounter or contact with the West namely, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. Once bitten, twice shy. The slave trade left the African continent and the Igbo society in particular devastated. Slavery for instance, “ravaged black Africa like a bush fire, wiping out images and values in one vast carnage” (Senghor Leopold 231). The above situation was further compounded by attendant denigration of the African. The colonial masters and the early white missionaries, with mindset imbued with the prevalent prejudice for the



black and superiority complex saw nothing good or positive in Igbo culture. The invading missionaries described everything about the host culture especially the religion as fetish. These notwithstanding, the encounter with Western civilization or Christian religion brought with it tremendous cultural modifications or changes. This is quite understandable as culture is always liable to change. This is an inevitable consequence.

Globalization and Traditional Igbo Hierophanies/Shrines

The greatest externally induced change in traditional Igbo hierophanies came from the encounter with white Christian missionaries who brought Christianity to Igboland. A kind of paradox arises when one casts a critical look on the dialectics between religion and globalization. Religion is often seen on the one hand as an agent of globalization but on the other as the greatest obstacle to globalization. How then does one reconcile the above dilemma? Religion tends to be conservative and resilient but at the same time, because it has to do with faith and emotion, it could sometimes be volatile. The case of the Igbo people in South Eastern Nigeria is such that they are progressive minded and readily willing to embrace novelties. Aguwa affirms the above point thus: “Igbo culture has an intrinsic disposition that more easily enhances change” (86). The hunger for change and novelty and the quest for spiritual experiences also contributed to the growth of the newly arrived religion. “As a novelty, Christianity was bound to draw a large following, especially as the Igbo, for example, were noted for their inclinations to religious experimentation, for being emulative, competitive and adventurous” (Okwu 21-47). Accordingly, the new Christian religion was easily welcomed with little or no hitches, initial apathy notwithstanding. This was facilitated by the help of certain material benefits which the missionaries used as bait. Humanitarian functions undertaken by the missions held no less attraction or the security they often provided and the confidence instilled in the natives” (Aguwa 107). There is also natural affinity between African traditional religion and Christianity especially in the areas of moral and theology such as teachings on the sanctity of life and life-after-death, the intermediaries and the Supreme Being who is the creator.

Positive Impact of Globalization on the Igbo Traditional Hierophanies

One remarkable positive impact of Western civilization in Igbo land is the introduction of Western education in Igboland. In every part of Igboland today wherever one finds an Anglican or Roman Catholic church one also finds a school attached; courtesy of the early Christian missionaries. This was followed by other developments in areas of communication, transportation, health and technology in general. The art of reading and writing assisted in communication and documentation. Although there were traditional methods of education before the coming of the Europeans but those informal methods could not compare to the benefits of Western education. This equally, can be said about health care whose scientific approach simply made the traditional health care system look like mere child’s play. There was also improved hygiene. Gradual transformation from subsistence economy to industrialized economy in Igboland was as a result of the



encounter with the Western civilization. These transformations tell on the activities in and around the shrines and other places of worship.

Religious pluralism easily springs to mind when one considers the impact of globalization on Igbo traditional hierophanies. Religion is an aspect of man's response to hierophany. The Igbo man comes to learn that traditional apart from there are manifold manifestations of the divine and human responses to it. In other words, there are various forms of hierophanies and human reactions to the hierophanies in form of religion. This is to say that the traditional Igbo religion is not the only religion that exists. Through his encounter with the white missionaries, the Igbo man was exposed to the various denomination of Christian religion. Similar to religious pluralism is religious hybridization which is a *mélange* of traditional religion and the Christian religion. The indigenous churches or the independent churches are off-shoot of the encounter between the Igbo society and Christianity. Today the Igbo society boasts of various religious denominations.

Globalization impacts greatly on the Igbo traditional moral ideals. It sees to the abrogation of certain obnoxious practices such as killing of twins and human sacrifice. In a way, one can say that Western civilization came to perfect the Igbo moral ideals.

Negative Impacts of Globalization on the traditional Hierophanies

Globalization is considered as "the first truly world revolution." It is a known fact that, "all revolutions disrupt the traditions and customs of a people"—that is, "people's very security, safety, and identity." The contact with western civilization brought about secularization which invariably leads to desacralisation of the cosmos and indeed the shrines. This further reflects on the general life in the society. There is also shift in societal roles. A good instance is the removal of supervision of justice from the deities in the shrines to law courts. In the law courts logical truths are emphasized often to the detriment of moral truth thus sometimes leading to miscarriage of justice. With its ratiocinating habitus, Western education helps to curb superstitious beliefs and further equips one with the critical intellectual ability to question one's beliefs and assumptions. But there are also attendant negative effects. This brings about lack of faith and loss sense of reverence for the traditional hierophanies.

One outstanding negative outcome of globalization on the traditional hierophanies is wanton destruction of traditional sacred places, the shrines. A *conditio sine qua non* for conversion or becoming a Christian is rejection of one's earlier religion which in most cases is the traditional religion. "At first, converts from the traditional religion would renounce African religion, burn their gods and defile their shrines" (Aguwa 108). It has become a recurrent phenomenon to destroy traditional idols and shrines. In some cases prayer sessions and crusades organized by Christians culminate in destruction of traditional shrines as if the success of the prayer or crusade is determined by the number of shrines or idols destroyed. The traditional worshippers are not spared. As early as 1964 Chinua Achebe wrote that "Mr. Goodcountry told the converts of Umuaro about the early



Christians of the Niger Delta who fought the bad customs of their people, destroyed shrines and killed the sacred iguana” (46).

Today there is tacit neglect and marginalization of the traditional religion. This manifests in the lack of inclusion of traditional feasts and celebrations in the government calendar. For instance we have public holidays for Christian and Muslim feasts but none for the commemoration of our traditional feasts such as New Yam festival in honour of the earth goddess for fecundity. There is no doubt that on occasions of such feasts the shrines become point of attraction and emphasis. For example during the celebration of Imo-Awka Festival, every activity culminates at the shrine of Imo-Awka. Observance of such holidays could help not only to widen but also perpetuate the influence of our traditional hierophanies.

The Resilience of the Traditional Igbo Hierophanies

Despite every onslaught, the traditional Igbo hierophanies remain resilient with some of its elements immutable. The immutability in this sense however does not imply that such can never be changed in the absolute sense, rather it is more of attitude of resilience or persistence, for example, for all the disorganizing effect which Christianity has had on the indigenous culture, the Christian church premises is still only second in importance to some traditional shrines in Igbo land such as Imo-Awka shrine in Awka, Anambra State, Nkwo Market that houses the shrine of Akpu the tutelary deity in Ifitedunu, Dunukofia Local Government Area, Okija Shrine etc. The same resilience reflects in the relapsing behavior of the people: Christians tend to revert to the shrines to seek solutions to their problems in moments of crises. Indeed there are uncountable nagging spiritual problems in Igbo society for which Christianity is yet to provide ready solutions. “The relapser finds Christianity unsatisfying or inadequate for his personal and family needs of wellbeing and security. Such often remains in the church and at the same time avail himself of the benefits of traditional religion” (Aguwa 108). The search for solution to life problem often leads to formation of mixed-breed church that combines features of the Christian church and that of African traditional religion. It is on this basis that Agunwa, echoing the opinion of many writers, avers that, “It is the spiritual inadequacy of Christianity for Africans that accounts for much in the birth of the indigenous churches” (111). One observes similar ambivalent behavior in the area of health care where the people patronize both the orthodox medicine and the traditional medical practitioners; the religio-mystical approach in trado-medicine notwithstanding. Surprisingly, some sicknesses that defy orthodox medication are often cured via traditional medicine. This trend becomes unavoidable considering the fact that in Igbo culture, “religious, health and legal institutions equally involve some divine principle,” Aguwa avers (91). In a résumé, the dialectical/paradoxical attitude of embrace and rejection has always characterized some people’s approach to the traditional hierophanies or the shrines: rejection by day and embrace by night. This sustains the phenomenon of resilience which keeps bringing anew the seemingly forgotten hierophanies and the traditional religious practices.



Evaluation and Conclusion

This work has done an excursus on the dialectics between globalization and the traditional Igbo hierophanies with focus on the shrines. The research examined the concept of hierophany and the significance of the traditional shrines in the life of the Igbo people. In traditional Igbo society, shrines serve as religious arena and foundations of moral and spiritual life, satisfying the ontological thirst for the divine. They serve as gateways for trafficking between the divine and the human. They create avenue for cult that gives glory and worship (praise and glory or thanks) to the Transcendence. On the social realm, they build up the community thus serving as cohesive of the community; a pivot around which the life of the community revolves. The shrine is a place for administration of oaths.

The process of globalization as we have seen, impacts both positively and negatively on the hierophanies in Igbo cosmology. The coming of Christianity in Igbo land broke the jinx of monopoly enjoyed by the traditional religion thus paving way for manifold hierophanies and attendant religious pluralism. This later gave rise to the hybridization of indigenous religion. This has its adverse result on identity as some worshippers are neither fully Christians nor traditionalists. Formal education came to Igbo land via western civilization. With its *sciento-technical* and ratiocinating *habitus*, western education tends to subject the traditional beliefs and tenets to critical examination thus curbing undue superstitious beliefs and practices. Another positive effect of globalization lies in its ability to perfect some of the Igbo desirable values. Conversely globalization creates the problem of desacralisation of the cosmos, erosion of some of highly held traditional values, and sometimes outright destruction of traditional hierophanic objects, places and periods. There is derogation of the worshippers of these traditional hierophanies.

Despite all these, the traditional hierophanies continue to thrive due to the resilient nature on the one hand and the inadequacies of Christian religion on the other hand. The present paper suggests that the traditional hierophanies as far as possible should be retained even in modified forms. Freedom of worship should be extended to our traditional religion. Feasts and festivities of the hierophanies should be observed and public holidays observed in honour of such feasts. What is obvious is that the Igbo culture has been launched into an irreversible process of change from which it can never again extricate itself nay the impact of globalization. The onus then lies on the Igbo to filter or discern properly what is good for the culture amidst the goodies brought about by globalization. The Igbo people should preserve the good things of their culture and at the same time be able to appropriate whatever good that comes from outside their culture and possibly harmonize the two where and when necessary.



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