

Engendering Development in Nigeria through Cultural Heritage Research

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populous nation in the black world with over 130 million people and an extensive land area of approximately 913, 0763 square kilometers. The ethnic groups are equally numerous. These include the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Tiv, Idoma, Itsekiri and Efik. The languages as well as dialects are too many to be accurately counted. Nigeria is unarguably, one of the richest countries in Africa in terms of human, natural and cultural resources. Some of the mineral resources that are found in abundance in this geo-polity are tin, copper, iron, petroleum and coal. On the other hand, the ancient cultural artifacts include the world famous Nok terracottas, Benin and Igbo-Ukwu bronzes as well as elaborate stone carvings and ceramics of Ile-Ife (Udo, 1982; Balogun, 2000; Ogundele, 2006).

The country is bounded in the south by the Atlantic Ocean, in the west by the Republic of Benin, in the east by Cameroon while it shares its northern boundary with both the republics of Niger and Chad. The two major vegetation types of Nigeria are the forest and savanna. These two broad vegetation communities have sub-types such as secondary forest, primary rain forest, guinea savanna and sahel savanna to the extreme northern part of the country.

The climate of Nigeria is a product of the north-south movements of the Inter-Tropical Discontinuity (ITD). This ITD separates two contrasting air masses the hot-wet tropical maritime (MT) and hot-dry tropical continental (CT) air masses. The effects of the CT are better felt between December and February when it attains its southern-most extent. On the other hand, the effects of the MT characterize the remaining part of the year with June and July having the biggest amount of rainfall (Akanni, 1992). Some of the major rivers that crisscross Nigeria are Niger, Benue, Kaduna, Chiroro, Ogun, Oshun and Cross. All these geographical conditions have a great deal of influence on the socio-economic and general cultural lifestyles of the numerous peoples of Nigeria.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Anthropology is the study of mankind in terms of the relationships that exist between peoples and different environmental settings at different temporal levels as well as locations. This subject started as a separate field of study in the 19th century. By this time, almost (if not) all parts of the world had either been colonized or visited by some members of the Western world. These colonists and curious travelers alike tried to study the peoples of the Americas, Africa, Asia and the islands of the Pacific Ocean. They (the colonists) were curious about these peoples whom they described as “savages”. They were interested in finding out how they (the peoples of the above regions) related first to one another within the so-called primitive world and later to the “civilized” Europeans. These early anthropologists never believed that the non-Western societies were experiencing the phenomenon of social change (Lenski, 1974; Onwuejeogwu, 1981; People and Bailey, 1988).

The early anthropologists quickly found the theory of unilateral evolutionism appropriate for analyzing and interpreting the customs of the “savages”. According to this theory which was borrowed from biological Darwinism, the history of life was progressive. That is to say, that simpler and lower forms of organisms gave rise to higher and more complex ones. Africa and others parts of the “underdeveloped” world are up to now at the bottom of the ladder of advancement. The Western world was at the top of the ladder - the apex of civilization. Cultures were therefore classified into a series of stages of development as follows:

1. Savagery
2. Barbarism
3. Civilization

The above conception of anthropology by the pioneers such as Tylor, Morgan and Malinowski was aimed at justifying the colonization of the African and Asian worlds among others. Anthropology at this point up to the latter part of the 20th century was colonial in terms of goals and methodology. Different peoples were stu-

died with a view to developing appropriate strategies for exploiting their resources –human, mineral and cultural. Indeed, anthropology during this period lacked an appreciation and understanding of the broad scope and character of human cultural diversity as well as its strengths for promoting regional and trans-regional unity.

It is not inappropriate therefore to refer to this aspect of human knowledge during the early period as Anthropology of Oppression. This is because it was not targeted at promoting cultural integration and sustainable development. Nigeria was one of the African countries that had this experience.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE TODAY

The meanings, goals and methods of anthropology in today's Nigeria are at variance with what happened in the 19th through to the mid 20th century. Current anthropology in this country is aimed at developing an understanding of the fundamentals of human cultural behaviour and diversity as well as how these are tied to the apron strings of the environment. The discipline is about sustainable development of the geo-polity being studied and the relationship that exist between it and the rest of the global village. This underscores the fact that what affects Nigeria has implications for other parts of the world. Anthropology today treats the host community as a subject rather than an object to be used, abused and discarded (Andah, 1993). Humanity is fundamentally about oneness and by this token, promotion of peace and harmony is possible only within the domain of mutuality in research.

Anthropological knowledge gleaned from field work has to be applied to contemporary issues and problems. This borders on the promotion of peace, equitable distribution of resources among a people, health care delivery system, tourism development, rural/urban migrations, environmental impact assessment (EIA) and cross-cultural integration (Ogundele, 2004). This is anthropology as if people really matter in terms of ameliorating their standards of living in a pragmatic way.

Contemporary Socio-cultural and Ecological Issues

Tourism is a complex industry that centers on

man in the context of his relationship to other humans in a different environmental set-up. Indeed, it (tourism) is about anthropology otherwise there is nothing left; both the host and the visitor (the tourist) have to strike a balance in their relationship with each other in order not to offend their sensibilities. This industry is not just about making money by the host community from the visitors, but also about promoting friendship and mutuality without destroying their self-respect or integrity at all times. There is no doubt that every society has its own rules and regulations which the visitor must also respect so as to encourage a great deal of sustainable development. This leads us to development as if people today and tomorrow matter (Burns, 1999; Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002). For example, the socio-cultural values of the different ethnicities of Nigeria like the Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa are a part of the resources to be packaged and preserved for tourism purposes.

This is in addition to important archaeological sites and contemporary attractions like the Osun Oshogbo grove in Oshogbo; cloth-weaving factories in Iseyin and the War museum at Umuahia. Given this situation, efforts have to be made not to destroy or obliterate them. It is the collective responsibility of tourism operators and all the stakeholders to ensure that we are future-sensitive. Such a move is not easy and herein lies the centrality of anthropological knowledge to a success story.

The above point is also linked with the subject of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). A lack of appreciation of the fundamentals of EIA has always been creating conflicts between oil workers and the local communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. There is a gulf between modernization and sustainable development. The former has little or no respect for local values, challenges and expectations while the latter pays serious attention to them (local values, ecological conditions and feelings of the people). Such a situation (modernization) is serious because oil prospecting activities often lead to oil spillage on the local rivers and streams. This makes fishing (an age-long livelihood among the people) impossible. Even drinkable water is hard to come by. Farming activities are also adversely affected, given the numerous petroleum and gas pipelines that crisscross the local landscape.

Shrines, ancient communal groves, age-long eco-systems and settlements in general are

destroyed with little or no consideration for the feelings of the indigenes. Such a situation makes the eruption of violence inevitable. It is too easily forgotten that it is much cheaper and far wiser to embark on EIA surveys rooted in anthropology before, during and after a major construction and/or pipe laying activity in a given region (Ogundele, 2004).

Gaining knowledge of the complex character of how a group of people relates to its immediate environment cannot be glossed over in the scheme of things. This underscores the reason why anthropology (if properly conceptualized) today is not about espionage with a view to embarking on economic exploitation and political oppression of a technologically weaker society or nation. Current anthropology normally focuses on how best to promote understanding and peace both at the local and trans-national levels of human existence. This is a precondition for sustainable development in any part of the global village.

E.I.A officers with the appropriate anthropological training in Nigeria are strategically positioned to offer high-profile technical and social engineering advice on how best to relocate settlement features such as shrines, burials and houses of a given people whenever oil prospecting activities among other things are about to disturb the existing equilibrium. Such officers could also advise the government or oil companies, on how to go about the politics of compensation. This is because no amount of rationalization or the use of force can be a justification for destroying the cultural as well as ecological heritages of a people or peoples under the guise of economic development.

Every human group likes to preserve and manage its age-old ways of life without interference from any quarters. There is no substitute for sustainable development. Local systems, be they social, economic or ecological are a collective asset or heritage of the group concerned. Therefore they have to be protected at all costs. Suffice it to say that ancient eco-systems were the foundations upon which ecotourism is built. Endangered plant and animal species are preserved here for the present and future generations of humans in the face of environment-friendly behaviour and policies.

Anthropology as a study of humanity also has a big role to play in health care delivery in Nigeria. The number of people infected with the HIV/AIDS is on the increase in the country, largely

as a result of economic backwardness, some negative cultural practices and a lack of good education rooted in anthropology.

Anthropology promotes tourism and this is a revenue generating facet of human life. Tourism operations are capable of offering jobs to a considerable number of people both in the urban centers and rural settlements. For example, economic empowerment of hitherto idle ladies would make them less vulnerable to sexual harassment and other kinds of sexual abuse that can lead to several sexually transmitted diseases. Similarly, restiveness among the local boys can be reduced to the barest minimum when they are gainfully employed.

This is the reason why anthropology has to be used to strike a balance in the host-tourist relationship. Apart from this, the indigenous marriage system enshrined in polygamy in Nigeria has a lot of health implications especially the issue of HIV/AIDS. Many men especially in the rural areas of the country have more than one wife per head. Not unexpectedly, infidelity reigns supreme among the people as a result of this kind of social arrangement.

"Inheriting" widows by close relations particularly among the Yoruba and Igbo of southern Nigeria poses a serious health hazard to both parties in the long run. Similarly, facial and other body markings and mutilations of male as well as female genitals are at variance with positive cultural practices. This shows how not to assimilate the past. In other words, the culture of a people must be critically imbibed because it is never static in nature.

As the natural and social environments of a people are changing with the passage of time, we are duty-bound to modify or jettison some of the age-old cultural traits in order to move forward. But despite the ugliness and health risks of genital mutilations and so on in Nigeria, many rural and to a lesser degree, urban dwellers continue with the practice.

No amount of radio/television jingles and posters about the dangers of all these cultural practices to good health can make the expected positive impacts on the Nigerian populace. A sound knowledge of anthropology is most desirable. For example, anthropologists today need some basic knowledge of drama or theatre art as a tool of effective communication. It is extremely difficult to convince the people about the need to change some aspects of their culture

through a language or approach too alien to them. However, dramatizing the dangerous effects of polygamous marriage system and widows inheritance by the anthropologist after living among members of a community for some time appears to be a worthwhile exercise.

This approach which is people- sensitive or friendly is likely to be much more acceptable to the locals than the use of posters and radio jingles. It is too easily forgotten by many scholars that it is difficult to change the ways of life of people. Therefore anthropological training and education have the capacity to enable us to choose the most appropriate social engineering strategy for a given community.

Educating the rural folks and occasionally those in the urban centers about how best to promote good health by government agents in Nigeria often suffers serious set-backs because of a general lack of appreciation and understanding of the full import of anthropology in today's development. Indeed, only the trained anthropologist can penetrate the impenetrables through the lenses of appropriate communication skills and social engineering concepts. Such factors of life as religion, health, education, politics, economy, marriage system and kinship system are affected by the rapid wind of change. This is a big challenge for anthropologists in Nigeria. All these new challenges, problems and expectations make anthropology today a more socially engaging, exciting and evolving subject central to human development.

Our world today is in a shambles! Peace appears to be absent from the vocabularies of most peoples or ethnicities on this planet (Andah, 1993: 30; Uya, 2003). This situation arises largely from a lack of proper education about these things that unite one region with the other through time. For example, much of the ethnic pluralism that we have today in Nigeria is not as deep rooted as most people think. There is a corpus of linguistic data reminding us of the ancestral links in antiquity. Glimpses of these ancestral connections can be found in some basic words and/or expressions in languages like Yoruba, Igbo, Edo, Igala, Idoma, Itsekiri and as far afield as Ashantiland in Ghana where Twi is being spoken. For example, the word for "welcome" among the Ashanti of Ghana is "Akwaaba" whereas the Yoruba of south western Nigeria call it "Ekaabo". Similarly, the Igala of central Nigeria refer to "eye" as "eju", while the Yoruba of the south-western

part call it "oju". Evidence of common linguistic and ethnic origins of the above peoples among others in Nigeria and West Africa as a whole is robust (Ogundele, 2004).

Therefore anthropology today has to break the artificial barriers constructed by the various colonial powers for their own personal agendas in Africa. This is not to suggest that the map of Africa would be redrawn in an empirical manner, rather the mindset of every individual African should change with respect to the conceptualization of the status of the current geographical boundaries. In other words, these boundaries are arbitrary and therefore at variance with the realities of the African essence. The map of Nigeria like all other African countries is the artificial creation of Europe aimed at effective economic exploitation and political domination of the region.

This colonial arrangement cuts off some segments of ethnicities from their kinsmen and turns them into strangers. For example, the Bariba of Borguland in central Nigeria are the same with those of the Republic of Benin. Similarly, some Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria are put today in Benin. This dislocation is one of the root causes of underdevelopment in contemporary Africa. In this regard, anthropological education is very important. It has the capacity to enable peoples who have been dislocated to appreciate their oneness and/or closeness prior to either natural separation with the passage of time or as a result of the Berlin phenomenon of 1884 (Osae and Nwabara, 1982).

This is current anthropology as if unity and peace on national, sub-regional and trans-regional levels matter. In other words, applied anthropology can promote considerable peace and progress in Nigeria by digging deep into the past. This would involve building bridges with allied disciplines like art history, sociology, geography and historical linguistics.

The geographical area now known as Nigeria with effect from 1914, was not totally cut off from the crosscurrents of global history in antiquity. There is evidence of diffusion of crops such as water yam (*Discorea alata*), Banana (*Musa acuminata*) and Asian rice (*Oryza sativa*) from the southeastern Asia (in pre-colonial times) to Nigeria.

On the other hand, cassava and maize got to the country after 1500 A.D. The Portuguese explorers and traders brought the crops to Nigeria

and other West African coasts before the indigenes helped in diffusing them into the different parts of the sub-region (Ogundele, 2004). These alien crops have been so successfully adapted to West Africa that most people would not believe they have foreign origins. For example, crops like water yam, maize and cassava are now central to the culinary cultures of Nigeria.

This development shows how a culture is intricately linked to the global system. It also reminds us of successful networking in pre-colonial and colonial times- a trend that must continue among the nations of the world today. It is not an over statement to claim therefore that all humanity is one, the diverse cultural traits notwithstanding. The anthropologist has to urgently begin to exhume these past realities more than hitherto in order to be able to construct a new world characterized by mutual understanding and respect (Orser and Fagan, 1955; Fagan, 1999)

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Nigeria is the most populous nation in the black world. It is also famous for its very rich cultural and natural resources among other things. Not unexpectedly, there are numerous development problems and issues staring the country in their face like a dreadful monster. These difficulties can be understood against the background of such facets of life as health and socio-economic and political conflicts.

This situation makes it necessary to begin to conceptualise of and practise anthropology as a subject capable of addressing the problems listed above in a sustainable manner. Sustainable development in the spheres of E.I.A; Tourism; Health and Cultural Integration can be achieved through the lenses of mutuality and openness in anthropological research. The different ethnicities of Nigeria and as far afield as Ashantiland in Ghana are a product of common cultural ancestry in remote antiquity. Relics of these common origins can be seen in some basic words and/or expressions in many West African languages or societies. Given this position, anthropology in the 21st century can be profitably transformed into a tool of cross-cultural integration and promotion of peace.

This is anthropology as if the local people matter as opposed to the earlier conception of the subject within the domain of economic exploitation and political oppression. Dramati-

zation of certain themes and issues such as the negative effects of polygamous marriage system and body markings as well as genital mutilations, is one way by which the anthropologist today can reach the local peoples of Nigeria. The above cultural practices are major risks to health, particularly sexually transmitted diseases.

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ABSTRACT Today's Nigeria is witnessing a paradigm shift with respect to anthropological scholarship vis-à-vis human development. Increasingly, anthropology is being conceptualized of and practised within the domain of clearer understanding and better appreciation of the intriguing cultural diversity of the country. This philosophical orientation is certainly at variance with the goals, methods and practice of anthropology in the 19th and much of the 20th centuries. Anthropology in Nigeria during the above period was largely a tool of imperialistic exploitation and political oppression. This attitude was a reflection of the wrong and generally arrogant notion that the people being studied were "relics" of primitive barbarity and they should therefore be related to as objects rather than subjects. However, the discipline is now evolving into a truly scientific engagement aimed at liberating technologically weaker societies from the bondage of poverty and disease. In this regard, anthropologists today in Nigeria have started (at least minimally) to address such issues and problems as environmental degradation and/or abuse; health with particular reference to HIV/AIDS; poverty; conflict management and cultural diversity. All these form the core of sustainable development – a complex human phenomenon that remains a dreadful monster staring Nigeria as well as other African countries in the face.

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