



## Concomitants of Western Civilization and Modernity on African Cultural Practices



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#### Abstract

Many seek to understand the benefits derived from traditional festivals hence the conduction of the study which looks at the reasons for the low patronage of traditional festivals. Many are of the view that Christian religion is the only true and revealed religion and therefore do not pay any attention to the traditional festivals. The study reveals also that modern education and civilization also play a major role in the low patronage of traditional festivals when this could actually be used positively to change certain dislikes about traditional festivals other than looking down upon it. Colonialism in its own way distorted and retarded the pace and tempo of cultural growth and trend of civilization in Africa. The era of colonial pillage and plunder led to the relative stagnation and often precipitous decline of traditional cultural festivals in the colonies. The effects of western civilization and culture on Africa are in several phases: political effect, economic effect and social effect. Western civilization is a commitment to neoliberalism, commitment to liberal democracy, commitment to consumerism and commitment to Christian world view as the origin of western civilization. Although no major effort of industrialization took place during the colonial period, and there has been no significant development since, Western technology has long entered the lives of Africans through familiarity with manufactured products imported from the West. Modern medicine has largely taken the precedence over traditional methods in matters of health.

**Keywords:** African traditional festivals, divination, western civilization



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## Reasons for low patronage of traditional festivals

Many people quite often ask those engaged in the study of African cultural festivals to tell them the benefits derived from such study (Gusau, 1981). The benefits they ask for are not only for the society but also the nation as a whole. African cultural festivals have been maligned in many ways (Gusau, 1981). According to Giddens (1997), many overzealous Christians and Islamic enthusiasts have branded African cultural festivals as barbaric, primitive, unprogressive and unrevealed. Many modern men who are engrossed in the influence of science and technology believed that it is a dead and useless celebration which should be discarded and thrown overboard. In the same way, Ukanah (2011) asserts that fanatic and some parochial members of the so-called missionary religions, especially Christianity and Islam, always assert that theirs is, 'the only revealed religion' and what obtains in African traditional festivals are the worship of non-existent spiritual beings and idols. They often assert that the traditional African do not honour and worship the true God, therefore the festival should be wiped out of the surfaced of the earth, forgetting that most of their members go to African priests and diviners secretly in the night to seek solution to their problems when they are faced with the realities of life Ukanah, 2011). This means that the practice of medicine, in its various forms, which is an aspect of this traditional festival celebrations, comes under serious attack by the practitioners of the orthodox modern medicine (Nabofa, 1988). In view of this, Greene (1996) points out that:

African cultural festival embraces all aspects of African life. It involves people's history, philosophy, poetry, psychology, medicine and health care delivery, ecology, various arms of the traditional government, ethics, economic and social activities, education, military strategies, mathematics (especially numerology) astrology, arts in its various forms and even including science and technology which need to be celebrated through African traditional festivals.

## Modernity as a reason for low patronage of Traditional Festivals

The traditional African festival in general, has an exceptionally enduring quality which makes it linger on in the face of all odds. It is also a festival that could not be wished away or swept under the carpet because of its enduring nature. One of the factors responsible for this enduring nature is the annual festival of the divination.

Thus Adegbola, (1983, p. 448) reports that:

Divination in African traditional religion was a determined foe that could not be wished away and that a grave error had been committed by missionaries who did not seek to understand this religious festivals before pronouncing their obituary.

Though, through modern education, technological know-how, contact with other world religions, some aspects of the traditional religious festivals have changed, some aspects still survive and some would be changed or transformed to meet the needs of the changing times and generation to come. The future is still very bright for the practicing of these various festivals (Chachah, 1999).

It implies that there is every hope that since life continues, the people shall continue with the celebration of the annual festivals. The adherents are still resilient and will continue with the worship of the divinities in the various cults with the annual festivals. They could not be dissociated from the traditional festivals and its ritual practices into which they were born or make them to revert and backslide from it. They would continue to revive, resuscitate and revitalise it from time to time. The resilience of traditional festivals has often led to the song:

Western civilisation and culture began to creep into African socio-cultural milieu, first, with the contact of Europeans with Africa, a consequence of Berlin conference in the quest for imperial pilfering of African resources and, later, consolidated by the unstoppable wave of globalisation (Mittleman, 1997).

It is important to stress that colonialism distorted and retarded the pace and tempo of cultural growth and trend of civilisation in Africa (Obidi, 2005). One of the most profound consequences of colonization has been how the political and economic rape of the colonies has also led to what sometimes seem to be an unbridgeable cultural gap between the nations that were the beneficiaries of colonization and those that were the victims of the colonial assault. The era of colonial pillage and plunder led to the relative stagnation and often precipitous decline of traditional cultural festivals in the colonies. With Africa subjugated and dominated, the Western culture and European mode of civilisation began to thrive and outgrow African cultural festivals (Obidi, 2005). Traditional African cultural practices paved the way for foreign way of doing things as Africans became fully 'westernised'. Western culture now is regarded as frontline civilisation. African ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain. Not only were certain aspects of the material culture in the colonies lost or destroyed, colonial societies also lost the power and sense of cultural continuity, such that it became practically impossible to recover the ability to strive for cultural progress on their own terms. As argued by Mimiko (2010):

The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was implanted. Traditional African systems of conflict resolution were destroyed and, in their places, nothing was given. The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the art and act of subjugation of the mass of the people in the service of colonialism.

The above assertion was corroborated by Kasongo (2010:314) when he submits that "one could infer that when westernisation was imported to African countries, the hidden side of modernism was materialist interests. Civilisation was just another concept of domination: imposition of incoming new culture over traditional cultural values". It is important to emphasise fundamentally that urgent and more decisive steps need to be taken in order to reorder and reverse this evanescent trend of cultural emptiness, without which Africa may experience seasons of cultural

extinction and drought of African values. According to Liman & Onyetube (2013) it is appalling to note that two hundred years or so of colonisation were not only destructive in terms of cultural heritage and values for which Africa was famous before colonialism but also precariously retrogressive as the continent was robbed of decades of opportunities- opportunities of self-development, opportunities of self-government and, indeed, opportunities of self-styled technological developmental pace.

### **Western Civilization as a reason for low patronage of traditional Africa festival**

Indeed, the significant fact about African cultural history is the convergence upon the indigenous tradition of the two external influences—the Arab-Islamic and the European-Christian—to which the continent has been exposed for well over a millennium. The values and lifestyles associated with these traditional festivals have been assimilated and to a large extent indigenized on the continent. This observation provides a broader perspective on the phenomenon of Westernization in Africa, an observation made as early as the late nineteenth century by the great African cultural theorist Edward Wilmot Blyden and summed up in the late twentieth century by Ali Mazrui as “the triple heritage”. (Irele, 2010). The effects of western civilisation and culture on Africa are in several phases: political effect, economic effect and social effect. Western civilisation is a commitment to neoliberalism, commitment to liberal democracy, commitment to consumerism and commitment to Christian worldview as the origin of western civilisation. Colonialism and liberal democracy will be put under political effect, neoliberalism under economic effect and missionary to be under social effect.

The colonial factor was essential to the understanding of the process of Westernization in Africa itself. The holistic distortions of the hitherto well organised African societies in every sphere of life pointed to the depth and effectiveness of colonisation in the process of westernising African societies and their cultures.

Political effect includes: Distortions of natural boundaries without due recourse to antecedent institutions and cultures. The western civilisation submerged and dismantled indigenous institutions and, in its place, a foreign rule was established. Traditional institutions before then were regarded as not only political authorities but also custodians of cultures.

Introduction of Westminster liberal democracy: This does not just work in Africa. It is not that Africa did not have its own pattern of democracy before imposition of liberal democracy but the typical democracy in Africa and its processes were submerged by westernisation. As insisted by Mimiko (2010:640):

But the point is that the so-called Kabiyesi syndrome, which has been accorded as an explanation for the shortage of democracy in contemporary Africa, is actually a betrayal of inadequate understanding of the workings of the African traditional political systems. I strongly dispute this proposition as unhistorical and therefore invalid in the context of Africa. Our hypothesis is that in the epoch before contact between Europe and Africa, the latter not only developed relatively advanced state structures, but that emergent pre-colonial African states also had “sophisticated systems of political rule” with strong democratic foundations. I argue that the basis

of the advertised inability of these societies to sustain democracy in contemporary (postcolonial) times could not have consisted in the absence of a democratic culture on their part. Rather, it is the residue of constraints that were attendant upon imperialism, which has been the dominant experience of the African peoples since the fourteenth century – defined most profoundly by slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and their handmaiden, military governance".

In accordance of low patronage of African traditional festivals Alkali (2003) asserts that:

Extended family giving way to nuclear family. Traditional African family values breaking down very rapidly. Extended family that was wonderful instrument like a social verve, social security in our community has given way to nuclear family. Little wonder that there is no more respect for age; no more respect for values that we held sacrosanct in Africa traditional festival; younger ones now find it very difficult to greet elderly ones.

In consonance of this, irele (2008) opines that we now have children of single parents, a phenomenon that is identifiable with America. People no longer communalise, nobody wants to be anybody's brother's keeper let alone participating in traditional festival celebrations. It led to rural exodus and the displacement of large segments of the population. Proficiency in our language is declining in Africa because we are compelled to embrace Western culture and civilisation as Western language; Western language has created a dichotomy between an elite and mass of our people who still cannot do business with foreign language. It causes alienation for people who cannot speak English or French. Language is a vehicle of culture, we are in a very serious problem.

In addition to this, Giddens (1997) submit that the impact of Christianity has to be considered, for this has been the most important single factor in the process of Westernization in Africa and has undermined African traditional festivals. This means western education, involving literacy and the mastery of a European language, became the condition for entry into the modern sector. For most of the colonial period, education was in the hands of the Christian missions, who sought not only to convert Africans but also to inculcate Western values instead of African traditional values embedded in festival celebrations. Christianity challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life; in particular, it sought to impose monogamy and the nuclear family as the norm (Dime, 1993).

Although no major effort of industrialization took place during the colonial period, and there has been no significant development since, Western technology has long entered the lives of Africans through familiarity with manufactured products imported from the West. The cultural alteration provoked by the pressures of colonial rule and missionary in all spheres of life are pervasive enough to qualify as the signs of a new cultural coup in Africa. This is more noticeable in the area of science and technology on African experience and consciousness. Modern medicine has largely taken precedence over traditional methods in matters of health.

The trend of cultural westernisation of Africa has become very pervasive and prevalent, such that Western civilisation has taken precedence over African values and culture that is manifested in festival celebrations is regarded as inferior (Akinwale , 2008). As with other societies and cultures in the so-called Third World, the impact of Western civilization on Africa has occasioned a discontinuity in forms of life throughout the continent. This has led to a cultural dualism that often presents itself as a real dilemma in concrete, real-life situations (Falade, Akinola & Adejube , 2009). In other words, the African experience of modernity is fraught with tensions at every level of the communal and social settings of the traditional societies. The post-independence Africa is confronted with how to have a true identity, a new culture that is African in nature that is portrayed by traditional festivals (Dime, 1993). From the foregoing, it is evident that literature abounds on the decline of cultural values in Ghana. However literature is scarce with regard to the study area. It is therefore hoped that the current study will fill the gap

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