

EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF *NONGU U KRISTU U I SER U SHA TAR* (NKST) ON TYOSHIN PEOPLE OF GWER-WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

This paper evaluated the impact of Nongu u Kristu u I Ser u Sha Tar (NKST) translated as Universal Reformed Christian Church (URCC) on the social life of the Tyoshin people of Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State. NKST has a lot of benefits to the Tiv nation and the Tyoshin people in particular; ranging from spiritual uplift, increase in literacy, improved healthcare, rational thought, urbanization, and socialization amongst others. At the same time, NKST has its negative impacts on the social life of the Tyoshin people, as it introduced certain alteration and modifications on their social life. The paper seeks to elucidate on those positive and negative impacts and proffer solutions. The study adopted qualitative research design and made use of primary and secondary methods of data collection. Expository, descriptive and evaluative methods were used to analyze the data collected. The findings revealed the positive and negative impacts of NKST on the social life of the people, covering; How the NKST used technology, translation and preservation to upgrade their language, Respect for elders and constituted authorities through the help of modern education, improvement of music and dance with the aid of modern equipment, additional equipment for sowing and designing of dresses, enhancement of unity and group alliance via social media and church groups, modification of traditional marriages, and the social implications of the impacts of NKST on the social life of the people. Despite the positive impacts, the negative impacts were also discussed; showing how NKST distorted, altered and modified the social life of Tyoshin people. The paper benefits students of religion, leaders and members of Tyoshin land and researchers for further studies. The researcher recommended that; Tyoshin people should embrace the positive aspects of NKST in order to enhance more of social development in their area. Leaders of Tyoshin should make it a duty to build a cross-cultural relationship with NKST;

this would help them to lead their members better. Attention should be giving to preserving the sanctity and core values of the Tyoshin people despite the pressure of NKST influence.

Keywords: Impact; NKST; Tyoshin People; Social Life

Introduction

Christianity, with its swift progress in spiritual and socio-cultural changes, has a significant influence on many aspects of human life, including society's social life. Christianity has had a mixed impact on the dynamics of social life, having both beneficial and bad effects. The evident shift that occurs when society accepts Christianity is the deterioration of conventional religious beliefs and rituals. As demonstrated in both developed and emerging societies, this has resulted in a deeper loss of meaning and depth in social religious commitment and devotion, which in turn causes a fall in traditional religious allegiance and belief. Despite its ability to subvert human cultural institutions, Christianity (NKST) has advantages as well. It enables communication and interaction amongst persons with different cultural origins. The Tyoshin people's social cohesiveness has been greatly impacted by the social life dynamics that have been produced by the Christianity (NKST) trajectory. The consequences of this made it necessary to assess the advantages and disadvantages of this topic: The impact of NKST on the Social Life of the Tyoshin People of Gwer-West Local Government Area.

Conceptual Clarification

At this point, it is important to define certain terms that are used in this study to enhance their operational context, and to avoid ambiguity

- i. Impact: Impact is used in this study as an encounter or co- habitation of the Tyoshin people with Christian religion (NKST)
- ii. NKST: The acronym NKST is used in this study as; *Nongo U Kristu U I Ser U Sha Tar*, translated in English as “Universal Reformed Christian Church” (URCC)
- iii. Social life: Social life is used in this study as the day-to-day activities that are commonly practiced among the Tyoshin people of Gwer-West local government area of Benue State
- iv. Tyoshin people: Tyoshin people is used in this study as Tiv people, domicile in Gwer-West Local Government Area of Benue State

Impact of NKST on the Social Life of Tyoshin People

The researcher evaluated the impact of NKST on Tyoshin people's social life practices, worldviews, and beliefs, particularly in the Gwer-west local government region. The coin

has two sides to it. Prior to assessing the adverse effects on individuals, the research looks at the advantages.

The Positive Impact

The positive impact of NKST on the social life of the Tyoshin people cannot be overemphasized. These impacts come in the following ways:

Impact on Tyoshin people's Language

Tiv is the common language used for communication among the Tyoshin people. Their language, which they use to convey their beliefs and customs, is Tiv. The NKST early missionaries used technology for translation, printing, and language preservation, which contributed to the Tiv language's inclusion on the global linguistic map. It is well known that the Tiv people are a privileged group because they have a permanent written language (Benjamin Ityavkase Ishii 328). The Tiv language has been better preserved because of the introduction of NKST. According to Jude Utah, "the culture of the people will find expression through the biblical culture that was so created" (20).

Impact on Tyoshin people's Respect for elders/ constituted authorities

According to Ukase Terseer and Kongo Pever, the Tiv people ran their political system before to the entrance of colonial rulers and Christians in what is now known as Nigeria. This suggests that constitutive authority was also present in Tyoshin land before the Christian religion developed. The collective council of all members of the immediate and extended family globally was referred to as "Tar" (world). "Ityo" (clan) was considered a more approachable council for the people who might gather to settle arguments and discuss important issues. "Iye-ngyor" refers to the extended paternal family, with the paternal brother being the closest relative. The "ya" refers to the complex where families with the same father and mother reside (Oral interview).

The traditional Tyoshin person is a respecter of cultural values. Old age was highly respected. It was a sign of one who is in a good relationship with the Creator. A child that respects elders would live long to be an elder too (Ugbu Ephraim T and Alager Aondofa, Oral interview). The introduction of formal education has brought with it greater sensitivity and empathy. There are a lot of academic programs and practical lessons taught in schools and churches as teaching aids to enhance young people to respect the elderly ones. These have in no small measure improved the social life of the Tyoshin people

Impact on Tyoshin people's Music

The Tyoshin traditional music has greatly benefited from the use of technology through the use of contemporary instruments, speakers, and microphones, among other things. In the church today, the Tyoshin musical instruments such as *gbande*, *imar*, *kwen*, and *akacha*,

among others, are utilised for God's glory. The modern NKST's embrace and enhancement of Tyoshin music has opened up Tyoshin's cultural legacy to the realm of entertainment and God-worship in the music business. "The acceptance of Tyoshin traditional music into the NKST has promoted the Tyoshin music community," Idyo Gwabo and Igbashio Aondokura confirmed (oral interview). According to Caleb Mauwa "Different cultures across the world are a marvel diversity of rich and assorted traditional music which are remarkably valued within their cultural contexts respectively. Interestingly, traditional music and dance in different cultures across the globe have indelibly proven to have a symbiotic and core relational in many facets. From the foregoing, it is clear that, the acceptance of traditional music and its publication into Christianity and the use of modern equipment helped the Tyoshin musical world to the extent that enhanced both religious and secular music around the globe.

Impact on Tyoshin people's Dance

Another aspect of the social life of the Tyoshin People of the Gwer-West local government area of Benue State is the Tyoshin traditional dance such as *ajigbei*, *ingough*, *tsue tsele* among others. "The Tiv people in their original culture loved music and dance to the extent that a Tiv dancer who was good at dancing would elope with a woman," according to Susan Aluavese Aburabur, cited in Tavershima and Orpin (17). "Miriam, the sister of Moses, dances with other Israelite women to praise God," according to the Old Testament of the Christian faith (Ex. 15:20). There is a distinct difference between the socio-religious traditional dance and the secular Tyoshin traditional music since the Tyoshin tradition dance was converted to adhere to Christian practice. The Tyoshin traditional dance has greatly benefited from this. According to Ayange Terseer (oral interview), "the Tyoshin people have separated the Tiv traditional dance into what can be called Tiv Christian dance today." According to Ayange Terseer, the traditional Tiv dance has undergone positive modification. Another benefit to the social life of Tyoshin traditional dancing is this. According to Jude Terna Kur and Nicholas SesughIwokwagh in their article, *the information value of Tiv music and dance in the age of modern communication technologies*, posits that, "Traditional music and dance occupy a very important place in Tiv society(n.pag). The NKST has enhanced this social life of the people. Wilbert R. Sherk affirms this by saying "people do not need to step outside of their milieu in order to respond to the gospel" (42). This is another positive impact that NKST has brought on the social life of the Tyoshin people in Gwer- west local government area of Benue State.

Impact on Tyoshin People's Dress

Before the advent of Christianity to Tiv land, the Tiv people adorned themselves with their kind of dresses. These clothes are called "*anger*" *Ivavtyo*, *Tugudu*, *gberave* among others. Akuma R.T. asserts that, "among the Tiv people of north central Nigeria, their traditional

attire, “*Anger* has symbolic meaning. The *Anger* Fabric is made of black and white stripe and it have its symbolic meaning (2). This *Anger* is sometime traced to the origin and character of the Tiv people. Gwagba Gawon argued that “the white color on the *Anger* to the Tiv man signifies purity, why the black is a reflection of the shadows of the hills which the Tiv believed is their ancestral home, a meeting place for peace (Oral Interview). The church's use of uniforms is only advancement over this long-standing Tiv custom. By making changes to this practice, NKST has contributed to its improvement. The advancement has also been aided by Christian religious instruction. Additionally, according to 1 Timothy 2:9, “I want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair, gold, pears, or expensive clothes.” According to Tion, “the Tiv people used the *Anger* to display their wealth and honor, and a Tiv man feels like he is on top of the world whenever he wears his *Anger* and sits on his horse” (86).

The new designs that are sown with machines using *Anger* appear to be far better than the old ones. According to Ivy Panda, the dress has become a vital aspect in the physical appearance of human beings. All religions or cultures have their own unique modes of dressing understood by the dress. The dressing code of a person may indicate his/her religious affiliation, sexual orientation, social class and or marital status. (nopag). All that are mentioned above are the products of NKST. The new pattern and designs have help to promote the Tyoshin traditional dress in churches within Gwer- west local government area of Benue State and beyond. Gboko Denen Demian testified that, “truly, NKST has impacted positively on the dress code of theTiv people of Tyoshin people in Gwer-West local Government area than in time past (oral interview), this is indeed a positive impact.

Impact of NKST on Tyoshin People Group Alliance

The Tyoshin, who belong to the Tiv people, are accustomed to working in groups. This is evident in how they establish themselves in their villages. Torkula Akawe posits that, “The Tiv people till date, live in union of compounds people by members of a kin group closely related by blood, as a very closely-knits of an individual with his children and brothers” (9). Since, the Tyoshin people are predominant Tiv, this practice has been improved and conveyed into the Christian religion (NKST) in Tyoshin land, particularly those within Gwer- west local government area. They are enjoying this social practice as is argued by Achimin David, Dabo Isaac and Kule Terver Ezekiel, “one of the things that is keeping some of us in NKST is the groups that are formed within the church such as, MIM (Makeranta u iyange I memen)- Sunday school and Atsam (choir group) among others” (oral interview).

Through the electronic transmission of church services and programmes, NKST has reinforced this tradition. Even when they are not at home, some of the Tyoshin people in

gwer-West like viewing live streaming services online (James Terhemba Tse, oral interview). The social life of the Tyoshin people in Benue State's Gwer-West local government area has benefited from NKST

Impact on Tyoshin people's Marriage Practices

Marriage is another social practice that is also carried alongside into the NKST. Tiv identity was defined by marriage and this was most evident in their corporate responsibility. In fact, a man acted not so much as an individual as he did the member of the group whom he was dependent. Filial respect was encouraged by this state of affairs and a group unity was established by the exchange marriage" (Rubing Eugene 17). The Tyoshin people are still marrying and giving out their children in marriage in the NKST. This practice is done culturally, in fact the Tyoshin people are very comfortable with the way marriages are celebrated in the NKST in Gwer- west local government area.

NKST has helped this practice to wear a new look, "marital practices among African communities have evolved over the years. Colonialism, urbanization, inter-ethnic blending, modernization and globalization have proved to be the most prominent factors influencing these processes. Among the Tiv of central Nigeria, the evolution of the concept of marriage has mirrored the transformation of socio-cultural fabric of an African people (Bernard B. Fyanka 26). These transformations range from the Abolition of exchange marriage, polygamy, elopement, marriage by force among others (Torkula, 97). The practice of monogamy has replaced polygamy, which has lessened the mental, physical, and financial toll that numerous women place on one man. In contrast to exchange marriages, when certain people were occasionally unable to marry due to a lack of sisters to exchange for marriage, bride prices, which many could pay, are substituted for the human exchange of humans for marriage.

Tyo Jacob and Baaki Angela asserts that, "for us in Gwer-west, the new way of doing marriage in today's era is better than in the past were people married many wives and have many children without catering for them" (oral interview).

Considering the aforementioned, the advantages of NKST were demonstrated. Even though this article was unable to fully capture all of the beneficial effects, it is evident from the aforementioned areas that NKST has greatly enhanced and supported the social life of the Tyoshin people in the Gwer-West local government region.

The Negative Impact

Although there are many negative effects of NKST, the study only takes into account a small number of them because the beneficial effects were covered in the preceding section. The following are these detrimental effects:

Impact on Tyoshin people's Language

With the use of technology and printing presses, missionaries who travelled to Tiv land to spread Christianity among the Tiv people translated and printed the Tiv language. The Tiv people applauded this endeavor since it was the first of its kind in Tiv nation. "The NKST was a happy church when it received the complete Bible in its members' mother tongue in November 1964" (Shii 328). This effort is worthy of note, nevertheless, there are negative impact that accompanied this effort by the missionaries; "when the Dutch Reformed Church Mission came to Tiv land for evangelization, they learn the spoken Tiv from the Tiv (Both adult and children) after that, they reduced the knowledge of spoken Tiv they had acquired into written form and used same to show or teach the very Tiv teachers how to write what the native had taught them (J.T Orkaa vii), this has denied the language of grammatical accuracy and phonological structures. Western schooling is another monster that is destroying the Tiv language. Since a large portion of the Tyoshin people has received western education, they prefer to interact in English. Homes, schools, marketplaces, and even churches are experiencing this. In actuality, a large number of people in Tyoshin Land may not be able to speak their native tongue fluently anymore. The language is vanishing quickly. The Tiv language is in danger of becoming extinct if precautions are not taken. This has a detrimental effect. Chado Kpeiyol argued that, the introduction of the English service in some churches in Gwer-west local government area is pulling a lot of youth away from the Tiv section where they are supposed to listen and learn the Tiv language (Oral interview)

Impact on Tyoshin People's Music/Dance

The Tyoshin people carried their music and dance into the NKST for the worship and praise of God as was discussed earlier in this research. The members of Tyoshin people in Gwer-west local government area is enjoying these instruments, such as, *GbandeKwen*, *Imar* among others. The advent of modern instrument and music are impacting negatively on this social practice. (Iorhemba Utaver, oral interview). The arts, including music and dance, have historically been mediums for expressing religious devotion and cultural identity. The modern equipment such as guitar, modern drums, keyboard, mixers among others are really making some Tyoshin people to look down on their traditional music. This made Ordu Amos to decry that, "we that love and play the Tiv tradition music are being looked upon as "old school" ancient people (oral interview). The "Tivness" that is portrayed in the Tiv traditional dance is destroyed as a result of the introduction of modern music into the church, which is normal for music to go along with dance. Traditional Tiv dances transmit and preserve the historical identity of the Tiv people. This has a detrimental effect.

Impact on Tyoshin People's Dress

Negative effects are also attributed to social dressing; in the early days of their arrival, missionaries made great efforts to conform to Tiv traditional clothing. However, as the Tiv people adopted Christianity, some changes were made. Shii opines that, the aspect of the Tiv traditional dress was destroyed, "A style in clothe just like every other tribe has its way of dressing. The Tiv also had their mode of dressing before the coming of western education in the land. The Tiv mode of dressing was hanging a cloth on the wrist and the other on the shoulder. This was the mode of dressing for the men. The clothes they used were, *Godo*, *Ichado*, *Anger*, *tuguduakpem* and *gbagirthe* caps they wore were *swaki* and *agundu*. The women mode of dressing was; *ityoanger*, *ashisha* and *invavtyo* and they wore *mbaagba* and *ahye* in their ankle legs. All these types of dressing by Tiv have been discarded. We have mentioned some changed custom of the Tiv people. This list is not exhaustive. What we have notice is that, Christianity and western education had given a serious blow on the culture and traditional religion of the Tiv society (417). The aforementioned circumstances have placed the traditional Tiv attire in jeopardy and confusion. This has a detrimental effect. Tyoyongu Ukor Joshua lamented that, "NKST has destroyed the Tyoshin modest and beautiful way of dressing, women now wear trousers, he says instead of wrappers and skirt; clothes that our mothers used as under wears, are now used as travelling clothes, exposure of inner parts of the body, in fact, he lamented that; this is exhibition of immorality" (oral interview).

Impact on Tyoshin People Group Alliance

The Tyoshin were a people who loved cohabitation and greatly valued unity. Communality is the first feature of the Tyoshin worldview that should be mentioned. "No Tiv was an island unto himself. The fundamental desire toward cosmic tribal life reflected the essential harmony and unity of the macrocosm. The futures of the individual were reflected in the life of all members of the community, and each community has a stake in the destiny of others" (Shii 12). NKST has negatively affected group alliance in Tyoshin tradition and. Shii once again lamented that, "the church taught that salvation was a personal matter, and that one stood finally before a personal God to give a personal account. Many Christians could not participate in some of the practice of the community and the Christians are the catalyst to the break up the ancient Tiv ties. The church now offered a new and important community to the Tiv. The church is also a place to identify with a group, a new focus of loyalty, the church serves as a substitute for the lost oligarchy of the compound" (411). This is detrimental

Impact on Tyoshin People's Marriage Practices

The early NKST missionaries recognized the Tyoshin traditional marriage system, and as of right now, the Tyoshin people continue to celebrate marriage in the church. NKST has

had a disastrously bad effect on this social practice. According to Agbeuge Tertsegha, the abolition of *yam she* (exchange marriage) which was at the instance of the instigation of the missionaries rather compounded more complications as those who had no sister for exchange in marriage could borrow from relatives to marry, the reverse is the case, when one does not have money today for the said purpose, it becomes difficult. As a result of the abolition of exchange marriage, the principle of *ya na anghian* (eat and give a brother) which is one of the Tiv core values is fast declining in Tyoshin land (Oral Interview) Chia Kasaren asserts that, the placement of the church wedding over the traditional marriage is another monster that is destroying the Tyoshin traditional marriage practice and unique identity (oral interview)

All the above-mentioned factors are products of NKST (Christianity), and they are destroying marriages in Tiv land and Tyoshin People of Gwer-west local government area is no exception. This is also a negative impact.

Social Implications of the Impact of Modernity on the Social Life of Tyoshin People

This section explores the sociological ramifications of NKST's effects on several aspects of social life, such as the Tyoshin People's conception of God, language, music, dancing, clothing, unity, marriage, and established authority within the Gwer-West local government area. The Tyoshin concept of God has undergone adaptations in response to NKST as posits by Ochala A. "Traditional beliefs in a deity have interacted with external religious influences, reshaping their understanding of the divine" (45-59) this has improved the social perception of God. NKST has presented favorable justifications for the Tiv language's preservation, per Terhemmen, C.S. The significance of global languages and contemporary communication technology has led to an improvement in the Tiv language's function in everyday communication and cultural transmission. (166–181). Not only have Tyoshin dance and music maintained their cultural relevance, but they have also been transformed into contemporary forms. "Modern influences have diversified the expression of Tiv musical and dance traditions, even though traditional instruments and rhythms remain" (HembaI.T171-186).

NKST has impacted Tiv dress, with Western attire often coexisting with traditional clothing as argued by Terna T. "This shift is emblematic of larger changes in Tiv society, reflecting the balancing act between heritage and globalization" (49-45). The institutions of marriage and systems of authority within Tiv society have experienced shifts due to NKST teaching, "Changing economic realities, education, and exposure to external ideas have influenced marital dynamics and traditional power structures" (Anum, I.146-159). The Tiv, and the Tyoshin People in particular, now enjoy much higher social position as a result of all the previously mentioned facts. More of the Tyoshin People's social life has been made public

by NKST, exposing them to a level of social standing that is admired by many in the community.

Language plays a crucial role in the transmission of religious traditions and cultural values, However, “modernity's emphasis on globalization and multiculturalism has led to the spread of dominant languages and the erosion of indigenous languages, affecting the preservation of sacred texts and oral traditions” (Fishman, J.A 15-20). As a consequence, the linguistic diversity those once united religious communities are at risk, potentially diminishing the sense of belonging among Tyoshin people of Gwer-West Local Government area. In the past, the arts, such as music and dance, have served as platforms for expressing religious fervor and ethnic identity, NKST has changed that as is captured by McNeill, W.H “these creative forms have undergone modification and globalization in modernity, which frequently results in their separation from their original religious contexts” (437-458). As such, Tyoshin People may experience a decline in shared rituals and a weakening of their cultural bonds from the Tiv ethnic ties.

Traditional religious dress is not only a reflection of individual beliefs but also a marker of communal identity, but NKST has done some negative influences, “The impact of modern dress is evident in the adoption of Western clothing styles and the decline of traditional dress practices, leading to a dilution of religious and cultural distinctiveness” (Barnard, M. 20). This shift in dress can contribute to challenges in maintaining a cohesive socio-religious community of Tyoshin People. The detrimental effects of NKST on Tyoshin people's socio-religious life are multifaceted and have an impact on essential facets of cultural and religious identity. The Tyoshin People's socio-religious life is always changing due to changing cultural norms and technological breakthroughs. Even though these changes are not intrinsically bad, it is important to comprehend their sociological ramifications in order to protect the richness of the socio-religious traditions of the Tyoshin People in the Gwer-West local government region in the face of constant change.

Recommendations

After assessing the benefits and drawbacks of NKST on the social lives of Tyoshin People followers in the Gwer-West local government area, the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. Tyoshin people should embrace the positive aspects of NKST in order to enhance more social development in their area.
2. Leaders of Tyoshin should make it a duty to build a cross-cultural relationship with the NKST; this would help them to lead their members better.
3. Attention should be giving to preserving the sanctity and core values of the Tyoshin people despite the pressure of NKST.

4. NKST has come to stay in Tyoshin land, as such, the people should learn to establish an equilibrium between the church and the Tyoshin culture
5. And the church in this area should be mindful that this is a people with a unique culture and identity, and should be respected for it.

Conclusion

After discussing about how NKST has affected the social lives of the Tyoshin People in the Gwer-West local government area, it is important to remember that the people should also utilise the good aspects of NKST to improve their own lives and further the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to maintain the sanctity and fundamental beliefs of the Tyoshin People of the Gwer-West local government area, they should also firmly reject the destructive tendencies of NKST inside them.

The sociological effects of NKST on the social lives of the Tyoshin People show how tradition and change interact in a nuanced way. Their understanding of God, language, cultural manifestations, social structures, and creative traditions all continue to change as the people negotiate the effects of NKST helping to shape their identity in the contemporary world. While it is true that NKST and the Tyoshin People are here to stay and must coexist, it is also true that NKST's value cannot be overstated and that its negative effects in Benue State's Gwer-West local government area must be carefully balanced in order for NKST's potential to be fully realized.

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