



MODERNIZATION: ITS EFFECTS AND CHALLENGES ON AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION TODAY

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Abstract

The term modernization does not denote any philosophy or movement but it always symbolizes a process of change. In fact it is understood as a process which indicates the adoption for the modern ways of life and value. This modernization has been one of the major contributors of secularism in Africa which has affected African traditional religion in so many ways. It did it through making ATR adherents loose sacredness of life, bringing in other religion that influenced ATR, taking the adherents of ATR etc. The research made use of culture-area approach method in his work. It recommends that modernization should retrace its steps and give ATR chance to operate especially allowing the adherents of ATR to operate freely on their ground, the foreign religion should also operate on a level ground by understanding that all religion are the same. It advocates for comparative study of religion for all and sundry.

Keywords: Modernization, Effects, Changes, ATR, Today.

Introduction

Modernization cannot be discussed effectively without brief discourse on the colonial principle called secularism. Secularism involves the shift of societies from religious to non-religious values, influenced by modernization and rationalization. It is linked to the decline of religion's authority in social life and governance, as theorized by thinkers like Weber and Durkheim. Secularism in Africa, though less visible than in the West, is evident in reduced religiosity, materialism, and privatization of beliefs, with cultural shifts and urbanization contributing to its rise. Consumerism and the focus on scientific rationality also fuel secularism, challenging traditional African religiosity. Religious leaders and scholars highlight the growing tension between faith and secular influences in African societies.

The term modernization “does not denote any philosophy or movement, but it only symbolizes a process of change. In fact, “Modernization” is understood as a process which indicates the adoption of the modern ways of life and values”. The term being, use previously to refer only “to change in economy and its related effect on social values and practices”. It described as a process that changed society, from primarily agricultural to a primarily industrial economy. Because of the change in the economy, the society itself underwent changes in values, beliefs and norms. However, today the term is given a broader meaning.

Today, the term, ‘Modernization’ is understood as an attempt, on the part of the people, particularly those who are custom-bound, to adapt themselves to the present time, conditions, styles, and ways in general. It indicates a change in people’s food habits, dress habits, speaking styles, tastes, choices, preferences, ideas, values, recreational facilities and so on. It is also described as “social change involving the elements of science and technology”. The



scientific and technological inventions have brought about remarkable changes in the whole system of social relationship and installed new ideologies in the place of traditional ones.

Nweke (2021), in his article titled “African Traditional Religion vis-à-vis the Tackle It Suffers” mirrored the term modernization and its effective reality on the African continents and her indigenous religion and traditions thus:

Modernization has been one of the major contributors of secularization in Africa. It is the progressive transition from a pre-modern or traditional society to modern or first world society. It looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that with assistance, the less developed societies could be brought to the same developmental state with the more developed societies.

Hornby (2001) defines ‘modern’ as ‘of the present or recent time’. Modernity on its own, “means the condition of being modern”, it thus implies that modernity has to do with the contemporary happening as against old. In the modernization of ‘traditional’ societies, people are brought into sharp contrast to their fundamental beliefs. They are made to understand that most of their problems and questions have answers and solutions. The traditional societies are given practical solutions based on rational thinking and physical science as against the religious and divine assistance. While the physical sciences, rational thinking and modern social beliefs seem more concrete, convincing and progressive, the traditional societies are made to absorb this new medium to solve their problems, integrate themselves into the world frame, and facilitate better life and hopeful living against the religious beliefs of old. Thus, the religiosity is abandoned.

What are these contemporary things or happenings, which may cause secularism? They are the style of dressing (immodest dressing), the electronics, the flashy things and cars and even communication gadgets. Many Africans are now interested in modern things and even want to answer modern man.

The westerners therefore display a lot for Africans to buy but some of these things are not good for the Africans. Africans have not been able to realize that theatre or stage wears are different from ordinary wears. The whites use all these for acting drama but Africans use them as fashion. The Sunshade eyeglass is meant to be used when the sun is much but Africans enjoy them *as* fashion. The increasing numbers of rape and incurable diseases are all results of this entire “modernity syndrome”. Nevertheless, the westerners have studied Africans and discovered that they are good in consuming things, so they shift many used things that are outdated in their place over to Africans and Africans glory in them without questioning. The problem then is in the mind of Africans who allowed themselves to be deceived by the westerners in the name of modernity (Nweke 2021, p. 101-102)

Definitions

The term modernization is defined by various authors based on their understanding of modernization. Therefore, we shall consider a few of them as follows

Chris Barker’s definition of modernity [dt. *Moderne*]



Modernity typically refers to a post-traditional, post-medieval historical period, one marked by the move from feudalism (or agrarianism) toward capitalism, industrialization, secularization, rationalization, the nation-state and its constituent institutions and forms of surveillance.

(Chris Barker 2005, 444).”

The definition of modernization by Krishan Kumar

“Modernization: in sociology, the transformation from a traditional, rural, agrarian society to a secular, urban, industrial society.

Historical Background of Modernization in the World

Modernization is the continual process of societal transformation from the traditional systems to modernized society including features like industrial, political and social strata. According to Giddens It originated during the European age of Enlightenment especially in the 17th and 18th centuries where reason, science, and progress as cornerstones for societal development are so much emphasized (Giddens, 1990). Aftermath, the early modernization theories emerged in the mid-20th century’.

Immediately after the World War II era. This era, some scholars arose to explain the development trajectories of nations transforming from agrarian economies to industrialized societies especially some parts of Europe.

The division of labour in society

Émile Durkheim’s theory of the division of labour emphasizes how social cohesion evolves as societies grow more complex. In traditional societies, solidarity arises from shared beliefs and similar roles, known as mechanical solidarity. In modern societies, individuals perform specialized tasks, creating interdependence and fostering organic solidarity. This shift reflects societal progress but may also lead to issues like anomie if norms fail to regulate relationships effectively. Durkheim argued that this specialization is crucial for social order and development.

Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical studies of Chile and Brazil

A.G. Frank's theory argues that underdevelopment in Latin America is not a natural stage but a result of capitalist exploitation and integration into the global economic system. He highlights how colonial and post-colonial structures in Chile and Brazil created dependency, where local economies served the interests of foreign powers. Wealth extraction and unequal trade relationships perpetuated poverty and underdevelopment. Frank contends that breaking free from this dependency is essential for genuine development.

Social structure and personality

Talcott Parsons, in his work called “Social System” propounded a theory known as Personality and social structure, he showed how modernization brought about the influence of personality and social structure relationships affected the entire human populations, informing policy decisions. At the same time how social structures reshape personality and early personality traits influence the development of social patterns.



The stages of economic growth: A non-communist manifesto

While in the mid-20th century a sociologist called Walt Rostow (1960), explored and expanded on these modernization theories. He went on by proposing a linear model of development in the stages of growth (1960). His model was of the view that all societies can only progress through five distinct stages of economic development that is culminate in high mass consumption. It is possible to identify all societies, in their economic dimensions, as lying within one of five categories:

1. The traditional society,
2. The preconditions for take-off,
3. The take-off,
4. The drive to maturity
5. The age of high mass-consumption.

Various scholars like Parsons (1964), strongly emphasized the role of institutional distinction in advancing societal complexity and economic growth.

The Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism

Max Weber in his sociological enterprise, especially in one of his famous work called “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1905/1930), gave the foundational understandings of how modernization was so much influenced by culture and religion. Here, Weber posited his argument against particular religious ethics, especially Protestantism, which contributed heavily to the rise of capitalists’ economies in the Western societies. In the same vein of thought, Émile Durkheim posited in his work called “Social Solidarity” where he explore how the traditional societies transitioned to more multifaceted, industrialized forms of organization (Durkheim, 1893/1984).

Legacy of the protestant ethics

1. Transition to secular rationalism: Over time the religious basis of capitalism faded, but its principles, work ethic, rationality, and profit-making remained central to modern economic life of the societies.
2. Mechanization of Societies: The Protestant ethic contributed to creating a rational, capitalist order that now governs individuals’ lives with irresistible force,” independent of religious motivations.

The Consequences of Modernity

Giddens (1990), in his book titled “The Consequences of Modernity” argues that modernity represents a distinct break from traditional societies, characterized by its unique institutions, rapid changes, and global interconnectedness. He analysed the view of "postmodernity" as a new era, suggesting instead that we are experiencing a radicalization of modernity's consequences. Modernity's dual nature is evident in its creation of unprecedented opportunities for human progress and its darker aspects, such as ecological destruction, totalitarianism, and the militarization of societies. Giddens emphasized the importance of institutional analysis over grand philosophical narratives to understand modernity and its impacts. He highlighted the increasing tension between security and risk, trust and uncertainty, in the modern world, advocating for a re-evaluation of classical sociological theories to address these challenges.



The following are the various consequences of modernization that have made indelibly wound on the African Traditional religion in various ways.

Loss of sacred spaces

With the advent of modernization most often through urbanization system of settlement and industrialization of the society many sacred spaces had been destroyed or even neglected which has led to the diminishing of cultural and spiritual importance.

Influence of other religion

Through exposure of the local people to the western secularism, globalization and modernization, many were influence through different religion which has led to swift shifts in traditional religious beliefs and practices, and the traditional faith has often been diffused with these secular ideologies.

Misunderstanding

Modernization has created a lot of vacuum between the traditional principles and that of the modern principles. This menace has brought about misconceptions conflicts which has often resulted to lack of appreciation for the indigenous cultures and practices through writings and public speech.

Lack of priests and worshippers

Because of the modernization of the various African communities and societies, the contemporary generations moved away from the traditional roles, which is causing decline in the quantity of traditional priests and worshippers, continuously threatening the preservation and cultural heritage of the people.

Rationalism

Because of modernity, some of the Africans began to rationalize the core values, customs indigenous religion and its rituals by equating the teachings of the ancestors with western scientific methodology and prove; philosophy and theology.

Promotion And Role of African Traditional Religion in The Modern African World

Here we shall consider the view of one of the African Traditional Religion theorists, Nweke. He has studied closely and understood the miserable conditions of Africa as a nation suffering from the long-lasting sting of colonial masters and the neo-colonial masters who are eating deeply into the bone marrow of African system of governance through western systemic leadership in the name of modernization. Here he gave several possible ways of solving the African continent problems by adapting and promoting of their indigenous religion which their fore-fathers practised, lived and died happily than the western rule and divide method of governance that has led to series of atrocities in the African countries under colonial rules and which is still on going.

In his article titled “*African Traditional Religion as an unexplored tool for achieving human development and national restructuring in Nigeria*”, he examined African Traditional Religion as a valuable tool but neglected resource for promoting human development and national restructuring in Nigeria. He highlighted, how African Traditional Religion has suffered under Western influence and neo-colonialism but continues to advocate its relevance



through media and education. Key tools identified include a unified worldview, sense of community, and value for human life. The paper argues that incorporating African Traditional Religion's values can address challenges like corruption, secularism, and moral decay in Nigeria. Recommendations include revitalizing African Traditional Religion's principles in education and public discourse to achieve holistic national development. (Nweke, 2019: 101-105)

In his understanding of African situations, he highlighted the potential of African Traditional Religion in addressing conflicts and fostering nation-building in Nigeria. He used Nigeria as a case study not that this article meant only for Nigerians. He argues that African Traditional Religion's ethical principles, communal values, and interconnected worldview can promote unity, justice, and moral discipline. The study recommended reintroducing African Traditional Religion principles into Nigeria's socio-political and legal systems to drive development and social harmony. It emphasized the need to publicize African Traditional Religion to counter neglect and ensure its integration into modern nation-building efforts. Finally, it called for a cultural and moral return to traditional values to achieve sustainable national development. (Nweke, 2024: 85-86)

Effects of Modernization on African Traditional Religion

The effects of modernization is numerous to mention, hence we shall consider the positive and the negative of its effects on the African Traditional societies and their indigenous religion

The Positive effects of modernization on the African traditional societies

Modernization in the real sense is a great tool for achieving the socioeconomic progress of any giving nation. It has led many nations into prosperous stage of life, built and raised their economic pyramid, brought many out of abject poverty, improved their health care, education and equally foster renovation and innovation of an individuals. It has contributed immensely to political reformations through democratization principles and the active participation of the people. It aids communities to respond to global challenges such as pandemics and climate change through leveraging and knowledge sharing mechanism which is a technical knowhow of every nation.

The Negative effects of modernization on the African traditional societies

We shall consider the negative effects from various sociologists and African Traditional Religionists as follow.

Inglehart and Welzel (2005), demonstrated that People's basic values and beliefs are changing, in ways that affect their political, sexual, economic, and religious behaviour. These changes are roughly predictable. Drawing on a massive body of evidence from societies containing 85 percent of the world's population, they posited that modernization is a process of human development, in which economic development gives rise to cultural changes that make individual autonomy, gender equality, and democracy increasingly likely. They present a model of social change that predicts how value systems are likely to evolve in coming decades. They demonstrate that mass values play a crucial role in the emergence and flourishing of democratic institutions. (p. 2-5)



Nweke explored the impact of globalization on African Traditional Religious Rituals, emphasizing its effects on cultural practices like worship, dress codes, and communal values. He argued that globalization has led to a loss of cultural identity and self-rejection among Africans, while promoting foreign cultural dominance. However, he also highlighted the potential to globalize unique African values, such as communal spirit and respect for human life, as contributions to the global community. Using a historical method, and he recommended upholding African traditions and fostering self-acceptance amidst globalization's challenges. (Nweke, 2019: 306-307)

He further investigated the relationship between African culture and values, Christianity, and contemporary Nigerian society. He highlighted how African Traditional Religion encompasses values like communal living, respect for elders, and sacredness, which are increasingly eroded in modern Nigeria. In this article, he criticized the early Western missionaries for undermining African values, misrepresenting the people, and neglecting the potential for integration between African culture and Christian teachings. He advocated that the Nigerians should return to core African values as a foundation for moral and societal improvement in Nigeria. The study emphasized the need for inculturation of Christianity to align with African cultural identity. (Nweke, 2022: 237)

In his exploration, he evaluated the conflict between African Traditional Medicine (ATM) and Orthodox Medicine (OM) in Nigeria. While Orthodox Medicine relies on scientific methods for diagnosis and treatment, African Traditional Medicine integrates physical, spiritual, moral, and social dimensions, believing that illness can stem from spiritual or moral causes. Then he further highlighted the strengths and limitations of both systems, emphasizing that some diseases require scientific approaches, while others benefit from traditional methods. He called for dialogue and integration of both systems to ensure holistic healthcare for a healthier society. (Nweke & Ezekiel, 2023: 61-62)

Apart from the above negativity effects of modernization on African Traditional Religion posed by some authors, the reality of this negative effects of modernization are equally seen in the following aspects of nation's development

Environmental Degradation: it is largely caused by industrialization of the society which has contributed to climate change, deforestation because industrial sites and both environmental and atmospheric pollution.

Social inequality: modernization has led to social inequality among the individuals and societies based on their social statutes. Mostly this inequality leads to unequally distributed, exacerbating disparities between and nations especially at the international level which can be seen in international policy of the Europeans.

Cultural erosion: the traditional values and the religious practices are usually marginalise and side-line in order to embrace and favour the Western idea of modernity

Urbanization challenges: the advent of modernization brought about urbanization which has led to division, overcrowding, social dislocation in many societies and inadequate distribution of infrastructural materials.



The links between modernization, cultural evolution, and democratic governance.

Arturo Escobar (1995, p 20) in his noble work known as *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* critiques the dominant development discourse that emerged after World War II. Escobar examined how "development" was constructed as a way to manage and transform the "Third World," perpetuating global inequalities. Key points include:

1. Development as a Discourse: Escobar applies poststructuralist and Foucauldian frameworks to analyse development as a historically constructed system of knowledge and power.
2. Problematization of Poverty: Poverty in the Global South was framed as a universal problem to be solved through Western models of economic growth and modernization.
3. Colonial Continuities: Development practices extended colonial modes of control and domination under the guise of aid and progress.
4. Failure of Development: Development policies often led to increased poverty, exploitation, and environmental degradation instead of the promised prosperity.
5. Representation and Power: The "Third World" was discursively produced as a backward, dependent entity, legitimizing intervention.
6. Critique of Economics: Escobar challenges economics as the dominant framework, advocating for a culture-based political economy.
7. Emergence of Alternatives: He highlights grassroots resistance and the call for post-development approaches centred on local knowledge and autonomy.
8. Anthropological Lens: The work critically combines anthropology and cultural studies to understand development's cultural and political impact.

Escobar calls for reimagining development beyond Western paradigms, fostering diverse, community-driven alternatives.

Contemporary Implication of Modernization on the African Traditional Religion

Iheanacho (2018, p.1-22) in his article "African Traditional Religion in a world of change" examined the dynamic impact of change on African Traditional Religion (ATR) and its worldview in a rapidly modernizing world. He highlighted how colonialism, education, and foreign religions, like Christianity and Islam, disrupted African Traditional Religion's interpretative paradigms and values. These changes led to cultural alienation, a decline in traditional practices, and the marginalization of indigenous worldviews. Despite this, African Traditional Religion remains integral to African identity, emphasizing spirituality, morality, and social cohesion. The work advocated for African intellectuals and leaders to rediscover and promote African Traditional Religion's positive attributes, ensuring its relevance amidst global influences.

Evaluation

Later, in the late 20th century various critiques of modernization ensues through the dependency theorists and post-colonial scholars who challenged its Eurocentric deterministic assumptions.

These theorists argued that modernization always overlooked especially at the negative effects of colonialism and the global power asymmetric, which hindered development in the global south (Frank, 1967, p453-455).



Modernization itself has two faces, in other words, in reality it has double-edged sword based on the plan of the colonial masters. It is like the usual style the 419 gangs are using, Bible in one hand while pistol (gun) in the other hand.

It brought a lot of unmatched progress to Africans, however post challenges that require considerate management. Note worth, it transformed many communities and societies but the method of western model of modernization is not widely accepted by some nations with unique cultural and historical contexts especially countries like Ethiopia and Asians. In order for modernization to align with the African cultures and religion practices, it must incorporate indigenous religion, knowledge, culture and culture of the people and finally, at the government level, the resources must be distributed equally to every areas concerned and sustainable facilities within the environment must be available.

Conclusion

Modernization as colonial ideology and tool remains the basis of nation's prosperity device that enables communities and societies to evolve and adapt to global changing realities. However, its merits should and must be balanced with the efforts of the government to abate its negative consequences such as cultural erosion, inequality and environmental degradation. Modernization in one way or the other must highlight sustainability and inclusivity, in order to ensure it serves as a tool for equality in terms of growth and development of every nation rather than propagating existing discrepancies. For modernization to work out effectively in Africa as a continent it must fully embrace the culture, custom and the traditional religion of the people. It must also embrace the diverse perspective of the people's ideologies, fostering resilience and harmony in a rapidly changing world without leaving out any iota of the people's beliefs that is positive.

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