



Rejuvenating African Traditional Beliefs in the 21st Century: An Example of the Egbesu Brotherhood of Ijaw Land

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Abstract

The paper investigated the rejuvenation of African traditional religion: the Ijaw Igbesu Brotherhood in Context. It is no secret that African traditional belief systems are practiced effectively in the 21st Century as compared to previous centuries. This is connected with the emergence of European missionaries, European colonial master(s), and general Western civilization in Africa. In addition to this, Africans generally have a negative attitude toward traditional African beliefs. Africans are no longer progressive passionately in the worship of their deities and gods. The average African today is either a Christian or Muslim, and only a few persons still have faith in traditional African beliefs in spite of being discriminated against by society. The study found out that the Ijaw Egbesu Brotherhood is an Ijaw traditional movement dedicated to the worship of Egbesu and other deities in riverine communities in the area. The group is basically concerned about the survival of Ijaw cultural values, especially Ijaw spirituality, and how it can be revived in order to prevent the total decay of Ijaw's traditional religion. It concluded that Ijaw Egbesu Brotherhood is committed to the promotion of African traditional religion with a focus on Ijaw of the Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Keywords: Egbesu Brotherhood, Belief, Rejuvenate, Ijaw

Introduction

The Ijaw ethnic group is among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria's Niger Delta and, arguably, the fourth largest ethnic group in the entire country. The Ijaw people are mostly found in riverine communities. They have a very rich culture. Like most African groups, they worship deities, ancestral fathers and mothers. The present realities show that the traditional religion of the people is being weakened as a result of Westernization, and Christian doctrines. The implication for this is that a substantial number of Ijaw people no longer find pleasure in practicing African Traditional Beliefs. This does not mean that there are no persons still in practice; those that are still in practice are seen as barbaric, uncivilized, wicked, witches, and all that is evil.

Another perspective on this is that even those who claim to be Christians and civilized tend to frown at these traditional beliefs and cultural practices. Whenever activities of cultural undertone are organized, or festivals that are deeply rooted in Traditional African Belief, these anti-traditionalists get emotionally involved. Some participate actively and would justify their involvement as just and necessary. They claim that it is not sinful in the sight of Jehovah (Christian God), even when they know it is against Christian teachings. This is mostly associated with events like the war boat regatta and the Ijaw masquerade display. These are performed during cultural festivals and other spiritual events found in traditional Ijaw communities which dates back to the pre-colonial Ijaw society.

The Ijaws worship several deities and Egbesu is one of such deities. Besides the orthodox religions, Egbesu, is a deity recognized by all Ijaws irrespective of the clan, although each clan or community has its own deity ("asain"). In some cases, you find an entire clan worshipping a deity, while "asain" could belong to a particular family or community. A notable example in this regard is the "TarakiriOru" which is the deity for the whole Tarakiri clan and "Okiri" specifically for the Toru Orua community. This study investigates the position of traditional African beliefs in the 21st Century, focusing on the role of the Ijaw Egbesu Brotherhood in reviving it.

Conceptual clarification

The nature of this paper requires that certain concepts are defined for a better appreciation of the work. The Egbesu Brotherhood's aim is to revive Ijaw spirituality that is fast waning, just like it were with the Egbesu Boys of Africa who fought for resource control for the Ijaw people of Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Therefore, an attempt is made here to define the following culture and brotherhood.

The Concept of Culture

Culture entails the total way of life of a people, it covers the material and immaterial life of a people. i.e. spirituality, values, norms, food, dressing Pattern, and politics among others. Nevertheless, several views on culture abound, some of such definitions are a function of the lenses through which it is explained and range from very complex to very simple. For example, a complex definition was proposed by Kroeber and Parsons (1958) that culture, "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic- meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior" (p. 583). For Arnold (1993, 192), culture was a remedy to such human failings as 'the want of sensitiveness of intellectual conscience, the disbelief in right reason, the dislike of authority'. Culture is a memory and control device of society. It may be conceived of as providing the distinction between correct versus incorrect behavior. (Dirk, 1997). The overall living conditions of the individuals get influenced by cultures. Through cultures, individuals generate awareness in terms of norms, values, standards, and principles, which are regarded to be of utmost significance for individuals in enriching their lives. From the stage of early

childhood, individuals have imparted knowledge in terms of cultures from their family members as well as teachers. As individuals grow, they need to put into operation the cultures, so they are able to enrich their lives. The cultures are different in terms of various communities, i.e. rural, urban, and tribal. All these communities have their own cultures, norms, values, beliefs, and principles on the basis of which they live their lives. When individuals, belonging to various communities, age groups, categories, and backgrounds recognize the meaning and significance of culture and implement it in their lives, they will not only be able to achieve personal and professional goals but emerge into productive human beings (Radhika, 2020)

Others approached culture from an accommodative point of view. For instance, White (2007: 3) provided a definition of culture that is less in scope "By culture we mean an extrasomatic, temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon symboling". Culture is shared mental software, "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede, 2001). According to Jahoda (1984), "culture" is the most elusive term in the vocabulary of the social sciences and the number of books devoted to the topic would fill many library shelves. All definitions provided above suggest that culture is a total way of life of a people, the explanations point to the relative nature of the term to an agent, class, or people.

The concept of Brotherhood

Different scholars have given different meanings to the concept of brotherhood. Brotherhood is the bond that a group of people shares, seeing themselves as brothers. Put differently, it is a relationship that people from different backgrounds have and sees themselves as brothers. It is also an association or fraternity of people with a common purpose, profession, or belief. Brotherhood implies affection, loyalty, and kinship among the members. Brotherhood could be understood as a connection based on a commitment to mutual assistance. For example, one participant explained "Brothers are there for one another. If a brother loses a parent or loved one, we would all be there to support him through the hard times."

There is also a genealogical angle to it. in this regard, Smith (1964) explored the notion of fraternal solidarity, suggesting that groups develop solidarity as an adaptive response to the need for implementing goals and that the commitment of the members to the group is contingent upon their commitment to the value of the goals of the group. Within such groups, he suggested, there is a gradual development towards the generation of a motive for the sustenance of group cohesion, independent of any external opposition. Brotherhood could as a collection of individuals who enjoy one another's company (Joshua, 2015). From a social perspective, brotherhood is about a sense of friendship that goes above and beyond friendship outside the context of fraternity.

Brotherhood acts as a support mechanism, and its validation influences individual-level engagement and non-engagement. (Stuart W. Grande, Ledic

Sherman, and Mary Shaw-Ridley, 2013). Members of a brotherhood share some sentiments, aims and objectives, and goals that it hopes to achieve in the meantime or in the nearest future. It creates a platform for members to feel loved especially when they may have suffered some level of discrimination from family or other conventional gatherings such as the church or workplace.

21st Century Mores

Mores are social norms that are widely observed within a particular society or culture *Macionis, John J.; Gerber, Linda Marie (2010)*. Mores determine what is considered morally acceptable or unacceptable within any given culture. A folkway is what is created through interaction and that process is what organizes interactions through routine, repetition, habit, and consistency. Mores are strict in the sense that they determine the difference between rights and wrong in a given society, people may be punished for their immorality which is commonplace in many societies in the world, at times with disapproval or ostracizing. The main examples of traditional customs and conventions that are mores may include; lying, cheating, causing harm, alcohol use, drug use, marriage beliefs, gossip, slander, jealousy, disgracing or disrespecting parents, refusal to attend a funeral, politically incorrect humor, sports cheating, vandalism, leaving trash, plagiarism, bribery, corruption, saving face, respecting your elders, religious prescriptions and fiduciary responsibility (Drew, 2022). The 21st century came with challenges capable of eroding the old norms such as the idea of the well-bread child that is obedient, respectful, and hard-working and tied closely to the tradition and culture of Africans. This is not the situation today, as there is a total departure from the old ways of life to a more complex lifestyle. As a result, some people are tempted to deviate from old ways.

Understanding Egbesu

In this paper, "Egbesu" is also spelled "Igbesu", as such, the author may use both words interchangeably to mean the same thing. Egbesu means different things to different people. There is generally no accepted meaning of Egbes, it depends on the lenses through which one looks at it. For some, it is a war god of our people –the Izon or Ijaw tribe. Beyond being a war god to the Ijaw people, he (Egbesu) does even greater things. He is taken as a god of justice, as oppressed persons find justice in his shrine, for instance, when one is deprived of his or her land, in dire need of prosperity or when one needs things to work out fine for one. Egbesu is a deity that rights wrongs in society for those who believe in him; he is a father to the fatherless and, he meets the needy at the very point of their needs (OyinmieiOtolu, personal interview, July 28, 2019)

The concept of Egbesu has existed in Ijaw land from time immemorial. Traditional worshipers used it to protect themselves or others from physical weapons such as machetes and guns. Some tend to worship Egbesu as a god, while others only use it whenever they are in need of protection from man-made weapons. However, Egbesu actually exists as a supernatural or divinity that is supposed to be adored but not worshiped. Like other divinities, Egbesu

exists as an elemental being that serves the will of God and that of man, as a man may choose to direct it through his “free will” (Ebikabowei Tengi, personal interview, August 28, 2019).

Just as there are supernatural beings (gods) that take care of fire, lightning, and thunder and, water, Egbesu as a nature-being deals with the protection of the human body from physical harm by weapons especially during dangerous situations such as war, violence, and conflicts Egbesu is a very popular concept of God, referred to in the Ijaw nation and it could be said that about 70% of Ijaw people recall, run to or believe in its ability to protect them from harm by the physical weapons of their enemies and foes. Therefore, they engage in its practice as the situation demands, during moments of tension irrespective of their religious affiliations. Nevertheless, core practitioners of Egbesu use or engage in this practice always in preparation for the unknown.

‘Egbesu manifests in various forms, i.e., thunder, water, and storm. Whenever he is called upon, his response whether by thunder or otherwise is dependent on the mood and circumstances that surround the invitation. When he is called to fight battles, he comes with thunder and lightning to the dwelling place of the reported. Likewise, when he is called in a peaceful mood, he responds kindly. These are the signs that signify his presence among those that believe in him’. (A. Otolu, Personal Interview, July 15, 2019).

Egbesu is a spiritual being that cannot be seen. The idea here is that nobody can claim to have seen him, yet the only way he is seen is through his manifestation and the materials used in Egbesu’s shrine used in war and peacetime. He is considered a god for most Ijaw-speaking communities, because of the different ways he intervenes in providing solutions to problems presented before him. Thus, he is accepted as a god among the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta region. Many people have argued that the Niger Delta ex-militants that confronted the Nigerian federal government for over two decades used the divine power of Egbesu in waging the guerrilla wars. This may seem superstitious, but the reality is that it worked for them in averting and preventing bullets from penetrating their bodies and sometimes making them invisible to their enemies.

For the modern Ijaw indigene, Egbesu is much more than a phenomenon used for protection in ancient times. It is the masculine aspect of a Supreme Being—the Ijaw man sees the Supreme Being (The Almighty God) as a woman; hence they call God feminine names such as “oyin” “tamarau” “ayibarau.” Her masculine aspect, which is about might is what the Ijaw people refer to as Egbesu. The Egbesu phenomenon is used for judgment, protection, and expansion. In ancient times, what we had was Egbesu of the nine Ijaw clans, known as “Esen-ebe.” These nine clans made it possible for Egbesu to be popular among these various Ijaw clans. It is worth noting that the original clans of the Ijaw people were nine before migration brought about more clans in the Ijaw nation. Thus, the high priest of Egbesu in each clan automatically becomes the king of the various clans. So he bears the name rather the title “Agadagba.” This was the top hierarchy of the Egbesu priesthood. When a king becomes an Agadagba or high priest of Egbesu, he presides over the people of

the clan, he functions as a protector, and judge; he does all of these with the direction of Egbesu on earth. One of the qualities of Egbesu is that it protects his devotees from all kinds of attacks, including physical and spiritual attacks. As a result, the younger generation tends to abuse and use its potency for criminal activities like sea piracy, stealing and kidnapping (Daniel Ekiyor, personal interview, 2019)

While delivering a lecture during the Amaseimokumo festival at Gbaranmatu Kingdom Delta State in 2019, Binaebi maintained that “Unlike fallen angels that could be measured in size and length, Egbesu cannot be measured like a physical being and has not been measured by any human being—even by the world’s best scientists and spiritual masters. Egbesu exists at the service of humanity. It has no agenda to deceitfully control human beings like fallen angels,” Binebai clarified. “While demons and fallen angels dislocate the cosmic and social order, Egbesu restores and balances both the cosmic and social orders,” Binebai insisted, stressing that Egbesu, whom he held as indestructible and undefeatable, has since his encounter with humanity, “stood on the path of justice, love, peace, and progress.” Arguing that Egbesu is diametrically opposed to evil, Binebai queried: “If Egbesu is the spiritual foundation for combating evil, how can it be considered as a fallen angel or demon? Do demons or fallen angels preserve the commandments of God? What they do essentially is influence a man to break those commands. Rather than evil, Binebai said: “The purpose of Egbesu, in the life of the Ijaw nation, is to maintain a very strong, united, and very prosperous Ijaw nation in Africa and the world.” That purpose, he said, explains why Egbesu provides a military shield to the Ijaw territoriality; its wealth prevents mass deaths and promotes brotherliness. It abhors betrayal of the Ijaw nation using the powers of Egbesu, ritual killing, and other vices as crossing Ijaw moral red lines. (Binebai, 2019).

A Brief Overview of the Ijaw (Ijo) People

‘Ijo’ is also spelled as “Ijaw” “Izon.” This is because of the different dialects and the influence of Western Civilization, Ijo is the Anglicized version of Izon. However, for the purpose of the paper, these concepts will be used interchangeably, as the concepts mean the same thing is referring to the Ijo nationality. The different Ijo groups are variously referred to as *ibeor se*, simply meaning, sense of belonging together, oneness, and clan. The term (Ibe, Ebe) is mostly used among the Ijo in Central and Western Delta. However, Nembe tends to use both *Ibe* and *Se Se*, from a broader perspective, means nation; this is common to Kalabari, Okrika, and Ibani people of Eastern Delta Ijo. The idea here is that members of the Ibe speak the common language (dialect), for example, all Ijo people all over the world irrespective of the eastern delta Ijo, Western Delta Ijo or even Central Delta Ijo are referred to as Izon-be, such a group is recognized by her neighbors as a unit. They believe in common ancestors, deities, and places of origin.

The Ijo ethnic group is found in Nigeria, basically in the South/South geopolitical zone, arguably the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, with an estimated population of over 10 million people. They are mostly found in the

coastal areas of Nigeria, especially in the following Niger Delta states of Nigeria, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Cross River, Ondo and Edo states, respectively, and their major occupation is fishing (creek fishing). Although the Ijo is the dominant ethnic nationality along the Nigerian coastline, they have neighbors such as the Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Yoruba Benin etch (Atei, 2009). On the origin, Ijo tradition of origin is that they do not tell the exact time the people came into being; instead, they recall migration patterns, movements, and the formation of the breakaway groups in recent times. Lack of written records of ancient legends cannot with exactitude say when they entered and occupied the Niger Delta region.

The Egbesu Cult

The reference to Egbesu as a cult does not carry the modern-day concept of a cult. Instead, among the Ijaw people, the idea of the Egbesu cult is about the bond shared by adherents of the Egbesu deity. The idea here is that being the high priest of Egbesu and king, he has a close set of people that administer and take care of the palace and shrine, who are called the devotees. They maintain rules such as, they do not oppress, steal from their neighbors, they do not kill, they do not have sexual intercourse with a neighbor's wife, they must at all times promote justice., They are also expected to sacrifice a ram to Egbesu. They are more or less the protectors of Egbesu doctrines, principles, shrines, and temples. They basically protect "Egbesuism" from becoming outdated. One of the qualities of Egbesu is that it protects his devotees from all kinds of attacks, including physical and spiritual attacks. Because of the efficacy of Egbesu in providing security, the younger generation tends to abuse and use its potency for criminal activities like sea piracy, stealing or anything negative. As a result, members of the Egbesu cult at every given point in time are close to the king and they do not degenerate to the level of miscreant or get involved in criminal activities. The Egbesu cult was an ancient group of individuals in every community, clan or village that participated or were engaged in the Egbesu practice. As of then, there were shrines called the "Egbesu shrine" in which people go to fortify themselves (Ebidooe Amboro, Personal Interview, August 28, 2019).

The Egbesu Worship Days and Practice

There are no special days set aside for the worship of deities (Oru) in Ijaw communities, but then, the brotherhood usually worships the Egbesu according to the traditional Ijaw calendar. In the Ijaw calendar, there are four days, and of these four days, one is considered sacred, on such days, no farmer is expected to go to the forest to do anything, be it land cultivation, hunting or fruit gathering. It is on this day that the Ijaw normally goes to the various shrines to worship the various deities.

Basically, the Ijaw people have a four-day week, and one of these days is considered sacred and holy, which is called Akenbai, while the other days are Akenbuombai, Akenlambai, and Opufu-akembai. It should be said that the Opufu-akembai is also a mini holy day in Ijaw spirituality. The worship of

Egbesu or other deities in Ijaw society is done usually by libation with soft drinks like Fanta, Sprite, etc. on such days devotees are expected to keep themselves pure and holy, for example, avoiding those things that are prohibited at the temple, i.e., abstaining from sex including his wife (s), not eating certain kinds of delicacies, not going close to women under menstruation among others. All of these are observed the night before the Akenbai.

The Egbesu Brotherhood

The origin of the Egbesu Brotherhood cannot be separated from the agitations of the Niger Delta militants since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999 with Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as President. The Ijaws are known to be peace-loving people. In fact, they had always worked for the development of the Nigerian state even before the country gained its independence. While the oil that sustains the economy is found in their land, nothing good can really be said of them, with a high incidence of poverty, lack of basic social amenities, and little or no infrastructure, amongst others. What the people wanted was a fair share of the national resources -at least let them control the resources got from their backyard. While they waited patiently for the Federal Government, nothing positive was coming forth; hence the feeling of marginalization crept in. It was during this time they realized and also remembered how their forbearers used to handle cases of oppression. In ancient times, when an Ijaw man or woman felt oppressed, they turned to Egbesu for guidance, direction, and protection. So it was in the 20th Century when the Ijaws suffered oppression at the hands of the Federal Government of Nigeria over who controls the resources from crude oil. The Izonpeople went back to Egbesu for help in order to enable them to wage war against oppression and the injustice against them. It was this protective aspect of Egbesu, that the people used as a kind of spiritual bullet-proof to fight the oppressive military government. When the people saw the efficacy of the Egbesu phenomenon, the young minds that took up arms were very happy, overwhelmed, and quite impressed by what they were able to achieve and the much impact they were able to create, culminating in the granting of Amnesty to the Niger Delta militants involved in the arms struggle.



Members of the Egbesu Brotherhood

Following the success stories of the Egbesu phenomenon, youths across the Ijaw communities in the Niger Delta region started to abuse and use the powers of Egbesu negatively- kidnapping, stealing, sea piracy, and other criminal tendencies were now the order of the Day. The Egbesu phenomenon is an element of nature, like water and air; you can do what you want to do with it, you can do whatever you wish with it, the repercussion is yours to bear, and it is just like reaping what is sown. During an interview session Daniel, He noted that:

If you have Egbesu on you and you say you want to use it to rescue a child, the blessings that come with rescuing a child will be with you; then if you say you want to use it to rob a bank, the curse that comes with taking from another will be on your head (Daniel. Ekiyor, personal interview, October 9, 2019).

In the face of abuse, where youths of the region consistently used the powers of Egbesu negatively, it became very imperative to draw the attention of the youths to what exactly Egbesu represents in traditional Ijaw belief. He noted further that:

There was the need to remind ourselves that it will be a shame to us if the Ijaws cannot use the Egbesu phenomenon to foster growth and development and unity among different Ijaw clans.

When the agitations were high, Ijaw youths came together in unity to form social movements with a mandate to fight for the emancipation of the Niger Delta region. At that time, the youth had the supreme Egbesu Council or the Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA) led by Sergeant Yeri and friends. They were able to guide the Egbesu process; they were like the devotees around Yeri, the chief priest as a guide. However, it became necessary to spread this belief across the six Niger Delta states, which were very cumbersome for the few persons that controlled the affairs - Ijaws residents in the 6 (six) Niger Delta states. Overwhelmed by the efficacy of the Egbesu during the agitations, a group of youths started misappropriating it for criminal purposes that are against the teachings and doctrines of the deity.

Egbesu represents justice, fairness, and equity. On the contrary, the criminal tendencies of the few youths became a shame on the people; the Egbesu phenomenon that is supposed to be used to curtail evil is now used to perpetrate crime in the region and beyond. As a consequence, young men of Ijaw extraction who are aware of these things, believing in Traditional Ijaw belief, came together to promote and rejuvenate traditional Ijaw practices. These persons were Daniel Ekiyor, a traditional prophet, Bodmas Kemepadei, an apostle and graduate of religious studies at the Niger Delta University, Elaton Duakubo, a social activist, OyinmiebiOtolu and a handful of Ijaw traditional worshippers who came together and formed the Egbesu Brotherhood. Before you can join the Egbesu Brotherhood, you have to believe in Ijaw spirituality, and you would be purified and be informed about what is expected of a member which is to promote, protect, and preserve Ijaw spirituality. A member could further see the need to maintain the various shrines located in his or her domain, evangelize to people the need for them to be true devotees traditional African religion.



Devotees of Egbesu Worship at Gbramaratu, Delta State

Aim and Objectives of the Egbesu Brotherhood

The aim of the Egbesu Brotherhood is to reinvigorate the essence of Egbesu and the various deities worshiped all over Ijaw communities. The deity Egbesu prohibits oppression, killing, and indiscipline. Egbesu is deity that upholds justice. The motive of the founders of the brotherhood is to inform brethren that the phenomenon is not for criminal activities or oppression. Daniel Ekiyor affirmed this during an interview session:

We wanted to tell our brothers that the criminal tendency now associated with the name Egbesu is not a good thing for us who practice traditional African religion. So we decided to curtail these criminal activities done in the name of Egbesu.

He further argues that:

Traditional African spirituality is actually the first form of spirituality that existed, and so there is a need for us to re-echo it to our brothers, that those that used Egbesu negatively lacked one particular ingredient, which was the fear of God, and the only way one could have the fear of God in this human form was when one practiced spirituality in truth and spirit. The idea of religion is best described as the political aspect of man's spirituality constructed by society (Ekiyor 2019).

In essence, the brotherhood mandate is to assure the older generation, especially the traditional worshipers, that there is hope for African spirituality, particularly Ijaw spirituality. The brotherhood tries to make sure that whatever the people believed in before the arrival of the Christian missionaries does not vanish away and the spiritual practices of the people are sustained for generations yet unborn.

The symbol of Egbesu Brotherhood



Furthermore, the Egbesu Brotherhood thrives to show to the world that the Ijaw people have a way of worshiping and accessing God. According to Ekiyor, "Our spirituality is original to us and identifies with us, and makes us who we are." The religions of Christianity and Islam that are widely practiced in the 21st Century are not indigenous to the people.

Members of the Egbesu Brotherhood claimed that they were trying to make the average African man understand that his spirituality is domiciled in him and that there was no need to go to Jerusalem or Mecca to see God, maintaining that the land where you are born is also a holy land. The brotherhood also evangelizes to Ijaw people that it is not ideal to rubbish the name of Egbesu by using it for criminal activities, and calls upon them to come back home, which is African spirituality:

We must tell our brothers the hard and bitter truth that Egbesu does not like criminality and if Egbesu does not like criminality, likewise does not harbour greed. So, if you are not greedy, then you will be contented and if you are contented, then you will not use Egbesu to oppress a brother or sister (Daniel. Ekiyor July 3, 2019)

The Egbesu Brotherhood has metamorphosed from a mere preacher of morality to a spiritual organization dedicated to promoting and preserving traditional African religion, especially of the Ijaws. For Daniel, the Ijaw spirituality is what sustained our ancestors from being greedy, from being over-ambitious and contented. In a clearer perspective,

What the Egbesu Brotherhood is into is much more of an evangelical movement from one temple of worship to another, preaching to the people about God. There are a few traditional worship centers currently functional; such as the Mother-S Temple in Patani; the Gbaraun Egbesu Shrine in Oporoza; the Kolokuma Egbesu Shrine in Kaiama; Agadagba Bou in Sabagreria axis. We also have the Agadagba shrine in Patani and the Egbesu shrine in Egbema(D. Ekiyor July 3, 2019)

He maintained that what the brotherhood does in any of these places of worship is that, when there are programmes, the brotherhood goes there to evangelize and tell the people what Egbesu stands for and how to remain faithful to the deities of the land. It is with this understanding that Binebai (2019) posits:

It is a significant dynamo in the inculcation of traditional and spiritual education through the literature of the Egbesu Brotherhood, public lectures, and publications by the Supreme Order of Woyein (SOW). The trinity of Gbaraun-Egbesu, Ibolomoboere, and Amaseikumor pantheons, have enabled Ijaw to walk across the subaltern line by attracting

identity, just as it has caused our successes in politics, business, academics, and even in liberation struggles. Having this in mind, Ijaw must return to its traditional religion to fully actualize its aspirations. Education alone cannot be the instrument for communal development. There are some other agencies of particular interest to me, which is the spiritual angle of the development of man and society.⁸

For rapid transformation to glory, Binebai argued that "Ijaw must follow the tripartite principles of human existence namely Acknowledgement of a Supreme Being Egbesu/God, Illumination of our world with knowledge/wisdom and Love for multiplicity" all of which, he added, "are carried and symbolised in the Amaseikumor festival". Regretting the dearth and threat to Egbesu culture as a tragedy for the Ijaw nation, Binebai said the challenge of its sustenance rests on the shoulders of the Egbesu Brotherhood. "In some Ijaw communities, some spiritual secrets have gone with their keepers and operators. When a strong and good past is buried by the bolted mind of its custodian, the future hangs and dangles in perilous bleakness. This unprogressive practice of dying with secrets that could have advanced Ijaw nation in our traditional societies weakens and denies the present and future generations some form of strength and prosperity",

Conclusion

Africa today has been influenced by foreign religions (Christianity and Islam), with Westernization and Western Education also negatively affecting African cultures. The implication of this is that traditional African beliefs witnessing a sharp decline. A number of Africans are no longer interested in what their ancestors believed in, worshiped, and practiced. Thus the whole idea of being African has waned in some. From the positions and submissions of Binebai, Daniel, and others, it is safe to conclude that the Ijaw Egbesu brotherhood exists, to revive the dying belief in traditional African belief, with respect to the Ijo nationality in Nigeria's Niger Delta region.

The paper among other things recommends that:

- i. The Ijaw nation, particularly its political leaders, should add as a matter of constant practice, religion, and spiritual power, to its clamor for material development in Nigeria. For example, Mahatma Gandhi practiced the Hindu religion to fight for the liberation of India,"
- ii. "Ijaw nation must follow the tripartite principles of human existence, namely acknowledgment of a Supreme Being Egbesu/God, Illumination of our world with knowledge/wisdom and Love for multiplicity," all of which, "are carried and symbolized in our cultural festival such as the Amaseikumor festival."
- iii. The dearth and threat to Egbesu culture as a tragedy for the Ijaw nation, the Egbesu brotherhood should not relent to rejuvenating Egbesu practices and Ijaw spirituality. The survival of Ijaw spirituality rest on the shoulders of the Egbesu Brotherhood.

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