

NIGERIA TRADITIONAL MORAL VALUES IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION: APPROACH OF JUSTICE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Ogugua Patricia Anwuluorah and Jude Chinweuba Asike

Introduction

The activities of Globalization are inexorable. It means that no part of the world can be taken to be an enclave any longer. There has been growing interdependence or dependence in some cases. But even mere dependence, negatively as it may sound, entails that the dependent section cannot exist or act optimally alone. Figuratively, 'no country is an island anymore'. What happens in one part of the world affects the other part. This is exemplified by the recent economic meltdown, which affected most economies of the world negatively even though the ripples started from far away climes.ⁱ There is no gainsaying the fact that globalization is rather complex. This complexity has come about most especially through the agents of acculturation. The tremendous impact of acculturation on the life of Nigerians is readily seen in the way many of the traditional normative systems are being seriously called to question. Indeed, Ekpunobi and Ezeaku lament that:

Some aspects of the traditional values and morality have been influenced by the processes of modernity that are passing through the African societies. Some values and morality are wearing new frames in order to grapple with the increasing socio-religious problems of the contemporary society.ⁱⁱ

It has therefore become very necessary to search for ways through which the moral challenge posed by the current tide of globalization sweeping across Nigerian nation can be met through resilience of its numerous traditional moral values.

Nigeria cosmology

Prior to the advent of western education, the indigenous people of Nigeria had certain cosmological ideas, which formed the basis of their system of values. Central to the Nigerian's view of the world, and the place of man in it, was the belief that the universe was peopled by spirits, some great, some small, some benevolent, but many more were malevolent. All of them were capable of swift and often vindictive anger. The supreme Being, the *Allah* of the Moslems, the *Chineke* of the Igbos, the *Olorun* of the Yorubas, and the *Abassi* of the Ibibios, and also the *Ifa*, the *Fenigbeso*, the *Ojukwu*, and a host of other deities and spirits either inhabited or were guardians of land, sea, and air as well as everything in them. Just as in other parts of tropical Africa, the Nigerian air was swarming with these spirits and supernatural powers. Most Nigerians brought up in the villages and native towns of Nigeria have at one time or the other smelt a spirit or spirits. The air of mystery pervaded the Nigerian atmosphere far more oppressively when the Christian message was first introduced than is the case today.

Apart from the deities is the belief in ancestral spirits. This belief finds expression in various ritual practices connected with the ancestral shrines and subsidiary belief in reincarnation. The closeness of the ancestors' spirits helps to support the strong kinship attachments so common in Nigeria. These beliefs provide the moorings of the traditional Nigerian culture. They provide the framework into which the beliefs in witchcraft, charms and magic must fit in. They explain the respect paid to certain elders and traditional rulers who form the visible link between the living

and the death, and justify the myths about man's relationship with the universe. They make sense of the values of the traditional Nigerian society. The significance of the missionary's challenge is that he invited the native to abandon all these beliefs in favour of the belief in the Supreme Being, God.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Idea of Globalization: Issues of Justice and Responsibility

Globalization describes a process by which regional economies, societies and cultures have become integrated through a globe-spanning network of communication and trade. The term is sometimes used to refer specifically to economic globalization: the integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology.^{iv} It is usually recognized as being driven by a combination of economic, technological, socio-cultural, political, and biological factors. It can also refer to the transnational circulation of ideas, languages or popular culture through acculturation.

Sofadekan observes that all through history, the people of Africa and indeed the rest of the third world have been the target of the successive ideological creations of the Western world not minding how it affects their existence. Through the periods of slavery and colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism, and now globalization, the western worlds' view has been imposed upon most of mankind; and Africans merely see themselves as struggling against many odds to liberate their minds, attitude and societies from such a related entanglements because their customs and needs are much different. Many people, especially the disadvantaged, experience this as something that has been forced upon them rather than as a process in which they can actively participate. Some see it in terms of the economic agenda of powerful nations dominating the world.^v Hence, Pope John Paul II emphasizes that:

One of the church's concerns about Globalization is that it has quickly become a cultural phenomenon. The market as an exchange mechanism has become the medium of a new culture. Many observers have noted the intrusive, even invasive, character of the logic of the market, which reduces more and more the area available to the human community for voluntary and public action at every level. The market imposes its way of thinking and acting, and stamps its scale of values upon behavior. Those who are subjected to it often see globalization as a destructive flood threatening the social norms which had protected them and the cultural points of reference which had given them direction in life.^{vi}

In furtherance to the above, many individuals of sterling quality have made contributions in this regard and argued that for the concept of globalization to be worthy and meaningful, it has to be humanitarian in its approach and detail. Thus, its concern for humanity must not be negotiable. It is on the strength of this argument that Pope John Paul II while meeting with the 33 members of the Pontifical Academy for Social Sciences recently observed that: "Globalization could become a new version of colonialism if it does not have a common code of ethics guiding it." It is necessary, therefore to insist that globalization like any other system be at the service of human person, it must respect fundamental human values, self solidarity and common good. Here ethics demands that systems be attuned of the needs to man, and not that man be sacrificed for the sake of the system. What this connotes is that man in his wisdom should continue to affirm that ethical discernment in the context of globalization must be based upon two inseparable principles including: First, the inalienable value of the human person, source of all human rights and every

social order. The human being must always be an end and not a means, a subject and not an object or a commodity of trade. Second, the value of human cultures, which no external power has the right to downplay and still less to destroy.^{vii}

Globalization must not be a new version of colonialism. It must respect the diversity of cultures which, within the universal harmony of peoples' are life's interpretive keys. In particular, it must not deprive the poor of what remains most precious to them such as, their religious beliefs and practices, since genuine religious convictions are the clearest manifestation of human freedom. Despite the diverse cultural forms, universal human values still exists and they must be projected as the guiding force of all development and progress. Hence, Agbakoba said that: "It is becoming increasingly clear that it is necessary for the world to have a global ideology that would provide for and project justice and respect for the persons and communities as well as provide a basis for the minimizing and resolving of conflicts locally and internationally".^{viii}

The Concept of Moral Values in Nigeria

Values are fundamental in all human societies and in human actions and activities. Generally, morality originates from religious considerations, and so pervasive is religion in Nigerian culture that the two cannot be separated. What constitutes moral code of any particular Nigerian society- the laws, taboos, customs and set forms of behavior- all derive their compelling power from religion. Thus, morality flows out of religion, and through this the conduct of individuals are regulated; and any break of the moral code is regarded as evil and punishable.

An Important fact about the rules which constitute the ethical code of Nigeria societies is that they are usually integrated into a unified system, and to understand the ethical code no rule can be considered apart from the system as a whole. The only desirable ideal is social harmony and peace for the good of man and society. Most of the important virtues are either couched in proverbs or expressed in the form of a folk-tale with a moral to it. The proverbs may serve as prescriptions for action or act as judgment in times of moral lapses. Proverbs are often cited at an appropriate times during an argument, can settle the dispute instantly, for the proverbs are believed to have been handed down by the ancestors and predecessors to whom we owe our communal experience and wisdom.

The Resilience of Nigeria Traditional Moral Values in the Context of Globalization

Some Nigeria traditional moral values-: truth (*Eziokwu*), justice (*Ofo*), *Hard-work*, tolerance etc. are universalizable and can meet the criteria for universal values. Let us examine these moral values with special reference to Igbo and Yoruba tribes of Nigeria.

Truth (*Eziokwu*): For the Igbo, the truth is the major strand that welds society together. Without truth there was no need for human society. The trust built in Igbo society lies mainly in the ability of the individual members to tell one another the truth. Thus, it is obvious that the pillar stone of every community is telling the truth. Thus the Igbo say:

"eziokwu bu ndu"

"truth is life."^{ix}

On the other hand "*onye okwu asi*" ("a liar") is someone who negates this life principle which the truth gives. Truth has its own reward, as this Yoruba song shows.

Be truthful, do good;

Be truthful, do good;
It is the truthful
That the divinities support.^x

Embodiment of truth in our actions both in private and public affairs stand the chance of dealing with embezzlements of public funds, sale of fake drugs, human trafficking, and the lapses in our judicial systems among others.

Justice: Justice is an important notion in Igbo traditional morality. The Igbo religious symbol for justice is “*Ofo*”. This is not a spirit but the symbol of authority which descends from the ancestors, a guarantee of truth, and sometimes part of the regalia of the Umualusi (Spirit). As the embodiment of the spirit of ancestors, it is ever reminded that ‘*ndu*’, the supreme value, requires justice so as to even this ‘*ndu*’ out of all members of the community. A popular proverb in Igbo says:

“Ejim ogu, ejim ofo, ofo ka ideyi ji awa ala.”

Translates:

I hold ‘*ogu*’ in one hand and ‘*ofo*’ in another, It is through the powers of ‘*ofo*’ that the soft rain water furrows the hard ground.”^{xi}

This reminds the community of the power of justice which in its nature is believed to involve transparent honesty, innocence and fair play, the rain like justice may seem weak, but it is capable of leaving its mark on the ground. So can a man who observes the difficult job of pursuing ‘*ndu*’. Hence, an over used proverb among the Igbo says:

“Egbe bere, uguo bere, nke si ibe ebena, nku akapu ya.”

Translates:

“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch, which ever says the other will not perch, let its wings break off.”^{xii}

This again emphasizes peoples concern for the principle of justice. In the living of ‘*ndu*’ (life), there is enough room for all to ‘perch’ and achieve fully the supreme value. Greed, jealousy, destruction of other peoples chances for making success of life and the lack of the spirit to give and take by which the community could live harmoniously and grow are greatly deprecated by Igbo. The traditional idea of justice frowns at marginalization and the increasing level of poverty as a result of the unjust distribution of abundant natural resources in the country. This has led to persistent conflict in the Niger Delta region. The militants there have continued to pressurize the Federal Government to give them fair share of the petroleum resources from their land.

Hard-work: In the Igbo cultural life, certain Igbo proverbs/adages/aphorisms lay great emphasis on the importance of hard work and the consequences of laziness, and not showing seriousness towards ones work or means of livelihood.^{xiii} Below are some examples:

- *‘Ngana kpuchie ute, aguṣ e kpughee ya’.*
(If laziness/sloth pushes one to sleep, hunger, will wake him up).
- *‘Aka aja aja, na-ebute ọmụ mmanụ mmanụ’.*
(The hands that toil/labours shall eat).
- *‘Onye ruo, o rie’.* (He that sows, reaps).
- *‘Onye rukarja, o rikarja.’* (He that sows more reaps more).
- *‘Nku onye kpara n’ okochi ka o na-anyanya n’udummiri.’*

(The firewood one gathers during the dry season would be used during the rainy season).

- ‘*A ruo n’anwu, e rie na ndo*’. (Enjoyment comes after hard work or labour).

The proverbs are used to remind both young and old that there is dignity in labour. Since among the Igbo people, proverbs make greater impact on the mind than ordinary words. Any lazy person, dependent on others for survival is looked down upon and considered a failure. Inculcation of these proverbs among the youths is capable of discouraging examination malpractices and the urge to acquire ‘certificate quick syndrome’.

In the Igbo community life too, names are given to enable man to be strong and engage him/herself in hard-work for a meaningful life of accomplishment. These names remind one to be full of strength, and avert the negative consequences of exhibiting laziness and weakness towards one’s work. The Igbo man values strength and labours for his survival, sustenance and self-esteem. Names like these show that strength is needed to make wealth: ‘*Dike*’ (Be strong), ‘*Ikedimma*’ (Strength is good), ‘*Nwadike*’, ‘*Onyedike*’, ‘*Odike*’ (Strong ones), *Ikeakor* (Never be deprived of strength), *Ikeazota* (With strength one acquires), *Ikeuba* (Strength to prosper), ‘*Ikedi*’ (There is strength), ‘*Ezeuchu*’ (King of enterprise) ‘*Akubuike*’ (Wealth is strength). Without strength nothing can be achieved. Wealth is obtained by strength and not by cheating, kidnapping for ransom of money; and other corrupt practices.

Character (‘*iwa*’): The Yoruba conceive of ‘*iwa*’ (character) as providing the means by which man regulates his life to avoid conflict with the supernatural forces and also to be able to live in harmony with his fellow men. Thus, in a system dominated by many supernatural forces and a social structure predominantly authoritarian and hierarchical, the Yoruba believe that each individual must strive to cultivate a good ‘*iwa*’ to be able to live a good life in perfect harmony with the forces that govern the universe and the members of his society. This, then, accounts for the high premium placed on good character.^{xiv} It is always considered to be very important that one does the right things so that one should ensure that one’s good destiny becomes a reality. Thus the character of the person would determine, to some extent, his situation in life. If he is a man of weak character, he could easily become a prey to a philosophy of resignation and idleness.

The unique place of ‘*iwa*’ would appear to predispose the people to the tremendous socio-cultural changes that are rapidly overtaking the whole country. Definitely, consistency and steadiness of character together with the corresponding attributes of patience and tolerance are major assets at this time. It is our strong conviction that traditional concepts like ‘*iwa*’ offers positive directions to reduce corruption, fraud, cheating, greed, ethnic conflicts and religious intolerance in Nigeria.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that some aspects of Nigeria traditional values and morality have been greatly influenced by the processes of globalization. However, we have seen that there are elements of universal values which are inherent in Nigeria traditional moral values for examples: truth (*eziokwu*) for the Igbo and (*otito*) for the Yoruba, justice (*Ofo*), hard-work and tolerance etc. Thus, despite the diverse cultural forms, universal human values still exist and they must be projected as the guiding force of all development and progress. This approach will no doubt ensure justice and responsibility in globalization.

References

- ⁱ J. B. Oguejiofor, Globalization and the resilience of Traditional Paradigms: The Case of the Igbo of Nigeria, in A. B. C. Chiegboka, T. C. Utoh-Ezeajugh, G. I. Udechukwu, eds., *The Humanities and Globalization in the Third Millennium*, (Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick, 2010), pp.15-25.
- ⁱⁱ Felicia Iremeka, Moral Values as the Pivot for Sustainable Development in Nigeria, in Jumoke F. Oloidi, ed., *Nigerian Peoples Culture and Development*, (Enugu: Ebenezer Productions, 2011), pp.99-144.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Otonti Nduka, *Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background*. (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp.10-11.
- ^{iv} Bhagwati, Jadish, *In Defence of Globalization*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University, 2004).
- ^v A. O. Sofadekan, Effects of Globalization on the Family Institution, in M. A Folarunsho, I. O. Oyeneye, R. I. Adebayo, eds., *Religion and Modernity*, (Ijebu-Ode: Almsek, 2007), pp.54-59.
- ^{vi} Louison Emerick Bissla Mbila, CSSP, Pope John Paul II on Globalization.
- ^{vii} L'Osservatore Romano, Editorial and Management Office, Via del Pellegrino, 00120, Vatican City, Europe.
- ^{viii} Joseph C. A. Agbakoba, Building Cultural Bridges in the Era of Globalization, *Philosophy, Culture and Tradition. A Journal of World Union Catholic Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 5, (2005), pp.41-53.
- ^{ix} D. U Okpata, *Essays in Igbo World View*. (Nsukka: A. P. Express Pub.,1998), pp.71-91
- ^x Kofi Asare Opoku, *West Africn Traditional Religion*. (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), pp.152-153, 158-159).
- ^{xi} Edmund Ilogu, *Christianity and Igbo Culture*. (Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1974), pp.131-132.
- ^{xii} Ibid.,
- ^{xiii} P. A. Ifegwazi, *A Philosophical Approach to Selected Igbo Proverbs*, (Onitsha: Midfield, 2004).
- ^{xiv} J. A. Omolafe, The Socio-Cultural Implications of Iwa in Traditional Igbo Thought. *Orita, Ibadan Journal of religious Studies*, (1990), pp. 69-86.