

REVIVING TRADITIONAL SOCIAL VALUES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigerians are resilient people that have developed value systems and methods of coping, which has enabled them to maintain their communities and to survive times of great hardship in African continent. Regretably, as the society passes from folk to urban society, their traditional values are bound to be affected as old values disappear while traditional values suffer reversal and disruption. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the place of traditional values as basic tools for ensuring sustainable development through cultural security and sustainable development among Nigerians. It x-rays the meanings of culture, traditional values, cultural security and sustainable development. The paper further explores dominant social and traditional values in African culture with emphasis on good human relations, hospitality, respect for elders and community social security system among others. It also clarifies the impacts of cultural diffusion on African culture. The paper concludes by recommending among others that the issue of cultural renaissance via African traditional social values must be practically considered as a strategy for promoting cultural security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Keywords: *African Culture, Cultural Renaissance, Cultural Security, Social Values, Sustainable Development, Traditional Values.*

Background to the Study

The question of value is akin to human society and activities. Thus, every society has set of values, covering every aspect of human endeavour. These values are the guiding principles found in any society (Macaulay, 2013). Over the years, there have been the agitation and clamour for invigorating and maintaining durable and lasting positive values in Nigeria for cultural security and sustainable development.

Before the advent of colonialism into the African society, Nigerians operated a set of unwritten but functional traditional values. The values and traditions made the young ones in the society to be obedient to elders and constituted authorities and the law of the land. Children by that time were morally sound as they respect their parents and elders in the society. They learnt to work to achieve and to be contented with that they had. They

learned the vocation and skills of the society and were socially well interacted through the various moonlight stories, various community activities and ceremonies, such as wrestling, age grade, wedding, funeral and the likes (Otite & Ogionwo, 2006; Oderinde & Yusuf, 2012).

It is an incontrovertible fact that the advent of colonialism and imperialism nearly caused a dethronement of our cultural pathway. This is why Akinpelu (1983) while quoting the former president of Tanzania Julius Nyerere argued that:

Of all the crimes of colonialism there is none worse than the attempt to make us believe that we had no indigenous culture of our own, or that we did have was worthless or something of which we should be ashamed, instead of being a source of pride (P. 33).

Unarguably, the interaction of Nigerians with various other peoples of the world has brought about a great deal of change on their values, social, moral and religious life. The moral situation of youths in our society is not encouraging. Omoyajowo (2003) as reported by Oderinde and Yusuf (2012) found that the youths are no longer virgin until the time they marry. They engage in premarital sex regularly. In the same vein, Adalumo and Adalumo (1999) felt disgusted with the skinny, short, too tight and semi-naked wears which the youths in our society put on. While writing on the social vices that are common in the Nigerian society today, Oderinde (2009) listed lying, cheating, premarital sex, robbery, abuse of office, advance free fraud, tribalism, nepotism, drug abuse, thuggery and lately oil bunkering, human trafficking, abduction and suicide bombing. It is against this background that this paper advocates the revival of traditional social values for cultural security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The Objectives of this study examines the place of traditional values as basic tools for ensuring sustainable development through cultural security and sustainable development among Nigerians. It x-rays the meanings of culture, traditional values, cultural security and sustainable development. The paper further explores dominant social and traditional values in African culture with emphasis on good human relations, hospitality, respect for elders and community social security system among others. It also clarifies the impacts of cultural diffusion on African culture.

Literature Review

Conceptual Classifications

Traditional values refers to a composite set of principles, and to an extent knowledge and beliefs that are held in high esteem as embedded in African societies, and that are deemed worthy of being regarded as the guidelines for human behaviour in interpersonal, group and inter-group communications and relationships (Blake, 1993). In its own right, "traditional values" simply means the values coming from tradition rather than any specific philosopher, moralist or writer. Traditional values are those beliefs, moral codes, and mores that are passed down from generation to generation within a culture, subculture or community. They include respect of elders, acceptance of the supremacy of hierarchical structures, sense of good human relation, sense of hospitality among others. These values cover the whole ramifications of the society and these values apparently play some regulating roles in human relationship and also stabilizing factors of the society.

Culture is very much an elusive term to define, perhaps because of its wider scope and broad nature. Culture is a universal and a relative concept which entails all the traits characterizing a particular society and which are consciously or unconsciously acquired by the members of the society. It is universal because there is no society without culture, while it is relative because it differs from one society to the other as there are no two societies with the same culture. Culture refers to the complex whole of man's acquisition of knowledge, morals, beliefs, art, custom, technology, which are transmitted from

generation to generation (Oтите & Ogionwo, 1979). It is categorized into material and non material culture. Cultural values however, are those worthwhile and acceptable aspects of non-material culture of a people which help in moulding the character of the people. Cultural values are the bedrock of the society (Oyewale, 2012). On the other hand, cultural diffusion is the process by which cultural traits or complexities of one society or ethnic group are borrowed by another, resulting in their spread from a centre of origin to other distant, geographical areas.

Sustainable Development: It is generally agreed that the word “development” refers to a state of change that leads to progress. However, there is a considerably wide diversity of perceptions on what form of progress constitute development. These different perceptions have both discipline and context dimensions-economic, social, political, human, national or sustainable. Basically, sustainable development is defined as the development which meets the needs of present generation without endangering or compromising the needs of future generation to meet their own needs. However, sustainable national development connotes the collective and individual impacts of development in its all various dimensions - economic, social and political, within a nation.

Functional Values in African Society

In the traditional life, Nigerians hold certain things to be of great values. It is these values which give them a distinct cultural personality and enable them to make some contributions to world knowledge, history and civilization (Okolo, 2013). It is not the task of this paper to articulate all the cultural values of the Nigerian society, but only the dominant ones that make a comprehensive system which gives the people a holistic outlook. The values according to Macaulay (2013) are grouped as moral values, social values, aesthetic values, political values, economic values, religious and spiritual values. Emphasis at this point shall be on social values since they appear to be the bedrock of African cultural values as it tends to cover the other range of values subsumed under those aforementioned values. These social values in African setting according to Macaulay (2013) are;

Sense of Good Human Relations:

There is no gainsaying the fact that there are enduring social values which inspite of the invasion and the encroachment of western values-system remain unshakable. The guiding principle of human relation in the traditional Nigeria community is “live-and-let-live”. This presupposes inter-personal and inter-community relationship realized in the interaction between individual of the same community and different communities. Everyone is mindful that each person has something to contribute to his welfare, no matter the degree (Macaulay, 2013). Equally, the art of dialogue and conversation is a cherished value in African relations. People freely discuss and express their problems and look for suggestions together. Expressing the importance of free and bonafide discussion in human relation, Onwubuiko (1991) stresses the unwillingness to talk to people about either private or public affairs can be interpreted as bad manners or sign of enmity.

Sense of Community:

Another social value much cherished in Nigerian society is the sense of community. It has been pointed by Onwubuiko (1991) as well as Macualay (2013) that the African idea of security and its value depend on personal identification with and within the community. Generally, the authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community. This is because the community offers the African the psychological and ultimate security as it gives its members both physical and ideological identity. It must be noted that in the African mentality, the community as an entity remains, while individuals, as persons come and go. Therefore, the African emphasized community life and communalism as a living principle of which the basic ideology is community-identity. Its aim is to produce and present an individual as a community culture bearer.

Sense of Hospitality:

Within the traditional Nigerian social values, there is always spontaneous welcome and accommodation to strangers and visitors. For instance, unlike in the western world, no appointment and special invitation are needed for one to visit a distant relation or neighbour. On arrival, one is there is food the visitor is invited to eat. He is treated kindly, just as one would wish to be treated when visiting another home. To this end, Nigerians have symbolic ways of expressing welcome. These include presentation of Kola nuts, traditional gin, coconuts, water, e.t.c. in various communities. These are given to show that he is welcome and safe.

Sense of Respect for Authority and Elders:

Within the traditional African society, sense of respect for authority and elders helps to solder and smoothen social relations. There was the deep respect for legitimate and constituted authority, be it that of head of the family or of the Oba, Obi or Emir in Nigerian socio-political system. This obedience is not to the person of the king as an individual, but rather to the institution, and abuse of it, disobedience becomes legitimate and the culprit is made to bow out. Equally, it is natural for Nigerians to respect an elder. The way the young ones salute the elders was and still is regarded as evidence of morality or lack of it, instead of as a matter of etiquette. Among the Yorubas, a young man is described as totally immoral simply because he would not prostrate for his elders. The importance of respect for elders is even seen in the Igbo saying "He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle" which exemplify the infallible truths from the elders in the promotion of good behaviour among the young for the betterment of the society (Macaulay, 2013).

Sense of Extended Family System:

Traditional Nigerian languages generally have no words for uncles, aunts, cousin and niece (Iroegbu, 1994). This is because all these are part of the one family. The family is one, but extended. Marriage is taken as a good and serious thing in the sense that it is a covenant between two (extended) families, kindreds and villages. "Living together" and the sense of "community of brothers and sisters" are the basis of, and the expression of the extended family system in Africa. It is a system that ultimately anchored and still rests on the philosophy of "live and let live". For instance, a man has the obligation to cater for the widow and orphans of his dead relative. Equally, while reviewing the scenario in Kenya, Ghana and Senegal, a University of Nairobi's professor of philosophy- Joseph M. Nyasani identifies the traditional African family as a setting wherein the vertical power structure of the society is introduced and sustained as predominant over the freedom of individuals (Nyasani, 1997). For him however, there is a "fundamental difference between the traditional African child and a child in the western culture. The child in Africa was muzzled right from the outset and was thereby drilled into submission to authority from above" (Nyasani, 1997:129).

Sense of Religion:

Generally, Africans are deeply religious, for African life is religion and vice versa. In Nigeria to be specific, social values rest on the moral values which in turn rest on religious values. To some scholars, it is perverse and perhaps sacrilegious to separate the moral and the religious values; if separable at all, religious values are more fundamental and undergrid the moral values. It is the sense of religion that naturally endowed man with respect for human life and human dignity. According to Akinpelu (1983), "such a respect definitely lacks depth and authority if based simply on moral considerations or moral arrangements between men, except, of course, if the morality is conceived as one and the same with religion in the first instance" (P.37). Hence, the spiritual elements run deep in the personal and interpersonal value system of the traditional African society.

Impact of Cultural Diffusion on African Culture

Basically, cultural diffusion is not a new concept to Africa. Scholars believe that there has been three major phases of cultural diffusion in Africa, namely: 1870-1914; 1945-1980 and from 1980 till now (Ajayi, 2003; Wojuade, 2012). Indeed, Africa's contact with other

parts of the world especially America and Europe started in the 15th century through trade including the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Africa never remained the same from this point as it significantly altered the course of Africa's history culturally, politically and economically (Wojuade, 2012).

To this end, Fadeyiye (2001) submitted that the colonization of Africa and the resultant long association with Britain and France has encouraged cultural diffusion between Europeans and Africans. Indeed, it is not only the culture of the west but also that of the Eastern societies that are now prominently seen in Africa today. Fadeyiye (2001) further declared that “today many Nigerians prefer European diet, dressing, language, music and dance” to their native ones. In Nigeria for instance, people, both young and old joyfully welcome imported things. Imported goods and services such as; cloth, food, plates, belts, shoes, indeed, the large percentage of all things that are used domestically are imported. The desire for imports does not stop on materials alone as Nigerians prefer the services of foreign teachers, engineers, physicians, architects and so on to the indigenous ones; as a result of this high taste of imports, our industries, culture, tradition and values crumbled (Oderinde & Bello, 2012).

Writing on the impact of colonialism (an earlier form of cultural diffusion) on African culture, Kwame (2007) also points out that over-reliance on western education as a result of colonialism have created a distorted value system. According to Fafunwa (2006), the pillars of African culture are seven in number. These include physical training, intellectual training, respect for elders and people in authority, vocational, social and emotional training of the young. Consequently, when the core values of African culture were religiously observed, everything went on well in our society (Fafunwa, 2006; Oderinde & Bello, 2012). Regrettably, with the introduction of foreign cultures and civilization however, things changed. Our traditions were thrown to the dogs and foreign civilization became the vogue. All this point, many things started to go wrong. According to Omoyajowo (2003) as cited by Oderinde and Bello (2012), it was a taboo for unmarried people to have sex in the traditional African society. It was not known that a lady became pregnant while she was yet unmarried. A lady must be “virgo intacta” until her wedding is concluded. This is because it was a disgrace for the parents of a newly married wife not to be met virgin by her husband. Regrettably, recent happenings in the continent have revealed that youths and adults alike have abandoned their culture for the foreign (Western and Eastern) ones raising questions on where lies our traditional value system.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the need for a cultural renaissance of Nigerian experience cannot be over-emphasized. If pursued with sincerity of purpose it will help to effect a change in our attitude towards resolving the challenges emanating from cultural laxity and diffusion. This cultural renaissance will not only give Nigerians a new view of history, which will stimulate them with the desire to emulate cherished traditional social values and virtues but also give a new sense of liberty characterized by a passionate desire for knowledge of and a willingness to practice them.

Equally, for there to be cultural security and sustainable development, the traditional social values system must be promoted by the leadership. This is because falling into and copying the western values by African leaders will only destroy humanity as they are strange to the philosophy of humanism which is the basis of African traditional value system. This is why efforts should be made to jealously guard these values because they give us a character that is distinctively and uniquely African.

Recommendations

There is no doubt that Nigeria indeed needs a cultural renaissance. This is because the contact of the Africans with the west through colonialism has shown several negative impacts which are much more in magnitude than the benefits (Wojuade, 2012). The swallowing up of traditional values in Nigeria by the western culture has generated the

erosion of cherished values and virtues of life among the Nigerians. This is the evil of forced acculturation (Ekwuru, 1999). To this end, we must develop a normal process of cultural evolution where voluntary acculturation is considered as an essential dynamic medium for cross-cultural diffusion and development.

It must however be noted that in advocating the need for this cultural renaissance, not all the traditional practices are worth keeping in this Cultural Revolution. There are aspects of the traditional culture in Nigeria that have constituted a bane to the sustainable development of society and personality (Wojuade, 2012). There is no gainsaying the fact that, the primary goal of modern societies is that of development. According to Bodunrin (1985), the key to the realization of this goal “in the contemporary society is science and technology” as they are seen as the attitudes of the mind such as freedom of enquiry, openness to criticism, a general type of skepticism and fallibilism and non- veneration of authorities (Bodunrin, 1985). Hence, for Africa and Nigeria in particular to develop there is the need to jettison or modify aspects of traditional culture that impede the development of these attitudes.

However, in the bid to save the culture from extinction, it is important to explore the use of culture and cultural institutions to address global problems facing societies. For instance, tapping on traditional medicine and knowledge systems to fight diseases like HIV/AIDS and Ebola virus, we could call for people to eat more of the traditional African diets instead of expensive, genetically - modified foods that are imported from the west. This is because the native goods have proved to be healthy, nutritious and accessible.

Equally, the teaching of values such as empathy, mutual respect, loyalty, honesty, among others should be an important task in the teaching learning processes in Nigeria. Hence, the values of the African society have to be considered and the views held by other members of a particular community. These important traditional values in our society need to be built and propagandized to bring about positive change in society that we all need.

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