

A DISCOURSE ON GLOBALIZATION AND CONFLICT IN AFRICAN VALUES

By

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Abstract

Advancements in the areas of science and technology have created easy access to means of transportation and communication which has further made the world a global village and its inhabitants cosmopolitans on a global conference table. This has made it easier for the transportation of cultures, religions and ideas to different parts of the world. People are getting to know more about other people's culture and religion. It can be said that most things are not the same again all over the world as a result of cultural influences. This trend has brought the African values face to face with Western values, creating a conflict of cultural perspectives. This piece therefore studies the nature and dimensions of this conflict of values. It observes that in this conflict of values, the Western values are gradually having an upper hand in virtually every dimension of the African life. It therefore argues that for Africans to retain their values in the age of globalization of values, African values must be taught in the smallest sociological units of the African society and in institutions.

Keywords: Globalization, African, Values, Conflict, Discourse

Introduction

A cursory glance at the history of Africa reveals that the cultural encounter between Europe and Africa at various periods, ranging from the slave trade era through the colonial period to the present age, could be better described as a forced acculturation, a concept Kanu (2010) understands as a situation in which a highly developed society imposes certain elements of its culture on the other,

consciously or unconsciously, thereby forcing the 'weaker' culture to derail from its unique tract of cultural civilization. During these encounters, African beliefs and ideals have suffered enormous alterations or even threat of extinction.

Achebe (1958) in his celebrated classic and epoch-making piece, *Things Fall Apart*, brought out the consequences of the encounter between the European and African cultures. He particularly looks at the Igbo society, specifically at the period when the white man broke into it as a missionary, trader and administrator. This is located in Obierika's accusation of the white man:

Does the white man understand our custom about land?, asked Okonkwo, "How can he when he does not even speak our tongue?" responded Obierika, and then he continued, "But he says our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers and our clan can no longer act as one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart". (pp. 124-125).

In our age of globalization, an evolution characterized by a systematic reconstruction of integrative phases along economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries, and thus the breakdown of barriers and intensified integration (Fafowora 1998), the African cultural values have been in a more intensified way brought face to face with the values, not only of Europe and America but also of all the corners of the world. The result of this encounter is a conflict of values. This piece therefore studies the conflict of values that have emerged as a result of this encounter.

A Historico-Descriptive Perspective of Globalization

The understanding of globalization by particular scholars to a great extent determines the beginning and nature the scholar in question would attached to globalization. Globalization was first employed in 1983 by an American economist Theodore Levitt, and made popular some years later in 1988 by a Japanese Scholar and Business consultant called Kinichi Ohmae in his work on 'The worldwide strategies of multinationals'. According to Obiefuna and Aniago (2010) traced an ancient form of globalization to Hellenism, an attempt by Alexander the Great in 334 B C to Greekicize none Greeks, by imposing Greek culture, custom, law and language on the colonies he had conquered.

Kanu (2014) links the history of globalization to Europe, when Portuguese navigators discovered some part of the world, and through trade, evangelization, exploration and colonialism rules the world. This led to the movement of people from one part of the world to another, and led to a cross-cultural influence. From this, we understand that globalization is not a one-way traffic; it is not something you could blame on another as though you are innocent. Everyone is guilty of globalization, because everyone globalizes and everyone is globalized. There is an African adage that says, “when the cutlass is cutting the tree, the tree is also chopping the cutlass”.

The history of globalization has also been traced to the advancements in the areas of science and technology. We now have easy access to means of transportation and communication which has further made the world a global village and its inhabitants cosmopolitans on a global conference table. Thus Cairncross (1997) would aver that the media is a veritable factor in the acceleration of globalization, and in fact the single most crucial factor in the communication revolution. Aja (2001) would also write that globalization is “electro-communication driven” (p. 126). This has made it easier for the transportation of cultures, religions and ideas to different parts of the world. People are getting to know more about other people’s culture and religion. It can be said that most things are not the same again all over the world as a result of cultural influences. Generally, globalization is a natural process of development. More recently, scholars like Chinsinga (2003) have argued that globalization can be linked to a number of events: the time when Bretton Woods agreement on exchange rate collapsed in 1971 during Nixon’s administration; the emergence of conservatives in power like Ronald Reagan in the United States of America, and Margaret Thatcher of the United Kingdom. These and the developments they initiated accelerated the process of globalization. There are also accounts that link globalization to the demise of the Soviet System and the end of the Cold War. A cursory glance at these historical developments reveals that they are based on the negative conceptions of globalization. Globalization goes beyond these pieces of historical developments. Globalization began at the time human beings achieved consciousness of self and others.

The Conflict of Values in Africa

The experience of the conflict of values in Africa is principally based on the differences in the cosmological structure of the Western world and the African universe. Kanu (2013) defined cosmology as the way a people conceive, perceive

and contemplate their universe which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is the lens with which they see reality. The African values are based on the African cosmology, the way they perceive reality. There would therefore emerge a conflict of values when the African wants to become an European or when an African is forced to become an European. In the process, two worldviews would clash and even though it might lead to the creation of another perspective, there would emerge a conflict of values.

For instance, many missionaries who came to Africa were not well informed about the cosmology they came to evangelize. They came with an almost impregnable confidence in the overwhelming superiority of the European West and in all the ways of society and culture which they had taken for granted in their homes. The consequence was that many of them rejected African names for baptism, as a replacement, they encouraged the adoption of not only Christian names, but also European family names like Dos Santos, Caetano, Johnson, Crowther (Hastings, 1976). There was no appraisal of our peculiarities, our languages enriched with traditions of centuries, our parables, many of them the quintessence of family and national histories; our modes of thought, influenced more or less by local circumstances. African songs were rejected for European songs in Churches, not knowing that Africa is a continent of song, dance and musical instruments. It is a continent of language and languages. The drum was not heard in most churches, only the harmonious accompanying carefully translated European hymns sung to the tune of the West. The result was frequently deplorable; African languages cannot be bent to European hymn tunes (Hastings, 1976). Thus, many Africans worshiped God in the white man's way without an accompanying satisfaction. The African developed a vacuum in himself that could not translate into fulfillment. Although he worshipped God, he did not feel the fulfillment of worship. The widening of this conflict has led to the evolvement of syncretism, very evident in African Christian Churches.

Another area of conflict of values is in the concept of life. This again is based on cosmological differences. While the African cosmology understands life from the vitalist perspective, which Obiefuna and Kanu (2013) aver considers life as a singular original phenomenon, irreducible to matter, in the West, life possesses a very simplistic and mechanistic meaning. The West conceives life in terms of a well contrived machine, with its levers (bones), its pumps (heart), its bellows (lungs), etc. Descartes and Leibniz proposed the analogy of living organisms and machines, in particular the clock. From this perspective, life is perceived as an

organization of matter. What distinguishes living substances from non-living substances is that living substances have a much more complex way of molecular structuralization (Mondin, 1998). This strongly conflicts with the African value of life as sacred and as the highest value that there is. With globalization there is a rising influence of the Western perspective on the African perception of life. In addressing issues like abortion, suicide, euthanasia etc., the Africa seems to be at a crossroad of values, between the liberalism of the West and the African conservative perspective.

Globalization, a world where the western perspective still dominates, seems to leave a psychological effect. Kanu (2012) avers that it has created a lasting sense of inferiority such that many African no longer have confidence in their values. This has affected local industries; whatever comes from the African is tagged 'inferior'. This ranges from simple machines to simple things like clothes, furniture, bags, shoes, belts etc. Indigenous industries now prefer to tag their products 'made in USA' or 'made in China or Taiwan', giving the impression that local products are not of desirable standards. Inferiority has turned our eyes to be 'outward looking' rather than 'inward looking'.

Very significant is the value of language. Because of the emphasis on international languages and the hunger for the international many young Africans have no knowledge of their local language. Referring to the period of colonialism, Leonard Senghor (1976) said that 'African misfortunes have been that our secret enemies while defending their values made us despise our own' (p. 17). Cultural values ranging from the sense of the sacred to respect for life and elders, respect for marriage institution, premarital sex, virginity, honest labour and communalism, are gradually swallowed up by western values, such as materialism, nudity and hedonism'.

Towards a resolution of the Conflict of Values

If the conflict of values in Africa must be resolved, there is the need for an African cultural renaissance. Hastings (1976) captures the meaning of an African cultural renaissance as "rediscovering the wisdom of the ancestors, revaluing their ceremonies, reawakening their names, renewing their languages" (p. 43). The quest for an African cultural renaissance does not mean a call to primitivism; it is not a call back to cultural practices such as the killing of twins, patriarchy, human sacrifices etc. It is not a call to close the door against cultural interactions, because every culture gives and takes from the other. The move for a cultural

renaissance is a reminder to Africans that the Western culture is not a finished product, they must be considered as raw materials still requiring processing and refinement before use. Thus, Hallen (2002) argued that Africa must define itself in and on its own terms regarding issues without reference or deference to any alien culture. The problem that African cultural renaissance tries to avoid is what Iroegbu (2004) calls “cultural hegemony”. That is, an attempt by some cultures to dominate, to assimilate, or even to totally obliterate another or other cultures. Mugambi (1998) observes that the future of Africa can only be forged by accepting and mending the socio-cultural present. African identity must not be sacrificed on the altar of compromise. We must step forward towards restoring our values.

This promotion of our cultural values must begin from the smallest sociological unity: the family. The family in Africa, is the maternity home, the nursing home and the birth place of culture, and at the same time where it is nurtured and developed. Parents should take the teaching of culture as an important duty and primary right.

In this age of globalization and near invasion of the mass media in our homes, it is incumbent for parents to provide their children with alternative African perspectives.

One great instrument for cultural renaissance is language. Irrespective of where parents find themselves with their children they should endeavor to teach their children their native language. Language carries with it the culture and worldview of the people who own it.

Learning institutions have a role to play in this process. It is through education that our values can be restored in the heart of young Africans. Africans as Africans need to know what makes them Africans. This was the point stressed by Socrates when he said “Man know thyself”, self knowledge is the beginning of every renewal process. Plato (1989) had also pointed out that, “since the mind of the young are very impressionable we must, if we are to educate them properly, make sure that the poetry on which they are brought up is suitable for the purpose” (p. 518).

The African law making bodies also have a role to play; if the laws and policies that can safeguard our values are promulgated by the government or enacted by traditional ruling councils, the decay of our cultural heritage will be impeded.

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