

Role of Culture in African Development

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Abstract: There is no denying the fact that Africa has a bank of rich cultural heritages with diverse aesthetic values that are flexible and highly adaptable with imbued ancient wisdom yet undiscovered for today uses and purposes. The culture has a lot of educating and reformative values which can impact positively on re-regulating today's and future societal norms and morals. The enslavement to western value orientations and culture has produced the conflict of values. We therefore need a re-orientation of the cultural values if we must benefit from the past and utilize it to make the today and tomorrow. But if a return to the exact glorious past is impossible, how can we re-validate viable values, contextualise and consolidate them for today, obviate the mistakes of the past and confront today and tomorrow with such lasting eternal values that can make the today active in a world where values are no longer constant. These questions we try to answer through secondary research sources, to anchor on the need to educate the African mind through a progressive cultivation of generative thinking capacity.

Key words: Denying, heritage, anchor, deconstructing, ancient, obviate

INTRODUCTION

A major advocate of the cultural paradigm in development, the renowned Kenyan International Scholar, Professor Ali Mazrui has observed that cultural forces drive national behaviors, international politics and affairs, international relationships and hegemonies. It is his anchor then that since the world is racially specific in distribution, Africans would loose out in patterns of trade and investments and for a long time to come, if we cannot assert the own control and assert the micro-cultural identity, the own form of cultural identification.

To further buttress his point, his book, Cultural Engineering in East Africa, Ali Mazrui, outlined the four challenges facing the African namely:

- How to indigenize what was foreign
- How to nationalize what was indigenous
- How to nationalize what was sectional
- How to emphasize what was African (Ali, 1991)

Another erudite author worth citing in this aspect of cultural challenges is the innovative Theory of the Kulturizatio System Power Structuring of Post-Colonial Africa Philosophy, professor Obioma Atuloma. He sees the need for a new system for imaging a post-colonial Africa in dealing with its ethnic and developmental challenges though a three tiered sequencing of:

- System conceptual articulation (Municipal state)
- Operations process liner correlates (intra-Afrikanism)

- Reconstructions extension conceptualization (international society). From his KZO Theory works he asserts that:

Postcolonial Africa countries will remain rolling stones of the human race, unless and until anew incentive came into their approach to municipal and intrafrikan activities such incentive must be innovate, African-oriented and provocative. It must be an incentive deriving from within African values and translated into goals with clearly defined principles of their attainment. It must be Kulturization and this theory of national activeness will liberate post-colonial Africa from the half-regarded status to which vital foreign interests have conspired in collaboration with ignorance on the part of the Africa themselves, to condemn her into (Atuloma, 1975)

Atuloma's Kzio theory is all more the more interesting as it is based on a conceptualization whose cumulative effects would work through the innovation of a common national kultural base. For him, the existence of a common Kultural base is the pre-requisite for the possibility of skillfully welding the fixed (human and non-human) factors of socio-political nature. For Harrison and Hutington, culture defines as a set of values which when used as a strategic block for a-priori and posteriori constructs bring about societal progress. This was their thesis in culture matters; how values shape human progress, a view shared by Sylvester Oladapo Williams who contends that:

Culture serves as a defence in the efforts to build and instill in the people and institutions, the spirit of confidence in the ability to achieve great heights and build a society that earns the respect of the whole world (Sylvester, 2002)

This must be the activeness that Professor Atuloma speaks of in his 1975 Kizio theory-an active ingredient in remarking Africa. This seems to be like the modern day perspectives on culture in terms of concept, role and praxis which Atuloma defines as the totality of thoughts, feelings and activities bearing on the society.

In the light of the foregoing, we state a more elaborate definition of culture, as the way of a life of a people. Culture is then a people's everything: not just their dances but also their language, their history, their arts and crafts, their commerce and industry, their laws and customs, their medical theory and practice, their games, their celebrations (joyful and mournful) their ruling ideas, their weltanschauung (world view) including prejudices, their folklore and mythology, their proverbs, their philosophy. All these and more make up a people's culture. Culture means a people's way of life. Considered globally and at another level, culture denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms, by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitude towards life. Culture then is a people's mirror, a people's version of reality.

The German ethnologist, Leo Frobenius (1873-1935), whose seminar research is a magnum opus in the origins of African culture was more scientific and philosophical in his definition and perspectives of culture, in general and African culture in particular. It was he who evolved the expression culture morphology or the Gestalt doctrine of culture which culminated in the philosophical principle of PAIDEUMA-the soul or spirit of a culture which uses people as a means for taking shape. It takes possession of man and man becomes emotionally involved or ergriffen (possessed) and becomes active.

For Frobenius, individual cultures is more than just the conglomeration of various elements but as living organisms or PAIDEUMA, it must be seen in its entirety as an organic whole from its earliest origins and it has its youth, its zenith, its decay and death. And like in all begetting Leo Frobenius does not see African culture as an isolated phenomenon. His study revealed a close and fruitful contact with old cultures of the Mediterranean and Near East. It was from these it derived its distinctive African high culture which to him is different, in a different category and of equal value with other cultures of the earth.

Given this white acclamation, why then do we go on denigrating and degrading ourselves. The colonial educational heritage imposed on us a low esteem assessments and have a large part to do with it. But then, as a former slave named Afro-American Michele Paul now named YeYe Funua Olade would say:

The (African) systems were working thousands of years before the white tribes came out of the caves of Europe to be civilized. We have allowed the whites to destroy the culture through religion... We must now go back to the culture and update it in terms of government, education systems and religious systems, applying African solutions to African problems (Eike, 2000)

If fashion populist, 69 years old Giorgio Armani would find influences in his creativity from the design simplicity of the Far East instead of his Italian Baroque and Avant Guade artist, Picasso would find influence in Congolese art, to develop his Picasso's Cubism, then we are not looking deep enough into the cultural roots for solutions and creative ideas. It therefore means that culture is imperative for development today even in the face of globalization. As Chief Ojo Maduekwe states it:

One of the side effects of globalization is an instinctiveSearch for one's roots. There is need to apply life- Affirmative values within one's cultural matrix as handed Down over the centuries, (as) livability should be perceivedIn an organic sense... The harmonious marriages of the Traditional and modern takes the African from where it is and integrates it to where it ought to be, chastened by the Continent's past failures and inspired by its proverbial resilience (Maduekwe, 2001)

Nothing could reveal better the lack of seeing the nexus and the urgency for change in our defective behaviour than when Nigerian's World Bank's Country Director, Mark Tomlinson at a wotclef Seminar, drew the attention of the populace to our neglect of a vital, ingredient in addressing our myriad problems of violence, civil unrest and poverty.

Recognizing the cultural dimensions of development, from a broad anthropological perspective, Tomlinson decried the illiterate cultural approach to development, which has been the bane of developing countries and responsible in the main for countless cases of wastes and tragedy. His cited examples make the points too glaring-well meaning educational programmes that failed to achieve their objectives because local traditions were ignored; water wells sited near villages remaining unused because the sponsors failed to recognize the friendship and kinship bonds between women which long walks to

collect water built and settlement relocations from ancestral villages which have spelt psychological, social and economic set backs stemming from a loss of identity and culture.

There is no denying the fact Nigeria has a bank of rich cultural heritages with diverse aesthetic values that are flexible and highly adaptable with imbued ancient wisdom is yet undiscovered and remains untapped for today uses and purposes. The culture has a lot of educating and reformative values which can impact positively on re-regulating today's societal norms and morals. The enslavement to western value orientations and culture has produced the conflict of values. We therefore need the activeness of the cultural values if we must benefit from the past and utilize it to make the today and tomorrow. But if a return to the exact glorious past is impossible can we re-validate old and viable values, contextualise and confront today and tomorrow with such lasting values that can make today active in a world where values are no longer constant.

HOW VALUES CREATE CULTURE

The role of elites in fact, the ruling elite or what Wright Mills calls the power elites in any society, tends to create the acceptable norms and societal values. It is based on those normative values that society somehow directs its own internal organization in furtherance of a preconceived goal, namely survival. Individuals merely take a cue from the societal menu of what Talcott Parsons describes as elements of a shared symbolic system which serve as a criterion or standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open in a value system.

What binds them in, a society is dependent on the internalization of the standards, the conformity to which tends to be of personal, expressive and or instrumental significance to ego. The conformity, based on need-dispositions is the condition for eliciting the favourable (and avoiding the unfavourable reactions) of the others. With a plurality of actors, the conformity is in accordance with the value-orientations which are always institutionalized. The set standards of behaviour of the actor ego, evokes expectations-role expectations-in relation to a particular inter-action context. And hence the institutionalization of a set of role-expectations and of the corresponding sanction is clearly a matter of degree. The polar antithesis of full institutionalization is anomie and there are of course degrees of anomie. Anomie of course refers to the absence of a structured complementarity of the interaction process or the complete breakdown of normative order in a concrete social system or structure, when standards and sanctions no longer grip men. What then sets the values, according to Talcott Parsons is that motivationally considered, there are attachment to

common values... the actors have common sentiments in support of the value patterns which may be defined as meaning that conformity with the relevant expectations is treated as a good thing.

In a world Values Survey research project conducted by Professor Ronald Inglehart, the evidence today is:

A growing body of evidence (that) indicates that deep-rooted changes in world views are taking place. These changes reflect economic and technological changes (Inglehart, 2003)

The above observations are noticed amongst both young and old, worldwide. What could be said as reasons for these observable shifts could be the speeding up of social change as the consequence of the disturbance of accepted standard of values. Societies are changing in phenomenal ways and with it, material and moral values. As M.V.C, Jeffreys would note:

It is because all the important problems are fundamentally moral problems and moral problems of which we can for the most part see no clear solution, that life in this age is so puzzling. Material standards of living were never higher, but moral confusion was probably never worse (Jeffreys, 1962)

The impact of the contemporary world on ordinary people and their response to it has produced contradictory tendencies. The contradictions no doubt stem from an increasing need for intelligently responsible behaviour in a world that makes responsible behaviour increasingly difficult. Herein lies the difficulty of making out personal values or meaning in a mass-cultured world.

In the days of Robespierre in the Reign of Terror there was the fundamental principle of the Sovereignty of the general will, stemming from the doctrine of the absolute right of especially illuminate group, to determine general values. It must be realized that while no one has found a more workable practical device than majority rule majority rule, however is at best a very crude way of trying to find out what is for the common good and what the personal values ought to be.

THE DYNAMICS OF VALUES AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The days of mass culture is gone and in the influence of a technological age, we have moved into a world of extreme transience and we now live in a world Suspicious of history and cultural relativity. We are in an age shaking off philosophical, religious and artistic faith in the absolute meaning of truth, good and beauty. We are moving out of a transcendent foundation of eternal values in an unchanging heaven and receiving them in once and

for all unquestionable revelation into a twilight of eternal values. The certainties of society, history and man ended in the last millennium. The great traditional moral frameworks attached to inherited denominations have been taken over by Science, Progress, Emancipation of peoples' Solidarity and Humanistic Ideals. We are arriving at what Fukuyama would admirably describe as Post history or what Jerome Binde would call post-humanity and post-materialist.

In this age of stock market values-a set of standard of values, stable, absolute values, fluctuate in a vast market. In an age of radical innovation and unprecedented breaks, the human species, geopolitical balances, the continuity of history and maintenance of a desirable utopia of a better life for the greatest number is being affected.

In this all powerful context, we are living in a world of frivolity of values, marked by the emotional and intellectual influence of ephemeral images. In the emergence of a society based on knowledge, on going, life long education for all would produce the growth of a new tendency of long term new values that are both cognitive and prospective, less inherited than invented, less reproduced than created, less received than passed. Jerome Binde a specialist in Anticipation and Prospective studies and Jean-Joseph Goux put the new experience in this perspective:

Creation is everywhere. We are all creators or aspire to being creators, in personal life, in the absence of stable, eternal frameworks, everyone is forced into creation.... And must invent a life-style. This generalized anesthetizing thus affects not only society as spectacle (media, advertising, visual and sound environment) but the very core of the ethical principle and the entrepreneurial dynamic. The role of information and the media re-enforce this orientation, since the stock market logic of values, like that of fashion and short-lived trends, implies taking any temporary indicators into account to be grasped at the moment, instant information replacing the sense of history and the recognition of its long evolution which have become illegible (Jerome and Goux, 2002)

African like the rest of the third world is at a cusp of history with a fractured experience which it must use to distill its past and look at the prospects of tomorrow. How have its cherished values played out in the aftermath of culture contact of colonialism and neo-colonialism? Where will we be tomorrow when institutional absolutism is gone.

VALUES AND PROGRESS-A DEVELOPMENT TRAJECTORY AND PARADIGM

A society is no more than the values it espouses. Therefore, in order to move, men must modify the world in order to be more. For men as beings of praxis to transform the world is to humanize it. The humanization creates a social structure with its dialectics of super and infrastructures.

In the history, we cannot but look at the relationship between a metropolitan society and the dependent societies which has been the source of our respective ways of being, thinking and expression in the economic, historical, cultural and political context of our lives. As observed by Paulo Freire, the action of the metropolitan society upon the dependent society has a directive character whereas the object society's action, whether in response or initiative has a dependent character.

The infrastructure of the dependent society is shaped by the director society's will. The resultant superstructure therefore reflects the in-authenticity of the infrastructure. Whereas the metropolis can absorb its ideological crises through mechanisms of economic power and a highly developed technology, the dependent structure, by definition a silent society is too weak to support the slightest popular manifestation. This accounts for the frequent rigidity of the dependent structure (Freire, 1972)

The traditional African societies had, without a modern day concept of philosophizing, arrived at fundamental truths and philosophic conceptions abundant in the many traditional sayings. These values formed the traditions.

These intelligence propounded ideas and provided insights that swayed the rules and traditions of the land. Indeed no sphere of life or existence escaped the indigenes. They evolved ideas and beliefs that had internal coherence.

All that world got challenged at the end of the 18th century when Western capitalism emerged in firstly, mercantilism, then latter in the slave trade and finally in colonialism. The gale could not be withstood in the superior gunboat and aggressive pulling down of all institutions in Africa in the context of a global economy which has persisted in today's globalization.

There have been various agitations for a roll back to the past which is now impossible as the institutions and structures that produced the then values can no longer be reformulated, more so when in the new nation states, the metropolitan societies have imposed new structures which are now global and beyond the ethnic boundaries

of yesterday. Others have called for a synthesis of traditionalism and modernism or a gradual syncretism or gradual change. Yet others seem committed to a total modernism.

In all of these what seems possible and even inescapable is a modernization of African and Third World societies but these require a deeper understanding of the institutions and values inherent in the older environment. The approach that best lends itself is that advocated by Dr. T. Uzodinma Nwala in his book, *Igbo Philosophy*:

Understanding African traditional environment, in turn, requires, thorough investigation and study other than the purely historical geographical, sociological/ anthropological, religious or even political study. It requires an explication of the mind of the African which influences the way he organizes himself and his society and erects those social and ritual elements that define his culture. To understand the traditional African mind and to find a meeting point between it and contemporary values, concepts and ideas, requires our having to explore the African mind less from the purely religious point of view, because (the) contemporary mind and conceptions are less religious-oriented but very much secularly and scientifically oriented (Nwala, 1985)

I have underlined continuously—the African mind as the area to discover the ingenuity of the past and the key to remaking the future. However in it, the mind lies the discovery of where the disaster occurred a psychological damage in the resultant culture contact with the west, the disorientation and chaos of the African mind which has not been able to regain the capacity to objectify the crisis it is on, in order to create the values that can make for progress.

To simply say we are in a crisis of values is merely an understatement. We must situate the crisis contextually, from the history and in the manner African societies saw and challenged progress.

Values are in disarray and in the continued servitude in the colonial years and afterwards, even today, there has been no crystallization of ideology to remake the African societies more so with the breakdown of historical cultural ties. Individual ideas are in ascendancy and consensus has been destroyed. The ethnic nations that could cohere values and organization no longer exists and the structures left now for nation building lack legitimacy and in the struggle for existence there are no consensual ideas and values for integration and national strength. Clientelism and prebendalism is in the ascendancy with a political class that assumes leadership without a nation-state ethos and core leadership values; we cannot but

recede further. Progress cannot but elude us still. Hernando de Soto, the Peruvian economist, captured the mood correctly when he said:

The question in Africa is how to go from the tribe to the market. Real participation of people doesn't take place in the way it does in Asia, where regimes manage to appropriate their money much more intelligently and direct it to the right causes. Egypt is not so different from Mexico or Peru. In all, you have large shanty towns and an informal sector and there's the same basic question of how to create a market-economy and a real democracy. Supposedly in a democracy, if the majority of people are poor, then they set the criteria of what is right yet all those mechanisms that allow (society) to decide where the money goes and that is appropriately allocated – are not in place in the third World. We take turns electing authoritarian governments. The country, therefore, is left to the (whims) of big-time interests and whoever funded the elections or parties. We have no right of review or oversight. We have no way for the people's voice to be heard, except for eight hours on election day (Hernando, 2003)

That is only one end of the story. The other end is situated in how the values in African cultures stunt progress in an inherent manner. In a typical society, contingent situations and new problems do call for new solutions which may influence the existing order and ideas, through a societal internal dynamics of ensuring progress and change. But then there is always a proviso—the solutions must not be radical and revolutionary. Such ideas were always opposed. Upstarts, except where they prove exceptional in intelligence and wisdom or have proven themselves successful in farming, trading, war or oratory had little chance of acceptance. In fact, they would be regarded as deviants and social misfits.

The societies still lie dormant in conservatism as if we still live in a stone age. Little wonder we can't see how far back we are, in the old vehicles which can't carry us into a modern age much as we cry for modernization. Change seems unsettling and uncomfortable. Old paradigms of a stable, unscientific world cannot do in an age so full of changes and where societal norms change so rapidly and societal bulwarks and historical ties have all given way. The minds are fixed on the past, as move forward in space and time. But yet more dangerous in the lack of transforming values to remake the society is the near irreparable damage to the African mind which is the tropical disease of underdevelopment caused by the fatal effects on the mental facilities through its dependent capitalism and structures, the final blow of colonialism.

We must discover the african mind that build the empires, the great moats and ramparts and the pyramids. That mind atrophied alright but it can be resuscitated to its earlier heights and enervated from its decline through a carefully crafted programme of research into African's philosophical thoughts and its underpinnings and evolving training in creative thinking and more importantly in lateral and generative thinking so critical in patterning, freedom, abstractions ability to conceptualise, to re-examine ideas, to restructure old ideas, to reject ideas intelligently or reshape new ideas-ideas that could create modern day visions and values to remake and generate Africa and enable her contribute her comparative share for human development and create those eternal values that shape human progress, mindful that we live in a world of cultural relativity and impermanence of values; in a world of stock-market values as civilizations and cultures meet and impact negatively or positively.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the key to recovering the African is by deconstructing his colonial experience, re-imbuing him with the strengths of yesterday's myths and urging him to now use his culture as the matrix of constructing his future.

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