

REVITALIZATION OF AFRICAN MORAL VALUES

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DOI: 10.13140/ RG.2.2.23433.67684

Abstract

Moral is being in compliance to a standard of right behaviour. It relates to the principle of right and wrong in behaviour. African culture basically cherishes and emphasizes high moral standard. Wealth without moral is despised and unacceptable to almost all African communities. People prefer good name as something more valuable than wealth. African values such as truthfulness and sanctity of life were regarded very highly. It has become worrisome how these values fare in the face of contemporary challenges, how they are safeguarded or discarded in many contemporary African societies. The study therefore deems it necessary at the recovery and conservation of these values in order to give them their rightful place in the present day realities of change and advancement. The study drawing primarily from the Igbo culture uses observational method, library sources and oral interview for data collection. Findings show that there is the need to revive the African moral values. The responsibility for this revitalization lies on every African, starting from the family to proudly portray their rich African moral values.

Keywords: Revitalization, Moral, Value

Introduction

This paper is on the rebirth of African moral values at the verge of total annihilation. African moral values are moral codes that were handed from generation to generation. They are the unwritten laws that guide the lives of the people. Onuoha (2015) refers to moral principles as that which guide the actions and belief systems of people. Therefore any "action, decision or belief which serves the purpose of a group, a community or race eventually becomes part of the value system of such a group". (Ezeoke, 2010:19). Peoples' moral value system evolves over a period of time through mutual experiences and collective relations. Africans, especially the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria were known to be truthful, honest, just, and humanitarian, they are their brothers' keepers, and they have respect for the sanctity of life among other values and virtues. In the past a truthful person is held in high esteem, the person is looked for whenever there is conflict because he can be trusted to give a true verdict. However, presently most people with ill gotten wealth were accorded more respect to the detriment of the

society. This could be part of what lead to the problem which the society is battling today. These challenges are the immoral acts as murder, human trafficking, kidnapping, insincerity, injustice and lies among other ills which have eaten dip into most African societies. It is a misplaced priority, just as Mapaire (2011) has noted that Africans as a product of colonialism and imperialistic ambition, has contributed to the loss of African values. It can be said that westernization, coupled with globalization and quick money syndrome has given way to the loss of African moral values found in truthfulness and sanctity of life. Therefore, in the face of the onslaught from globalization, technological and scientific discoveries, many scholars are worried that African values face the threat of total annihilations.(Onuoha, 2015).

From the foregoing, revitalization of African moral values has become necessary in this fast moving and changing world. Moral values are the hub of any given society. Before now the Africans were known for preserving the sanctity of life and upholding truthfulness, which gave rise to Africans being their brothers' keepers. But alas these great values are fading gradually as advancement and development continue to creep in. We now hear of murder in many African societies, and the murderers do not receive adequate punishment for their offences. Lies, including those that are very grave and could lead to loss of lives and property, are no longer viewed as great evil in some parts of African societies. Speaking about the Igbo people of eastern Nigeria, Ezeoke (2010:20) states, "Igbo were known and respected for their total regard for sanctity of life." Do we still merit that respect? Have the Igbo not been known to shed the blood of their siblings or even their parents in the quest for material acquisition?" The rate of decay in moral values among most Africans has become worrisome for the imbalance it has created in the entire system. Isidienu (2016: 128) decries thus and cautions that "This drift in value has a lot of consequences." Having seen that in many African communities life is wasted; and most people tell lies at will and live a kind of life that totally negates African moral values. The researcher deems it necessary to proffer ways to revitalize African moral values, especially those found in truthfulness and value attached to life. This will go a long way in re-awakening the forgotten and neglected values and therefore enable the Africans to live an upright life for a better African society.

The study will therefore explore different concepts relevant to the study such as value, revitalization, moral; bring to light the value attached to life and the value attached to truthfulness; and the implication of neglect to the

ese values; solutions are proffered with regard to revitalizing the lost values.

Explication of Concepts

Value

Value implies something of usefulness, importance and worthwhile. It is that quality that makes something to be desired and the amount of meaning attributed to it. Values are those things that make the life of a people adorable. Okoye (2010:63) states that,

Value as the single factor that mould character, conduct, culture and world view are central in the life of any people. They represent basic convictions that shape the specific modes of conduct and ultimate objectives preferred by a people. Value has as a judgmental element. They (value) prescribe what is right or wrong, good or bad, desirable or despicable.

Value is the ultimate for the survival of any group of people or society. Ezioke (2010: 22) captures this when he asserts, "A people without value are a people sliding into a fiery hell. They are doomed to a disgraceful extinction." However when a people's value system threatens to skid due to misplaced value, the only option for the survival of such people is revitalization.

Revitalization

Revitalization is to provide novel existence, vigor, motion or attainment to a deteriorated situation. It means to stir something from the state of depreciation to an enhanced situation. According to Okwudishu (2010: 45), revitalization implies "Reinvigoration, revival and restoration." On the face of degeneration of moral values the only option is to revive or mobilize various agencies that will rejuvenate the people's moral standards. Based on the above Mifflin (2016) avers that revitalization is betterment, improvement, a change for the better, and progress in development. Generally speaking, there is need to revive African moral values, as Iwe (nd: 85) rightly states, "There is an urgent need to revive and revitalize the drooping spirit and basic institution of our culture, if we have to avoid the incidence of selling our souls to foreign cultures." From the foregoing, it seems therefore, that revitalization is the answer to the degenerating African moral lapses.

Moral

Moral actions and moral uprightness are highly appreciated among African communities. Thus, speaking about Igbo people of eastern Nigeria Isidie nu (2016: 84), affirms that "Igbo people believe in hard work and good moral standard." Every culture, society, group or individual has some moral

standards it wants to protect. It is the moral standard, ethics and moral values that build up the people's identity. Onyewuenyi (2002: 421) states that "ethics generally deals with judgment of approval and disapproval, rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness of actions". The midpoint of the above opinion is the assessment of life which gives the African character. It is the intermediary between the seen and the unseen and both have a very strong binding relationship. An action does not only affect an individual personally; rather it also connects the community and the spiritual beings. This is why a "breach of customs normally earns for the community some evils and disharmonious reaction from the ancestral spirits." (Ilogu 1985:27) The assertion among the Igbo that *Otu mkpisi aka ruta mmanu, O zue o ha* literally translates as when one finger collects oil, it will affect other fingers explains the fact that, there is a great relationship between morality and ontological order. Further, an abomination such as murder committed by an individual will arouse anxiety in the entire community. This is so because once it happens, an expression of untold wrong, solicitude, unnecessary calmness and anxiety grips the entire community because of the ontological relationship with the offender. Kanu (2015:238) avers, "With regards to morality, there is a strong connection between moral rules and the type of communal kinship relationships that exist among African societies". When an abomination is left unattended and the gods unappeased or an act of injustice is allowed to perpetuate in a community the consequential effect is usually calamitous.

Morality is highly advocated in African society because of the role it plays in the life of the community. Mbiti (1981:175) adds that, "In the course of the years, this moral sense has produced customs, rules, laws, traditions and taboos which can be observed in each society". It is a general belief among the Igbo that their morals were given to them by God. The ancestors therefore keep watch over the people to ensure their observances of these moral laws. Ilogu (1985:26) enumerated some of these moral laws among the Igbo as:

1. Do not take the life of the member of the commune
2. Do not steal, especially yam, the staple food of the people
3. Do not commit incest
4. Do not defraud strangers
5. Do not hide abominations

Certainly any deviation from these moral rules is highly punished because "by committing a particular offence, a person puts himself and other people in the dangerous situation where God punishes him and other people" (Mbiti, 1981). Morals help to keep the society together. Its emphasis is on

human conduct that enables him to live at peace with himself and other members of the community. Without morals, the society would be in a state of anarchy, as morals help people to ensure that they perform their duties to the society and enjoy certain rights from the society. "It is morals which have produced the virtues that society appreciates and endeavours to preserve, such as friendship, compassion, love, honesty, justice, courage, self-control, helpfulness, bravery and so on" (Mbiti 1981:75). Morals are deep rooted in the life of the African people because of their long standing tradition of what is right or wrong. High moral standard needs to be revitalized because it keeps the society together and keeps them from disintegrating.

African Moral Values with respect to Care for Life

In African ontology the desire to preserve life rates high in the act of morality. The idea that life is precious manifests in all aspects of their life such as personal names, proverbs, parables as well as in events and other activities of life. Obi (2009:7) emphasizing on Igbo peoples' value for life, states that everything the Igbo do is towards the preservation of life. He enumerated them thus: "eating, drinking, sacrifices, rituals and rites, kinship, taboos and other moral provisions, worship and even the existence of sacred specialists is for the preservation of life". Ogugua (2003: 10) added that "The enterprising spirit of the Igbo is to preserve, maintain and better life." Such Igbo clichés and statements as *Onye di, ihe o ga-eme adi*. Literally, means that, as long as one lives he or she will still have responsibilities. This idea also manifests in Igbo justice, the principle of *Egbe bere ugo bere* meaning literally let the kite perch, let the eagle perch (live and let live). In African philosophy, once one is alive, he will be allowed to live freely and peacefully with other members of the community. He will live and also allow others to live their own lives. It is this communal living ideology that made Mbiti (1982:108) to declare that "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am". It is the community that gives the individual his meaning in existence, without which life is meaningless and unattainable. Among the Igbo, justice and moral obligation demands that both the eagle and the kite should perch and that whichever denies the other the right should suffer a broken wing. In admiration of this situation, Amadi (2005:58) affirms that this proverb expresses with varying subtlety the golden rule 'live and let live'. He points out that the "principle is regarded as the acme of good neighbourliness". *Ndu onye aghala nwanne ya, Ndu ibu onye nche nwanne*. The assertions mean that one should be one's brother's keeper and a preserver of one's brothers' life. This life is further x-rayed by Iroegbu in Kanu (2015:191):

The community is the necessary and sufficient condition for the life of the individual person. The individual person is immersed into the natural world and nevertheless emerges from it as an individual and a person within his conscience and freedom given him by the meditation of the community in which he senses a certain presence of the divine.

The individual has the right and free will to live his life. However he should bear in mind that his rights stop where another's starts and therefore, should not infringe another's. If it does the community has the power to administer justice without fear or favour. According to Onyewuenyi (2002:419) "Life expresses the supreme value of Igbo as betrayed in their speech, thought, and their acts and deeds. People are named Ndubuisi (Life is first), Ndukaku (Life is worth more than wealth). This means that no matter the achievement of the individual, if it does not lead to the preservation and increase of life, then they are meaningless". The sense of bodily mortal life or physical strength is not what an Igbo understood as life. It is understood as existence, being. It means both living and existing. For instance, a human being who is dead is no longer living but existing. The implication of this is that life is, therefore fully actualized in the ancestral world. The ancestors on the other hand influence the growth of life of the living. Onyewuenyi (2002:420) emphasizes that the concept of "Ndu is understood hierarchically in that God is Ndu. The spirits and ancestors participate in a higher degree in the life of God; then the living according to Primogeniture". It is clear that this ontological relationship prevails on every African to increase, preserve and strengthen life. It is therefore not surprising that God, earth, spirits, deities, ancestors, the living are usually called upon in matters relating to uprightness of life. It is also strongly believed in African metaphysics that other creatures have certain forces and power embedded in them and are thus in most cases, beckoned on to manifest as witnesses in matters that affect life.

Based on findings therefore, it was observed that life is valuable and should not be wasted. Everyone has the moral obligation to protect life. The reasons why Africans attach much value to life as gathered were as follows:

- i. Life is sacred, precious and sacrosanct. Preservation of life brings progress and development, but life destruction brings all kinds of evil to the community. Ogugua(2003:10) avers that "The sacredness of life is what makes murder or homicide a heinous crime."
- ii. Life is given by God and very important to God and humanity and without life one becomes a non-living thing. Life therefore ensures continuity of existence.

- iii. Life is paramount, valuable, and fragile and a natural gift from the creator and so man cannot create man.
- iv. Life should be preserved to avoid silly behaviour from the citizenry. If you allow people to kill, there will be nothing like family, kindred, village and community. Therefore for harmony, peace and orderliness, life must be preserved.
- v. Life has no duplicate; life once taken cannot be replaced anymore so everything is done to avoid the loss of life. Every life is from God and nobody has powers to terminate it. God gives life and no one should take away what he did not give and cannot replace because life is irreplaceable.
- vi. Life is very essential and every individual have right to life. Also life is valued in order to protect the dignity, sanctity of life. It is also to ensure safe living in the community and protection of properties and foreigners who came to the town.
- vii. Value attached to life propels people to pursue peace and order in the society. The reason is for security, production and economic growth.
- viii. Value attached to life gives the citizenry a sense of freedom. They live without fear in the society. It therefore helps to curb social vices. Also when one considers the value of life he or she may not think of killing another person. These help to move the community in a better direction because the progress of any community is its reputation.

It was also gathered that right to live is a natural justice recognized by the traditional religion, that everybody has a right to life which is nature's rule. All humans value their lives and none wants to lose his or hers.

Truthfulness in the Moral Life of Africans

Generally morality in African world view perceived truth as very important to life. Morality also deals with truth and truthfulness. Africans value truth so much so that they do not want to associate with lie and liars. The extent can only be appreciated when one comes to understand that derogatory names among the Igbo such as *Ntu bu ọzọ* meaning that, the person in question has attained lie as his highest title. It should be noted that in most parts of Igbo land ozo title is the highest title in Igbo land; *Onye ire abua* meaning literally 'a person with double tongue' and who speaks from both sides of his mouth or tongue. The other remarks are *ọ si gi kwuru*, *gbaba* that is, if he tells you to stand at a place, what he actually meant is for you to run away for your safety. Liars, as Oputa (1998:93) maintains are, peo

ple “Whose speech is full of contradictions, fictions and inconsistencies. Somehow, the Igbo come to know and identify people who talk in this manner and of course, such people are not respected in the society”.

The way the Igbo value truth made them to equate it to life. This is expressed in their often used maxim *Eziokwu bụ ndụ* meaning that truth is life. Truth brings harmony in interpersonal relationships. It gives one security, strength and makes one to be in a state of tranquility. Truth gives meaning, reason and value to life. Truth as noted by Ogugua (2003:13) “Is correlated value of justice. Real justice acts on the truth. The Igbo say *ihe a dighi eme onye aka ya kwụ ọtọ* - “Nothing happens to the man of truth”. Justice is denied when truth is concealed. Igbo people believe that truth can never be hidden; that one day the truth will manifest. Meadow (2016) affirms that “Nothing speaks like the truth, and it cannot be hidden for long.” Igbo people use to say, *e tigusie eziokwu, O gbaa ihe elu*. After suppressing the truth, it will surely manifest. *E jighi aka ekpuchi eziokwu* literally means that truth cannot be covered with hands. Igbo people believe that anything that is true is as clear as day time as in *Eziokwu dika ehihie*. It is self-explanatory and needs no conviction.

From the foregoing it was clear that Africans attach so much value to truth. The following observations were made:

- i. Truthfulness brings God’s nearness to a community. God means truth. It is the key to all progress and development in the community.
- ii. Truthfulness is life and can save every situation. One feels safe if one is on the side of truth. *Onye na-ekwu eziokwu na-adị ogologo ndụ. Onye na-ekwu eziokwu na-enwe nsọpuru*. People value honesty.
- iii. When truthfulness is enthroned in every case in the community, justice must take its place.
- iv. Truthfulness brings trust, equity, fairness, peace, love and unity among members of the community. Truthfulness ensures that justice prevails.
- v. Truthfulness exalts a nation.
- vi. Value attached to truthfulness is that without it, one becomes a bad citizen.
- vii. Truth is seen as divine, supreme and sets one free. It is an easy means for resolving disputes.
- viii. Another reason for this value is that people around you know you and whenever they need to rely on people, they come to you. ‘*Ezi afa ka ego*’ Truthfulness is valued in order to build a fidelity relationship amongst people and for justice and fairness to take place. Truthfulness makes people to have trust in one another. Truth boosts people’s trust and honesty.

- ix. Truthfulness is a way to preserve life. It brings peaceful co-existence . Truthfulness lessens the gravity of an offence.
- x. God is always beside whomever that says the truth. Truthfulness brings progress, peace and tranquillity.

It was also gathered that truthfulness makes one to be justified, and that, it is only the truth that can give justice. Truthfulness in every matter will surely pave way to justice and that when the truth is determined, justice is automatically done. Without unveiling the truth of a matter justice cannot be possible. Truth makes people responsible and trustworthy. Truth enhances final judgment. It is a divine dimension that ensures that life is preserved. According to Ogugua (2003:13) "It is truth that brings meaning to life . The truthful person is always at peace with himself; and he shows the way to the rest." A truthful person makes things easy for others by ensuring that justice is maintained. Truth and justice are the two sides of a coin. Justice depends on truthfulness and truthfulness paves way for justice. When justice is done the value for life is attained. Truthfulness results or translates to a good society. It ensures that things are done the right way. When one admits that he or she has done wrong, it depicts remorse and willingness to change for better.

Implications of Relegation of African Moral Values

It was gathered that the value attached to life brings to lime light the need to uphold African moral values; this will help in binding the members of the society together. It was indicated that life is sacred and very important to God and humanity and ensures continuity. According to Ogugua (2003:7)

Life proceeds from God and belongs to God. It is sacred, given to man on trust. It is a supreme gift with irreplaceable value . Every other human value is subordinated to it. The traditional Igbo do not toy with life. This is noticeable in the prayers they say daily before breaking kolanut, sacrifices they offer before their deities, and names they bear, myths and even in the organization of their community.

The above is applicable to all African communities. The implication is that , if life is not preserved and the value attached to life not revitalized, the human race will diminish, and this will be against the law of nature. If value attached to life is neglected, human society might go into extinction. God created the human race and gave them power to maintain its continuity; therefore everyone must be allowed to live his or her life. It was noted that people are aware of this fact since it was gathered that everybody has rig

ht to live, that nobody has right over another person's life, for that is the rule of nature.

It was opined that care for life makes people feel reluctant in doing evil since no one would want to be portrayed as an evil person. Here value attached to life plays the role of making people to be good citizens. It was emphasized that enlightenment on the value of life will help African communities to abstain or to avoid any act that threatens life. Value attached to life therefore ensures security of life and property and will be used to maintain orderliness, peace and harmony in the society. Care for life gives the citizenry a sense of freedom. Freedom makes people to live without fear and helps to curb social vices. However, when value attached to life is neglected, the results are anarchy; insecurity, disharmony, hardship and these will make people to remain in perpetual bondage. It is therefore impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the rights to life, upon which the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks social foundations when on the other hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated especially where it is weak and marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of the society, such as democracy and peace. (Pope John Paul II, nd.)

From the foregoing it is clear that the value attached to life helps to maintain in communities' reputation. It is impossible for any community in hostilities to experience peace. Automatically the indigenes will migrate and investors will find it difficult to invest any meaningful business in a community where there is no security of life and property. The situation will create a great setback in terms of economic growth, political peace, and social relationship among others.

On the value attached to truthfulness, there is an indication that truth is life and a way to preserve life. Truth is divine, supreme and gives freedom to people. Truth brings progress, peace and tranquility. The law of nature asserts all human parts functions they perform. Therefore lying to one another or lying in situation where people want to ascertain the truth of a matter is wrong. It is against the role to which speech is supposed to play in human communication. Communication deals with the thought in our mind, so an action becomes deceptive where there is desire or inclination and intention to lie. Lying creates hostilities and dishonesty so that the friendly r

relationship in the society becomes scornful. Justice is easily attained in a community where people always say and stand on the truth. It lifts the community to a greater height, it lightens burden, makes people free and creates a harmonious living among people. The implication is that anyone who refuses to say the truth of a matter has denied justice to the people concerned.

Suggestions on Revitalizing the lost African Moral Values

African moral values will be revived when Africans make it a duty to proudly display and uphold their rich moral values found in truthfulness and sanctity of life. When truth is said, justice is assured and life is persevered.

African moral values are an important aspect of African culture. People and their culture are inseparable, for this reason every African should be alert to their moral values which made them unique and gave them identity.

Most foreign moral values that negate African moral values should be strongly discouraged. Wars, murder, human trafficking, kidnapping and injustice should be avoided by all African countries. African leaders should promote peace, togetherness, truthfulness, justice and concern for life.

The family as an agent of socialization should carry it as a function and responsibility to orient the young ones on the need to imbibe the rich African moral values found in truthfulness and sanctity of life. Families should make the young ones to internalize these values and virtues so as to ensure the same behavioural pattern and for the exhibition of African ideology.

Africans should always remember the sacredness of life and so learn to forgive others even when it pains to do so. Revenge should not be desired for offence done to one, rather one should work towards forgiving and reconciling with others.

Africans should stand firm on the promotion of African moral values even when it is opposed to foreign dominant moral values. They should vehemently oppose the forceful imposition of foreign moral values and life style that is not in line with African ideology.

Teachers should exhibit high moral standards by practicing honesty, fair judgments and having value for life. They should live an exemplary life, and be role models to the young ones. They should also emphasize the rich

African moral values found in truthfulness and sanctity of life which is the hallmark of all the values.

Conclusion

It is the stance of this study that the spirit of honest and urgent revival is needed in the African moral values found in care for life and truthfulness. Life is so precious to be undermined; truthfulness one of the elements that preserve life need not be degraded. Revival will be achieved by the availability of adequate cultural elements and organizations for the recapture of African cultural moral values for a total cultural emancipation, identity and sanctity of life of African nations.

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