THE INDISPENSABILITY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE PRESERVATION OF AFRICAN VALUES

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Abstract
Value system is the cultural outlook of a people and the understanding of the value system is the understanding of the belief system and cultural system of the people in question. Every society has a set of values covering every aspect of human endeavour. These values are the guiding principles found in any society and they cover the whole ramifications of the society. The values apparently play regulating roles in human relationship and also stabilizing factor of the society. Africa has existed as a continent even before the colonial era, with its own value system despite its multi-ethnic nature. Africa has value system that is in consonance with her environment and condition. These values make a comprehensive system which gives African man a holistic outlook. It is sad to note that Africans are now engaged in the process of completely abandoning their value system by trying to embrace another value system. There is an urgent need to appreciate and preserve the value system by which Africans are known. This paper views indigenous languages as indispensible if the African values must be preserved. This is important as language is an essential part of, and intrinsically linked to indigenous people's ways of life, culture and identities. Languages embody many indigenous values and concepts and contain indigenous peoples' distinctiveness and cohesiveness as a people. Nations stay together when citizens share enough values and preferences and can communicate with each other. It is argued that language is the carrier of the cultural heritage of societies thus the death of a language constitutes the annihilation of norms, values, attributes and beliefs of a people.

Introduction

Culture is popularly seen as the ways and life of a particular people or society. It also involves their value system. A value system is a set of consistent ethic values (more specifically the personal and cultural value and measures used for the purpose of ethical or ideological integrity. It is a system of established values, norms or goals existing in a society. These value structures or systems were used to ensure and promote order of socialisation and morality in a society. An African is exclusively a person from the indigenous ethnic groups found on the continent of Africa and people who trace their ancestry to these group in the African Diaspora.

Africa has existed as a continent even before the colonial era with its own distinct cultural beliefs, values, norms and practices despite its multi-ethnic nature. The peculiar nature of the African culture is evidence in their way of life depicted in marriages and family relationships, legal systems religious, economic and political structures. These value structures or systems were used to ensure and promote order of socialization and morality in the African society. The African traditional culture and value system may not be perfect, but they serve the purpose of which they were meant to serve and kept the society moving without the rancour and disorganisation experienced in the modern-day African society. Africans have many good values that are worthy of preservation in the face of western cultural onslaught. Basically, the focus of the African value system is the human being as a community being,

who without losing one's personal identity and mortality, values one's relationships with others.

In the interim, Africa is losing out in the cultural preservation battle. There may never be a trace of anything African, culture wise in the near future. Posterity appears to be left with little or no healthy cultural value.

Language is the carrier of the cultural heritage of societies, thus, the death of a language constitutes the annihilation of norms, values, attributes and beliefs of a people. It does not require any intellectual analysis to realise that indigenous languages stock peoples' cultural heritage. Indigenous languages contain complex understanding of a person's culture and their connection with their land

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This paper is divided into five sections. The introductory part of the paper is handled in section one. Review of related literature will take the centre stage in section two under the following sub-headings: Africa and African value system, threats to African value system, indigenous languages. Section three will take care of indispensability of indigenous languages in preserving African values. Summary and conclusion will be done in section four. The paper adopts the methodologies of conceptual clarification, critical analysis and reflective argumentation to achieve its goals.

Literature Review

Africans and African Value System

Africa is the world's second largest and second-populous continent. About 30.2 million km^2 including adjacent islands, it covers six percent of Earth's total surface area and 20.4 percent of its total land area (Wikipedia). Africa is a term which super-umbrellas all the indigenous ethnic cities of the African continent. Therefore, an African is exclusively a person from the indigenous ethnic groups found on the continent of Africa and people who trace their ancestry to this group in the African Diaspora (African Race). There are at least 3,000 distinct ethnic groups in Africa. Africans in full diversity are the natural people of the African landscape. The hairs, the skin, are all specific adaptations to living in the African landscape

Africans speak hundreds of different languages like Swahili and Hausa, and European languages like English, French and Portuguese. The rich cultural heritage that Africa has goes back thousands of years. Advanced civilizations flourished in Africa at times when the rest of the world was in the dark. There is no continent more blessed with striking beauty and diversity than the African motherland.

When we talk about values, we refer to interest, pleasure, likes, preference, duties, moral obligations, desires, wants, needs aversions and attractions and many other modalities of selective orientation (William, 1968:283). Africa has value system that is in

consonance with her environment and conditions. These values cover the whole ramifications of the society and these values apparently play regulating roles in human relationship and also stabilizing factors of the society.

These values make a competitive system which gives African man a holistic outlook. They include among others: moral values, social values, economic values, political values, religious values, aesthetic values. African cultural values equally include:
(i) sense of community life
(ii) sense of good human relations
(iii) sense of the sacredness of life
(iv) sense of hospitality
(v) sense of sacred and religion
(vi) sense of time
(vii) sense of respect for authority and the elders
(viii) Sense of language and proverbs

The Sense of Good Human Relation

The guiding principle of human relation in the African community is "Live-and-let-live." This presupposes inter-personal and inter-community relationship realized in the interaction between individuals of the same community and other communities. The relationship between individuals recognizes their worth as human beings and not only what they possess or what can they do for each other, even though these can come as later or secondary

considerations in terms of reciprocity and in terms of interpersonal relationship. Help, for one another is not based on immediate or an exact equivalent remuneration. Everyone is mindful that each person has something to contribute to his welfare, no matter the degree. The arrangement of human relation is that of being one's brother's keeper in caring for each other's welfare. Every man has the obligation to assist those who need help. The needy and the helpless are taken care of and assisted. It is along this perspective that Ifemesia (1985) posits, "A way of life emphatically centred upon human interest and values: a mode of living evidently characterized by empathy and by consideration and compassion for human beings". The art of dialogue and conversation is a cherished value in African relations. People freely discuss and express their problem and look for suggestions together. Expressing the importance of free and bonafide discussion in human relation, Onwubiko emphasized, "the unwillingness to talk to people about either private or public affairs can be interpreted as bad manners or sign off enemity." (Onwubiko, 20). It is important to note that African believes that he who discusses his affairs with others hardly runs into difficulties or make mistakes in the execution of his plans. Although, there is accommodation and respect of individual's sentiments, hence conversations that may cause misgivings are avoided. This is what the Yoruba people mean in their adage: "the fingers of a man who has only nine are not counted in his presence." So in this perspective, African sense of accommodation accounts for why; in traditional African culture, the weak and aged; the

incurable, the helpless, the sick were affectionately taken care of in comforting family atmosphere (Okafor, 23).

Sense of Community Life

Onwubiko pointed out that the African idea of security and its value depend on personal identification with and within the community. The authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community in the economic sphere, the guiding principles for the economic arrangement is that of being one's brother's keeper or caring for each other's welfare, at least within one's immediate community. The basic principle of African social set-up is communalism.

Reacting against capitalism, individualism, exploitation and other concomitant class conflict, Nyerere of Tanzania pointed out that African communalism was a fundamental principle of the economic arrangements. A man is just as rich or poor as his community. Thus, every man is obliged to work and contribute when he is able to, and to be provided for, as a matter of right, when he or no longer productive.

In the community, parasitism is not tolerated. Whoever is capable of working but refuses to, or is lazy, will be allowed to starve there and then. The philosophy behind the African communalism therefore generated individual responsibility within the communal ownership and relationship. The prosperity of a single person, says

an adage does not make a town rich. In other word, a person can only be truly safe in a community.

In all economic consideration, land is a veritable factor. It is also the avenue to wealth and poverty. Therefore, in this distribution, the communalistic principle was brought into play so that all able-bodied men could contribute their quotas, without excuse. This is to make sure that no group who be a landless peasantry looking up to some usually absentee landlords for their daily bread as a permanent wage-earning class. This presupposes a communal cycle of land tenure, with the community or family head holding the land in trust for all members, born. Akinpelu has it that "the allocation was strictly according to need and the ability of the individual to develop." (38).

In essence, we are saying that 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. So, the African emphasize 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.

The sense of hospitality
The sense of hospitality is inherently indispensable in the currently

survival of African values. There is always spontaneous welcome and accommodation to strangers and visitors. Africans easily incorporate strangers and give them lands to settle, hoping that they would go one day, and the land would be reverted to the owner. This is usually done with the belief that one will never opt out of his own community. In Africa, unlike West, no appointment and special invitation are needed for one to visit a distant relation or neighbour. On his or her arrival, once there is food in the house, the visitor is invited to eat. He is treated kindly, just as one would wish to be treated when visiting another home.

There are symbolic ways of expressing welcome in Africa. These are in forms of presentation of kola nuts, traditional gin, coconuts, white chalk, garden egg etc. in various communities. These are to show that the visitor is heartily welcome and safe. The basis of hospitality as noted by Onwubiko among the Igbo is that "a guest must not harm his host and that when he departs, he should not develop a hunch back on the way home"(23). Another aspect of hospitality that is highly cherished is sharing with a needy neighbour who comes for assistance. Anybody who has and does not assist is taken to be a bad fellow.

The sense of respect for authority and elders
Without language, no communication can take place. Indigenous language being part of the culture is indispensable in expression of respect. The sense of respect for authority and elders helps to solder

and smoothen social relations in African society. Prior to the advent of slavery, slave trade and colonialism, there was stability, peace and harmony in any African setting.

There was the deep respect for legitimate and constituted authority, be it that of head of the family or of the Oba, Obi, Eze, Igwe or Emir. This authority is hierarchical but democratic, in the sense that one remains legitimate and sacred only for as long as it continues to be exercised in the interest of the governed, and in accordance with the time-honoured and sanctified customs and traditions of the people. It should be pointed out that the obedience is not to the person of the Igwe or Emir as an individual, but rather to the institution, and any abuse of it, disobedience becomes legitimate and the culprit is made to bow out. In a place like Yoruba, suicide was an honourable way of doing so, so much was regarded for peace, stability and orderliness as political values that the individual life could be sacrificed to maintain the integrity and inviolability of the institution.

Naturally in Africa setting, respect for elders is highly dignified. The way the young ones greet the elders was, and still is regarded as evidence of morality or lack of it, instead of as a matter of etiquette. In Yoruba land, a young man is described as totally immoral simply because he would not prostrate for his elders.

The significance of respect to elders is seen in the Igbo adage saying: "He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an

oracle". The oracles are believed to give the infallible truths. The elders are also believed to say the truth and the words and instructions are heeded to for the promotion of good behaviour among the youths. Elders are taken to be repository of communal wisdom and therefore are considered leaders in the affairs of the people. The respect given to the elders has its practical effect in the maintenance of custom and tradition. The young are always looking forward to being elders. So they are often told that if a child respects an elder, he would be respected by the young when he becomes an elder. The elders should be respected because they have many years of experience; they know and hold the traditional values that have always kept communities together. Their minds are less poisoned by the modern world than young minds.

The Sense of Extended Family

Iroegbu has this to say, "African languages generally have no words for uncles, aunts, cousins and nieces. All these are part of the one family. The family is one, but extended." (84). Marriages are taken as good and serious thing in the sense that they are covenant between two (extended) families, kindreds and villages. The extended family system is very much alive in contemporary Africa in spite of the wave the Western value system is making.

"Living and together" and the sense of "community of brothers and sisters" are the basis of, and the expression of, the extended family system in Africa. The rationale behind it is that balance of kinship

relations, seen as essential to the ideal balance with nature that was itself the material guarantee of survival, called for specific conduct.

The extended family system is a system that ultimately anchored and still rests on the philosophy of "live-and-let-live". It is a principle which defines rights and duties, responsibilities and obligations towards the less fortunate, those incapacitated in one way or another. For example, a man has the obligation to cater for the widow and orphans of his dead relative. His failure to do this earns him scornful reproach or contempt and as a result, it is difficult to find someone in the community without help. In essence, extended family is a veritable instrument in the family cohesion and community continuity and stability.

The Sense of Religion

The attachment to religion and worship of God, form a dominating part of African world view. Africans are deeply religious and for African, life is religion and vice versa. All they do or say and permit is impregnated with a vision of the divine, and all natural reality is explainable in function of the supernatural being. Indigenous language is indispensable in religious doctrine as it is the vehicle unto which religious doctrines are conveyed.

African social values rest on the moral values which in turn rest on religious values. To many people, it is perverse and perhaps sacrilegious to separate the moral and the religious values. If they are separable at all, religious values are more fundamental and

undergird the moral values. It is the presence of religion that lends meaning and authority to values. The sense of religion which is our spiritual selves according to Macaulay Kanu is that of instinctive feelings of oneness with the divine or our longings for, and intimations of immortality" (10). Religious or spiritual element in African man characterizes our relationship with the divine, with God and or the gods. It is an indubitable fact that this sense of religion is promotion of moral excellence. It is the sense of religion that naturally endowed man with respect for human life and human dignity. Akinpelu says, "such a respect definitely lack depth and authority if based simply on moral consideration or moral arrangements between men, except of course, if the morality is conceived as one and the same with the religion in the first instance" (37).

Threats to African Values

The intrusion of foreign cultures through the media facilitated by advanced communications technology is fast causing most Africans to lose ties with their roots. Some Africans feel that they have to be like Americans in order to be successful and happy. They replace their names, clothes, art, music, weddings, literatures, language, religions, life styles and values with Western ones. Africans cherish everything Western; they take glory in Western values thereby relegating African values.

Adinlofu (2009) opines that the African practices, relevance and

functions are being socially disfigured by the intrusion of Western values. African ways of doing things are becoming primitive, archaic and regrettably unacceptable in public domain.

As it is now, all over the continent long after the colonial period, Africans are adopting new habits and acquiring new tastes derived from Western culture, often considered progressive in relation to traditional culture. In most African countries, indigenous languages are now learnt as a second language that is also taught with English. No one seems to take African languages seriously. They seem to have nothing to offer except in everyday economic communication between "members of families and informal conversation with friends and colleagues".

Furthermore, Mutasa 2003:6 observes that owners of the language do not see much value in the indigenous language and to worsen the situation, authorities seem to be reluctant to ensure that indigenous languages by appropriate legal provision, assume their rightful role as of official communication in public affairs, administrative and educational domains. This is a problem since cultural heritage and knowledge is passed on throughout each generation by the use of indigenous language

The Need for Appreciation and Preservation of African Values
According to BamGbose (1998:9) "The effects of the continued dominance off foreign languages over indigenous languages can be

able to communicate in an individual's first or indigenous language connects a person to his ethnic group and helps to shape a person's identity. Speaking a language does not depend on the peripheral knowledge of the language. It depends on the ability to express oneself adequately in the proverbs and idioms of the language community. These proverbs, idioms, riddles are based and determined by the culture of the community. Also, familiarity with proverbs, riddles and idioms of a community, means a thorough knowledge of that community. This is because these are drawn from and refer to the environment, and social order and behaviour common in that community. They determine the norms of action in the community and above all, they are didactic in nature.

Conclusion

Indigenous languages are valuable historical part of the Africans' cultural heritage. They contain complex understanding of a persons' culture and their connection with the land. Language is an essential part of and intrinsically linked to indigenous peoples' ways of life, culture and identities. Languages embody many indigenous values and concepts and contain indigenous peoples' histories and development. Africa has values that are in consonance with her environment and condition. Being able to communicate effectively in an individuals' first or home language (mother tongue) connects a person to their ethnic group and helps to shape a persons' identity. In simple terms, to preserve African values which are at the verge of extinction, Africans must start with being proud of our indigenous language which is part of our cultural heritage. This is essential because if we do not appreciate our own cultural value, there is no way we can preserve from negative influences. It is important to stress fundamentally that urgent and more decisive steps need to be taken in order to reorder and reverse the evanescent trend of cultural emptiness, without which Africa may experience seasons of cultural extinction and drought of African values. This can only be possible through indigenous languages.

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