

GLOBALIZATION, CIVILIZATION, AND AFRICAN VALUES: THE IMPERATIVE OF A CRITICAL SYNERGY

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ABSTRACT

The phenomena of globalization and civilization are undoubtedly born out of man's natural quest for auto-transcendence, self-actualization and the establishment of a world order. Their merits are obviously enormous. Indeed, civilization and globalization are essential correlates of development as far as the human society is concerned. However, the heterogeneous nature of the human society obviously poses a great challenge to their prospects. The effort at integrating or combining the socio-cultural, political, economic, religious, and technological elements of regional human societies into an international economy, without an objective assessment of their peculiarities, may not yield a satisfactory result. An uncritical adaptation of the values and variables associated with globalization and civilization to the African context would either vitiate the project of achieving a world order or undermine authentic African values. The basic concern of this discourse is to critically assess the imports of globalization and civilization especially in relation to the task of fostering an objective and positive development of African socio-cultural values. The paper expresses an advocacy for a more critical approach to this project. In fact, it is only through objective assessment and adaptation of the positive values of civilization and globalization to the African value system that the prospects of achieving an authentic synergy can be guaranteed.

Keywords: Globalization, Civilization, African, African values, Auto-transcendence.

INTRODUCTION

Man's natural drive to seek comfort finds expression in his constant quest for auto-transcendence, self-actualization and the efforts at improving his living conditions. Civilization and globalization, as features of the modern human society, are results of man's efforts at achieving auto-transcendence. However, some aspects of civilization in the contemporary time are largely degenerate and betray a misconstrued essence of the concept. An understanding of civilization that expresses an acceptance or toleration of such rather unnatural and antisocial practices as homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, disrespect for human life, disregard for one's parents and elders and deliberate single parenthood on the pretext of freedom and liberty, is certainly deficient. Such debauchery approach to civilization not only smacks of profligacy and inauthenticity but also expresses gross negligence of objective human values.

Every human society develops at its own pace and in accordance with its appreciation of human values, worldviews and ideologies. As a matter of fact, slow-paced civilization is neither synonymous with incivility nor underdevelopment. Indeed, each human society is replete with variegated assortment not only of persons but also of ideas and peculiar perspectives to life. These largely determine the pace of its development. An attempt, therefore, at unifying diverse worldviews by establishing an undifferentiated and unitary system of values would rather be a false route to the establishment of a world order. A proper assessment of such variables as the diverse socio-cultural orientations, differences and peculiarities in worldviews, psychologies and idiosyncrasies characteristic of human societies is critical to the determination of an objective understanding of civilization and a more sustainable approach to the project of globalization.

This paper defends the thesis that the routes to civilization and self-actualization may vary from one culture to another; nonetheless, the common objective is the enhancement of man's living condition, that is, the development of the human person and his society. Thus, it examines to what extent our ideas of globalization and civilization embrace and indeed take cognizance of the peculiar features of individual cultures of the different human societies. Using the traditional African value system as a case study, this discourse contends that an authentic approach to civilization and globalization must equally take positive human values into consideration.

CIVILIZATION: A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The concept “civilization”, in the context of this discourse, is coterminous with development. Given that different human societies can develop along diverse lines, the concept of development could be approached from varied perspectives though with basically the same focus. Thus, without writing off any of the formal definitions of the concept of civilization, the present discourse basically underscores the imperative of focusing on the essence of the concept as an objective basis for assessing a society's progress.

In relation to its root “*civitas*” (city), the concept “civilization” generally describes the state of a given human society in terms of advancement or the process of its development. Accordingly, it is predicated of human societies that have attained a considerable level of sophistication in terms of science and technology. From this perspective, it is also the process of educating a society so that its culture becomes more developed ().

From a broader perspective, civilization correlates with culture and regional traditions. In this sense, it refers to the human society with its well-developed culture, social organizations, government, laws, and arts or the culture of a social group or country at a particular time (). Hence, one could speak of American civilization, French civilization, Chinese civilization, Egyptian civilization, and of course, African civilization.

GLOBALIZATION: A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Globalization, as a concept, largely correlates with civilization. It refers to the considerable interface, cross-currents and mutual relations of the dynamics and features of civilization.

Kolb (2018) conceives it as “the word used to describe the growing interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information.” The concept “globalization” also designates “the process of interaction and integration among people, companies, and governments worldwide. (Levin Institute, 2018). For Larson (2001:1), globalization “is the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer. It pertains to the increasing ease with which somebody on one side of the world can interact, to mutual benefit, with somebody on the other side of the world.”

The concept globalization embraces a wide range of inter-social activities and could have multifarious dimensions and approaches. For Rodhan (2006:5), “globalization is a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities.” Corroborating this view, Sheffield et al (2013: xx) write: “globalization is a very broad concept not only with respect to the diversity of regions, cultures, and actors but also with respect to the diversity of analytical approaches that can be employed to study it.”

In the context of the present discourse, the historical approach to globalization that takes into consideration the peculiar developmental processes of particular socio-cultural regions is adopted. The peculiar indicators of development in each human society is accordingly considered the framework of its civilization and its window to globalization. From this standpoint, therefore, the seed of globalization could be considered already sown in the pre-industrial era, germinated through the mechanism of agrarian revolution and blossomed in the contemporary era of industrialization and high technology.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VALUE SYSTEM: AN INDEX OF POSITIVE HUMAN VALUES

For the purposes of clarity, the usual usage of the concept “African” in contradistinction to the concept “Western” is adopted in this study. Hence, while the whole of Africa cannot be lumped together as a necessarily homogeneous human society, it is hereby presupposed that there are more unifying than divisive features in the different African cultures. A number of values are actually common to the African communities just as a number of values are shared by the Western world. These values, though with some subtle or local variations, are fundamentally the same and cut across different African cultures.

In contradistinction to the Western value system that is often characterized as individualistic, the African traditional value system is essentially communalistic. It fosters a unique and all-embracing relationship with nature, God, the deities, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the kindred, the extended and nuclear families, as well as neighbours. The common good is often the major spur of man's actions. Individualism is therefore alien to most African cultures. The living and the dead belong to the same socio-cultural sphere, even though the level of participation differs in accordance with the categories and hierarchies of being. The Supreme deity, God, and the subordinate deities are entangled in this socio-cultural web of relationship – all geared towards the common good and the betterment of the human society.

Generally, the Africans bring moral concern and perspectives to bear on social and political

questions; they impregnate culture and human works with moral values. The African value system is characterized by a transcendental ethical standard or a moral order which transcends the individual and society and accommodates both. In this system, the gods, who are at the apex of the hierarchy of beings, shower blessings on those who obey them and posit actions that do not harm their fellow men or contravene the laws of the land. On the other hand, they mete out punishment to those who commit evil and abomination.

In addition to the respect for the gods and fear of their wrath, the traditional African value system prescribes deep respect for one's parents and elders. They are considered to be closer to the ancestors who in turn are closer to the gods. The elders, as embodiments of wisdom and the possessors of authority, have the responsibility of disciplining the younger ones and guiding them on the path of right conducts and values. While respect for elders is a high moral value, disrespect for elders is considered an antisocial practice in Africa. In a typical African society, parents can take disciplinary measures on children that are not biologically theirs. In Igbo tradition, for instance, this is the import of the name, "Nwa Ora" (usually written *Nwaora* or *Nwora*), which suggests that the child belongs to all. A similar idea is captured in the expression, "ekwughi ekwu mere okenye mana anughi anu mere nwata". This specifically implies that the elders have the responsibility of counseling the younger ones who would have themselves to blame for the negative consequences of paying deaf ears to the wise counsels of the elders. As a principle of discipline, therefore, it is unacceptable to spare the rod and spoil the child.

More still, the traditional African value system often accords with nature and natural course of events. It prescribes and legislates on total adherence to natural laws and principles. For sure, one of the central questions of ideology is whether values are objective or subjective? The effort at addressing this ideological concern is complicated by the fact that there is often an illusion of good in what is actually not good, and an appearance of evil in what is really good. Yet, a recourse to nature and sufficient sense of social responsibility remain formidable keys to this ideological puzzle. From the African perspective, for instance, homosexuality, lesbianism, and bestiality, fall short of natural principles and standards. These sexual preferences and expressions are considered sexual pervasions precipitated by a psychological disorder.

From the vantage point of its being in consonance with nature, the African values are authentic and considerably approximate to ideal human values. Indeed, one cannot justifiably consider pristine African traditional values instances of incivility. In assigning roles, for instance, the primeval African societies take cognizance of gender differences in strength; hence, they assign more tedious tasks to men while the less-tasking ones are left for the women. Therefore, while the contemporary movement for women emancipation and gender equality may have its merits, the subordinate role of women in traditional African societies may not altogether be condemnable.

Although the African socio-political systems or value system may present varying shades of ideological orientations they basically interlock. They express remarkable similarity especially in their approach to human values. Indeed, Africans have always had a unique cultural identity by which, as a principle, they were called a people. The Africans' manifestation of man's natural instinct to improve his living condition demonstrates the

Africans' age-long involvement in the civilization process. As a matter of fact, one of the first recorded civilizations is the Egyptian Civilization (3000 BCE). Studies in archaeology, anthropology, genetics, linguistics, and similar disciplines, bordering on human history present it as second only to the development of cities in Lower Mesopotamia (3000 BCE). (Stearns & Langer, 2001:21). The Great Pyramid of Egypt – one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and one of the strongest works of architecture in existence – was once the largest man-made building on earth. Describing the Great Pyramid, which sits in the desert near modern Cairo, Gray (<https://sacredsites.com>) writes:

The Great Pyramid of Giza is the most substantial ancient structure in the world – and the most mysterious.... The Great pyramid was originally 481 feet, five inches tall (146.7 meters) and measured 755 feet (230 meters) along its sides. Covering an area of 13 acres, or 53,000 square meters. It is large enough to contain the European cathedrals of Florence, Milan, St. Peters Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's. Constructed from approximately 2.5 million limestone blocks weighing on average 2.6 tons each, its total mass is more than 6.3 million tons (representing more building material than is to be found in all the churches and cathedrals built in England since the time of Christ.

In the light of such landmark achievements in auto-transcendence, therefore, the wave of civilization cannot be considered an exclusive reserve of the Western world. Unfortunately, one still finds some derogatory remarks incongruous with this fact of history. The implicit denigration of African route to civilization is exemplified in the question attributed to Emil Ludwig on his visit to Africa: “How can the untutored African conceive God?” (Smith, 1950:1). Such subtle belittling of Africa's route to civilization, with its social, political, economic, and religious implications, is obviously unjustifiable. This approach to globalization and civilization often results in the imposition of foreign social systems on people, communities or countries but such systems foisted on a people from outside are often not stable as they do not have solid foundations. They collapse at the first serious trial. Indeed, it amounts to nothing but self-deception and gross manifestation of inferiority complex of a kind to pride oneself as civilized only on the ground of acquiring a foreign culture no matter how superior it is considered to be.

The attempt here is far from a blanket deification or canonization of the traditional African value system as an ideal and impeccable embodiment of objective human values; otherwise one would immediately be trapped by the difficulty of attempting to justify some of its inherent unwholesome practices. It may be difficult, for instance, to reconcile its insistence on the sanctity of human life, on the basis of which murder is considered an abomination, and the killing of twins or the use of human heads for the burial of kings in some African cultures. Instead, this discourse advances the thesis that the routes to civilization are diverse and society-relative. Industrialization neither exhausts the imports nor paints a wholistic picture of civilization. An objective synchronization of the features of civilization and globalization must take this into consideration.

GLOBALIZATION AND CIVILIZATION: IMPORTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR

AUTO-TRANSCENDENCE AND WORLD ORDER

The merits of globalization are obviously enormous. The imports of globalization are felt in science and technology, culture, religion, politics, economics, morals, etc. Thanks to civilization and technological advancement, the human society has progressed from the use of the primitive flint instruments to the most complicated modern machinery. In world economy, globalization has occasioned the promotion of accessible global production and financial markets, and initiated healthy competition in the world job market. Alongside such contemporary technological inventions as the radio, the television, the internet, and communication satellites, globalization has increased the level of information flow around the world. By means of these, too, it has tremendously fostered the growth of cross-cultural contacts by spreading ideas, values, practices and even languages. Politically, globalization has given rise to a new global consciousness and has improved political cooperation and solidarity among nations of the world especially with a view to ensuring world peace.

The advantages of globalization, notwithstanding, some unwholesome features can be identified as its disadvantages. Some of these are however linked to abuse. In the economic sphere, for example, globalization enhances economic inequality and facilitates the exploitation of underdeveloped nations and economies, especially due to their inefficiency in the management of their rich natural resources. Also, given the interconnectedness of global markets, an economic collapse in one area can have a remarkable impact on the others. Hence, the possibility of “global economic meltdown.”

Globalization can serve as a mechanism for the subjugation of the less privileged or developing economies. By promoting capitalism, globalization inadvertently fosters the suppression of the working people. No matter how sugar-coated the capitalist ideologies may be, capitalism remains a system of oppression of an overwhelming majority by a handful of exploiters. Discussing the impact of globalization on developing countries, Wallerstein (1998:11) remarks that “globalization represents the triumph of a capitalist world economy tied together by a global division of labour, driven by the logic of capitalist accumulation.” Sometimes, with a view to maintaining subtle control over countries which have formally won their independence, the imperialists entice them with economic “aids” to which some hidden strings are often attached. By so doing such countries are held in perpetual bondage as they labour under the yoke of neocolonialism.

Furthermore, granted that there is some sort of correlation between cognitive development and appreciation of human values, that is, although the former may enhance the latter, cognitive advancement may not necessarily imply advancement in morality and civility. In other words, although knowledge aims at controlling and disciplining the animal tendencies in man, it sometimes does not succeed completely at achieving this. Little wonder, the supposedly cultured and the civilized sometimes posit actions at which one can shrug one's shoulders in dismay. Indeed, the modern world, with its scientific and technological sophistication, does not always feature a modern man that has completely conquered his anti-social tendencies. Unbridled liberalism, as an unfortunate feature of modernism, is a bedfellow of the antisocial tendencies sometimes manifested in the modern man. It often fosters the stubborn lure to accede to indiscipline and less austere life. It encourages consumerism, epicureanism,

materialism, atheism, and even profanity. Unfortunately, many modern cultures flaunt these as indices of civilization. Surely, these cannot pass for ideal human values.

Globalization and modernization considerably foster man's natural proclivity to freedom and liberty. Even as man often seeks to go back to the original liberty into which he was thrown in the state of nature, that pristine state in which laws did not obtain, he is still in chains for one man's freedom stops where another man's freedom begins. In fact, to acknowledge one's freedom is to acknowledge one's obligation to obey the moral law; man's freedom is not a lawless freedom but freedom under the law. In their exercise of freedom or their ability to make free choices, people sometimes posit actions and choose ends that harm others. Insofar as their acts harm others, their behavior is irrational. Law, therefore, keeps man's freedom in check; it serves as a principal bulwark against extreme liberalism as a false route to civilization and globalization.

On a very important note, the contemporary approach to civilization poses a great threat to the human family as an institution. Formally, the family is the product of marriage, a more or less stable, intimate relationship union between the man and woman which often culminates in the procreation of children. This union presupposes mutual attraction, common interests and spiritual affinity of husband and wife. Such unnatural sexual preferences and expressions associated with modernism as homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, as well as same-sex marriages, and single parenthood, undermine the marriage institution. These trends issue from unbridled and misguided passion and lust. Little wonder, they are alien to many human societies and lack universal acceptance. In Igbo language, for example, there is no word for homosexuality. It was never a practice. It is considered a sexual perversion, a psychological disorder and a moral evil. Such practices cannot justifiably pass as permissible global practices, especially as they run contrary to the natural course of human actions.

In essence, despite its numerous merits, globalization may constitute a pseudo melting-pot of human values. In the light of the heterogeneous nature of human society, prospects of a global socio-cultural homogeneity advance a false route to the establishment of a world-order and socio-cultural development.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOWARDS A POSSIBLE OBJECTIVE SYNERGY OF HUMAN VALUES

Culture, with all its correlates, defines a people. Obviously, no culture is static because dynamism is an intrinsic part of culture. However, every culture has its uniqueness and peculiarities. With the unprecedented technological inventions of the modern world, globalization tends towards the formation of a global culture to the detriment of some individual cultures. Through the social media including the television, films, music, and the internet, products and ideas that reflect popular cultures and lifestyles are marketed and consumed. Consequently, there is a wave of new tastes, habits, and values sweeping across the nations of the world. Given that the observable decline of moral and ethical values in the modern world testifies to the fact that the conventional approach to civilization and globalization is defective, alternative routes must be sought.

Against the backdrop that no single culture is a compendium of objective human values, it has

to be acknowledged that every human culture is unique and defines the people that own it. Indeed, it is by the principles and standards of a given culture that an assemblage of individual human persons is conceptualized as a people. An objective approach to globalization and civilization would, therefore, require an integration of the inherent positive human values existing in individual cultures. The positive elements of every human community, their value system and the peculiarities of their environment must constitute the basis of assessment of their civilization. The natural human need to have coverage over the body against harsh weather conditions, for instance, would require lighter clothing materials in one region and heavier ones in another. “Necessity,” it is said, “is the mother of invention.”

More still, an authentic global value system must accord with objective human nature and be especially based on the observable order in nature. The determination of “global best practices” must be based, not necessarily on the acceptability of a particular set of socio-cultural values, but on their accord with what is ontologically human and natural.

In essence, a reappraisal of the fundamental human values from the point of view of individual human cultures and their peculiarities would definitely attenuate such global problems that threaten the prospects of a world order: racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, unbridled freedom, human rights abuse, etc. The appreciation, propagation and promotion of objective human values should constitute the standards and yardstick for measuring civilization and the basis of globalization.

CONCLUSION

The quest for auto-transcendence and self-actualization is not only coeval with man but a natural feature of every human society. This natural strive constitutes a necessary propellant of development and civilization. The African value system, as a case study, practically demonstrates this. In spite of the slower rate of development in Africa in relation to the Western world, it is never bereft of considerable developmental strides. Hence, the peculiar and positive human values in any given culture must be highlighted as critical variables in the process of its civilization and the project of globalization.

It goes without saying that civilization and globalization, by means of scientific and technological advancements, have wielded considerable positive influence on the modern the world. However, they also pose a great danger to objective human values. The social media – the internet, cell phones, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and similar features of civilization – sometimes become handy tools for crimes. While these obviously enhance the projects of civilization and globalization, an abuse or misuse of these can tremendously vitiate their primary aim of making the human society better. The wave of such global problems as racism, violence, youth militancy, imperialism, neo-colonialism, child labour, human trafficking, single parenthood, prostitution, immodest dressing, robbery, cultism, and drug addiction, which sometimes sweeps across the nations of the world, thanks to information technology, can threaten the prospects of a world order.

However, the Latin adage, “abusus non tollit usum” (abuse does not remove use) still holds true. The modern man hardly lives authentically without being abreast with scientific knowledge, discoveries and innovations. The modern human society, as an age of information

technology and innumerable sciento-technological inventions, has a global character. Authentic existence for the modern man in a modern human society is a function of his conscious adaptation to such a sophisticated society. Hence, there is need for a guided response to the demands of civilization and globalization.

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