

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR AFRICAN CULTURAL MORAL VALUES: IGBO PERSPECTIVE

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Executive Summary

African moral values are the focus of this paper among other things that may be bothering African cultures. In the recent times, there are challenges on the moral values of the African people. The presenter among other communities of the African continent focused more on Igbo peoples' moral value. Morality acts as the guiding principle for a functioning society. Without moral values, we would either live in a state of anarchy, or a society where we are kept in line only by threats of punishment from a governing figure. In general, in our daily interactions, it is morality that makes us continue to respect one another and treat each other with dignity. This is what many philosophers have called the unspoken social contract. These challenges on African moral values are already sinking the moral values and morality of the African people, and thereby living the future society of Igbo people in great and precarious moral decadence. If not checkmated with every serious measure, it will continue to endanger the people's society in the near future. This is why the writer chose this topic to make a clarion call to Igbo people and Africans in general, especially mothers to make hay while the sun shines. This work therefore, intends to discover some of the prevalent moral decadence in our contemporary society, their effects on the society and unit families in particular. It seeks also to encourage the place of mothers in the proper upbringing of their children. It is expected that the views of other writers about what moral decadence is, and the place of mothers in child's upbringing will help the writer to x-ray the topic better. The knowledge from the findings and recommendations will be of great help to the contemporaries to seek ways of curbing the problems, so that Igbo and African values will be preserved and maintained for posterity. Data collection method for this research is mostly secondary data collection. The research concludes with proffering some suggestions on how moral values of the African people, especially among the Igbo people can be restored, retained and maintained.

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Introduction

Everywhere in the world, there is a general cry over the moral degradation affecting the average Igbo moral values. There is a current and recurrent materialism which has gripped and crippled the Igbo person, leading to the generation of a new set of vice and material values courted by both the old and the young. This moral challenge is mostly imposed on Igbo set of moral values by quick money making and easy popularity. Money is at the root of this materialistic philosophy and has become the biggest benchmark for a well-endowed and successful personality. In the words of Ani, Ome & Nwankwo (2014);

This material culture has spawned a new generation of immoral personalities who are selfish, self-centered, high criminal in intent, corrupt in management of state resources and educated without adequate character molding. We are beginning to witness the era of the “successful” Igbo man and woman without character and values. These new generations of Igbo people especially the younger generations have lost all sense of communal values which is different from a well-balanced and dignified community citizen who cares for others, puts others first and works for the common community good. It is now obvious that these morally nescient citizens cannot, in all honesty, claim to be communal citizens since they have lost their human dignity acquired over time from their Igbo forebears and forefathers. (p.1).

There is, furthermore, an erosion of core Igbo communal values as a result of the negative impact of the Eurocentric concept of the human person which elevates the importance of the individual personality over and above the interest of his society. In this Eurocentric concept of the individual, the interests and values nursed by the individual for his perpetuation and personality are eulogized and elevated to the level of state craft. In modern states such values manifest in the condemnable phenomenon of Igbo leaders who are corrupt, nepotistic, despotic and power hungry. The presence of such crop of leaders has also been worsened by the corrupting speed of globalization and the prevalence of global values which attack the roots of African communalism and communal values.

In the words of Mbiti (1990), In Africa, especially in Igbo land, a man who has lost his human dignity is no longer into touch with his fellows and his society’s values. (p.52). Such a morally derailed personality will continue to drift and dwell in a selfish world of only his dreams, interests and ambitions. His presence in governance becomes a

development disaster because he will fail in the first test of leadership which is to mobilize and carry his society along in every policy and program implemented by him.

Conceptual Clarification

It is important to make some clarifications of the key words as contained in the research topic. This will guide the readers to grasp the clear-cut understanding of the context in which they are used in the paper. The following are the keywords as contained in the topic of the work; Contemporary, Challenges, African, Cultural, Moral, Values, Igbo Perspective

Contemporary

Things that are contemporary are either happening at the same time or happening now. Contemporary art is recent art. In history class, if you hear that one famous person was a contemporary of another that means they lived at the same time. Contemporaries are people and things from the same time period. It is belonging to the same age; living or occurring in the same period of time. It also means existing or occurring at the present time and conforming to modern or current ideas in style, fashion, design, etc.

Challenges

A challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination to solve or manage. African, to arouse or stimulate especially by presenting with difficulties

African

African can be used as a noun or an adjective. As an adjective, it means of or connected with Africa, the continent that is south of the Mediterranean Sea, east of the Atlantic Ocean, and west of the Indian Ocean. As a noun, it means a native or inhabitant of Africa, especially a Black person of African ancestry. The term African, conceptually has to do with belonging to African. This informs that this paper discussed cultural moral heritage that belongs to Africa.

Cultural

Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including arts, beliefs and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called the way of life for an entire society. As such, it includes codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals and arts. According to Asikaogu (2018) who threw more light in the meaning of culture as follows;

Culture is passed on from one generation to another, through learning, transmitted in people writing, religion, music, clothes, cooking, and in what they do. Culture is more than just material goods, that is, things the culture uses and produces. Culture is also the beliefs and values of the people in that

culture. Culture also includes the way people think about and understand the world and their own lives. Thus, “culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another.” it is mankind primary adaptive mechanism.” (p.45).

Ejikeme, (2020) said the following on the meaning culture; Culture is the totality of the way of life of a group of people that has been developed, shaped and practiced over the years. Culture is the connective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. Hofstede (1980) also said that, the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group’s response to its environment. Jean (2002) opines further, Culture is the product of a complex inheritance constantly submitted to scrutiny and the need to adopt to a constant conquest to achieve.

From a common ground culture is that which characterize a particular group of people and their very ways of life which differentiates them from other people. It is observed in the writings of African scholars that the distinctiveness and uniqueness of communalism is enshrined in its characteristics, principles and norms.

Moral

Morals are the prevailing standards of behavior that enable people to live cooperatively in groups. Moral refers to what societies sanction as right and acceptable. *Moral* comes from the Latin word *mores*, for habits. The moral of a story is supposed to teach you how to be a better person. If *moral* is used as an adjective, it means good, or ethical. If you have a strong moral character, you are a good member of society. If someone is a cheat and a liar, you might say, "She is not a moral person.

Values

Values are individual beliefs that motivate people to act one way or another. They serve as a guide for human behavior. Generally, people are predisposed to adopt the values that they are raised with. People also tend to believe that those values are “right” because they are the values of their particular culture. Some values have intrinsic worth, such as love, truth, and freedom. Other values, such as ambition, responsibility, and courage, describe traits or behaviors that are instrumental as means to an end.

Igbo Perspective

This has to do with the Igbo concept of moral value. It explores the Igbo worldview. Igbo Perspective is a way of Igbo people are thinking about and understanding something such as a particular issue or life in general.

Abridged History of Igbo People

The Igbo people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, known for their rich cultural heritage, history, and traditions. In this paper, there will be a review of the fascinating world of the Igbo people, exploring their history, culture, language, and traditional practices. The Igbo people are a socially and culturally diverse group of people who live primarily in southeastern Nigeria. This region is also called Igbo land. They comprise the total population of Nigeria; they are among the largest ethnic group in the country. Though the people are spread out between groups of villages, they share one common language, also called Igbo language. In fact, the term "Igbo" can be used to refer to the people, the language, or the land. Besides Nigeria, there are also large populations of Igbo in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Igbo are also sometimes called *Ibo*, though this is a misspelling that originated during the period of British rule in Nigeria

Culture of the Igbo People

Igbo culture is vibrant and multifaceted, with a strong emphasis on family, community, and tradition. Some key aspects of Igbo culture include: Extended Family System: The Igbo practice an extended family system where several generations live together in a single compound. The head of the family, typically the oldest male, holds significant authority. Igbo people are known for their peculiar cultures virtually in everything that involves Igbo people. According to Cook (2020):

Serious archaeological investigations of Igbo land have revealed evidence that the Igbo have lived in the region for thousands of years. The ancient man-made tools discovered in the area that date back to the Stone Age indicate that the culture was built largely around growing and harvesting yams. Over time, the Igbo improved their technological skills, using iron to craft sophisticated metal tools that allowed them to better utilize the resources provided to them by the surrounding forests; they could cut down fruits from tall palm trees, which allowed them to process the fruit into various edible and medicinal oils. Historians often attribute the large modern-day population density of the Igbo people to their ability to effectively cultivate yams and their ability to use the oil palm tree in many different ways. (p.1).

During the Middle Ages, the northern Igbo Kingdom of Nri maintained a sphere of religious and political influence through the rule of a priest-king called an *EzeNri*. The *EzeNri* was in charge of managing trade, diplomatic relations, and religious matters on behalf of the Igbo subgroup known as the Nri people. The kingdom persisted as the main authority well into the 16th century but began to weaken due to the growing power of neighboring kingdoms, as well as the beginning of European colonization.

The Language of the Igbo People

The Igbo language, also known as “Igbo” is a tonal language with a rich vocabulary and distinct linguistic characteristics. It is primarily spoken in Nigeria, but you can find Igbo-speaking communities around the world due to migration and the Igbo diaspora. The language is written using various scripts, including the Roman alphabet, which was introduced by Christian missionaries during the colonial period.

Some highly esteemed Values in Igbo People’s Culture and Challenges

Igbo people have great value to certain cultures, especially when it has to do with morality and customs. In this segment of this paper the presenter will make known some cultural values of the Igbo people, afterwards will also review the challenges to the extinction of these cultural values of the Igbo people.

The Cultural Values of the Igbo People

The culture of the people is of prime importance to them and the value of a culture to a people can never be fully measured in monetary terms. The expression “human values” is used by a lot of people with different interpretations and meanings, and under different contexts. Value is a universal dignity and concern which is used often in moral, philosophical, legal, social and economic discourses. Ejiofor (2002) said that;

The love of culture is not blind, that it is mystic and spiritual. Culture instills pride in man. Without it, the past seems non-existent and the present seems suspended without pillars or props. The Cultural values of the Igbo people are their reputation. People without culture do not exist. Even America as the world’s wealthiest nation still lay emphasis on cultural identity. They eat with fork in the right hand to differentiate themselves from the British who eat with the left. (p.158).

What is culture among the Igbo people? It is a complex whole valued by all peoples since time immemorial, a treasure highly prized by the world’s greatest nations, an apple of the eye of many tribes and primitive peoples, a possession daily glorified by many other Nigerian peoples. The cultural values of the Igbo people can be seen in their language, art and crafts, festivals, dishes, clothing, oral traditions, among others. Morality is the number one value cherished by the Igbo people. Igbo people have a lot of morals that guides their society and help to checkmate the behaviour of people.

However, respect for elders has gone into extinct. The children, youths and adults have a rule on how they should live that portrays the Igbo culture. Children are told a lot of folktales during moonlight by the elders that depict humility, courage, and obedience. Youths, through social organizations during initiation ceremonies, are guided with

some norms that help them to live an honest and transparent life. The adults are penalized for their wrong doings. Masquerading serves as a social function bringing people together as one during festivals. In Igbo cultural setting of the past, people lived in villages and groups, and the social ties was close. However today, the city life has crushed the bond of communal ties. Ejikeme (2020) said:

People live in cities a times without knowing the names of their neighbours for months. Among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo people have adopted the western life and have held tenaciously to it Frankly speaking, we are not proud of our culture. The issue of language has been a problem in Igbo cultural values. English language fluency is mistaken for intelligence. The local languages which is the most efficient medium of education, becomes outmoded because of displacement. It is lamentable that most Igbo people, especially elites cannot communicate in their mother tongue. Most parents do not consider it crucial to communicate with their children in their mother tongues, which should rather be the first language. They are well pleased when the children are fluently speaking English. Instead of an Igbo person showing his identity through speaking Igbo language, he will prefer to speak in other languages (preferably Yoruba or Hausa). (p.158).

A lost language is a lost culture, while a lost culture is a loss of invaluable knowledge lost. To this preceded idea Kwame (2010) opined as follow;

The Igbo people begin their ceremonies by presenting and breaking kolanuts with accompanying prayers such as ndibeanyi ta oji (our people ate kolanut) ,ndi be anyiojiabianu (our people kolanut has come), onyewetaraojiwetarandu (who brought kolanut brought life).....In the Igbo culture therefore, no traditional ceremony is deemed to have commenced without the presentation of kolanuts. Clothing in Igbo culture is another value that should be looked into. (pp.158-159).

Baffoe (2005) noted that these myths and taboos were needed at some point in the society's development to regulate life, many of which have outlived their usefulness as a result of urbanization and the trends of modern development. Today, most of all the cultural values have changed drastically due to influence of globalization.

The Igbo extraction of African people possesses some moral values that are centered on communal values which are necessary to exhibit by every Igbo person both in the home and in diaspora. Living antithetically to these values is a taboo and attracts some punishment. In the traditional Igbo cultural context, taboos refer to those prohibitions aimed at the promotion of moral values, religious sanctity, social cohesion and cosmic harmony. According to Anedo (2019) said, taboos are a set of prohibited actions, a set of morals binding on a people; the violation of which attracts a severe punishment

which may include death penalty. The institution and observance of taboos help in the peaceful co-existence of members of the community. It helps in the projection and promotion of social integration.

Violators of taboos are seen as agents of socio-political disintegration and chaos. The institution of taboo targets the holistic orderliness of life and all human activities and interaction in Igbo land. Ogbu (2013) observes that the ideology of abomination "nsọala"... cuts across the entire Igbo land and made manifest in their artistic, social and religious as well as political traditions and patterns of leadership. He went further to note that it is a heinous crime to commit abomination against the earth, Ala. Such crime requires sacrifices for its expiation. Okeke (2019) said; the traditional Igbo see aru (taboo) as norms, the breach of which, whether voluntary or involuntary unleash some mystical sanctions not only on the individual but also on the entire society. (p.19).

Igbo People's Cultural values and Challenges

It is necessary to enumerate some of the personality traits Igbo people are currently losing as a result of moving away from their traditional value system and western life influences. Ebigbo (2002) in outlines and explains these lost values and acquired vice as follows:

Disrespect to elders: The Igbo today obviously has more regard to material wealth than he has for human beings. He has no respect for elders. He feels that everybody is equal in all spheres of life in as much as he fends for himself. This has given them bad reputation in other parts of Nigeria.

Selfishness: He has more concern for himself than for others. He is such that forgets every other person when it comes to satisfying himself. This has made him infamous in Nigeria.

Arrogance: By all indication, an Igbo man is the type that feels very arrogant to reckon with others at any point in time. He believes that he is a king in his home in as much as nobody feeds him and his family, therefore damning every other person and the people in authority. This has made him infamous in Nigeria.

Transparency or Proven Character: An Igbo man, of course, is naturally endowed with and exhibits a proven character or transparency. This results from the Igbo belief that "imebi aha nwaogaranyakaogbugbuya" as well as their belief in the Igbo customary meaning that "Neze aha kauba". This transparency still exists but has been badly battered by the present phenomenon of 419 (What is known as advance fee fraud under Nigerian criminal law). This is a reflection of OzoEze symbolism propagated by the Nri system. This Igbo value and characterization is in accord with what Norris (2001) would regards as the roots of a federal democracy and its survival.(p.12).

Self-Esteem and Self-Belief: An Igbo man is one who strongly believes in self-esteem and self-belief. That is, the consciousness that whatever is worth doing is worth doing well and the desire to attain the peak of his target in it. The Igbo man has strong self-reliance in his ability to achieve his goal in life. He believes that there is nothing any man could do to him and could not be even better.

Dedication to Duty: An Igbo man is known to be highly dedicated to duty resulting in his belief that in whatever field of endeavour he or she is found he must remain an achiever.

Rectitude: An Igbo man believes that he is being cultured in doing things in a proper or universally accepted manner. In other words, he is bestowed with pure sense of standardization.

Ambition: An Igbo man is no doubt a man full of ambition. He wants to be at the top or ahead of others in every field of life.

Perseverance: An Igbo man is one who always perseveres in his struggle to make ends meet. He is extra resilient to retrogressive factors of life. No matter the ups and downs in his struggle to survival, an Igbo man believes that giving up is not the best, so the end determines the means. This is a reflection of Ikenga symbolism.

Self-Control: An Igbo man is one always full of self-control. His all-time consciousness is to respect and avoid disgrace to himself. This imbibes in him the sense of self-control. Again, this is another Ikenga quality.

Bravery: This is one of the natural attributes of an Igbo man. An Igbo man is conscious at all times of self-defense and the desire to conquer. This is found in the Igbo adage “mberede nyiri dike, mana mberede k’oji ama dike” meaning: surprise attack conquers the brave but it is also that which marks the brave.

Hard Working: The Igbo people are hard workers, because they naturally believed in the philosophy that one must always be the architect of his or her own destiny. Therefore, they determined to work hard and succeed. This is again another Ikenga symbolism.(pp.43-46).

Most people of Igbo extraction are worried at the alarming rate of social ills bedeviling the Igbo nation. These social evils which debauch authentic Igbo socio-cultural communal moral values include violent crimes like kidnapping of fellow Igbo brothers and sisters for ransom, hired assassinations, armed robbery, political thuggery, prostitution of the high order among the young people, etc. These socio-cultural eddies not only pose security risks to people but also paralyze social, religious and economic life of the Igbo people.

Preservation of Igbo Cultural Moral Values from Challenges

It is necessary as the truth of Igbo people's cultural values has been enumerated and discussed broadly with its challenges, it is necessary to further discuss the remedial measures of these discussed challenges in Igbo people's cultural values. It is fairly evident that Igbo customs and values seemingly are on the highway to extinction. Their fleeting existence, already stark, shows very slim chance of surviving the ferocious erosion of modernity. According to Odegbo (2016) who has expressed displeasure on the speed dwindling of the customs and values Igbo people thus;

Sadly, very little effort is being made by the Igbo people to forestall the progressive decline. Everybody, it would seem, acquiesces to the decay. From the hallowed to the mundane nothing is spared the buffet of the cruel fate. Coronations, title-taking, burial ceremony, marriage ceremony, breaking of kola nut, to the least of these customs and values have lost the touch of tradition. All are now in acute struggle against eroding influences that appear decided to lay them waste. Nobody is sure where the development is headed, but it certainly does not lead to any cultural flourish. (p.1).

Each time I think about this development and the possible solution, I flinch from the thought, not so much for the decline as it is for the fate that awaits non-preservation of these customs and values for the coming generation. When did Igbo people get to this sorry pass? What, if any, are the redeeming possibilities? Any relics for the coming generation and what is the assurance the bequest will be appreciated? Nothing is revered any more in Igbo land. Worst still is the violation of Eze title. Apart from turning official traditional event into an éclat of language competitiveness, the violation of Igweship has caused Igbo people to appear less serious in the eyes of their neighbours. The sudden craze for titles and, in particular, the coveting of *Eze* Igbo title by one that is new in various states outside Igbo land has further dwindled the authority of an otherwise elevated kingship institution.

A deeper understanding of the African culture and its peoples will ultimately breed a profound respect for, and embrace of, African traditional values which, when properly understood, reveal to the discerning mind a wisdom of the ages, capable of providing some solutions to our contemporary search for sustainable development and a peaceful, equitable society. As argued and pointed by Ike & Edozien (2001):

There is need to harness the innovative potential in our societies and cultures with a view to effecting a sustainable and self-reliant rationalization and modernization of communities. Our challenge is to search for appropriate paradigms and expressions to define and evaluate cultural, social, ethical and religious conditions relevant to our many African societies (pp. 3-4).

The starting point of retrieving that cultural loss is the immediate recovery of cultural human values. The recovery of cultural human values will recreate the concept of dignity of man as what ought to be revered and not for slaughtering and butchering for quick money-making purposes. Respect for the dignity of man will make speed loss of cultural moral values among the Igbo people wane. If this concept will be widely taught among the Igbo people both home and abroad, it will initiate a lot of assistance towards the recovery of the speed loss of Igbo cultural moral values. In preserving the moral value, it is worthy to note that value is intrinsically linked to the creation of wholesome individuals and socially acceptable character. According to Idiodi (2000) opined that, a society or a nation is great in nothing which is loose or low in moral character (pp.16-24). Character molding and stabilization in the human personality is at the heart of successful communal and state building using the contributions of morally responsible citizens. Value is attached to a human being because he has the capacity to be a responsible person. When a responsible human agent enters into his own creative endeavours, not only should he avoid anything counter to universal human value, he should also use his capacity of rationality to achieve a meritorious form of human value by developing a virtuous character and by engaging in moral conduct. A person develops his virtues as a means to gain his values and achieve flourishing happiness. Living according to moral principles contributes to one's having a sense of dignity/

Conclusion

It is worthy to note the following as the paper is concluding; it is obvious that the Igbo people are losing speedily their inherent sense of Igbo cultural values as a result of globalization, modernization and influence of western life styles. Igbo cultural values can be preserved as part of the African moral values when they are challenged by societal pressures by prioritizing on human dignity as part of human values. The Igbo man increasingly finds it difficult to successfully grapple with the challenges and problems of modernity revolving around the loss of his cultural moral values as a result of consistent corruption, quest for wealth and materialism and globalization which results from the loss of Igbo people indigenous cultural values. It is the duty of the Igbo people societal leader to raise alarm and bring to the notice of Igbo people the challenges the Igbo moral cultural values are facing and to start proffering solution beyond the prescriptions in this paper.

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