
Igbo Cultural Values and the Effect of Globalization: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract: *This work makes analysis of global influence on Igbo cultural values. No man is an island to himself, he is a being in relation with others, to be is to be with others. In the same vein, no nation or tribe is an island to itself. In the process of interactions, there is an interaction of cultures; thus, a borrowing and diffusion of cultures among nations. But unusual and unfortunate is the domination of one culture over the other. Igbo culture and world view have continued to be affected or suffer the forces of globalization. The challenging task is on how to blend the Igbo cultural values with the trends of globalization. It is obvious that globalization is actually affecting the mindset of the Igbo man on how to take the good things of globalization and still maintain the uniqueness of his cultural identity. The method of this is analysis. This will break the negative impact and influence of global culture over Igbo cultural values. With the rise of global culture, western culture, western norms, and practices are gradually being transported across the globe as the standard and acceptable way of behaviour. Igbo is the hardest hit in this regard, the once rich, cherished and dynamic African culture has been diluted beyond repair, if not totally eclipsed. This work therefore, is an attempt to assess the impact of globalization on Igbo cultural values. Therefore, this reveals that the Igbo culture is fast running the risk of cultural atrophy consequent of the current logic of globalization.*

Keywords: *Critical analysis, Igbo cultural values, globalization*

Introduction

Globalization is a medium and phenomenon that has brought a lot of changes in the entire world which has to do with political, cultural, religious, social –integrations. It is very obvious that globalization has turned the entire world into a global village. Communication has become so easy and fast that you can speak to anybody in the human race in less than one second through communication media like the G.S.M., Twitter, Facebook, advanced computers. The Igbos is fully involved in these global changes which have actually affected every part of human race and continent on the planet in varying degrees. The Igbos grapples with the dilemma of its status in the present globalizing movement especially with regards to its cultural values. It is also a problem on how the younger generation are being affected by these global changes.

It is also observed with dismay the confusion in the mind of young generation, who are actually being cut off from their cultural roots due to global influences. Again, the Igbo mind wonders to what extent he can still maintain his cultural identity today in the face of globalization. Nkrumah, opined that: “African history through the centuries has accumulated much of confused teachings and orientations from external influence, colonial imperialists, Islamic and Euro Christians elements, thus, producing equally confusing and conflicting vision”¹. At this juncture, we can to see to what extent the cultural values and practices of Igbo nation have been shaped and actually affected by the globalization process. However, Igbo

cultural values like others are in crises today as a result of globalization and modernization which have eaten deep into the fabrics of Igbo culture. Moreover, this work tends to present the negative effects and influences thereby presenting possible ways through which these evil influences will be checked.

Chapter 1

Globalization: A Disguised Modernism

Globalization is not a single concept that can be defined and encompassed within a set time from, nor is it a process that can be defined clearly with a beginning and an end. Globalization involves economic integration, the transfer of policies across borders the transmission of knowledge, cultural stability, the power, it is a global process, a concept, a revolution, and an establishment of global market free from socio- political control. Globalization encompasses all of these things. It is a concept that has been defined variously over the years, with some connotations referring to progress, development and stability, integration and cooperation, and others referring to regression, colonialism, and destabilization. Despite these challenges, this term brings with it a multitude of hidden agendas. An Individuals political ideology, geographic location, social status, cultural background, and ethnic and religious affiliation provide the background that determines how globalization is interpreted. Thomas Larsson stated that: “globalization is the process of wind 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 other side of the world.”²

The world as a historical interaction of people and societies is undergoing dynamic transformation of modern colonization called globalization before this modern colonization. Before this modern colonization, it is evident that colonial expansion of the west to the so- called ‘third world’ was from outside a global process that was ethnocentric, authoritarian, patriarchal and destructive of nature. Alvin observed that: “The dawn of this new civilization is the single most explosive fact of our time. Humanity faces the deepest social faces the deepest social upheaval and creative restructuring of all time. A global revolution is underway. Humanity faces the deepest social upheaval and creative restructuring of all the time. A global revolution is underway.”³

Furthermore, globalization has many implications for the world as biophysical planet. It is a complicated transformation based on the concept of total market, a transformation that seeks to incorporate the entire globe in a new international order by exalting the economic factor as the only source of meaning and value and teaches a new- liberal doctrine of economic self- interest in which the free market is wrongly assumed to be objective and fair. However, not minding the positive aspect of globalization, its ethnocentric, patriarchal authoritarian character is obvious and evident everywhere .Evidently, globalization destroys cultural practices and values in this contemporary dispensation, the younger generation look up to European ways of doing things as the ideal because of accompanying ramification of globalization namely: global communications and transnational advertising.

Moreover, although globalization makes the old dream of making the world one come to reality, yet in many ways, it is the colonialism of the past that is at work. It affects the whole world especially the Igbos with its specific values, ultra-modern sophisticated tools of communication, variety of processes, possibilities and positions.

Looking at it from the African point of view with particular reference to the Igbo nation, this cultural structure of globalization presents specific problems. Traditional Igbo culture emphasizes values such as community, family and respect for elders, life, and hospitality. But these cultural values come into strong confrontation with the western influence through globalization. The dominant geo culture of the west is an overwhelming force against traditional African cultures.

Chapter 2

Igbo Nation

Igbo land is the home of the *Igbo* people and it covers most of southeast Nigeria. The *Igbo* people, natively called *Ndi-Igbo* are the third largest ethnic group in Nigeria. *Igbo* people are said to be the most dispersed ethnic community in Nigeria. Their migration started in the early days of the slave trade and continues to be felt to this day. *Igbo* people are mostly traders, farmers, and craftsmen, with agriculture being the most dominant activity. presently, they occur in Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Abia, Ebonyi, states and parts of Rivers and Delta states, although they are present in all parts of the country and beyond because of their business interest and quest for wealth.

However, looking at the language of the *Igbos* which is called *Asusu Igbo*, their main religion is Christianity and few others practise traditional religion. The *Igbo* culture includes the various customs, practices and traditions that comprise archaic practices as well as new concepts. These customs and traditions include the *Igbo* people's visual arts, use of language musical, dance forms, attire, and language dialects. A notable cultural practice by the *Igbo* is the new yam festival which is held annually.

Chapter Three

Cultural values

Culture derives its semantic origin the Latin word ‘Cultura’ which means cultivation of the soil, and by extension, to the cultivation of mind and spirit. Different scholars define culture in various ways. Taylor defines culture as” the complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a members of society.”⁴ Others see culture as people’s way of life.

The word culture has no univocal definition. It is commonly define as the people’s way of life, meaning the way they do things. Culture is the characteristics of a particular group of people, “defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts.”⁵ Culture

is also defined as “the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and effective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. These shared patterns identify the members of a culture group while also distinguishing those of another group.”⁶ A people’s culture includes their beliefs, rule of behaviour, language, technology, rituals, art, mode of dressing, producing, cooking, food, religion, political, and economic systems. This explains why Taylor opined that: culture is a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. This implies that a people culture is unique to them and functional in the society that practices it.

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.”⁷ it is mankind primary adaptive mechanism.”⁸ 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. African society is an embodiment of cultures, culture that regulate principles and norms. It is noted in the writing of Africans and non- Africans scholars that the features and characteristics of communalism is one that takes the welfare and the well being of its members serious. This sense of harmony it gives is what defines Africans.

However, cultural values can be defined as the worth, usefulness important by the amount of other things for which it can be exchanged. Although individual or group of individuals may choose what they call their values, cultural values go deeper than values because, cultural values are transmitted and acquired not freely chosen. It is also inscribed deeply in the spirit of the people and also in their history. Igbo as a nation has the family and its name, sacredness of human life, chastity, respect for elders and parents, marriage and hospitality etc. What this portrays is that cultural values are intrinsically positive and potentially constructive Therefore, acknowledging African cultural values. Pope John11, admonished African thus,” Preserve carefully your African roots. Safeguard the values of your culture, know them and are proud of them: Respect for life, family solidarity and support for relatives, respect for the old the sense of hospitality, judicious preservation of traditions the taste for feasts and symbols.”⁹ These cultural values are currently be threatened by negatives influence or globalization as well as western unbounded excesses.

PRINCIPLE OF BROTHERHOOD

The true spirit of African Socialism is grounded on brotherhood, egalitarian and cooperation. Nyerere on his Ujamaa describes African socialism as attitudes of the mind where everybody cares for one another. This attitude of the mind justifies the creed of the first articles of the Tanu union which upholds the unity of brotherhood. This “I believe on the human brotherhood and the unity of Africa.”¹⁰

This narrowing it down to Igbo cultural values, it is very clear that Igbo cultural values one characterized by brotherly understanding, mutual respect, equal sharing and an acceptance of obligation to work. This principles of brotherhood can be manifested in various ways like, sense of community, sense of good relation, sense of sacredness of life, sense of respect for authority and elders. A popular Igbo proverb comes to mind here to express Igbo sense of community. It says “go the way that many people go; if you go alone, you will have reason to lament”.¹¹

Igbo idea of security and its value depends on personal identification with and within the community. The community is the custodian of the individual; hence he must go where the community goes. The community within the transcendental becomes the custodian of the individuals’ idea. This is why, beyond the community- clan- for the Igbo there stood the void in strong and ever present contrast. Outside this ancestrally chartered system there lay no possible life, since a man without lineage is a man without citizenship; without identity, and therefore, without allies...., or as the Kongo puts it, “a man outside his clean is like a grasshopper which has lost its wings.”¹² It means that the community offers the African the Psychological and ultimate security as it gives its members both physical and ideological identity. This principle of brotherhood can also be seen in the community attitude to work. It is true that “when job had to be done, the whole community turned out with supplies and music and proceeded to sing and dance its way through to the successful conclusion of each particular chore. In this way work was converted into a pleasurable procedure pleasure.”¹³

Generally speaking, the good will and brotherly atmosphere normally inspired and sustained during the work period; but music; justifies its usage. But what is more important is the solidarity. Its fosters. Thus, Obiechina states: “Whether the musical situation is meant to provide entertainment or is created for ritual and religious purpose. The same, to bring the community together”¹⁴

The value cherished in this community should enable them know that the other man is his brother as a human being. Again this spirit or sense of brotherhood is inculcated to the young one through socialization and acculturation. A child is imbued with the communitarian spirit so that, as he grows up, his solidarity with the members of the community becomes stronger. Community on this spirit of solidarity in Igbo community Uchendu observes that: “community spirit is very strong among Igbo almost from the first the individual is aware of his dependence on his also realizes the necessity of making his own contributions to the group to which he owes so much. He seldom, if ever, becomes reality detached from the group wherever he may live.”¹⁵

FAMILY HOOD

The fundamental, ontological and cordial unity of African communalism is the family, within which there is unity, freedom and equality. Nyere in his philosophy of Ujama noted that: “The foundation and objectives of African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies. He does not form an alliance with the brethren for the extermination of the non-brethren. He rather regard all men as his brethren as members of the extended family.”¹⁶ It is interesting to note here the Nyere interprets communalism through the idea of family system because of the essence of family in Africa setting is seen as one unity in a single whole. African family life has to do with more than the nuclear family of father, mother

and children. It encompasses and constituted the extended family in which all human beings both the men and women including the “Living dead are involved. “The African society is regarded as one big family, extended family system where there is a strong feeling of blood relationship.”¹⁷ It is the part of the culture of African people to express that all men belong to a common fraternity.

The structure and kinship ties in a conventional *Igbo* family clutter little from those found in most other societies. According to Ejiofor, the typical *Igbo* family consist of father, mother, children. Ogbal agreed with Ejiofor, but pointed out that the *Igbo* do not view the family to consists of only the man, his wife (wives) and children: family also includes the man’s servants, slaves, and those for whom he provides. The father is the accepted head of the family and the traditional *Igbo* family normally lives in a walled compound, consisting of at least two houses; one for the father and the other for the mother. Adult sons’ share the fathers house, while daughter and juvenile son’s have with their mother.

In contemporary *Igbo* society, this traditional residents structure has changed, distinction is no longer made between the father’s and mother’s houses due to globalization. It is also because a modern house, with a living room, can serve the entire family more than any other act of kingship or relationship with *Igbo* society. Again, the family is the greatest source of intimacy and solidarity. The *Igbo* views the family institution as the foundation of the *Igbo* society. Its importance lies not only in its being an agent of cultural conditioning for young members of society but also in that marriage and procreation, which takes at the family level. The family therefore, is indispensable for the continuity of the *Igbo*.

It is from this point of view that the intimate and personal bond between members of *Igbo* community could be said to have an ontological dimension. In other words, the bond gets its ontological dimension from the fact that there is a natural relationship between the living members of the community and the ancestors. Commenting on the ontological dimension of solidarity among the *Igbo*,

Nzominwu has this to say:

*The Igbo community denotes first and foremost... ontological equality of human relations. It is ontological in so far as all members of the community are believed to descend from a common ancestor. Everyman is linked to his parents on the natural level. He receives life from them, depends on them to grow up. His parents in turn are bound to their grandparents, etc this link which binds all members of the community or clan who are believed to be descendants of the same ancestors. Every one consider himself as members of a definite community and as a part of the whole.*¹⁸

This kind of bond among the members of the community does not come about by chance, as is the case with the created bond of an ordinary social group. It is precisely because its uncreated nature that it assumes that fundamental significance in the life of the people.

SACREDNESS OF LIFE

Igbo world is principally anthropocentric such that human life is sacred and is immensely valued. However, since life is sacred, it must be protected and respected. Willful murder is an abomination in African tradition and cultures, and therefore human life cannot be taken away with impunity, hence

Dwrkings writes... “human life has an intrinsic, innate value, that human life is sacred just in itself; and that the sacred nature of a human life begins when the biological life begins, even before the creature whose life it is has movement or sensation or interest or rights of its own.”¹⁹ He continued by saying that the fact that human life has intrinsic value can provide a strong reason to object violently to liberation “because the important idea we share is that human life has not just intrinsic but sacred value.”²⁰ Abortion is therefore wrong because it would disregard and insult “the intrinsic value, this sacred character of any stage or form in human life.”²¹

This purely true and obtainable in *Igbo* cultural value, the *Igbo* value life and its sacred so much that any attempt to short is seriously framed act. The *Igbo* value and recognizes the dignity and worth of the individual by reason of the life of the individual it also places the dignity and worth of the individual with respect and regard in *Igbo* cultural value.

In the *Igbo* cultural value, it is framed at in the hearers and heinous destruction of human life in the name of euthanasia and assisted suicide is a great threat to the sanctity and sacredness of human life. This is because the *Igbo* belief that all life comes right to take it back and these are cultural values. What this portrays is that cultural values are intrinsically positive and potentially constructive.

Acknowledging African cultural values, Pope John Paul admonished Africans thus:

*Preserve carefully your African roots. Safeguard the values of your culture. You know them and are proud of them, respect for life, family solidarity and support for relatives, respect for the old, the sense of hospitality, judicious preservation of traditions, the taste for feasts and symbols.*²²

It is therefore, unfortunate, that these *Igbo* cultural value are now threatened by negative effects of globalization as well as Western unbounded excesses. They are at crossroads with globalization either to be or not to be.

THE EFFECT OF GLOBALIZATION ON *IGBO* CULTURAL VALUE

Before the advent of Europeans to African, Africans particular reference nation to *Igbo* have a well evolved cultural parches. Now, globalization has made profound impact on the culture and religious of the *Igbo* people, uprooting the people in most cases from the comfort of their culture and religious with European cultural background.

This profound impact of globalization on the culture of the *Igbo* people has placed the *Igbo* mind in a cultural Dilemma. This global influence has eliminated *Igbo* from their ancestral cultural

practices and yet not deeply rooted in the new culture they embraced. The economic and political structure evolved by the *Igbo* people to attend to their basic needs was greatly affected and very highly weakened especially at the *Umunna* level. With the weakening of the *Umunna* political system enforcement of religious and cultural values was highly eroded.

Lamenting on the devastating effects of globalization on *Igbo* cultural values, Oni opted that: “the situation in *Igbo* today is so pathetic as a result of the gradual admittance of Western culture at the detriment of our own culture.”²³ *Igbo* has consequently changed from a land of culture, nature of tradition and rural setting where the cockcrow signals the dawn of a new day, to a land of urban dwellers with all the evils associated with it. *Igbo* traditional way of doing things and its cultural practices gave the way for foreign way of doing things as *Igbo* because fully “westernized”. Western culture now is regarded as frontline civilization. *Igbo* ways of doing things became primitive, archaic and regrettably an acceptable in public domain. Again, not only were certain aspects of the material culture in the colonies also lost the power and sense of cultural continuity such that it becomes practically impossible to recover the ability to strive for cultural progress on their own terms. Therefore, supporting this Mimiko argued:

*The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was unplanted. Traditional African systems of conflict resolution were destroyed and, in their places, nothing was given. The diacritic process rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new group of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the art and act of subjugation of the mass of the people in the service of colonialism.*²⁴

Therefore the destruction of *Igbo* socio-cultural fabric left the *Igbo* mind confused and in a dilemma. Uprooted from the cultural setting he is familiar with. The *Igbo* mind is planted in a whirlwind of foreign cultures that has little or no meaning to him. Therefore, the *Igbo* man is a state of confusion because they left behind the cultural values and practices of his forefathers and is now struggling to find meaning to the contemporary and new foreign culture. Again, the *Igbo* is torn between the nostalgic feeling of going back to the cultural milieu he is used to but which unfortunately has be described to him as backward barbaric and archaic, and especially trying to understand what the new culture of Western civilization with its disjointed notion about reality holds for him. Based on this Arowolo lamented that:

*It is appalling to note that two hundred years or so of colonization were not only destructive in terms of cultural heritage and values for which Africa was famous before colonialism but also precariously retrogressive as the continent was robbed of decades of opportunities of self developments, opportunities of self-government, and indeed, opportunities of self-styled technological developmental.*²⁵

This made *Igbo* cultural practices and value to looked down upon. It equally made most *Igbo* to jettison the pride of the culture and have a preference for anything. European whether it is offensive to *Igbo* cultural and moral values or not.

Evaluation/ conclusion

Globalization has seriously affected the *Igbo* Generally. Its implication and negative impact cannot be undermined. Politically, the quest for personal power at any price and risk is undemocratic, unjust and immoral. The individualism which have affected the *Igbo* communal spirit and oneness will continue to have negative impact in the future generation. The “we” spirit is gradually being replace by “I” spirit and that has been the reason why Nigeria in Nigeria and *Igbo* in particular.

Again, globalization also negates all the ideas of cultural relativity and cultural pluralism such that today, *Igbo* suffers from crises of identity because of the importation of foreign values; globalization has equally destroyed our cultural values and also the uniqueness of natural cultures and identities.

Therefore, Ekwuru optined: “from a purely socio-cultural perspective, it can neither be qualified as traditional nor can it be adequately described as modern in the real sense of the word.”²⁶ He further assert; “that many villages and towns obviously had stopped performing the annual rituals or regeneration and where it is still done, it is benefit of its original meaning and intention.”²⁷

Igbo have been badly effected by the evil wind of globalization and modernalism. This is why Ehusani observed that; “nowadays personal relations, and the overwhelming sense of the sacred, have been interested and obscured by the cankerworm of Western materialism and individualism.”²⁸

Therefore, globalization is a great challenge to *Igbo* land cultural values and heritage, so, man, woman, and contemporary generation should fold their hands in lamentation, but should stand strongly to this difficult challenge. The *Igbo* people should take their destiny into their hands and acts to corrects the anomaly urgently having the words of Kenneth Kaunda in mind who says:

*“The way things are going; African may be the last place where man can still be man”! He goes on to say that the West may have its technology, and the East its spiritualism, but Africa must rediscover its humanism and cherish it.*²⁸

Therefore, this cultural contact has brought about a forced acculturation that has left the rich cultural heritage of *Igbo* in a precarious condition of imminent extinction.

Finally, the *Igbo* cultural values and heritage having suffered from the cultural onslaught, must therefore try to adjust, take what is good for and reject absolutely what stifles its cultural development, and equally contribute its positive impact and valves to the world.

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