

CULTURAL IMPERATIVES IN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

An obvious tendency in the nature of modern development is the overpowering influence of Westernization. We now live in the midst of a technocracy being monitored by the west. This has been given a psychological anchorage that, in nation like Nigeria, our policy for development seems to be undermining the potential in our culture and tradition. We have tacitly accepted a separation of Tradition and Modernity. Thus, our leaders with serious tenacity embrace globalization, deregulation, privatization and readily ponder to western recommendation. Meanwhile, there is a pervading menace of unproductive corruption prebandalism, financial recklessness, crass materialism, uncritical adoption of foreign paradigm and trivialization of indigenous initiatives. It is pertinent to note that development has a cultural basis, its pattern is motivated by reality within a given culture. It does not thrive on holistic import of artifacts across cultural latitude without prior look into the expediency and workability of such. With reference to Africa, development pattern must ensue from the people's experience and integrated to the global network in pragmatic nature. It is not transferred technology nor a consumer's economy. It is not attainable at the undermining of indigenous initiative and the strong ethos that define our brotherhood. So, a thorough hermeneutic of development in Africa must pay crucial attention to the cultural imperatives, the ethos and perception of development as an organic whole, not an absolute concentration on the technical and the economical.

Keywords: Africa, Culture, Development.

INTRODUCTION

Development is, surely, not the exclusive preserve of any culture. Surprisingly, counter reactions to this fact have been a serious assignment for many scholars in the world. Their utmost contention is that development is

culturally anchored in the West. So, civilization and development can only be realized by imitating this culture. In the light of this, they uphold the idea of one and only culture of development instead of development of cultures. The apparent fallacies and implication inherent in this position are not beyond the grasp of concerned scholars but self-satisfied apoliticism, intellectual atrophy, analytical errors, dictatorial political structure etc., conjoin to enhance easy transfusion of a dangerous psychology. Thus, we live in a consuming system of one sided development engineered by the west. With an embarrassing complacency, we now replace civilization or modernization with westernization.

In Nigeria, precisely in this dispensation there is a phenomenal plunge into globalization and many sophisticated policies for development. We pander, too much, to western orthodoxy. We celebrate textbook principles without venturing into cultural actualities, peculiarities and self-inflicted impediment from moral contravention.

Without delving into verbiage, this paper is technically designed to explore the cultural imperatives in African development.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

(Culture and Development)

Without venturing into some banalities on the definition of culture we explicitly put it that culture is a product of human attempt at understanding, conquering and co-existing with nature. It is the solution to the problem of survival. As Maquet puts it "culture is the totality of knowledge, and behavior, ideas and objects, that constitutes the common heritage of a people" (Jacques Macquet, 1972:4). In short "experience constitutes the root of all cultural activities" (Anyawu, K.C. 1983:21). So, "culture cannot be separated from human experience, therefore, understanding culture involves understanding the philosophy of experience" (Anyawu, K.C. 1983:21). "It is the summation of human experience codified in a way of life and world views" (Anyawu, O. Anyawu. 1998: 31). In science, technology, politics, religion, morality, economics, etc, there is always a cultural ambience. The variation in experience across national boundaries or even tribal conclaves underline multiplicity of experience for multiplicity of cultures. But the dynamical structure of culture of cultural life at the same time permit integration at a pragmatic level.

A very salient statement that merits a restatement in the above is that experience culture and development are dynamically related. And, the dynamic nature of human experience motivate a change over time in cultural experience. So, the inadequacy of the culture of a past era may not be sufficient basis is

disparage such culture, especially when it is viewed in tandem with the scope of that era.

What in exact terms in development? Without proper specification, development is neutral, especially with reference to meaning. Within, the contextual viewpoint of this essay, development simply means man's progressive, qualitative and continued self-improvement. As enunciated by Peter Berger "development entails good growth and desirable modernization" (Peter, B. 1976:35). In a more refined exegesis, Okwudiba Nnoli asserts

Development is a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual in society interacts with their physical, biological and inter human environment transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process (Okwudiba, Nnoli. 1981:36-37).

Without any fear of misconception, "development is the ability and the desire to use what is available to continuously improve the quality of life, liberate people from hazardous power and the influence of natural geo-physical world historical environment"(Ogundowole, E.K. 1988:91-91). For there to be development, the method in operation must lead to the realization of full human and environmental potential. "At the level of the individuals development implies increase skill, greater freedom and material well being" (Walter Rodney, 1972:9). This idea buttress the point that man must be the centerpiece of a good developmental policy. It is the man behind artifacts that should attract attention not the plethora of artifacts in the nation. There is an impelling need to generate men with requisite mental capacity to utilize resources to the maximum, transform the society and being transformed in the process.

THE NIGERIA'S SITUATION

Nigeria, the giant of Africa, is ridiculous dwarf in the comity of advanced nations. The nation itself is a big paradox a class example in contradictory simultaneity. It is a constant conjunction of poverty and plenitude. Too many resources at the nation's command but the mystery of poverty is just too embarrassing. A graphic pointer to this is expressed below:

Nigeria is one of the 13 or 14 poorest nations of the world. About 80% of the people live below the poverty line. In spite of the evident institutional and enrolment expansion of educational institutions, the rate of drop out has become very high and average literacy is still at the order of 50%. The educational

system has broken down at all levels (Yesufu, 2000:529).

Ironically, research indicates that there are highly celebrated engineers in Africa and many of the best are in Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation. Besides, the resume of those engineers seem intimidating but the same corporation is a victim of geometrically accelerated paralysis. Our four refineries seem to be ordinary numerals. The bulk of fuel use in this country is imported at a price that is not favourable to the economic emancipation of the common yolk.

Inasmuch as the nation is not an orphan in technological development, most of the sophisticated artifacts used in Nigeria are transferred from foreign sources. We live on borrowed technology and this is done with mind boggling bravado. Africa as a whole borrowed the wrong things from the West. As amplified by Ali Mazrui.

We borrowed the profit motive but not the entrepreneurial spirit. We borrowed the acquisitive appetites of capitalism but not the creative risk taking. We are at home with Western gadgets but are bewildered by Western workshops. We wear the wrist watch but refuse to watch it for the culture of punctuality. We have learnt to parade in display but not to drill in discipline. The West's consumption patterns have arrived but not necessarily the West's technique of production (Mazrui, 1990:5).

Indeed, there is an expatriate mentality that stifles indigenous ingenuity to embrace foreign gift.

Virtually, every African country is heavily and unaccountably – indebted; some have even gone completely bankrupt. We are going through a second slavery which is more vicious than the first: this time, the chains are gold and silver; the masters are the trans-national finance conglomerates; the slave sellers are the corrupt African political elites (Osundare Niyi, 1998:233). “Africa has been rightly described as the most debt distress region in the world’ (Julius Ihonvbere, 1992:91). Africa is not just the poorest continent today but in fact the only one backsliding. This is no exaggeration. The average growth rate of Africa between 1980 and 1989 was minus 2.2 per cent. Since then, no cheering news” (Uroh, 1998:97).

There is a holistic ethnic and political environment. This evidenced in ethnic jingoism and politically motivated assassination across the land. This has

generated a welter of social stresses and considerable disequilibrium. Dangerous contest for power, irrepressible ethnic militias, morbid tenacity for self perpetuation in power, anomalous bribery, nauseating corruption, prebendalism, etc., are the regular features in our political discourse.

Well, with the advent of globalization there seems to be a ray of reprieve for our economic and technological problem, at least to some levels. But, globalization is no a one sided phenomenon. It pays off in a multidirectional manner not in a unidirectional consumption and regulatory manner. Nigeria seems to be at the consuming end of all buyabes, to the extent that a sort of moral deregulation steer us in the face. This pattern of development is likely to grow worse rather than better. This is necessitated by the excessive push for globalization “and our increasing reliance on capital intensive organizational structures fostered by the new technologies of information and communication” (Anya. 1998: 26). This is aggravated by corruption, apathy and insensitivity of the cabal in power. Our policy planners were emphatical on the essence of self-reliance and empowerment of indigenous resources but practical commitment towards this seems to be absent.

It may be very sad to note even if all the gadgets in America and the United Kingdom are brought into Nigeria, we may not be developed. Even though we sleep and wake in globalization, our situation may not change “unless we can design and put in place an alternative strategy of development founded on knowledge and experience and interlinked with the global arrangement on terms defined by African conditions and traditions, the hope for a balance and sustained development would be a forlon hope” (Anya. 1998: 26-27).

There is no doubt the fact that science and technology motivates growth and accelerate development when they are properly handled. Their effects across cultures vary. “While the progress of science and technology affects life in all parts of the world, the consequences are different in different phases of development and in different physical and cultural environment” (Anya. 1998: 31). Science often besieged culture with dangerous tendencies. While culture in an ethics-rational manner tend to preserve and to forbid certain actions that may be socially damaging or destructive, science has a tendency to propel constant change. It always exploit possibilities the way they come but we seem not to be concerned with this tension in Nigeria. Everything has a Western touch. This is not too bad within a world of pragmatic utility but it will be very bad when done at the expense of humanity.

CULTURE AS AN IMPERATIVE FOR AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Development at the neglect of culture is an expensive tragedy. Culture embraces all the material and non-material expression of a people as well as the process with which the expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expression of a people (Andah, 1982:4-5). By implication, culture as, a culmination from experience is an unavoidable factor in development. It is either, it dictates the path or it is being affected by it. Certainly, development and culture are symbiotically connected.

As earlier affected to, science and technology, contemporary, are always in constant tension. The tension of conservation and change. And for there to be sustainable development, there must be a reconciliation between these two tendencies, in such a way that man's life will be positively affected.

Remarkably, cultural dynamism, to a very great extent enhances the influx of tendencies and artifacts but this must be tempered with caution. There is need for rational and critical moderation. Cultures are the subject to constant changes. Only by adaptation and adjustment of its culture is a society able to satisfy its changing needs within the context of its physical human environment.

In this way new inventions, technologies, ideas, values and beliefs come to be fitted into the continuum of a cultural ecosystem from time to time" (Uroh, 1996:10-16). Surely, Nigeria, to meet up with the global trend in development must understand this dynamism but this can only be meaningful when done in alignment with culture. Scientific achievement is the product of people and because people live in definite socio-economic settings, it is clear that the particular ways in which scientific activities manifest themselves are bound to be influenced by the fashion, modes and thinking of the period in which they operate (Weies, 1965:16). Humanity may surely be the same everywhere but condition varies and approaches differ.

An incursion into Ifa Oral Corpus will to a great extent show the essence of this cultural dynamism and rationality in developmental pursuit.

Gbirigbiri laa yi do
 Gbirigbiri laa yi koko
 Iyi a yido ki a ma ma yi koko
 Ki inu Alamo ma ba bajé
 Nitori odo ni igi, ikoko lamo

We roll a mortal
 We roll a pot

The way we roll a mortal
We should not roll a earthen pot
Otherwise the owner of the clay will unhappy.
A mortal is wooden, a pot is clay (Sophie Oluwole,
2000:108).

So, even though Africa may not be the banner we need at times yet we must align our needs and methods with our existential problems. For instance, it is not too bad to deregulate an economy but does that automatically translates to moral deregulation or acceptance of all foreign proposals. Surely not! It does not call us to a world of psychedelic dressing, anomalous inhumanity as seen in retrenchment of workers, etc. The thrust of the matter is that globalization and cultural dynamism does not mean uncritical transfer of ideas and artifact across cultural latitudes. Globalization is not absolute universalism, so it will be expedient to align or network it in consonance with stringent particularities that affect our landscape. So, it does not foreclose the expediency of cultural peculiarities.

Africa, Nigeria in particular, must note that science and technology are not the exclusive preserve of any culture, so there is need to develop a body of connected thought which will determine the general nature of our collective action. Our philosophy must find its weapons in the environment and living conditions of the African people" (Uroh , 1998:97). There is need to destroy the ridiculous fallacy that Africa culture is unscientific. Every culture is an amalgam of the technical and the rational. It often engenders the interpretation of forms of life. So we must take cognizance of this and tap our ingenuity not merely rely on globalization and transferred technology that will carry along with its variegate tendencies from the parent culture. We have a culture. Scientific attitude and rationality is not alien to that culture, so unnecessary cleavage between our science and development is irrationally offensive.

We must strengthen efforts at intellectualizing our indigenous language as pedagogical instrument for science and technology. We think with the logic of language but how can the dynamics of chemistry and science be clear to a person who is still striving to master the letters and grammar of English Language.

Pragmatically, active oath taking through the invocation of Orisas in the pantheon, the elemental and dangerous incantation may clip the wing of our corrupt politicians. It will be expedient for our oath system to be aligned without cultural life. The fundamental ethics of our cultural life must not be trifled with. "Since the ethics of a culture is a most important aspect of it, we may reformulate our problem as being with how to exploit all the resources of the modern world

for the benefit of our society without jeopardizing the strong point of our culture” (Wiredu, 1998:22). We still have a lot to learn from the communalistic ethos of primordial Africa. Although, this ethos is under a devastating strain but it amounts to a dangerous defeatism to yield morality to the force of any humanly created circumstances. Not even science because science cannot teach us those things that fall out of its methodology. “Factual consciousness is impotent in the understanding of culture and the fact that it has triumphed in the area of science does not mean that it is the appropriate technique with which we can approach the question of politics, religion, etc” (Anyawu, 1983:22-24). After all, if liberal democracy is giving us problem, why can't we recall and reenact the consensual democracy that is ontologically grounded in Africa? Why the apathy to a development of African contraceptive in the ways of our ancestors? Why? Why? Why?

It is important to remark that the African condition today poses enormous challenges but any attempt at embracing foreign technocracy at the utter neglect of our indigenous ingenuity and resources is a sure expedition to the mount of anomie. Cultural realities are potential determinants of the patterns and means of development. And, as culture itself will be dynamically affected by development then a critical reconciliation of culture and development in this age of globalization, is a pressing desideratum.

A RETHINK ON QUESTION OF CULTURE

This paper is not a holistic defence of the workability of African culture. An attempt at this renders it a mere apologetic. There are certain constrains or inhibitive aspects of this culture that must be reconsidered. There is a burdening materialism; crash materialism or unproductive things. Why frittering resources away on “owanbe parties”, why the craze for expensive jewelries? Why using cars that even the manufacturers have not used because of the financial implications? Why should a man in pursuit of traditional mandate of ancestors marry ten wives and father many children which he cannot train. This will never redound positively to development.

In another perspective, certain superstitious beliefs hinder that flowering of development. One cannot tap the enormous resources in some sacred forest or forest of secret deed (Igbo oro). This, to a great extent, is unfavourable to development.

Indeed, African Traditional Religions have enormous potentials but this is being vitiated by the crafty dubiety or dishonesty of some practitioners. In reference to the active oath taking through the Orisa method, there is that

possibility that human factor may come in. It may be manipulated. Even the oaths administrator may withdraw its potency before applying it. What then should be done? There is no other alternative than looking for a morally credible practitioner. And to those that may claim other religions I know, with utmost conviction that every religion constrains powerful curses and punitive invocations for offenders. So, we need to leave elementary oath taking of sequential repetition and venture into the realm of active oath.

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