

*IN SEARCH OF A NEW PARADIGM OF VALUE RE -
ORIENTATION THROUGH RATIONAL
RECONSTRUCTION OF INDIGENOUS VALUES*

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Introduction

Values are empowering tools that help a society to face the challenges of the contemporary world such as religious extremism, ethnic conflicts, inequality, threats of globalization, and corruption. Core values that inform people's moral behavior are largely considered to be universal. However, these core values are usually colored by social, cultural, religious, political and personal contexts. This is because socio-cultural milieu differs from one community to community. If people would live together harmoniously, there is the need to inculcate values that would enable them develop a sense of humanity, tolerance and understanding. The question of how we should behave and how members of a society should relate with one another is a moral issue. As human beings continuously relate with other human beings, people cannot do without valuing in their day-to-day activities. As such, the value system upheld by members of a society, inform they behave and how they organize and manage their society.

Problem Statement

Nigeria is one of the most diverse countries in the world. It is also one of the most endowed countries in the world, both in terms of material and human resources. The country is characterized by multiple ethnic nationalities that are made up of over 300 ethnic groups. In spite

of her over sixty years of existence, and all the efforts geared towards uniting the ethnic nationalities, the question of National Integration remains a major concern as the country is sharply divided along ethnicity and religion. This situation has not helped in addressing the recent dimensions of socio – economic crisis and insecurity facing the nation. Aggressive re-orientation of Nigerians has become an imperative at this moment because the quest for national integration is intricately related to how people perceive fellow human beings and fellow compatriots with whom they do not share the same ethnic or language background. Nagging social problems such as inequality, ethnic conflicts, discrimination and violence, all boil down to the value and moral crisis facing Nigeria. A lack of proper value orientation is manifesting in poor national integration which in turn is negatively affecting the value placed on human life, social justice system, reward systems and leadership recruitment system. It is also manifesting in the allocation of honours, privileges and resources on the basis of ethnicity. Again, politics is played in Nigeria largely on ethno- religious sentiments without regard to merit and competence.

Many scholars have argued that civil strife in Nigeria and many other third - world countries could be attributed to “culture conflict”. Akinpelu (2005) traced the root of culture conflict to Christianization, colonization and westernization of Nigeria and other previously colonized African countries. He opined that whether consciously or unconsciously, the moral code of the colonized countries has been drastically eroded by the passion to modernize. The alien culture of the colonial masters has introduced a crisis in the African morality. This assertion is premised on the relationship between Western culture and African culture in the 19th and 20th century which was not a matter of cross-cultural understanding between equals or near equals, but rather that of subjugation (Curtis, 1972). In trying to learn the new way of life introduced by colonization, Africans went through the processes of borrowing, adoption and interpretation so that they sometimes “dewesternized” the values. The adoption disrupted their understanding of their own values and yet they did not fully comprehend the borrowed cultural values. Therefore, they are neither here nor there.

For a society to be integrated, its citizens have to share some core national values which tend to bind them together. Absence or weakness of the core values tends to bring about disunity, inter- ethnic strife, lack of trust, unhealthy rivalry, and underdevelopment. As observed by Falade and Falade (2013), the social matrix of Nigeria is replete with inter and intra community and inter religious strife caused by the artificial creation of Nigeria as a single geo – political entity. They contend that the people of the sub- nationals that constitute Nigeria were not effectively integrated towards having a sense of national identity by both the colonial and the post - colonial leaders. For selfish reasons the colonialist used divide and rule principles which disintegrated rather than integrate the people. For the same reasons, the indigenous po-

litical elites also stir ethnic - religious sentiments in order to divert the attention of the people from the real issues of governance and accountability.

Indigenous values are values that are inherent in a particular society or culture. It can be contrasted with foreign or borrowed cultural values that might have found their way into a community from other geographical areas through social interactions, education, new or traditional media and other instruments of globalization. Leo et.al (2013) contend that indigenous values operate on three principles:

1. They are part and parcel of the way of life of a people
2. The utilize symbolism from the community and therefore connect with the people
3. Age- long institutions come to play in their usage.

The idea of rational reconstruction

Rational reconstruction, as a theory and as a method, is traceable to the ideas of Jürgen Habermas. Habermas depicts social development as a learning process comparable to how individual thought processes develop with age and maturity. As such, he contends that societies do change as they develop in terms of that which they consider acceptable and reasonable social and cultural practices from time to time. Consciously or unconsciously, humans subject their values, norms and ethos to the standard of reasonableness and with time have to modify or outrightly discard some unworthy social and cultural beliefs and practices. From this perspective, Gregg (1998) considered rational reconstruction as a process of transformation. It is a process of transforming a given problematic, philosophical and scientific account into a similar, but more precise and consistent interpretation.

Rational reconstruction is possible and inevitable in human societies by virtue of man's rational nature. Humans use rationales to show the logical relationships that underlie their reasoning. The process of revealing these rationales is called rational reconstruction. Rationales involve the use of arguments and explanations. In an argument, a reason is provided as evidence to support a conclusion. On the other hand, an explanation and a conclusion serve as the accepted fact while the reason serves as the cause of the fact.

Rational reconstruction is a process of identifying the rationale underlying the reasoning that has generated ideas and worldviews. Through the process, the indigenous values can be given more precise interpretations, which are consistent with our contemporary life. This endeavor is worthwhile because western civilization had to undergo this reconstruction in the 17th century in the hands of David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Prior to their times, morality

in Europe was largely an admixture of reason and theology. It was impossible to separate religion from morality. Instead of outright condemnation of useful aspects of our culture that could have superstitious basis, we can articulate the unarticulated reasons which lay behind the minds of our ancestors. In subjecting the indigenous values to rational reconstruction, attempt would be made to ensure the following:

1. The worldviews would first be presented in a way that they reflect the basic idea of the ethnic group
2. The idea/values would be presented as precisely as possible
3. Unarticulated rational explanations that underlie the values are extracted on the basis of contemporary life in Nigeria
4. Possible areas of convergence and divergence between the old and the new would be analyzed.

This can be done by applying the theory critically and rationally in examining and analyzing world view, proverbs and wise sayings that express African world - views on social relationships, code of conduct and hierarchy of values, with a view to examining how they converge and diverge. The study also aims at identifying the commonalities and the differences among the major ethnic groups with a view to using them to create a framework for value re- orientation with a view of fostering national integration. The commonalities could help to strengthen the fact we are not altogether different from one another while the differences could help to promote tolerance and understanding among the ethnic groups.

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