

## **African Culture and the Problems of Social Order in Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** No part of culture is totally unrelated to the social order, but it remains true that changes sometimes occur which has resulted to the recent societal unrest. Political crises, youth unrest, armed robbery, corruption and general decadence are the order of the day in the African societies. People are taking laws into their hands and nobody seems to know the solution to it. As a move towards contributing to the solution of this problem, the discourse on African culture and the problems of social order was undertaken with the objectives of finding out the place of the African culture in maintaining social order. The African pre-colonial period in comparison with the colonial and postcolonial was studied in relation to how order was maintained, using some Nigeria ethnic examples. It was discovered that the African culture have values enshrined in them that if maintained is capable of maintaining order in the society which is the norm in the pre-colonial periods. It was therefore concluded that the African culture has an active implication in the struggle to maintain order in the society and recommendations were made in that line.

**Keywords:** Culture, Social Order, Africa, Norms, Values.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of social order is a topical issue in recent times, and is a response to the challenges of social control. That is to say that social order and social control are twin concepts that impacts on each other. This implies that to maintain order in the society, there is the need to have a control over the social system, and to have that control there is need to achieve and maintain order. To achieve these therefore, one needs to identify and tackle the problems of social order which have been identified by scholars to be both individual and social [1, 2]. Since humans are both individual and social, a conflict arises between the biological urges and the social expectations or norms.

This conflict is the pressure on human beings to satisfy an individual need such as meeting up with schedule which can lead to the jumping of queue in the bank, the interest in winning a political position which can lead to political malpractice, the urge to buy a car which can lead somebody who don't have the money to steal etc. All the above means of satisfying the human urge are against the expectation of the society to maintain order. Social order therefore, is the deliberate attempt by the society to manage the individual's biological drive that could not succumb to social control.

From the foregoing, it is discernable that there exists the individual's biological drive which can lead him away from the socially accepted norms; and a socially predefined means of attaining satisfaction of such drives. This goes to say that individuals who go contrary to the social norms are either not aware of these socially accepted means of satisfying their drives or are unable to achieve this socially accepted means. This inability to internalize the socially accepted means of satisfying ones needs and that of achieving the means have been attributed to many factors most of which boils down to the erosion of the cultural values through globalization and the distortion of social order in our contemporary societies.

The globalization concept of "one world many people" has grown to be heard by all, but whether its applicability is accepted by all is an issue of consideration. The concept of multiculturalism which goes with globalization has been argued to have little or no applicability as Ekanem [3] argues that the Africans only own their body while their soul belongs to the west. Africa, through the acceptance of the western religion and education system, have gradually thrown to the backdrop the African culture of inculcating the social norms into their young ones and by that maintain social order. This situation has led to a condition of culture shock, anomie and social disorder as the young

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Africans tries to practice what they learn from western culture in the African cultural setting.

Having identified this challenge, the question now is, how can the African culture help in maintaining social order in the contemporary African society? In attempt to answer the question, this paper shall explore literatures on culture, globalization and social order as an attempt to discern their nexus and implications as significant indicator for promoting and sustaining social order through culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The rest of the paper is divided into sections that will juxtapose the issues the paper is concerned with.

### **CULTURE AND GLOBALISATION**

Culture has been viewed in different ways with different orientations that makes it seem like every researcher see culture from the light of their research objectives, and for this reason, culture have no consensus definition [4, 5]. But for the purpose of this discourse, Tylor's definition of culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" [6] will be adopted. The sociological orientation towards the subject matter of culture seems to agree that culture survives from generation to generation and is passed from parents to their offspring through the socialization process [7, 8, 9]. This implies that whatever the culture contains, good or bad as may be judged by anybody, is passed from one generation to another.

This definitional contention further reveals that whatever the African society is at the moment, is what the immediate past generation were able to hand down. It may be argued as seen in the preceding contention (introduction), that globalization has exerted its impact on the culture of the African society. But the question is, couldn't the African culture impact on other culture through the globalization process? And must the African society throw away everything in their culture and accept everything from the western culture? This therefore tickles a deliberate interest in re-considering impact of globalization and its forerunner phenomenon – westernization on Africa's culture and the quest of maintaining social order.

From the westernization point of view as some authors [10, 11] has lend credence, it's an established fact that the colonial masters came with the Christian religion and western education which many scholars have captioned in the three "Cs" (Christianity, Civilization, and Colonization). This process brought in values that were alien to the African culture, and the African culture since then has never been the same [10, 11, 12]. This is evident the partial demolition of the African culture, tenets and dictates which are sacrosanct in the shaping and molding of the individual which was strong and its adherence was normative and served as a

major social control mechanism, which could also have the same relevance in all era of human existence (including our contemporary times). Hence, a strong social order mechanism to the present era.

Consequently, the introduction of western culture to the African society continued to eat deep into the fabrics of Africa and has gradually eroded the values enshrined in the African culture through the globalization process Haralambos and Holborn [13] described as "globalocation" and "globaliquidation". This has been made possible through such factors as technology which is an instrument of globalization. Samuel and Ekeng [16] argued as supported by other researchers, that the importation of western technology into the African society means the transfer of western cultural values into the African culture and consequently the African cultural values has gradually given way [14, 15]. But how well have the African youth and the society at large fared for imbibing these western cultural values? This becomes an imperative question, especially if the problem of social order must be achieved with its attendant impact in restoring a just and an egalitarian society which is devoid of any form of unrest, moral decadence, terrorism etc.

### **CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORDER: THE NEXUS**

For emphasis, it has been asserted above that technology is part of culture, and that the African culture had its own technology which has been eroded by the western culture. This implies that cultural values when transferred have the ability to change the order of things as is evidenced in the African societies where many cultural values such as dressing code, greeting habit, respect for elders, respect for human life etc have been trodden on the ground by the youths as they surf the internet seeing the world and learning the good, the bad, the ugly [17, 14]. This is evident as various scholars have argued that the pre-colonial African societies had their political system. Idegwu [18] and Ukwedeh [19] all wrote on the political system of the Igalas, an ethnic minority group in Nigeria, Yunusa [20] wrote on the democratic structure of the Yoruba kingdom to mention but few.

Yunusa pointed out the democratic arrangement in Yoruba political structure, the separation of power and checks and balances which helped to maintain order in the Yoruba political system [20]. Onucheyo [21] in analyzing the political system in Igala land pointed out that the kingdom had a centralized system of administration under the Attah of Igala, who worked with some advisory council, palace and District administrators. In the Northern part of Nigeria on the other hand, the Hausas had their traditional religion before the advent of the Islamic religion. Bako [22] argues that it was the introduction of Islam that brought about "teaching and preaching against the state order contemporary civil society

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mobilization” which as an ideology behind Islamic religion that has led into some ‘misunderstanding’ as it were, that has culminated into the insurgency that Nigeria and some other African countries are suffering now.

Among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, a very good example of what the introduction of western culture resulted into is the Aba Women right of the colonial days. The women revolted because they had a system of administration, where women were not expected to pay tax. The women were only meant to stay at home and rear children, cook food and keep their husband comfortable when he is back home [23, 24]. But the introduction of tax for women by the colonial masters led to the Aba women riot. Before the colonial masters, the Igbos had no king, political administration was by the general assembly (Oha-na-Eze) where every male adult is required and given the chance to contribute in deliberations on issues affecting the society. The age grade system was used to maintain law and order in the society. A situation where people of same age who know one another very well form vigilante groups to secure the community from external attack and internal disharmony [25, 26, 27]. The African societies especially in Nigeria lived in the extended family setting. Here, children are being trained by the general public as depicted by a particular Igbo adage “one person doesn’t train a child” (ofu onye adighi azu nwa). This helped the society inculcate the cultural values into the child even in the absence of the parents.

All the above values and tenets of the African culture (as evident in the various ethnographies considered) has been eroded by westernization and globalization, leaving the African societies diving deeper into a situation of moral degradation, with no regard for social norms which combines to create a society of disorder which we suffer in the contemporary African societies, evidenced by various forms of unrest. The imperative of culture make a case for one to consider various issues that have lead to the breakdown of social order in recent times. Especially as it concern the numerous killings in various part of Africa including: the Nigeria Boko Haram terrorism (including its neighborhood effect it has on border countries – Niger Republic and the Democratic Republic of Cameroun), the recent Xenophobic killings in South Africa and other behaviours (rape, armed robbery, political crisis, religious crisis etc.) which threatens peace and order in our society, which sustaining factors are traceable to cultural and moral decadence.

### **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Policy formulation is no solution to any problem, as many policy programmes have been initiated in Nigeria to solve the problem of youth unrest for example, yet the problem persists. A while ago, the

federal government of Nigeria granted the Niger Delta militants amnesty, and while the programme was going on, the Northern Islamic sect started the Boko Haram Insurgency. That is a pointer to the fact that the problem of social order (youth unrest) was not nipped in the bud. For a problem to have a solution, the cause or source of the problem must be found. In the Nigerian case, most of the policy programme has ever been like the cliché of giving a child fish in place of teaching him to fish. The traditional African society, have enshrined in its culture certain prescribed punishments due for anybody who disturbs the public peace, and executes it to the later without fear or favour. But the western culture through its bureaucratic process and the legal system has made it so rigorous but yet porous that a defaulter who has connections can manipulate his ways and go free.

The argument against the African culture in the maintenance of order has always been based on some ‘barbaric’ content of the culture. But the question should be what is barbaric? And who defined the word barbaric that qualified African culture as such? In as much as this discourse is neither promoting extra judicial killing nor disregard for human right, it should be noted that the contemporary law as copied from the colonial masters still contain prescription for death penalty. Therefore, the African culture may not have been wrong, if it decided that somebody went against the socially established norm and deserves death. What the policy makers should therefore be looking at is does this death penalty even solve the problem? Which is why the African culture preferred prevention to cure, and therefore, chose the extended family training system for children.

Policy makers have struggled to make policies that can ensure political stability for the nation, yet things tend to get worse. We may not have to depend on the gods like some traditional African societies did, but they sincerely believed that the gods spoke about who should rule as it were in some societies and they all give their allegiance. For some societies like the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria, there was respect for one another’s opinion during the ‘Oha-na-Eze’ meetings, and at the end they will always arrive at a decision that will be accepted by all. Therefore, a look at the African culture can help in maintaining order in the society.

### **CONCLUSION**

A walk through the streets of African countries like Nigeria, Cameroun, Ghana etc, One will wonder if clothes were meant to cover nakedness or to expose it, and we hear of rape every now and then, yet we allow more access to internet contents for the young ones, being fully aware that this is one of the mediums where they imbibe all these dress style. Political crises, robbery, and different sorts of youth unrest has held our society hostage, yet we allow our children watch foreign movies where they are exposed to different sorts

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of violence uncensored. This discourse has therefore looked at the place of the African culture in social order and found that the values embedded in the African culture as it were, if harnessed can be used to maintain order even in the contemporary African society. Given the foregoing, this paper therefore recommend thus:

It was stated above that one needs to know the source of his problem to be able to solve it. And it has been demonstrated here that through colonialism the western culture has been introduced into the African societies, and has been continuously updated through globalization to the detriment of the African culture and development. Therefore, it is recommended that a journey away from cultural imperialism should commence.

Secondly, technology was meant for man and not man for technology. If the western technology has come to erode the African cultural value, then the question should be, is it worth continuous patronage? They should be a strong censorship on what is brought into the African society in form of technology and technological devices. Their uses should also be censored, in order to control the content introduced to the youths who are easy targets. Here is where the extended family life style comes into play.

Thirdly, the traditional political systems should be further studied with the objectives of finding its weaknesses and strong points, so that the strong points can be enshrined into the contemporary political system. This will not only strengthen the political system, but will give the average Africans a sense of belonging, seeing a system they know quite well being practiced as against the alien system that they understand nothing about.

Policy makers are advised to make policies with the understanding of the situation at hand. That is to say, that the African culture has been overlooked at the wake of globalization, and we are now suffering the consequences. Therefore, to solve the problem, there is the need to revive the African culture, which could be done majorly through the education system.

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