

Integating Modern Technology in to African Cultural Values for African Development

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Abstract

The modern era embodies the enthronement and celebration of science and technology championing the cause of globalization. The effect is that albeit being a yardstick for developmental determination and measurement, modern technology has gradually become a synonym for development. If Africa is notable for the celebration and preservation of her cultural values, the proper placement of the values within modernity only makes it apt to convolve a critical consideration for integrating modern technology into African cultural values for African Development.

Introduction

That Africa is adjudged a developing nation is not only consequent upon its designation as a stunted growing economy but its place in the modern technological global ranking coupled with its wide accusation or impedance of cultural over conservatism. Despite the polemics and perceptions, any meaningful quest for the integral development of Africa must not negate the place of its cultural values since the question of culture is the question of essence and identity.

As long as culture indubitably remains the basic mark of a people's identity, a consideration for the development of any society in relegation of its culture amounts to either a devaluation or misplacement of value. An integration of such misplacement definitely leads a society to a gradual loss of identity. That does not in effect abnegate the import of culture contact and value

interaction in societal or national development.

The Import of Modern Technology

Modern technology is anything that is invented or developed within the last few years. For example, Windows 7, Microsoft's new operating system. In the view of Ask.com:

Modern technology is the use of machines to make life better. For example, the improvement of communication. It can be done via mail, phone, fax and many others. Improving transport by air, train, using cars. The greatest of all is the use of computer.

Going a little down memory lane:

The human species' use of technology began with the conversion of natural resources into simple tools. The prehistorical discovery of the ability to control fire increased the available sources of food and the invention of the wheel helped humans in travelling in and controlling their environment. Recent technological developments, including the printing press, the telephone, and the Internet, have lessened physical barriers to communication and allowed humans to interact freely on a global scale. However, not all technology has been used for peaceful purposes; the development of weapons of ever-increasing destructive power has progressed throughout history, from clubs to nuclear weapons. (Wikipedia, 2013)

The basic import of modern technology is that by contributing grossly to the

experience of mankind, it has forged a broader comprehension of the world. It has enhanced to a greater extent human material comfort. Modern Technology has induced a modernized view of the world. Currently almost all fields of life has adopted and developed a corresponding technology. Thus we can talk about *construction technology*, *medical technology*, and *information technology*, *agricultural technology* and the list is endless. The simple submission is that:

Technology has affected society and its surroundings in a number of ways. In many societies, technology has helped develop more advanced economies (including today's global economy) and has allowed the rise of a leisure class. Many technological processes produce unwanted by-products, known as pollution, and deplete natural resources, to the detriment of Earth's environment. (Ibid)

Not only is modern technology adding values to human society, it has become an indispensable value in itself. Not only has it become value, it has become a culture. If developed nations ever had customary or contrived cultures within the cause of their historical evolution, those cultures have been hugely infiltrated by modern technology. Thus, if culture is a necessary basis of a people's identity, the culture of developed nations in the recent times has become modern technology, since the word 'developed' as affixed to nation in this instance relates more to modern science and technology than something else. Hence, modern science and technology has become their yardstick for measuring development and its attendant ranking, a situation that has generated intellectual controversies especially among third world critics. Besides these, we are here confronted with the concerns of values and culture and not to strictly attempt a philosophical assessment of modern technology.

One crucial question is: Is modern technology, despite having become a culture, generally valuable? The answer tilts vehemently to the affirmative. Another question could be: Does modern technology possess values of inter-cultural relevance? There could be situational answers to this question which tends to lie more with the reality of globalization. In very simple terms, globalization entails that with the aid of modern technology, the world has become a global village establishing and ensuring open and easy visibility cum accessibility of all world societies and their activities to all. It can also be posited that the answer invokes the place of cross-cultural interaction in societal development. As regards Africa, has modern technology anything to add to its cultural values towards the integral development of the continent? A concise articulation of African cultural values would be apt as an essential step toward an adequate attention to this question.

African Cultural Values

Every given society is culturally identified in so far as culture can be defined as the perceptions or world views," the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society."(Google.com)

Another definition has it that culture is "the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively." If the idea of culture is central to human societies, then the point of variation lies in cultural contents and values. Identified as that which has worth, value as a term is conceived as something "good, beneficial, important, useful, beautiful, desirable, constructive." (Wikipedia)

Within the domain of value theory, there are varied approaches from various disciplines. But our concern here is cultural values. It is important to note that oftentimes, people tend to confuse cultural

values with societal or communal norms. Both are essential aspects of any culture but the difference lies in the reality that, whereas “Norms provide rules for behavior in specific situations, ... values identify what should be judged as good or evil. While norms are standards, patterns, rules and guides of expected behavior, values are abstract concepts of what is important and worthwhile.”(ibid)

Each culture is definable as well as identifiable by the sets of its inherent values. Thus, every cultural society hold specific value system. When culture is considered in relation to values, it is averred that, “A culture is a social system that shares a set of common values, in which such values permit social expectations and collective understandings of the good, beautiful, constructive, etc.”(ibid)

The diverse nationalities that make up the continent of Africa embody cultural value perspectives specific to their nature as a people. Hence, we can talk about Igbo cultural values, Ubuntu, Yoruba, Asanti, etc. These indices do not actually demean the possibility of a centralized idea of African cultural values. They are simply forms of expressing the cultural values of the same Africanity since African culture is a special expression of African reality. Nevertheless Jonathan Okeke of Department of Philosophy, University of Calabar notes that:

African cultural values constitutes according to Ezedike, the sum total of shared attitudinal inclinations and capabilities, art, beliefs, moral codes and practices which characterize Africans (455). This is continuous and cumulative thus

containing both material and non-material elements that are socially transmitted from one generation to another. (Okeke:2005, 18)

What this means is that we can adumbrate and enunciate what can be regarded as the cardinal African cultural values. But then, it is noteworthy that scholars(African) like Achebe, Oliver Onwubiko, Bolaji Idowu, Paul Ogugua et al vary in their perspectives on what constitutes the African Cultural values. In his article titled “African Cultural Values”, Emeka Onwubiko(2009) attempted a concise summary of the positions of some of the afore-mentioned scholars and submitted that the values include:

- (i) Sense of community life;
- (ii) Sense of good human relations;
- (iii) Sense of the sacredness of life;
- (iv) Sense of hospitality;
- (v) Sense of the sacred and of religion;
- (vi) Sense of time;
- (vii) Sense of respect for authority and the elders;
- (viii) Sense of language and proverbs.

Apart from the afore-mentioned, African cultural values are equally reflected as offspring, time, communal living, title, wealth, language, fashion, African Traditional Religion. The striking fact is that all the mentioned values cut across all spheres of African existence. While some are intrinsic values, others are instrumental.

About Integration

Having attempted this brief exposition of what constitutes African cultural values, we get back to address the question of possible integration of modern technology. Initially, is there a basis or justification for such

integration bearing in mind the lingering accusation of colonial erosion of African culture together with de-Africanization for the Westernization of Africans' mindset as evident in western imperialism and forms of neo-colonialism? In the first place, Palomar(2006) posits that, "... societies are groups of people who directly or indirectly interact with each other. People in human societies also generally perceive that their society is distinct from other societies in terms of shared traditions and expectations."

Again:

While human societies and cultures are not the same thing, they are inextricably connected because culture is created and transmitted to others in a society. Cultures are not the product of lone individuals. They are the continuously evolving products of people interacting with each other. Cultural patterns such as language and politics make no sense except in terms of the interaction of people. If you were the only human on earth, there would be no need for language or government. (Palomar, 2006)

I take very serious exceptions to Africa's continuous blame of her developmental predicament on colonialism. Despite its ills, it is high time African scholars begin to develop a more positive attitude about African colonial experience. Would it not be more reasonable to look at African colonialism as a tool of providence ushering Africa into the road of modernity? Modernity like development is not a concept specific to any nation. It is a universal historical concept to which the entire humanity exists and applies itself. Given this line of thought, colonialism can be viewed as world's civilizing mission.

This invokes for us the relevance of the dialectics of the Hegelian *World Spirit* in his theory of historical determinism. The spirit can use any segment of humanity to achieve specific goal within the cause of world historical movement. In the cause of this dialectic process, no given society remains

developmentally the same because the interactions between societies in forms of invasions, apartheid, colonialism, wars or even peaceful relationships bring about conflicts that naturally affect both negatively and positively the interacting societies. It simply continues to refine a society without prejudice to its root of natural diversity since nature thrives in unity in diversity. This process is constant, whether noticed or not. Hence, every human society has a history anchored on the wheel of time. Each society has its primitive period with its attendant characteristics.

Civilization and modernity can spark up with existential situations and dialectical circumstances will pull societies into them. This character and process of historical determinism tend to defile any human control. That exactly accounts for the results of African colonial experience. Many current known relatively developed societies were also colonized. British colonies and protectorate, apart from many nations of Africa includes; Ireland, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Malta. Europe(Spain) and Russia colonized the Americas. The difference is that they utilized more constructively, the fruits of their experience to overcome their developmental circumstances and advance. They did not celebrate their woes. Africans possess the rational will to surmount their developmental problems. Maduabuchi Dukor (2006:73) had stated strongly that, "The necessary components to African survival are the will, ration and the intelligence to develop. Yet he has not been able to adopt and adapt the science and technology that flows from the West." Is colonialism responsible for Nigeria's over dependence on oil coupled with the endemic corruption of its governments? Why is it not harnessing other economic potential to enhance its development? However, we maintain that African development still

includes possible integration of modern technology into African cultural values.

Although life is of universal value, the sacredness of human life is a core fundamental African value despite the primitive cultural practices of killing of twins, human sacrifices and other practices that endanger life. Thanks to civility and modernity which have upturned most of these practices. As modern science and technology have achieved a lot in the areas of biotechnology and genetic engineering to enhance the preservation of life, the use of similar technology for a manner less, unethical and wanton destruction of life amounts to a daunting paradox. Nevertheless, Africa has benefitted a lot from life saving modern technologies especially in proffering viable answers to genetic issues and life threatening situations.

It is unfortunate that despite the availability of scientific explanations and modern technological solutions to some life related issues, recourse to cultural explanations and solutions are still prevalent in Africa, not necessarily that they actually provide the answers more than modern technology, but due to blind obstinacy to preservation of cultural practices. But that is not to say that Africa should adopt all modern westernized attitudes to life. For instance, as Africa upholds the sacredness of life, it would amount to a denigration of core value when Africans indulge in incessant abortions and life endangering criminal activities with sophisticated arms and gadgets. Instead those technologies should be deployed for the security of lives.

With regard to the African value of offspring and child bearing, modern science and technology has provided barrage of solutions. Reproduction technology attends availably (although in some cases not very effectively) to male child cultural problems. Modernity has diluted the African cultural

discontentment but engendered a better appreciation of female offspring. Effective family planning techniques are also available. Gone are the days when greatness is measured by the number of children an African has. The economic realities of the time coupled with inadequate parenting pose greater challenge to multiple offspring. Africans only need adequate orientation and proper dispositions towards these innovations. Africans applying the gains of the technologies available in this area will ensure re-evaluation and strengthening of this value.

African sense of community and communal living are not merely cultural values but basic mark of African identity. Modern technology can play viable role in the enhancement of African communalism. In the present ICT era with its attendant ease on communication and information services, communities can own websites, e-mails and apply themselves to the services of other social and communication networks. These will in turn provide avenues for promoting communal interaction and belongingness, promoting indigenous knowledge and languages, and promoting African communal intra/inter cultural values. The use of forms of media technology for the promotion of communal customs and traditions definitely ensure the adequate provision of cultural educational materials for upcoming generations aimed ultimately toward the preservation of African communal values. African theatrical outfits like Nollywood, Ghana movies, etc, are, despite their moral derailments as well as imperial subservience, commended in their efforts to utilize modern media technologies to showcase the African cultural values.

Economic wealth is also one of the important African values. African sod is richly blessed with multiple economic resources. Technological endowment and knowledge is not the sole repository of the

Westerners. Prior to the deployment of foreign services, Africa possessed and still possesses its indigenous technology which has aided the harness and production of its economic goods and services. Aside imported technologies, Africa has adequate natural and human resources to modernize its technology as well as develop modern ones. Africa is replete with human potentials that possess the tech-ne and drive for modern technological inventions that can compete favourably in the global technological scene. Is the world renowned computer guru, Philip Emeagwali not an African? What INNOSON is currently doing in the Nigerian auto-mobile industry is a way of showcasing the African technological potentials and ingenuity.

That China is now a fast growing economy is consequent upon undeterred resolve to take her destiny in her own hands. Today, Chinese market is a beehive of world economic activities. If not for Nigeria's over dependence on oil with the endemic corruption trailing its government, why would a blessing like Ajeoukuta steel company be a latent and sterile venture? The truth is that Africans have not actually risen up to the challenges of modernity. Sometimes, African governments sponsor some of their wards to overseas to learn the arts of modern sciences and technologies, but most unfortunately, after the studies, those sent chose rather not to come back, instead be absorbed into those countries' labour market in disposition to the modern brain drain syndrome. Nevertheless, Africans can still deploy available modern technological resources to create wealth for the continent. Construction technology is available. Economic software abound and are developed as well as steadily improved.

That Africans are notoriously religious is an indubitable reality. Thus, the sense of the sacred forms a vital aspect of African culture to the extent that all aspect of

African life has a supernatural/spiritual dimension. The African Traditional Religion with its beliefs and practices is a crucial African cultural value. The only meaningful role that modern technology can play in this aspect is to proffer pragmatic explanations to certain religious beliefs deemed superstitious and superfluous. The African embrace of Christianity is visibly social and ephemeral. Africans have not been divested of their traditional religions.

The import of modern technology does not denigrate some of its inherent ills. As the world celebrates the juicy gains of modern technology, Africans should, at the same time, be wary of its potential threats to their culture. The greatest threat tends to be that of erosion of African moral values. The adoption and application of unethical Western practices as contained in recent ICT and media technologies currently spread like wide fire especially among African youths in deference of African moral values. Consequently, African society of today remains a debacle of all sorts of social and moral vices especially among the youths, known for alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, drugs, occultism, gangsterism and all manners of criminality including terrorism. Today, do we still talk about respect for elders among the youths? What sort of fashion is prevalent among our girls? The wide preference of foreign languages over indigenous ones even in the cause of African child formation is worrisome(In Nigeria, we now train our children in foreign languages). The intense infiltration of Western individualism into a communalist oriented African sod is a major negative effect of Western media to the extent of engendering a possible erosion of African family values. Its effect on African marriages is devastating. The current use of weapons of mass destruction for rebellious political cum terrorist activities by fellow Africans are simply unAfrican because it is a stark

negation of the sense of African brotherhood. The fact remains that:

Various implementations of technology influence the values of a society and new technology often raises new ethical questions. Examples include the rise of the notion of efficiency in terms of human productivity, a term originally applied only to machines, and the challenge of traditional norms. (Ibid)

African indigenous knowledge is rapidly on the decline. How many young African men can handle hoes, hunt effectively, climb palm trees, blow the traditional flute, dance their communities' traditional dance steps? How many of our young women of today can prepare traditional dishes, fry *akara*, go to streams to prepare *onugbu* leaves, etc? Instead of deploying the gains of modern technology more constructively, the reigning trend among most African youths of nowadays is cell phone for social networks and computers for entertainments(immoral), twitter, facebook, 2go, whatsapp, computer games, pornography, etc.

Conclusion

On a final note, the gains of integration obviously outweigh intractable disadvantages of modern technology. A response to possible objection for integration is that such integration would not affect the essence of African values but will tinker with the inherent practices within the values. It will challenge the African mindset towards a more progressive thinking. That is a major gain for African human development. It will ensure a constant refinement of African cultural values, weeding out from them dints of superstitions, primitivities, and making them relevant to the currents of the time. As the key driver of global economy, modern technology and its integration into African cultural values will ensure African developmental steady growth which will

upgrade Africa in the list of global developmental ranking.

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