



African Heritage, Philosophy and Globalization: An Overview

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Introduction

The issue of the influence of globalization on African heritage and philosophy has been a subject of great concern to scholars within and out Africa. It is no longer questionable that though globalization has improved the socio-economic status of many countries especially in the global south yet, it has also tremendous negative effects on their heritage, identity and philosophy. Notable among these effects is the loss and alienation of African values in pursuit of the western ones which is often inconsistent with African beliefs, values and philosophy. In other words, the very soul of the African identity is gradually losing its existence within the air of globalization. As an overview of the main thrust of this volume, we shall start with the clarification of the following concepts; heritage, African heritage, African philosophy and globalization.

Heritage

The term heritage has been widely defined and clarified because of its ambiguous nature. Different scholars define the aspect of it that falls within their orientation. Notably, some define heritage in terms of sites with tourist attraction, however, it goes beyond that to include, the visible and invisible properties of a given people. The Cambridge dictionary defines heritage as features belonging to the culture of a particular society, such as traditions, languages, or buildings, that were created in the past and still have historical importance. It goes further to define it as the history, traditions, practices, etc. of a particular country, society or company that exist from the past and continue to be important. Webster dictionary defines heritage as something transmitted by or acquired from a predecessor and as something possessed as a result of one's natural situation or birth.

In general term, heritage refers to the practices and traditions of a given people, often propagated from parents to children and from generation to another generation. It is culturally oriented in the sense that it defines where one is raised, as in the family or community.

Here, we can distinguish two types of heritage; natural heritage and cultural heritage. Natural heritage describes the remarkable natural endowment and resources in a given environment such as rare natural formations like unique rock shapes, mountains, valleys, habitats and species of animals or plants, oil and gas as in Nigeria and many other unique features that mark out the place. This natural heritage features most prominently in many definitions of heritage due to its connection with tourism.

On the other hand, cultural heritage refers to those things or expressions that show the creativity of a people. This can be further divided into two; the tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The tangible cultural heritage includes physical objects of all kinds that have meaningful connotation to the history and existence of a given people. This includes; physical things that have historic or artistic values such as architectural designs on buildings, paintings or monuments or natural endowment like cave dwelling.

Intangible cultural heritage includes non-physical aspects of a particular culture, often demonstrated by social norms such as manner of behavior, acceptable norms, operative rules, values, belief system, given names, customs, language, practices and so on. However, there is sometimes, no demarcating line between the natural and cultural heritage. In other words, some natural heritage can fall into the cultural and vice ver sa. Remarkably, one fundamental feature of cultural heritage is the presence of human creativity while that of natural heritage is, as the name implies, natural endowment.

African Heritage

From the above premise, African heritage is a diversified one, comprising of natural and cultural heritage. It involves all the practices and traditions of African people as propagated from generation to generation which they are proud to retain because of the roles they played in African civilization and which still have the potency to aid development in the present time. It is the natural endowments; wonderful landscapes, valleys, waterfalls, rocks, species of animal and plants, mountains, shrines and sacred places that are capable of attracting tourists and cultural heritage of various kinds, showing the creativity of the African people. Very importantly too, African heritage includes all forms of manner being demonstrated by social norms as shown by the African values, beliefs, customs, language, customs, philosophy of life and so on. Africans have principal beliefs and values such as the dignity of hard work, community consciousness, sacredness of human life, immortality of the human soul, respect for elders, love for children, fidelity in human relations, power of the spoken word, justice and fair play, hospitality and lots of others. These beliefs, values and virtues are instrumental to sustainable development.

Ezenweke (2017) succinctly states that:

Africa has a rich and valuable cultural heritage, coated with the sense of sacredness which aided African civilization. Upon this heritage hinges every other

life issues; notion of family, spirit of oneness, spirit of sacrificing for the group, concern for the weaker and the needy, show of hospitality, power and sacredness of the spoken words, covenantal dimension and sacredness of marriage, high priority for children, sacredness of life, hard work, sense of community and strive for good name... Invariably, African identity is a kind of trademark that keeps re-echoing "Cognatus ergo Sum." (Because I am related to others therefore I exist). In other words, it may be summed up with the concept of community. Invariably too, the identity of a truly African is measured by the extent to which he is conscious of the goals, desires and interests of his community. It is the attachment to one's community and contributions to its strengths that determine the identity of a truly African person. The role this notion played in the sustainable development in the traditional Africa cannot be over emphasized. It is this soul-rooted attachment to one's community that distinguishes an average African being from others. In other words, a truly African person places the interest of the community above his/her own. Pp 2 - 3.

From the foregoing, we may summarize that heritage is the totality of one's properties, make-up or the chief characteristics of a person or a group. It encompasses attitudes, beliefs, practices and philosophy that have constantly show up in ones history, especially in the positive sense. Based on this, heritage is closely linked with culture and identity.

African Philosophy

The term philosophy has also attracted a stream of definitions from many scholars from diverse disciplines. It is among such words that are ambiguous in nature. It is often seen as an academic discipline centering on logic, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology and metaphysics. It is also a search for knowledge, act of analyzing fundamental beliefs, or still, the most basic beliefs, concepts, and attitude of a person or a group of persons (Merriams Webster, Online). Many other scholars trace the meaning to Greek word *philosophia* which means love of wisdom, implying love or interest for the rational investigation of the actual meaning or truth concerning being, knowledge or conduct.

In the context of this paper, we use philosophy to mean the underlying principles associated with the basic beliefs, concepts, and attitude or, the worldview of a people. Ezenweke (2017) affirms that "African philosophy means the fundamental assumptions about reality of life as reflected in the language, thought and worldview of African culture or still, a distinctive tradition of philosophical reflection in African thought" p.3. It consists of a set of shared beliefs, values and assumptions that are implicit in the language, practices and beliefs of African cultures or the uniquely African world view (Mesim in Ezenweke, 2017).

Globalization

Globalization is a term with multi-faceted dimensions and so, has attracted a variety of definitions from various scholars. This is so because, the term has economic, socio-cultural and political magnitude. Globalization refers to the meeting or the coming together of people of different races, cultures and institutions. It is a process through which peoples, races and cultures are connected, united, integrated and affected by events all over the world chiefly through communication (Eze, 2014; Stegar, 2013).

Other scholars see globalization as a process of international integration arising from the interchange of worldview, products, ideas and mutual sharing, and other aspects of culture. It is a process by which the different peoples of the world are incorporated into a single society (Albrow & King, 1990; Kasongo, 2010). Giddens (1991) defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa (p.64).

In the context of this paper, we are more concerned with the cultural globalization whereby ideas, meanings and values in a distant part of the world is transmitted to other parts in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations (Capra, 2002; James, 2006). Cultural globalization has effects especially on the receiving end. For example, there is no doubt that globalization has played tremendous roles on the socio-economic life of many societies yet, beyond this, situates some worries that it has also distorted the cultural values of such societies which resultant effect is loss of identity. Umeogu (2013) asserts that “in the process of interaction between nations and countries; ideas, religions, language, arts, and other aspects of culture are interchanged, upgraded or modified... and globalization has contributed to the alienation of individuals from their traditions” p. 174.

Brown (1999) succinctly expatiates that:

Part of the process of globalization is the need to develop a culture that, in some broad way, can transcend diverse economic, ethnic, political, racial, and religious backgrounds. Such a global culture will have to be one that either seeks to transcend normal affinities for one's own cultural group or undermine them...inevitably lead to democracy as the only viable option for a political system, capitalism as the dominant economic system, a regime of individual rights to dominate interpersonal relations in the social arena, and governmental relations with its citizens. This process of producing a global culture will not occur without difficulty and conflict, especially for developing nations. The core values of Western societies, especially as embodied in a culture that places its primary concern on the rights of the individual, are in conflict with the core values of many developing countries. Many cultures in developing countries are based on a concept of protecting the livelihood of ethnic, racial, religious groups, or those who share a common language, not individual... It is the cultural beliefs, not the

individual, that has ontological supremacy... Respect is actually paid to a set of ideas, rather than to choices of individuals (pp 225-226).

Globalization therefore, brings about a new form of cultural imperialism, shaping children, the future citizens of the world into a set of competitive, information based citizens whereby the skill in the mastery of English language replaces local languages which is one of the marks of heritage and identity (Chinnammai, 2005; Umeogu, 2013). This loss extends to other African values, for instance, the rich, fresh green leaves, plants and healthy African food have been greatly lost to processed foods. This is evident on the observation that the ancestors of African Americans brought many wonderful food traditions to parts of the Caribbean, South America, and the southern states of the United States of America which got lost after many years with the influence of modern American eating habits. And their health has suffered because of this loss (Oldways, online).

In a nut shell, globalization is completing the work of colonialism in uprooting Africans from their roots (Eze, 2014). It further decreases the uniqueness of the once-isolated communities such as African community (Sernau, 2012) and alienates individuals from their traditions and values.

From the foregoing, it becomes clear that the rich African heritage and philosophy may be completely lost if action is not taken to retrieve and retain them. Many of the rich norms and values are being neglected. For instance, the sense of community is being replaced by the sense of self with its numerous destructive effects on development (Ezenweke, 2017). Fidelity in human relations, respect for elders and human life, hospitality to ones neighbor and strangers and many other values are dying fast. Many of the African shrines and sacred places that have the potency for tourism are being neglected and abandoned while Africans themselves are paying a fortune for similar ones in the west.

This observed anomaly has made the Association of African Traditional Religion and Philosophy Scholars (AATREPS) to dedicate her 2016 International Annual Conference to the theme *Repositioning African Heritage and Philosophy in the Contemporary Era*. The conference was held at the School of Postgraduate Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka from September 21 – 24, 2016. The conference, chaired by a renowned scholar, Professor A. N Eboatu, a professor of Polymer & Fibre chemistry and an ex-Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka was well attended. The business of the conference started with a thought-provoking keynote paper titled “*Creating More Space for African Philosophy: Problems and Prospects*” by an erudite scholar, Professor Jerome Ikechukwu Okonkwo of Department of Philosophy, Imo State University, Owerri. This was sustained by a fascinating lead paper titled “*African Heritage Philosophy: A Hermadialectics of the Conflicts of the Ontologies of the African Person and the African Self*” by another great scholar, Very Rev. Fr. Professor

Bonachristus Umeogu from Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Many other interesting papers were presented by scholars from various disciplines both within and outside Nigeria.

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