

## RE-INVIGORATING AND REJUVENATING YORUBA MORAL VALUES THROUGH AGGRESSIVE SENSITIZATION

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### **Abstract**

*The Traditional Yoruba value system expressed through myths, proverbs, songs, folklores and taboos does not only offer transforming possibilities in societal development but is also geared toward sustainable human habitation. Mouths however remain ajar in surprise to see the havoc that the double edged sword of Damocles that the Westerners and the imported civilization placed on Yoruba moral values has wrecked in the recent times. The values of respect, self-discipline, righteousness, diligence and faithfulness that the Yoruba are noted for have been seriously obliterated. The thrust of this paper is to explore how the dying and eroded moral values of the traditional Yoruba can be resuscitated and revitalized through aggressive sensitization. As the paper employs historical method in its analysis, the findings unequivocally reveal that Yoruba ethical values are intended to guide social and moral behaviour and that the concept of good, bad or evil, right or wrong feature prominently in African moral thought. The findings of the study further reveal that the erosion of Yoruba moral values has hampered and inhibited its self-reliance. The paper submits that reinvigorating the traditional Yoruba value system can be achieved through aggressive sensitization and by reflecting on the past.*

**Key words:** Reinvigorating, revitalizing, moral values, aggressive sensitization, traditional Yoruba, eroded

## Introduction

Yoruba are an ethnic group domiciled mainly in south western Nigeria. They occupy virtually all of the area formerly known as Western Region. They are also found in some parts of Nigeria like Kogi and Edo states. They speak different dialects such as Ijebu, Ijesa, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Akoko, among others. Babatunde and Zeitlin cited in Yetunde, Oluwasegun and Nurudeen (2011) maintain that the Yoruba are the most urbanized and possibly the most industrialized ethnic group in sub Saharan Africa. They further assert that 20 percent of Nigerians are Yoruba. Apart from South Western Nigeria, Yoruba are also found in Southern Benin in Africa as well as Diaspora Cuba, Brazil, Trinidad, Tobago and other parts of the world.(Adewale 2016). They are known for their strict adherence to their tradition. Merriam-Webster dictionary described values as: ‘to rate or seal in usefulness importance or general worth’. The word: "values" is also defined ‘as the degree or usefulness of something, it is the quality in something which makes it helpful, useful or desirable, it is the standard, worth and good qualities of something.

The word ‘Values’ in Awoniyi’s view refers to the attitude, beliefs, behaviours and actions that are cherished. They are acceptable standards of behaviours which each society expects its members to have (Awoniyi, 2013). It must however be emphasized at this juncture that every society has a unique culture which contains the norms and values of the people. In view of this, we can align with Fabode, Aleende and Adejugbe who state unequivocally that value is a coherent set of attitude, behaviour and action adapted and inculcated in a person, organization, or society as a standard to guide its behaviour and preferences in all situations.

Yoruba as an ethnic group, and just like any other ethnic groups in Africa hold their values in high esteem. An average Yoruba is born and nurtured from the cultural background, as he grows up to adulthood, he is expected to adhere strictly to his culture and values. He is regarded as a deviant and bastard when he falls short of the acceptable societal standard.

It is however very unfortunate and indeed disheartening to note that some aspects of Yoruba traditional values and morality have been influenced by the processes of modernity that are prevalent in African societies. In an attempt to grapple with the socio-religious challenges of the time and to fix the problem created by globalization, some of the Yoruba traditional values are on daily basis being swept under a very huge carpet of modernization while some had

completely fizzled out. This paper is therefore an attempt to re-awaken the Yoruba consciousness through aggressive sensitization so as to unravel the rich moral values that have been jettisoned.

### **An X-ray of Yoruba Moral Values**

The Yorubas have various moral and societal values meant and designed to regulate interpersonal relationship and enhance peaceful coexistence among members of the communities. These set of values are also put in place for social cohesion and smooth running of the community. As observed by Awoniyi (2015), they are designed to prevent members of the community from becoming rebellious and thereby endangering the welfare of the society. Some of these values are as follows:

- **Breast feeding:** This is one of the Yoruba cultural values. Adedimeji (1995) describes it as a crucial postnatal care for child growth and development through which the baby is given the most nourishing food from its very source. This process, he explains, brings about psycho-social understanding between mother and baby as the latter grows up to love, respect and protect the former, who did not only give birth to him but fed him with a part of her body. It is a fact that cannot be disputed that family mutual understanding exists in Yoruba society where breast feeding is traditionally obeyed and maintained. It is however disheartening that the acculturation syndrome embraced by many African societies and the challenges of modernization have negatively affected the noble value. These bring for instance, the foreign ill-formed culture of feeding babies with animal milk which is not only nonnatural but nonnutritious and at variance with African method of feeding babies.
- **Sexual uprightness and chastity during marriage:** As rightly observed by Yetunde, Oluwasegun and Onabanjo (2011), the general welfare of every individual within the society is the concern of every member. Marriage is exclusively reserved for those that have married. Much emphasis is however placed on virginity before marriage. It is a disgrace for a woman, her family members and by extension the entire Yoruba, to lose her virginity before marriage. The aberrant dishonor after marriage caused by conjugal infidelity also remains an aberration in the society. A man that is involved in conjugal infidelity is also not exempted from this embarrassment. He is therefore sanctioned though little control is placed on men's sexual activities, yet a man is not expected to seduce or be

involved in any sexual acts with another man's wife as this attracts capital punishment in the society.

Adedimeji(1995) lamented that virginity which shows woman's chastity and gives her due respect in traditional culture is now thrown to the wind. According to him the bridal costume and paraphernalia, the poetic quality of the bridal chants, the oration and dramaturgy of wedding rite which offer marriage cultural beauty are eroded.

- Self-discipline: People are expected to demonstrate certain level of integrity in whatever they do or say in the public. (Yetunde, Oluwasegun, and Nurudeen, 2011). It is believed that not all an individual sees or hears must be revealed among the Yorubas . There is an adage that says: "B'ojubari, enu a dake"(Mouth should always conceal what the eyes has seen). An individual is therefore taught from childhood stage the importance of this quality.
- Music: Apart from the cognitive value that music provides in African cultural societies, its impact on human mind and emotion cannot be over emphasized. Whenever a piece of traditional music is rendered, the mind is moved and the soul is awakened. The exhilarating effect of Yoruba talking drum(gangan) readily comes to mind here. Warriors at the battle fields become thrilled and excited as soon as they hear the sound of the drum. For instance, Kiriji War, was won by the Ibadan with the help of war drum.

The pervading negative influence of acculturation on this Yoruba traditional beauty is worrisome as pop music has taken over. Youths have lost interest in Yoruba traditional music. Some even argue that foreign music are inspirational while traditional Yoruba music are not and have the patency to mute demons whenever they are sung. Thus, the contents of aesthetics that African cultural music encompasses as submitted by Ademeji (1995) are now at the points of moribund due to the influx of acculturation into the systems of African societies.

- Patience: Among the Yoruba, patience is considered as the greatest of all virtues. There is ,therefore, a popular maxim that says "suuru ni baba iwa" (patience is the father of good character). It is generally regarded as the root of any successful relationship and success in life. It is also believed that patience is the solution to all insurmountable problems; this belief is justified in the Yoruba saying that "suuru le se okuta jina" (patience solves

difficult problems) One is therefore expected to possess the highest degree of patience which is believed to be a pivot through which issues of life roll. The significance of patience is further stressed through a Yoruba proverb that says “Agba ti o ba ni suuru o ti o ni ohun gbogbo” (An elderly person that possesses patience has everything). It is however very unfortunate that this noble virtue just like other virtues has been eroded and replaced by intolerance and get-rich-quickly syndrome.

Patience is central to Yoruba morality and the sub-foundation of character itself. It is believed in Yoruba mythology that “Suuru” (patience) is the firstborn of Oldumare (Oyebade and Azenabor, 2018). According to Oyebade and Azenabor (2018), the concept of “Suuru” (patience) is akin to the phenomenological temperament of “iwapele” (gentleness). A patient man will hardly regret actions. Therefore, patience is the fundamental virtue and god-like in the African nation of reality.

- Respect: Respect implies due cognizance of the rights and place of others in the scheme of things, irrespective of age, class, status or station in life (Idowu, 1962). Awoniyi describes it as an attitude of the mind that recognizes others in the scheme of things. Respect (Owo) also connotes Humility (Iteriba) which is associated with greeting, loyalty, gratitude and hospitality. The Yorubas believe that peace will remain a mirage and unattainable grandiose where there is no respect. This belief is supported by a Yoruba proverb that says: “Ai f’agba f’enikan ni o je ka ye o gun” (lack of respect for authority or others robs the world of peace).
- Good name: 'Good name' among Yoruba people is so cherished to the extent that it is considered as a source of pride and sometimes an elevator to higher social position. Good name has no alternative. Individuals are therefore compelled to maintain good name for the coming generations. It has also been seen as a means of social control. Every individual is conscious of what he does or how he behaves so that the good name of the family is not tarnished by engaging in anti-social activities which is capable of maligning the integrity and cherished name of the family. It is in view of this that parents inquire from the neighborhood the status of the name of the family from where their children want to marry. It is considered a social stigma to marry from any family with tarnished reputation.

- Right Choice of words: The Yorubas so much value right words spoken at the expected or right time. It is believed that “Ororere ma n yo obi ninu apo”, “Oro buburu ma n yo Ida ninu ako” (right words bring out Kolanuts from the pocket of the individual to whom the words are addressed whereas wrong words bring out sword from the same pocket). In Oyebade’s view, it is fundamental to speak words that succinctly capture an occasion because spoken words are collective properties of all and are believed to be discreetly used in conversations with forces either seen or unseen (Oyebade, 2018). He further submits that it is expected of every individual to be sagacious with words as harbinger of peace and harmony.

In Yoruba cultural context, a man of integrity must always speak truthful words. His assertion is supported by a popular Yoruba adage that says “Ka soro ka ba be ni iyi omo eniyan” (It is most honourable of a man to be truthful). A man whose words, in Yoruba understanding, cannot be trusted has failed integrity test because every false claim is blamed on character.

- Dressing: The value that the Yorubas place on dressing can easily be understood through their popular aphorism that says “Irinisi ni isoni lojo” (you are addressed the way you dress). Yoruba people are well known for their attire. They have a very wide range of clothing, some of which include: Aso Oke – which comes in different colours and patterns – Ofi, usually used as cover cloth but can also be sewn and worn; Aran and Adire. Yoruba worlds according to Adepeju and Oyetola (2013) are gender sensitive. Men wear Kembe, Dandogo, Dansiki, Agbada, Buba Sokoto and matching caps such as (Abeti Aja, dog-ear-shaped cap, fila-etu, and so on while women wear Iro (wrapper) and Buba (top) with a matching head-gear (gele). Clothing among the Yoruba people is a crucial factor upon which the personality of an individual is anchored. The outward appearance of a man is a reflection of his state of mind. The cloth one puts on, reveals his mood.
- Hair style: Just like Yoruba attire the hair styles of women among the Yoruba are of great value because hair styles perform several roles among the people which include: medium of communication, mark of initiation, that of mind, religious beliefs, marital and social status of woman in the society (Adepeju and Oyebola, 2013). In Adepoju and Oyebola’s explanation, a hair style from the forehead which ends at the back of the neck shows the

carrier is married. On the other hand, the hair style that runs from the right side of the head to the left ear reveals that the carrier has not married.

When women remove the woven parts of their hair while others are left untouched, it reveals that things are not well and it is therefore a sign of protest. If a woman shaves her hair, it shows that the woman concerned has just lost the husband and so she is in sorrowful mood and at the same time mourning the death of the husband.

Adepoju and Oyebola (2013) also observe that in the past, Yoruba women were noted for different hair styles such as suku, (a braiding hair style that runs from fore-head to the back or crown of the head); Kolese (a braiding hair style where each knot runs from the front and terminates at the back of the head, close to the neck; (Ipako-Elede) this braiding style starts from the back of the head but ends at the front; Panumo (keep quiet) This is hair style, with two different starting points, the back and the front. The knots meet at the center with a little opening. Ojompeti (rain soaked ear) The braiding starts from one side of the head, and ends close to the ear.

It is unfortunate to see that these rich Yoruba cultural heritage and values have been completely eroded. Perming and modern method of braiding with attachment have taken over, the budding generation are completely at sea.

- **Courage:** This is another Yoruba traditional value, that implies the ability to remain unmovable amidst the unsettling and unpredictable vicissitudes of life. One should be courageous enough to weather every storm of life. This virtue is supported by an adage that says “B’ emiwa t’ a o ku, ire gbogboni o s’ojueni” (once there is life, there is hope for all good things). As submitted by Oyebade and Azenabor (2018), “this virtue opposes escapism, self-condemnation, abandonment and indulgence in vices to circumvent life obstacles. Whatever challenges man is confronted with, the Yorubas expect him to persevere because “Aforiti lo l’aye” (success comes through perseverance).
- **Truth:** Among the Yoruba, truth is seen as the major strand that welds society together. Human society will be in complete shamble without truth. The trust built in Yoruba Society just like any other societies lies mainly in the ability of the individual members to tell one another the truth. Truth in Yoruba belief exhibits certain features which are as follows:- It is bitter. This is supported by Yoruba proverb that says: “Otito koro” (truth is bitter); Truth



is not popular. This is also corroborated by Yoruba maxim thus: Otito doja, O kuta .Owo lowo ni won n reke” (The demand for Truth is low while that of unrighteousness is high; truth doesn’t err.) This is also supported by Yoruba proverb that says: “Otito kii sina iro ni n kori bogbe” (Truth doesn’t go astray but lie does); Truth has reward. The common adage among the Yoruba is that “Eni to n so ooto ni orisa ngbe” (Divinities support the truthful). From the foregoing, it is obvious that “Truth” remains an important value that every “Omoluabi” (a well-rounded good person) must possess. He must not betray this quality because the totality of his integrity anchors on it.

- Diligence: The pervasive influence of hard-work on Yoruba culture finds explanation in her aphorism that says “Ise L’ogun ise” (Hard-Work is the cure for poverty). It is believed that a diligent person will always overcome every problem. He is well respected in the society because he possesses the medicine that cures poverty.

### **The Influence of Eroded Yoruba Values on Development**

The erosion of Yoruba moral values and its attendant evil on moral crises that touch every aspect of African ways of life can succinctly be described as submitted by Adewale (2016) as follows:

*Elderly people lament daily that they are meeting behaviour that shocks them: sexual immorality, dishonesty, corruption, crime, violence and many other things..... Middle aged people lament about children they fail to control. The youth complains of lack of example from the older members of the society.*

From the above, it is obvious that the erosion of Yoruba moral values remains an evil wind that blows nobody any good. The effects of acculturation on Yoruba values are palpable. Apart from the fact that it has reduced Yoruba values that were so cherished in the past. Africans have been seriously affected the negative impact of the neglected moral values. The middle aged are seriously affected while the energetic youth’s confidence level has been badly and severely obliterated. This terrible effect has in various ways hampered Yoruba social, economic and political development.

The family mutual understanding that exists in Yoruba cultural society where traditional values are upheld has disappeared. The acculturation syndrome embraced by many African societies has changed the noble values for worse. It has brought the foreign, ill-informed ways of doing things.



The system of feeding babies with animal milk which is not only unnatural but nonnutritious is responsible for the animalistic behaviour of youths in various so-called modern towns and cities in Africa today (Adedimeji, 1995).

The lost of Yoruba moral values has negatively affected Yoruba marital system. Broken homes, unfaithful sexual escapees among married couples and all other apparent and recurrent marital ills are constantly witnessed. Peaceful co-existence among people living in the same communities becomes extremely difficult. This has also made sustainable development unattainable grandiose.

The aesthetic value in Yoruba language that is full of symbolism and imagery with proverbs, sarcasms and other language embellishments has disappeared. It is not uncommon to see Yoruba conveniently adopting foreign languages as the preferred languages to be spoken at home. An individual that is proficient in foreign languages is considered to be brilliant, the youth have completely lost interest in Yoruba language thereby making the future bleak.

The value that Yoruba traditional society places on communalism as expressed in the sharing of a common social life, commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations , caring for others, interdependence and solidarity has been eroded. It is unfortunate today to see that extreme individualism that is potentially destructive of human value has replaced it; thereby exposing the budding generation to a lot of evil.

Without any shadow of doubt, if this situation persists, the embryonic formation of future development will be truncated as the youth, the budding generation will be subjected to the poverty of material existence and critical knowledge that Yoruba values would have offered them.

### **Rejuvenating Yoruba Moral Values Through Aggressive Sensitization**

Though African Cultural Heritage is enviably rich, full of vitality, it has been maligned in many ways. As Awoniyi has rightly observed many overzealous Christians and Islamic enthusiasts have branded it as barbaric, primitive, unprogressive and archaic. Many modern men who are engrossed in the influence of science and technology believed it should be discarded. In view of

this, it is necessary to re-awaken Yoruba tradition and consciousness so as to revitalize and resuscitate the dying values. This can however be achieved through sensitization.

Sensitization literally means making people sensitive about an issue. It is to create awareness, to bring something to the knowledge of others and to make known to people what would have remained unknown. If Yoruba moral values are alien to the youth, then they need to be sufficiently sensitized. This can be done by using the following strategies:

- Improving knowledge: To improve the knowledge of people about Yoruba moral values, there should be aggressive campaign at the family and school levels. Social interaction and mass media are also needed. Interesting programmes that will inculcate Yoruba moral values should persistently be organized at different levels. Parents need to teach their children at home Yoruba stories that can inculcate moral values should be constantly narrated. Government at all levels should also design the curriculum that will make the teaching of Yoruba moral compulsory.
- Attitudinal Changes: The way people feel about Yoruba moral values must change. The Notion that Yoruba moral values are archaic, barbaric and primitive must be corrected. Instead of church marriage, Yoruba traditional marriage where Yoruba cultural heritage will be displayed should be encouraged. Teachers at all levels in Yoruba land should be allowed to wear Yoruba traditional attires to work everyday. This will correct the erroneous belief that only English dresses can make them appear smart. For women, Yoruba hair styles such as “Suku”, “Ipako-elede”, “Kolese”, “Panumo” and others should replace the modern styles.
- Building social support: Building of social support can be achieved through interaction and discussion, by challenging falsehood and correcting misconceptions. Sensitization can also be done with convincing arguments and skill building. We can also sensitize by encouraging the audience to build a social support network.
- Awareness messages and aggressive sensitization of people about Yoruba moral values can also be done through Radio advert posters, banners, hand bills, souvenir, television advert, Newsprints, town criers and telephone SMS. All these, if properly used will no doubt make people have adequate knowledge of Yoruba moral values; many people including foreign missionaries will realize that Yoruba moral values exist.

Discussion on rejuvenation of Yoruba society will be incomplete if one fails to mention the restoration of the culture of the community. In the communal structure of the Traditional Yoruba community as observed by Dada (2009), the welfare of an individual in the society is everyone's concern. That is the major reason it is very difficult for material poverty to thrive. Some of the communal efforts that promote self-reliance include:

- "Owe": This is a form of collective help in which the effort of a group of people were pulled together in order to accomplish a task for another in the society.
- " Aro" or "Oya": This is a standby association for mutual help.
- " Esusu": This is a revolving credit association in traditional Yoruba society.

Through these communal efforts, self-reliance had been promoted, and poverty banished among the people. The restoration of the culture of the community is a call for holistic ethical orientation and revolution. Sacrificing cultural values on the altar of Western Technology should be totally condemned.

### **Conclusion**

The Yorubas must be ready at all time to market their cultural uniqueness and potency. This can be achieved through promotion of moral values. Any laxity exhibited by the custodians of these values would result in rapid erosion and disappearance of the people and their culture. In view of this, everyone who is attached to any culture must be able to identify its uniqueness. Acculturation, modernization, globalization and the influx of foreigners to Africa should not be seen as genuine excuse to erode Yoruba values. Social institution, most especially the family, should not therefore lose its function of socialization. To reinvigorate and rejuvenate Yoruba moral values, aggressive sensitization is needed.

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