Research article

HUMANIZING GLOBALISATION: IMPERATIVES FOR FAMILY ETHICS IN IGBOLAND

Dr. Donald Uchenna Omenukor

Department of Philosophy, Imo State University, Owerri. E-mail: Donomen2000@yahoo.com



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Abstract

The modern world is now being governed by a complex of culture. Most of this new culture, to individuals and societies are foreign; and against the new culture, traditional values are appearing helpless. Globalization represents the external changes in politics, economy, culture and society that are at present spreading across every length and breadth of the world. These changes and the accompanying new values present a relational conflict for individuals and for societies. Ndigbo represent the group of people who, although have a large number in the Diaspora, predominantly reside in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. With a worldview encompassing all aspects of life – culture, religion, politics, and leadership, play, work, among others – the world represents a constant interaction between the physical and the spiritual. The family is one great aspect of Igbo worldview and community, not only because it marks out kinship and sustenance of lineage, but also because it marks the basis and resolving point of all character formation not only for young people but also for adults. With such ethical principles as communalism, preliminary investigations, bride price or bride wealth, clear roles differentiation and abhorrence of abominations, the Igbo families are more stable, united, and progressive. However, globalization values that are mainly secular now share a conflicting domineering relation with indigenous values and most of the noble values associated with the Igbo family system are now being lost on the alter of acculturation and diffusion.

Keywords: Globalisation, Ethics, Society and Igbo World

Introduction

Ethics could be said to be two things: first, it could be said to represent well-founded standards of rightness and wrongness that prescribe what human beings ought to do or ought not to do. Secondly, ethics could be said to refer to the development of one's ethical standards. In this regard, it is necessary to constantly examine and re-examine one's standards to ensure that they are reasonable and well-founded. Bertrand Russell writes:

The need of ethics in human affairs arises not only from man's incomplete gregariousness or from his failure to live up to an inner vision; it arises also from another difference between man and other animals. The actions of human beings do not all spring from direct impulse, but are capable of being controlled and directed by conscious purpose. ¹

Thus, ethics demands a continuous effort by individuals and groups at studying their moral beliefs and moral conducts and striving to ensure that the individuals and the institutions they represent and shape live up to the standards that are reasonable and solidly based.

Appropriate foundation for ethics requires a standard of value to which all goals and actions can be compared. This standard is human life and the happiness that makes it livable. Life is a process of self-sustaining and self-generating action. Life requires action and action requires value and values are the motive behind purposeful action. Philosophy in general and ethics in particular is studied to show people how to live their lives.

Marriage and the establishing of joint life (the family) is a natural desire of human beings responding to their instincts. Ayatullah Ibrahim Amini states that:

Where else could one find a better shelter for the youth than a sincere family unit? It is the desire of raising a family which preserves the youth from pursuing irrational dreams and internal anxieties.... The sacred marital covenant is a Divine rope which links the hearts, calms them when they become unsettled, and focuses irrational dreams on one ideal goal.²

The family in the Igbo society is not only the individual's first contact with social organisation and control, but it is the home. The family is the centre of love, kindness, friendship, co-operation, education as well as control. The type of family organisation being the extended family system, it is a place where one is his brother's keeper. The family system in Igboland makes moral demands on the husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, children, brothers, sisters and even the larger community. These moral demands are in terms of rights, obligations, fairness, benefit to society, among others. It is these moral demands that helped keep families closely knit, progressive, disciplined, controlled and orderly. However, there are now present in Igboland, factors that have come to displace these moral principles and weaken the bonds amongst families. These foreign forces are the products and values of globalization. This paper attempts to examine these family ethical principles that helped sustain the Igbo family system and how they are being eroded by globalization forces.

Globalisation and Human Values

Globalisation, even though a very topical issue now, is a multi-dimensional concept. Encompassing different spheres of human existence and interaction, it has also been variously defined and described by scholars worldwide. M. C. Khor describes it to include economic, social, cultural and technological dimensions.³ For Baylis and Smith, as quoted in Chukwudom Okoli, globalisation is a process which involves much more than simply growing connections and interdependence. For them, it is "A historical process involving a fundamental shift or transformation in the spatial scale of human social organisation that links distant relations across regions and continents." All the definitions and explanations of globalisation find unity in the fact that economic, social, political, cultural and other aspects of life are being deconstructed and reconstructed.

Chukwudum Okoli states that globalisation is characterised by about three things, namely: (1) A stretching of social, political and economic activities across frontiers so that events, decisions and activities in one region of the world come to have significance for individuals and communities in distant regions of the globe. (2) The intensification of the growing magnitude of interconnectedness in almost every sphere of social existence, from the economic to the ecological; and (3) the growing extensity, intensity and velocity of global

interactions is associated with deepening enmeshment of local events. Thus, local events may come to have global consequences and global events may come to have local global consequences.⁵

Globalisation values impose a conflicting relationship with values in different societies. They also impose challenges that put the societies between the choices of cultural practices and the economical, political and strategic interests that come with globalisation. Value is that which one seeks to achieve or maintain in line with his/her life as a standard of evaluation. Values are the motive power behind purposeful action. For indigenous peoples, values are part of their culture; hence culture could be defined as the entire way of life of a people. This view becomes clearer when it is considered that culture manifests in norms, traditions, customs, worldview, symbols, kinship, socio-economic and political relations, attitudes, behaviour patterns, worship among others.

Human values guide human life. The values of individuals guide the life of these individuals while the values of communities guide the lives of those communities. David E. Schrader writes that "The values of individuals function to guide individual lives in a simple enough manner.... The values of communities function in a far more complicated manner." Different groups and classes of people have always been marked out by different values all through human history. O. I. D. Anele writes that there are a number of cultural motifs which serve as a form of identity for people in a given culture. language, mode of dressing, greeting, art and music, system of marriage and family life are serious vehicles not only for expressing culture, but also for ensuring order. In most parts of Igboland, the place of the family is very important in bolstering the institutions of traditional culture ad ensuring social control. However, globalisation aims mainly at changing the value systems in societies and transforming them and trying to alienate them to find a dominating system on which is based the planning and implementation of policies which meet certain interests. Who are Ndigbo? What are their family ethics and how has these fared against globalisation values, this paper progresses to examine.

Ndigbo: Worldview of the People

Ndigbo, despite a large number in the Diaspora, reside predominantly in the south-eastern zone of Nigeria. Largely homogenous, the Igbo language, with slight variegations in tongues and dialects, is spoken in the area. Tom Forest states that due to the effects of immigrations and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, there are Igbo populations in countries such as Cameroons and Equatorial Guinea, as well as outside of Africa. HechukwuMadubuike writes that:

The narrative of the Igbo people is startling in its litany of the dramatic and momentous events.... Yet Igbo history is not one of a drawn out tragedy and failure. It is usually rescued by the principle of *akonauche*, a combination of practical wisdom, tact, resilience and compromise, which elicit the desired result from the contending forces.¹⁰

This is not intended to be a recount of the history of *Ndigbo*, but an attempt to capture their nature and their world so as to afford a clearer understanding of Igbo family ethics. Igbo worldview is composed of customs, culture, tradition, language, environment, among others, driven by religion and executed through ritual. No phenomenon is taken for granted in Igbo worldview. Characterised by a deep symbolism and owing to the continuous interaction of the physical and the spiritual worlds, *Ndigbo* have sought meaning in everything. F. N. Ikwuegbu states that:

Where rigour and austerity are consciously and voluntarily sought, the Igbo looked for solution through application of known technology or techniques of organisation. To overcome these limitations, people appeal to or seek to influence and even manipulate supernatural beings and powers.¹¹

This accounts for why the Igbo world is full of men and women with different offices that help in administering and manipulating the relationship between the physical and supernatural arms of the Igbo world. *Ndigbo* believe in life after death through reincarnation and that the spirit exercises greater control over the physical. This belief conditions even the life that is lived. People are believed to reincarnate into families that they were part of while alive.

The traditional practices of the Igbo people are more in tune with animism which is the belief that everything has a life or a soul and thus leading to the worship of major gods. Igbo people see themselves as part of nature rather than outside it or superior to it. In terms of religion and rites of passage, today, majority of the Igbo are Christians, even though there are still some adherents to *odinala* – traditional religion. Onwuejeogwu avers that "Chukwu is the supreme deity in *odinani*

As he is the Creator in their pantheon and the Igbo people believe that all things come from him and that everything on earth, hence and the rest of the spiritual world is under his control."¹²

The Igbo society has often been perceived in a patriarchal sense that shows male dominance. Igbo culture value masculinity, strength, wealth and the fighting spirit. The social rules of the people which demand that a man not only present himself as strong and wealthy also demand that he must be able to control his womenfolk. Chinua Achebe states that if a man is unable to control his women and children (particularly his women), he was not really a man. However, despite these overarching social rules, it is not integral to Igbo culture to downgrade women or to make women subservient or mediocre. That the women are restricted to less tedious and less tasking tasks is not a sign of inferiority, but really out of respect for womanhood and motherhood.

Women have occupied and still occupy positions of strength over men in Igbo culture. There are the cases of the major communal deities that are women and are being served in different capacities; either in the pantheons as subordinate deities or as priests. The *Ogwugwu* deity in most part of Anambra area of Igbo is a case in hand. *Ogwugwu* is the female main deity followed by *Udo* her consort – the male deity. The *Agbala* in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is another. In the communities, the position of the *umuada* (daughters of the land) is often unquestionable and unshakeable in matters of conflict resolution and rule enforcement. More so, women in being mothers exert a lot of control on the family and the society. In Igboland, the relationship between the men and the women is one of complementarity of roles.

Nkolika Chukwura writes that:

Although females are brought up looking forward to their dual roles as wives and mothers. It would be misleading to think that the major roles of women in Igbo society are simply as wives and mothers, since Igbo women are prominent in public life as an organized force in both economics and politics.¹⁴

In Igbo traditional society, a significant part of a young man's or young girl's childhood training is geared toward preparing them for their future roles in the family and as useful and responsible citizens. This leads this paper to subsequently examine family ethics in the Igbo society.

Family Ethics in Igbo Society

Societies are always organized and controlled by customs and norms on how people or the members of a community are to relate amongst themselves or with their environment. Without norms and values, life would become random, actions and results also become random. This is not in the character of the human person who possesses reason. Social life not only depends on external relations between one group and another, but also o internal relations within close groups such as the families. The human family according to A. W. Haviland is "A group that consists of woman, children who still depend on her and a man who has legal relation to the women." ¹⁵

Ndigbo have customs about the family that have become key parts of their culture. It has earlier been said that a greater part of the upbringing of young boys and girls is to prepare them for their future roles as husband and wives and members of a family. Elements of Igbo customs – myth, folktales, riddles, proverbs, among others – are very imaginative, while also serving religious, social and educational roles. *Ndigbo*, like most other indigenous peoples of the world, use folktales and proverbs to transmit the people's morality to their children. In Igbo culture, when men want to make a family, they marry.

Marriage in Igboland goes beyond a sexual union. The marriage involves or consists of the nuclear family, the couple's parents, brothers, and sisters and even their distant relations. The extended family system practiced by *Ndigbo* brings in about three to four generations of nuclear families of lineal descendants. In Igbo marriages, there is greater emphasis placed on compatibility of the couples and families and social standing within the kinship community. The marriages are based more on arrangement rather then on love and the early preparations involved much screening for blood relationships, caste classification, traces of insanity in the family, and family curses and sanctions placed as a result of incest rules or any other kind of abominations.

Uzoma Onyemaechi writes that bride wealth or bride price is practiced in Igboland instead of a dowry. Bride price being a token of appreciation paid to a man or/and his kinsmen for giving away their daughter. This token is given to the bride's father or b\relatives before the elders of both families. The bride

wealth serves a lot of social, legal and economic reasons. It seals the marriage engagement and marks the official hand over of the bride to the groom. It also regulates the rate of divorce because if there is to be a divorce, the bride wealth must be returned in most of Igboland.

Igbo marriages are established mainly for procreation to keep the lineage going, hence the birth of a child, particularly, a male child solidifies the marriage. There is a common saying among the Igbo people that it is the male child that keeps the women in her matrimonial home. Uzoma Onyemaechi maintains that the Igbo traditional marriage is no marriage of romantic love through beauty or handsomeness. The couples establish a marriage for procreation and the important functions of marriage are; reproduction, child care, socialization, economic support, collective responsibility and status placement.

Traditionally in Igboland, marriage is regarded as a family affair. When a boy betroths or finds a girl he wants to marry, the matter does not end their quite unlike some western marriages. In Igboland, the families of the contracting parties will embark on series of investigations, checking out caste designations, lineage, character, clan relationship and family background. If all findings are satisfactory, then approval is given for the continuation of traditional rites. Marriage in Igboland is more inclined to polygamy as a man is considered wealthy when he can marry and maintain many wives and children; hence he is called – *ogaranya* – a wealthy man. However, with the impacts of Christianity and education, monogamy is gaining ground.

In the Igbo marriage system, the custom and traditions empowers the man to defend all his uxorial rights and also does not prohibit him from having concubines or getting polygamous in marrying more than one wife. What this means is that in marriage, the woman is every of the kinsmen's and kinswomen's wife, but in some certain matters as pertains to uxorial rights – sexual intercourse, washing of cloths, making of the man's bed and in some cases, even in cooking food, the wife is for the groom alone. Any woman who steps out of her bounds in these matters have committed an abominations. Some of the important ethical practices that guide marriage in Igboland include:

- i. **Preliminary Investigations**: This is the investigations undertaken by both contracting families to ascertain and ensure that both families are compatible in a lot of respects. It is to ensure that each of the families is decent, free from curses and hereditary sicknesses, of compatible castes, among other negative tendencies, of which contrary findings will automatically put a stop to the marriage. If the findings are positive and the marriage goes ahead, there are fewer tendencies for breakup as a result of discovery of something later which could undermine the foundation of the marriage. There is a high degree of trust among the couples and the families.
- ii. **Practice of Bride Price or bride Wealth:** The bride wealth or bride price is the token of appreciation by a suitor and his people to the bride's fathers or his relatives for giving away their daughter in marriage. The bride wealth is symbolic in a lot of respects. It shows that a lot of effort and resources have been spent in training and bringing up the girl; that the bride's parents are giving away something that is dear to them; that the girl would no longer be working for the prosperity of her father's house but that of her husband. The bride wealth payment marks the acceptance of the bride's father to give his daughter in marriage to the groom. This is ethical because once the bride's parents accept the bride's price, they are no longer to make further material demands from their daughter as she is now part of another family and its progress. Although, the girl is still morally bound to take care of her parents as much as possible. The bride's wealth further goes to show that the bride cost the groom something of value and so he has to handle her with value and care and this makes the marriage more cordial and stable.
- iii. *Clear Roles Differentiation*: In the Igbo family, there are clear roles differentiations. The father has his roles and so also are the mother and the children. In that case, there is complementarity of roles and the family runs smoothly and stably. This clear roles differentiation also goes to ensure that male children and female children are brought up to fulfill their future roles properly.
- iv. *Extended Family System*: the Igbo family system is built on the extended family system. The extended family system brings into the group several generations of nuclear families and lineal descendants paternally and maternally. This extended family system expands the range of consanguine relationships. It recognises membership by blood, affinity and by marriage. The extended family system ensures the maintenance of family bond, the genuine sharing of love, care of the weak and elderly members of the family as well as ensuring family stability and wellbeing.
- v. **Communal Involvement in Marriages**: In Igboland, marriage is a communal affair. Marriage does not begin and end with two young people meeting and agreeing to marriage. Once the young prospective couple meet and agree (or their parents can agree on their behalf), the ball leaves their court and moves to the family

levels where investigations begin. The family and the community remains involved until all the right is fulfilled; hence for anybody from either party's community, the one is an in-law. This practice ensures that marriages and families are built on dignity and mutual respect. The man realizes that if he maltreats the woman, he is maltreating the whole community (his and hers); and the woman realizes that if she misbehaves, she embarrassing both her husbands family and her own people.

vi. *Abominations*: In Igboland, there are certain acts that are considered abominations (*nsoala*). A lot of these abominations occur in families and marriages. These include: a wife having sexual intercourse with her brother-in-law or any other man at all while her husband is alive; bringing in another man into her matrimonial home. In each of these two cases, the husband could die if he does not know and sleeps with his wife. If he knows, he must make the abomination open and the wife would have to confess or she could go mad or die. A woman does not climb trees, particularly, *oji* (kola nut) tress. A man beating or battering his wife is seriously frowned at and if it happens during certain periods (like the week of peace in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*), it becomes an abomination. Stealing is an abomination for which a woman could be sent parking or for which a woman could leave the husband who commits such. Any kind of incest is abominable. Every member of the family has to be conscious of these acts and avoid them. Whenever these acts are committed, they are abominations and attract serious repercussions and penalties in atoning for them. They are atoned for through the *ikpuaru* ritual of cleansing performed statutorily by a man from Nri, the mythical home of *Ndigbo*. Avoidance of these acts keeps every member of the family on his toes and ensures peace, happiness, and overall wellbeing of the family and its members.

Globalisation and the Erosion of Family Values in Igboland

David E. Schrader writes that a century ago, William James offered an account of the development of moral values that can be generalized to other kinds of values as well. James' account accords well with two basic facts about human beings. The two facts are that human beings are generally social creatures an that they are more particularly linguistic creatures. They have evolved with a substantial concern generally to get on well with the humans around them and they have also evolved with the ability to develop language. ¹⁷ F. N. Osuji agrees when he states that "The Igbos as a travelling people, become influenced by other people's cultural and traditional practices, particularly those of the people with whom they reside in their countries and communities. ¹⁸

Generally, globalisation value system includes a lot of negativities. Its positive values such as democracies, human rights, tolerance, are directional and cannot be considered as absolutes. They are values not in all societies, but rather part of the conceptual elements for the spread of globalisation. For instance, tolerance reflects a powerful meaning of communication and dialogue, but the objective question here is – what kind of tolerance does the western culture call for, when it is the ethnocentric convictions of western culture that dialogue and communication with other cultures should be to the benefit of the victorious culture. Thus, even values of positive globalisation are based on rejecting and excluding the other. ¹⁹

The modern Igbo has gone through a cultural metamorphosis, especially with regards to marriage and the family. This follows the fact also that due to western influences, the status of women has also undergone great changes. Today, the marriages are contracted in the Churches and in Civil Courts, although, most still include traditional ceremonies. The modern Igbo woman now prefers church or court marriage not only because of their flamboyancy but because of the tremendous security they offer. However, there is a certain sense among the people that modern youths resort to court and church marriages to be able to avoid their obligations and sometimes to hide immoral deeds. These modern marriages afford the child to choose his or her ways at the detriment and destabilization of the family or the community with the attendant consequences. These consequences include: incessant divorces resulting from incompatibility issues, misplaced priorities, carelessness, among others.

All the aforementioned family ethical principles and social control measures were what helped to ensure family stability and social order in the past. However, a lot of things have changed. The first attack was from Christian missionaries who labeled almost everything traditional African fetish, idolatry and savage. From that time till now, with the spread of western education and other acculturation influences in globalisation, a lot of the values of traditional society are lost. Theophilius Okere captures this succinctly when he writes:

Cultures are indeed all in flux. In whole or in part, Igbo culture has undergone a lot of dramatic and even drastic changes. Much has happened and changed between the Igbo society of the mid 1800s described by Olaudah Equino and the present day Igbo society in which we live.²⁰

Okere continues:

Between the sustained brutalization wrought by the Slave Trade for nearly four hundred years, the political and social upheavals caused by European wars of conquest, military occupation and colonization and the frontal assault that Christian evangelization made on the traditional religion, psychology and worldview and perhaps as fatally, the bitter ordeal of having to negotiate a survival compromise within the love hate environment of Nigeria, Igbo culture, while remaining itself, has undergone a sea of change. Both materially and spiritually, the experience with the white man and within Nigeria has changed the culture almost beyond recognition.²¹

As Malinowski pointed out in her structural functionalism, any act anywhere within the specific community is sure to have effects in the overall working of the community. The youths of today are exposed to more and more western styles and practices and the accompanying values which are mostly secular in nature; hence they have continued to disregard these time-tested family and marriage ethics that ensured order and stability. Today, the craze is about fantasies and infatuations and these leave marriages with no strong foundations and the results are: divorces, single parenthood, separations, suicide, same sex relationships, prostitution and other forms of immoralities and crimes.

Conclusion

Humans are highly social beings always developing large complex social groupings. Man in his sense of organisation has created complex social structures made up of many cooperating as well as competing units. These units range from the families to nations. Social interactions in this units lead to the development of values And norms that form the basis of such a society. Every society in the world has distinct cultural attributed that distinguish them from other societies. These cultural attributed not only unite the people but also reinforce the totality of their continued existence.

Ndigbo have very rich culture guided and influenced by both religion and worldview, mirrored through symbols and executed through ritual. This culture is also rich in marriage and family values. These family ethics ensured that no abominations were committed, there is mutual respect, complementarity of roles, love, unity and stability. However, following the acculturation influences of globalisation with secular values rooted in individual and personal rights, most of the traditional rituals and norms have been abandoned and eroded and most of the abominations that caused serious stirs in the communities like homosexuality are now being celebrated.

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