

**INJUSTICE AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA AND
PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL USING AFRICAN TRADITIONAL
VALUES**

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Abstract

The World of Philosophy is replete with rigorous attempts to understand and interpret reality. And man is at the centre of this endeavor. Needless to say, man is a complex creature who is instinctively endowed with personal interest and also with rationality. The power of rationality manifests in the wisdom to address human existential challenges. These challenges can manifest in the form of injustice, insecurity, poverty, deprivation, etc. This paper is aimed at addressing injustice and insecurity in Nigeria using African traditional values that consider “human life” as the ultimate value in human society. It is worthy to note that, the current spate of injustice and insecurity which has claimed the lives of many Nigerians has necessitated this appraisal hence, some indigenous traditional African Values which include the value of human life, reward for good deeds, punishment for crime or bad deeds and communal spirit, create a new perspective of the reality of justice and security. Thus, the study contends that recourse to these indigenous values would resolve the issues of injustice and insecurity in 21st-century Nigeria.

Keywords: African values, Injustice, Insecurity, Philosophy

Introduction

There has been an alarming rate at which African Traditional values and cultures have been infiltrated by the negative effect of globalization, this situation is said to be responsible for the fast eroding of our traditional values like the value for human life that was hitherto held in high esteem. All these happen when people rely more on foreign guidance. This is not the way to break from the yoke of foreign domination which has greatly coloured our way of life since colonialism. For

Asouzu, “it is this African sheepish and copycat mentality and often wrongly, (adoption) of all things western” (Asouzu 256), that has created some of the problem. Where western infiltration has exerted tremendous socio-cultural influence on the Nigerian Cum African value System. This is evidence in the attitude of most youths who are more inclined to foreign ascent, and dressing, while their mother tongue and their indigenous dressing are thrown into oblivion.

Accompanied by the aforementioned unpalatable circumstances, is the introduction and propagation of Western religions which have assisted in watering down Nigerian nay African traditional values. This calculated ethnocentric intrusion, clothes in socio-economic relations, and religious benevolence have over time reshaped the psyche of most Nigerians. This situation has created an attitudinal paradigm shift from the African traditional sense of communalism and collective welfare to that of liberalism. In traditional African Societies (Nigeria), individuals received instant judgment from the gods when they erred, these phenomena kept people in check. But most Nigerians have abandoned this and copied the Western culture which is alien to our existential challenges and evolution as a Nation.

The inefficient management of these alien values has polarized the people along social ethnic and religious lines. This disparity created, therefore, accounts for self-centeredness which is the bedrock of injustice. Injustice necessitates tension in society and consequently, an overwhelming sense of bad blood as well as practical experiences of insecurity. This is even so because having lost grip on traditional and socio-cultural values that once held the families and societies together in African societies Chief amongst them the sanctity of human life, Nigeria is now gasping for the breath of justice, peace, and security. A return to these African traditional value systems will help.

Philosophy: An Overview

According to G.O. Ozumba, “... there was not a name, a practice, a profession, and a discourse, a discipline, a world view known and called

Philosophy ab initio. The term philosophy like other linguistic terms is a human creation. All we can say is that the mode of thinking which we now call philosophy had a beginning in time". Joseph Omoregbe, noted that "The single question 'what is philosophy' is very difficult to answer. Philosophers themselves disagree on what philosophy is or how it should be defined: Omoregbe Quoted Plato to have described the philosopher "as a man whose passion is to seek the truth, a man whose heart is fixed on reality" in the views of Aristotle "philosophy is right by called the knowledge of the truth". It however seems that the Oxford Companion to Philosophy provides a better vintage view of philosophy that will serve the very purpose of this work. It stipulates thus.

"Most definitions of philosophy are fairly controversial, particularly if they aim to be at all interesting or profound. That is partly because what has been called philosophy has changed radically in scope in the course of history, with many inquiries that were originally part of it having detached themselves from it. The shortest definition, and it is quite a good one is that philosophy is thinking about thinking" (Honderich, 161). That brings out the generally second-order character of the subject philosophy as reflective thought about particular kinds of thinking formation of beliefs claims to knowledge about the world and everything therein.

A more detailed, but still uncontroversial, comprehensive, definition is that philosophy is rationally critical thinking, of a more or less systematic kind about the general nature of the world (metaphysics or theory of existence), the justification of belief (epistemology or theory of existence), and the conduct of life (ethics or theory of value). Each of the three elements in this list has a non-philosophical counterpart, from which it is distinguished by its explicitly rational and critical way of proceeding and by its systematic nature. At this point, it is important to note that philosophy is a collaborative pursuit, unlike the meditative activity of sages which is commonly conceived to flourish best in isolated or even hermetic conditions. The form of collaboration involved, however, is not cooperative, like that of a surgical team, but competitive, a business of critical argument.

This business of critical argument however strives within the horizon of a well-coordinated and logically constructive discussion whereby all discussants are open-minded, unbiased, and completely devoid of all forms of sentiment. This form of discussion is usually targeted at widening the philosopher's (and non-philosophers') intellectual scope in particular and expanding the frontier of knowledge in general. This may come in the form of lectures, conferences, talk shows, debates, rational arguments, books, magazines, dialogue, etc. The description given above pictures a formal setting, but it should, however, be noted that there are also possibilities of a significantly circumstantial occurrence of intellectual discussions, engagement, or rational exercise that may be fruitful without necessarily birthed by a "well-coordinated and logically constructive intellectual environment ". This supposes a case scenario of 'marketplace philosophy'. The fruits of such platforms can however be harnessed via epistemological observation, coalition, analysis, and documentation of the basic ideologies that form the basis of such informal discussions.

Injustice: Different Sides

From one angle, injustice is seen as the absence of justice, violation of the right, or the rights of others. It can also be seen as an unjust act; In fact, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary sees injustice to mean "an act that inflicts undeserved hurt" (94) Injustice is a quality relating to unfairness to another or violation of one's rights." Injustice is a quality relating to unfairness or underserved outcomes. The term may be applied to a particular event or situation, or a larger status quo. Webster's online dictionary aptly puts it thus: "The sense of injustice is a universal human feature, though the exact circumstances considered unjust can vary from culture to culture. While even acts of nature can sometimes arouse the sense of injustice, the sense is usually felt about human action such as misuse, abuse, neglect, or malfeasance that is uncorrected or else sanctioned by a legal system or fellow human beings" (94). It is important to note that injustice is better understood in comparison or side by side with justice. While, some philosophers argue that

injustice and justice are two sides of the same coin, others are of the view that the former is independent of the latter with the former having the primary quality. The sense of injustice, however, can be a powerful motivational condition, causing people to take action not just to defend themselves but also others whom they perceive to be unfairly treated.

According to Edmond Cahn, “A relatively common view among philosophers and other writers is that while justice and injustice may be interdependent, it is an injustice that is the primary quality”. Many writers have written that while it is hard to directly define or even perceive justice, it is easy to demonstrate that injustice can be perceived by all. Scholars including Judith Shklar, Edmond Cahn, and Barrington Moore, Jr. have surveyed anthropological and historical works on injustice, “concluding that the sense of injustice is found everywhere there are men and women; it is a human universal.”

One of the common causes of injustice is selfishness. This is because people will often commit acts of injustice when they calculate it is in their interests to do so. It is however worthy of note that human injustice is not always caused by an attempt to gain unfair advantage or malice; it may be simply the result of flawed human decision making. Again, misuses and abuses about a particular case or context may represent a systemic failure to serve the cause of justice which circumstantially amounts to injustice.

Insecurity: An Overview

As a noun, insecurity implies uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; a crack of confidence. It also has to do with the state of being open to danger or threat, lack of protection, etc. Some scholars consider it to be the anxiety one experiences when one feels vulnerable and insecure in anticipation of some (usually ill-defined) misfortune. From whatever angle we choose to look at it, insecurity is intricately interwoven with an overwhelming feeling of uncertainty, vulnerability, dissatisfaction, and hopelessness that may culminate into frustration or a deep sense of dejection and alienation which is capable of negating the necessity of

harmonious co-existence within the human society such that is necessitated and held together by the principles of filial piety, collective responsibility as well as categorical imperative.

Insecurity however may arise where there is a deficiency in the capacity to formulate, manage, and implement policies designed for the day-to-day running of the human society as well as the management and distribution of the society's common wealth. It can also result from a deliberate act of selfishness, expression of ignorance, favouritism, nepotism, religious fanaticism, ethnicity, and the like. Sometimes, insecurity could stem from negligence of duty (as in the case of the state's security apparatus failing in their constitutional responsibility to protect the lives and property of the citizenry). It could be the consequence of insensitivity on the part of the government which can result in kidnapping, stealing, banditry, terrorism, rape, and other social vices (as in the case of the wife not showing desired respect to the husband and the husband not expressing love and affection towards his wife). Suspicion is also a window through which can be perceived (as in the government suspecting revolt by her subject [maybe because of harsh economic policy, lack of social security safety net, etc). Refusing to adhere to cultural and traditional norms and values can also breed insecurity which is exemplified in absolutely undesirable and culturally chaotic experiences. The list is endless.

From the foregoing; it is obvious that different facets of insecurity are discernable through various studies. It should however be noted that most of the causes of insecurity are avoidable, and preventable and can be properly addressed via a careful understanding, analysis, and application of core elements of African cultural and traditional values most of which have been systematically enshrined in African philosophy. Suffice it that some of these values which are aptly conceptualized in African culture, tradition, and philosophy are mentioned. Some of such values/concepts include; values for human life, filial piety, categorical imperative, love, respect, reward and punishment, retributive justice, complementarism, communalism, etc. which are passed from one generation to the

other through drums, work of art, dances, proverbs, books, oral traditional and so on.

African Traditional Values

In discussing African traditional values, we shall be concerned with values that are traditional to the African people. In other words, we are talking about such values that shape and define the interpersonal relationships within the African traditional enclave. Peter Etta and Friday Oti aver that, “traditional African society was said to be communal, with the spirit of brotherliness, very much evident. In a typical African society, an individual is considered rich or poor based on the overall richness of the community” (54). The people’s actions and inactions are interpreted, judged, and appraised at the instance of such established values.

Values here formed the bedrock upon which the life of individuals and society is built. Mbiti is quoted by Ekeopara to have stated that “values refer to the ideas that safeguard or uphold the life of the people in their relationship with one another and the world around them”. According to Chike Ekeopara, “Value connotes the measure of how strongly something is desired for its physical and moral beauty or usefulness”. When we talk of value we mean something useful, desirable, and that which has some worth. For. Ozumba;

In concrete terms, value is used to represent things that are tangible and are of utility to us. Here, we mean things like cars, books, houses, etc; as an abstract noun, it designates the property of value or being valuable. Here, for instance, we might talk of things like happiness, beauty, pleasure, satisfaction, and even the notion of God. Value in its real sense is used as an equivalence to worthwhileness or goodness, i.e. the desired good in which case evil is used or seen as having no values.

For and within the purview of this paper, the value shall be seen and understood as ‘established societal norms which constitute the foundational fundamental support system for morality and interpersonal relationships within the

African traditional setting'. It is this 'value system' that gives direction and interpretation to human actions and inactions to establish and maintain harmonious co-existence within the traditional society. These values include (but are not limited to) reward for good performance and punishment for crime. Filial piety – respect for elders and love for the younger ones, The sanctity of human life, communalism – sharing in the fortune and misfortune of others, collective responsibility (jointly taking responsibility in the overall sustenance of the society), modesty and decency-Most African Communities consciously expresses modesty and decency in words or verbal communication (as bragging and foul language is considered as evil) and action (one does not dress in a manner that is revealing or seductive or generally questionable) even in the acquisition of properties.

Showing respect to sacred institutions is also a core value in the African setting. For instance, places like churches, mosques, shrines, playgrounds; market squares, town halls streams, etc are considered sacred and must not be desecrated. In a typical African society, extending one's left hand for a handshake is considered as disdain, disrespect, or outright insolence.

Beyond the aforementioned African values and other important values not stated here, is the notion of Complementary Reflection which is an important metaphysical principle in African Ontology and which states that "anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (Asouzu, 273). This principle advocates for mutual and harmonious living, which idea can be captured in saying "Let the Kite perch, let the Eagle perch, anyone who said the others should not perch, let its wings break".

This mode of mutual complementary relationship becomes most actual in day-to-day encounters with the opposite other. It is a form of relationship carried out in mutual dependence and interdependence, as service in complementarily, outside of which no human existence in its insufficiency is thinkable. Hence it can be said that the idea of service complementarily brings closeness to what it means to be. This idea involves the mutual affirmation of our existence, which can never happen in isolation but is something mutual, this idea comes out clearest at the moment when

actors, in the deepest experience of that foundation that sustains their existence, urge themselves on, in full awareness of task as well accomplished, and service rendered to missing links, and enthuse mutually (hold firmly to the joy of being, always seek to retain it, now and in all future cases). In this deep ontological experience, the joy of being is experienced as the ultimate and determining, defining, and driving all missing links of reality. About the metaphysical principle, a basic valid statement that can be made about being, within a complementarity framework, is that being is that which serves a missing link. We do this to portray the fact that whatever is or has existence as to be, does so because it can be grasped within a universal framework. This is another way of stating that whatever exists does so insofar as it has a head and tail end. To be, as this relates to human beings is that capacity to live meaningfully as to be conscious of all human ambivalent situations, in the sense of *being in control* of all tension-laden situations. It is when the mind acts after the positive dimension of this ambivalence that it lives towards the joy of being. These are the conditions under which the mind can grasp being in its most dynamic essential mode and determination. Thus speaking, the idea of being, in any possible mode of its expression, is thinkable only within the framework of a mutually complementary relationship outside of which nothing can be conceived that is real. Innocent Asouzu puts it thus:

As a methodological device designed to grasp being from the preceding condition of its intrinsic relatedness with all its modes of expression, Complementary Reflection exhibits equally that intrinsic unity expected of a system of this type. In this way, the imperative of complementary reflection which demands that we allow the limitations of being to be the cause of our joy enters intrinsically into the formulation of the metaphysical and practical variants of the principle of complementary reflection, as they all form a unified and indivisible whole. The same applies to their constituting an indivisible unity with the truth and authenticity criterion. One of the major reasons for this is that they all have their

foundation in the principle of non-contradiction, that principle that equally has its source in that being that can be grasped in a complementary mutual relationship of all missing links.

African traditional values in the light of the above shall constitute the viewpoint of our evaluation, analysis, and consequent application. It is an all-encompassing ontological bedrock on which reality is holistically perceived, comprehensively demystified, productively positioned, and communally utilized with conspicuously ontological, intellectual, traditional, and other such benefits.

The Application of Some African Values to the Incidence of Injustice and Insecurity in Nigeria

It was the great Athenian philosopher ‘Socrates’ who in his moral philosophy opined that a man who engages in an act that is considered morally wrong does so because he sees something good in his action. It is the good he sees that becomes his motivation for acting in the manner he does. This seeming perceptive dysfunction may be a result of an error of judgment, intellectual bankruptcy, perceptive inadequacy, or a deliberate act of self-aggrandizement. Viewed from whichever standpoint, to be involved in such unceremonious complacency with the negation of general interest supposes psycho-intellectual anomaly which bothers on pervasive solipsistic ingenuity. Such an unpleasant disposition may be a reflection of a society that is infested with self-centeredness, lack of empathy, insensitivity, debased or adulterated value system, or a general aura of intellectual depravity.

When humans conscientiously or subconsciously engage in actions that are adjudged as morally (or legally) wrong, which consequently give birth to injustice and insecurity, society becomes prone to chaos and avoidable anarchy. Actions such as theft, murder, lying, deceit, bribery, carnage, corruption, hatred, jealousy, infidelity, blackmail, conspiracy, etc. amount to injustice to those at the receiving end. On realizing that one has become a victim of injustice, one automatically becomes insecure in such a society and if not properly guided might resort to self-help which is capable of making him susceptible to the practice of such moral vices

to which he has been a victim of. From the foregoing, it can be said that injustice breeds insecurity or at least they both work hand-in-glove. How then can an application of ‘Complementary Reflection’ as a philosophical element within the ambiance of the African Traditional Value system (ontology) serve as a tool for ameliorating this seeming societal anomaly?

Let us begin with the postulation of Socrates that it is the good that a man sees in a ‘morally wrong’ action that galvanize him to carry out the action not minding the effect of the possible outcome of such action on other members of the society. If he sees the good in an action that is ‘morally (or legally) wrong’, it implies that within the purview of his perceptive and intellectual capacity, he knows such action to be good which explains why he acted in the first instance. In other words, a man’s action is directly proportional to the level of his knowledge. If this is anything to go by, it also suggests that the same person who acted contrary to established societal values and norms may have acted otherwise if he were exposed to a body of knowledge different from the set of knowledge at his disposal. It is in light of the above that Complementary living becomes relevant as an alternative (and much better) intellectual disposition. Complementary living.

Though philosophically conceptualized is fully integrated into the African Traditional Value System. Here it serves as a philosophy of tolerance and integration, the spirit of tolerance and integration which is noted in the African value system will curb injustice and insecurity individuals within the Nigerian State, will learn to appreciate the weakness of others, and retrace their steps and appreciate the fact that human life is secret, no man can create another man, so it is unwise and unethical for anyone to contemplate taking another person's life either through rituals or other unwholesome means. kidnapping, banditry, and most other social vices that are also alien to African culture, things like these can only happen during tribal wars where warring communities can take their enemies hostage and negotiate for peace or other conditions.

This is not the case some dubious Nigerians now acquire sophisticated admonitions from the Western world and use them to terrorize innocent citizens

and create insecurity in the land. They unjustly demand ransoms from families of their victims, in most cases, even when these ransoms are being paid, they end up killing their victims, which is inhuman. All of this happens largely because Nigerians have lost track of their traditional African values “The negative influence from the West has affected the African to forget his heritage and engage in activities that are un-African” (Okpe and Oti 1). It is the view of this study that, African cultural heritage is rich healthy, and full of moral inspiration that can reawaken our traditional African values, and foster mutual and corporative living. Because of its comprehensive nature, it helps to metabolize one’s perception. It not only creates but is itself the window through which one views reality. The importance of this vintage becomes all the more glaring when we understand that our actions and inactions have a strong affinity with our perception which is also directly influenced by our psychological and intellectual preponderance.

This ontological value works on one’s intellect (the primary point of human actions) to eliminate self-centeredness while promoting selflessness. One who is selfless and sees himself as an integral part of a larger whole will not carry out any act of injustice which will amount to a negation of his very existence. The very foundation of his existence will be distorted and shaken by one single act of injustice that breeds insecurity because the world (visible and invisible) is one large whole driven by a positive mind and actions. Understanding reality from this perspective superimposes on us the ‘Kantian’ sense of the ‘Categorical Imperative’ about acting right. In this light, an injustice to other persons or entities is tantamount to injustice to oneself considering that ‘to be, is to be in a mutual relationship with all missing links of reality. No one who fully understands that evil to others is evil to himself will have his hands in any act of injustice.

It is conventional and convenient to describe the ancient African view of the world as “one of extraordinary harmony”, one of synthetic unity and mutual compatibility among all things. Adebayo Adesanya, a Yoruba writer, is noted to have said that “philosophy, theology, politics, social theory, and law, medicine, psychology, birth and burial, all find themselves logically concatenated in a system

so tight that to subtract one item from the whole is to paralyze the structure of the whole”. According to J. I. Unah, “this view of the world as one of mutual compatibility among all things is unintelligible to Western writers and thinkers. It has also produced negative reactions from some of them... However scholarly works on Africa have shown that most of what has been discountenanced as frivolous, non-logical, etc. by European writers is real and meaningful in the African cultural environment.

The existence and preservation of socio-cultural values helped African society to survive, to progress, and to maintain adequate social and ethical order. The African society incorporates all the ideals and ideas, the virtues and values which they lived for, fought for, and died for, into their daily life and living. Taken individually, these values include and cover such topics as:

truth, justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, beauty, decency, respect for people and property, the keeping of promises and agreements (as in oath taking and covenants), praise and blame, crime and punishment, the right and responsibility of both the individual and the community, character, and dignity...(Mbiti 11)

Complementary Reflection focuses on intellectual and psychological re-orientation and mutual repositioning to inculcate the ideals of societal harmony in all actors and factors. This is done via proper conceptualization of reality along the lines of established African traditional values. Strict compliance with or adherence to this all-important set of principles will help in checkmating the excesses of Western cultural inflow and influence with its attendant licentiousness and carefree attitude. In doing this, a situation where a person or group of persons acting in such a way as to consciously or subconsciously negate the social, moral, cultural, and legal system and indeed the entire structure that holds the society together without minding the unavoidable ontological boomerang effect of such actions is disheartening.

Summary and Conclusion

It is no longer news that injustice and insecurity in Nigeria, Africa, and indeed the entire world is widespread. Especially in the African setting, this situation has a direct bearing on the depletion and desecration of the sanctity of human life, distortion of our social structure and societal harmony as well as making a total mess of our traditional institutions and value system. It is the view of this paper therefore, that an evaluation and re-evaluation as well as strengthening of our traditional value system through a new thinking of our traditional African value system which places a premium on human lives and believes in communal and complementary living where the idea of live and lets live reigns supreme will do Nigerians nay Africans more good. With ‘Complementary Reflection’ as a bedrock of comprehensible harmony with ontological dimension, our society, and community would have been well fortified to ward off insecurity and injustice. In this atmosphere, values such as hospitality, honesty, industry, excellence, communal spirit or commonality of life, and the sacredness and value for human life would help individuals to live peacefully with one another, settle their differences, maintain peace, and harmony, social order, and justice and to be in agreement with their total environment. The maintenance of social order, peace, harmony, and justice is the collective responsibility of everyone in traditional African society. Respect for the value system is a communal affair that embraces both young and old, rich and poor, ruler and subject. This is because, any breach of the known and accepted social order or value system, results in instability, chaos, pandemonium or leaves the society in a complete state of unrest.

It must however be noted, that all the values portrayed in this work revolve around human life. In the traditional African setting, human life is sacrosanct. Therefore, without human life, every other value becomes meaningless. Adhering to the tenets and values listed above is ultimately aimed at enhancing the realization of the full potential of human existence. Within this framework, human life stands at the apex of all values and must not be taken or desecrated for any reason or under any guise. Following the principles of Complementary Reflection, actions must be

THE CALABAR HISTORICAL JOURNAL

Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2021 p121-137 ISSN: 2315-8816

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conscientiously geared towards bringing out the best in human co-existence as well as the environment (physical and spiritual, material and immaterial, etc.) within which humans find the joy of being. It is our submission therefore, that by imbibing the general principles of 'Complementary Reflection' and other values subsumed therein as the ontological driving force of the African traditional value system, we will leave the world better than we met it.

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Vol. 10, No. 2, June 2021 p121-137 ISSN: 2315-8816

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