
MORAL DECADENCE AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS ON THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

The decay in the society has affected the values and moral character of Nigerian youth. Nigeria, like any other nation of the world, is not spared of the prevailing moral crises in the contemporary period. Many of these crises are however, traceable to the new values ushered in during the colonisation of Africa and many of which are in direct conflict with African values. Moral values are found in our religion, culture and traditions yet our youth, for one reason or the other are not that religious. They consider our indigenous culture outdated and our traditions barbaric. Therefore, they queue up to embrace westernisation in its totality; abandoning our indigenous culture and tradition entirely, thereby losing their identity. This paper examines the causes of moral decadence and its socio-economic impact on Nigerian society and possible suggestions for curbing the menace for a sustained society are proffered

Introduction

Moral decadence is not an acceptable norm in the Nigeria society. Moral decadence as a phenomenon, has been over-looked in our society nowadays and it has led to a poor breed of youths in our

society. The youths who are suppose to be leaders of tomorrow are get involved themselves in vices capable of destroying their future. The character traits engendered by our social system that is, by our way of living, are pathogenic which can affect an individual's personality as well as the society at large. In Nigeria today, there is widespread concern about the moral crises faced by the country. Moral decadence permeates all aspects of our public life and rampant corruption is noticeable. For instance, those who work in offices see it as a norm to receive bribe before doing the official works. Due to lack of moral education, the Nigerian youths have come to see anti-social behaviours as the only hope of enriching themselves (Wokocha, 1991; Okoh, 1982). Thus, stealing, prostitution, political thugery, militancy, kidnapping etc, have, in recent times, become major sources of income in Nigeria. Kayode and Adeyinka (2009) pointed out that:

The majority of youths who are currently engaged in militancy, thuggery, gangsterism, cultism and other forms of anti-social behaviour are usually people who are aggrieved with the social system and who are deprived one way or the other. The provision of access to quality education is thus one of the ways of curing the social ills of the society and better regime of human development. (p. 38)

The imposition of western culture on the African traditional education has contributed to the prevailing ethical climate in Nigeria. It has resulted in a rapid shift in social norms. Behaviours deemed wrong in the traditional Nigerian society are, in recent times, tolerated and even praised. Omordu (2007) was of the opinion that:

The Nigeria youths today are in a state of confusion on account of conflicting messages from parents and elders on one hand and the effects of the various mass media such as radio, video, television, books, newspapers, computer networks etc. Instead of submitting themselves to the control and advice of the elders and parents, the youth rather resort to personal choice and right to live

one's life. (p. 32)

The influence of what is watched and read and on the media affects the relationships that exist between youths and others. Little is no wonder that killing, kidnapping, cultism, promiscuity, drug addiction, high rate of divorce and other vices are now commonplace in Nigeria today. Many people have abandoned integrity, conscience, discipline and industry in pursuit of money, because we stress material wealth at all costs, and as such, those who do not succeed usually resort to anti-social and immoral behaviour to get rich.

All over the world, there have been great men and women of honour, such as the social philosophers, humanists, artists, poets, political and religious leaders, great thinkers and others highly respected personalities, who have devoted their lives to the promotion of and sustenance of moral values (Nisbet, 1982; Omordu, &Oranusi, 2011; Esu, 2009; Bolarin, 2005; Denga, 1991). In Nigeria today, we also have the defenders of moral supremacy but unfortunately, the humanistic echo of these moral progressives seems to be ignored, or is being suppressed, by opposing forces of some unprogressives who also accuse their critics of unethical behaviours. With the present situation of things in Nigeria society today, it seems the situation is getting worse. Hence, what are major causes of moral decadence? Is moral decadence preventable in Nigeria? What are the socio-economic implications of moral decadence on the Nigerian society? Even, if it is not possible to completely eliminate moral decadence, can it be drastically reduced? Attempts will be made in this paper to unravel all these questions in order to nip in the bud the ugly situation which has eaten deep into the fabric of our society.

What are the major causes of moral decadence in Nigeria society?

The colonization of the African continent ushered in new values, many of which are in direct conflict with African values. The values were imposed on traditional, political, economic and religious systems. The British imperialism transformed the previously autonomous kingdoms and tribal oligarchies into dependent units of a central colonial administration. Thus, the traditional system of authority based on age, status and customs were replaced by foreign direct and indirect

rule. In the case of the latter, "power was exercised through Nigerian surrogates known as 'Warrant Chiefs' who had acquired Western education and the wealth associated with it, the basis of authority shifted from the status to achievement" (Iheoma, 1995).

In the sphere of the economy, agriculture which was the mainstay was transformed into cash economy, thereby resulting (from communalism) to individualism as the guiding principle of the economic activities. To compound the problem further, the colonial powers acquired the land either through outright confiscation or through obnoxious treaties which gave exclusive right over land to British power. Africa at this was denied the opportunity of having the sense of justice and fair play.

The introduction of western education and religion were also colonial legacies which had far-reaching consequences for indigenous value systems. In the traditional modes of socialization children were taught skills and behaviour patterns which tended to promote the spirit of communalism and cooperative behaviour. They were taught to subordinate individual interest to the interest of the social group. Iheoma, (1995) observed that "schooling pulled children in the opposite direction by fostering and encouraging competitive individualism...it is the instrument for social selection whereby men are stratified and placed in new relationship to their fellows"(pg 182). Thus, western education made possible the emergence of new elite whose privileges created stratifications wider than anything traditional society had known. Furthermore, the introduction of Christianity by the west with its doctrine of individual solution has promoted individualism and undermined African solidarity. Whereas in the traditional societies, religion provided the most powerful sanctions against moral lapses, the progress of Christianity as Iheoma (1995) observes, "has made possible, to a large extent, the aura of superiority conferred on it by imperialism – removed the awe that surrounded traditional religions and consequently, also removed the deterrent effect of indigenous religious sanctions". Crimes, which hitherto were seen as offence committed against the community, are now seen as sins against the Almighty God. People can now go on to commit crimes with the belief that God is merciful.

However, moral decadence or the outright rejection of moral

values, in Nigeria, could be generally grouped under four broad factors, some of which can interweave with one another: fraudulence, Satanism and hedonism or Epicureanism and militancy. Under fraudulent activities are examination malpractices which are now hydra-headed in technique or method. Many students from various institutions of learning are dismissed yearly for this anti-moral action. In fact, the secondary institutions are not exempted from this fraudulence, as seen during Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations. There is also fraudulence in some sporting events through doping, match – fixing and age falsification and examination malpractices. There are other forms of cheating through forging of signature for monetary gains or certificate acquisition.

Among other fraudulent activities that add to moral decadence is the presentation of fake papers or document for personal or collective gains. It is on record, for example, that many students have used fake certificates, transcripts and testimonials to gain admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Many of these students are usually located and dismissed particularly in their final years. Many people, particularly contractors, have been able to illegally secure contracts from government and private organizations with fake papers.

Moral decadence is also caused by Satanism. Under this category are cultic activities in higher institutions and within the society. It is believed that cultists are engaged in, or forced by environmental or emotional factors to engage in, various ritualistic and deadly activities that are not in agreement with modern social order. Under Satanism is also cannibalism, that is reported to be practiced in some Nigerian societies. There have been many reports in the media to this effect. Money rituals which also demand human sacrifice are part of the satanic aspect of moral decadence. There are various reports of missing people, and many suspects have been arrested in connection with this. Many Nigerians have also taken mammon worship to a satanic level, in that they can go to any length to achieve their material intentions. Under satanic influence is also assassination, which now seems to be a socio – political culture of Nigeria. It is on record that many Nigerians have been assassinated, particularly for political, ethnic or tribal reasons.

Under hedonism are a variety of moral vices that harbour moral

decadence. The hedonists, with highly epicurean tendencies, are generally in pursuit of pleasurable or material gains (Asogwa, 2008). The implication of this is that any method, good or bad, is employed to get their satisfaction. Though, not all hedonists are criminals, they are generally found to be armed robbers, smugglers, pirates, rapists, sex maniacs, drunkards, pornographers, kidnappers, and drug pushers (Omordu, & Amaele, 2014). Militancy is another problem caused by overall societal moral decadence among the militants. Their activities are disastrously destabilizing protest against what they revolt against. Unlike the criminals, there is an intentional vandalism of public or private infrastructure which they see as part of their oppressors' machinery.

Socio-economic impact of moral decadence on the Nigerian society Nigeria is a developing nation, struggling dynamically to achieve its developmental goals. So the problems created by various unethically social vices prevalent in Nigeria cannot but be a cog in the wheel of progressive development. For instance, foreign investors tend to be jittery in their intention to start business in Nigeria. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. There is the fear of falling into the hands of dupes during an initial business arrangement. Like other industries, the problem of electricity supply which appears to be intractable, presents enough fear. Armed robbery constitutes enough menace while cases of kidnapping are viewed with great discomfort and unease.

Many of these social vices also affect tourism, thereby robbing Nigeria of some capital which would have accrued from this (National Orientation Agency, 2009; Enu & Enu, 2011). The economy of Nigeria has been tremendously weakened by hundreds of fraudulent people who daily pirate the works of the artistes and writers who are the worses for this. The copyright commission, in spite of serious efforts to check this fraud, has not been able to achieve its objectives despite over two decades of the war over piracy. For these reasons, many creative artistes have been pirated out of business. Smuggling has led to the total collapse or weakening of many industries. Though, the government also has stiff laws against the importation of certain items, the smugglers have rendered this law ineffective through their nefarious activities and this has led to the collapse of many cottage

industries in Nigeria and the economic implications are very obvious.

Nigeria is littered with inferior smuggled or imported goods that do not merit the inflated cost of these products. For example, many electronic and other contrivances have not been able to give the type of performance expected of good quality products. For various manufactured or fraudulent reasons, many government workers also do not render the full service expected of a day's job because they rarely stay on their jobs; going about other private businesses. Unlike the private ventures, money collected by workers in government enterprises rarely finds its way entirely into government purse (Asogwa, 2008; Kalusi, 2000). This is because fraudulent practices will not make these workers render the correct account. Omordu, and Amaele, (2014) pointed out that Toll Gate was dismantled in Nigeria, because more than half of the money collected as toll Gate usually went into private pockets.

Many Nigerian youths have been wrongly lured into accepting life styles that can, at best be injurious to their present and future aspirations. Such lifestyles include smoking, alcoholism, obsessive womanising, cultism etc. Fake drugs have also damaged the biological systems of many people, while many have lost their lives. Most people find it difficult to recreate because of many unpredictable situations which include theft, car snatching or even assassination. Night clubbing, for these same reasons, among others, seem to be a forgotten experience. On campuses of many Nigerian institutions, social events are made to stop by 6.30 pm. Meanwhile, in the distant past, many of these events used to be an all-night affair.

Curbing moral decadence

There is no gain saying the fact that moral values have been drastically eroded in the Nigerian society. Rusell (1971) was of the opinion that, the things that make human life miserable are preventable, and the ways of preventing them are known. Hence, it is important to examine what will prevent moral decadence in Nigerian.

The traditional African education model lays much more emphasis on character and values related education, believing that when this aspect of man is made right other aspects will be right. For instance, the seven points agenda for traditional education, put forward by

Fafunwa (1995) lay credence to character and values related issues. Even the other two points on development of the child, latent physical skills and development of intellectual skills, have some bearing on character and value-related development. The African traditional education model is carefully drawn by traditional Africa, Nigeria inclusive, to produce the people oriented man through education.

One way of modernising, integrating and blending the African traditional education in Nigeria with our current way of life is to apply a 'Rational Reconstruction' of African culture particularly, of African thinking, beliefs and practices. Rational reconstruction, as Akinpelu (2005) put it,

is meant, in part the exhibition of the reasons that logically justify our holding certain beliefs and practices; and in part, the reorganisation and systematisation of those beliefs and practices, so as to make them coherent with the modern scientific outlook which, for better or for worse, we have irrevocably embraced and hence make them cognitively acceptable to the 20th century technology and rational mind (pg 58).

If we apply this to the moral domain of African studies, the process will involve analysing, exhibiting and emphasising the general theoretical and abstract organizing principles that underlie our traditional moral beliefs and practices, most of which we had hitherto received and held on to, on the authority of tradition, the elders or some divine eminence. It is to articulate the principles which actually guide specific moral judgments that are made, and to expose the reasons that lay at the back of the minds of our ancestors in issuing, "Do not do this" "it is forbidden to do that" "such is never done" "it is a taboo" etc. The application of rational reconstruction will help dramatise some of our traditions, and to convince others that we too had a rich culture that we could be proud of.

We should uphold the obligation to teach our youths to define themselves as Africans and to determine their essential characteristics as Africans and become conscious of the fact that they are Africans and live and act with that consciousness. Right from childhood, children

should be well exposed to all the elements of cultural traditions that teach people's etiquette and other norms. At this stage, there is a need for corrective, and not destructive, discipline, as well as parental love that is devoid of unnecessary pampering. This period, a child should be encouraged to naturally develop interest in what parents or older children do. Story telling or didactic television programmes are also important means of making children form good habits. The Nigerian educational system should therefore involve a well-patterned curriculum based on the African world-view of who man is, the type of society man should live and the type of things to be valued. We can only build a solid foundation for our youths by emerging and operating from the crippling disadvantages of colonial culture and a colonised mentality and re-establishing the sovereignty of the Nigerian world view. The Nigerian education should be for the development of man and not materials; a man of good character, a man who develops his skills and knowledge to the maximum capacity, so as to provide services to others first and himself last; to produce a man whose wealth is to the advantage of the society in which he lives.

The government, no doubt, has a major role to play in checking moral erosion by providing the necessary infrastructure that can make life more comfortable for citizens. Prison conditions should be reformed for better comfort and moral as well as practical training that can make ex-prisoners become better citizens should be intensified. The police force should also be modernised to effectively meet the demands of the contemporary scientific police operation. Though, the government alone cannot provide the infrastructure for Nigerian's work force, the socio-economic environment should be made very infrastructurally fertile and safe for entrepreneurship and job creation.

The cultural environment is a great determinant of one's values; that is why some people cannot afford to behave anti-socially in an environment that produces them. Tradition is a factor in one's upbringing, because it has all the prescriptive laws of moral ethics that are naturally entrenched and rigidly followed. In this regard, every effort should be made by schools and colleges to introduce courses that are culturally based. By doing this, one will see how materialistic pursuit is seriously relegated for human ennoblement and meritorious achievement. The print and electronic media should also

have a policy to constantly feature documentaries on the events that are socially, politically and historically inspiring to the contemporary Nigeria. These should focus, very necessarily, on good governance and leadership qualities. The heroes of Nigeria's nationalism, military exploit in the 19th century, particularly, various professionals with unequalled achievements and generally, men and women of honour can be presented as an inspiration to our modern age.

Conclusion

The Nigerian society has roles to play in curbing the prevalent moral decadence in the society. Teachers should see themselves as agents of moral values by emphasising the importance of those things that are either destructive or constructive to one's life. Pertinent educative stories as well as literatures that feature various heroic exploits of great Nigerians or Africans should be provided. As an attempt to further induce or inspire students, prizes that reward various levels of moral excellence should be constantly awarded to deserving students. Secondary school education should be taken very seriously by parents i.e. proper monitoring or guidance of their children becomes important when these children start secondary school, where their characters begin to be formed either positively or negatively. It is where, for the first time, they are exposed to many mischiefs of those students who have not been properly brought up at home. The teachers, at this level, should also help to instill discipline, in line with those of the early mission schools. Hence, religious leaders (Christians and Muslims) should intensify efforts to put children, young boys and girls on a sound spiritual lane.

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