

Cultural Values: Index for Peace and Branding Africa

By

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Abstract

Social order determines peace and stability in any polity, its absence jeopardizes peace and harmony and close avenues for any investment, attraction, patronage and development. This paper examines Branding and Peace in Africa arising from social and political instability assumed to have resulted from socio-cultural challenges occasioned by the cultural influences that Africa had suffered as a colonized continent without due consideration to African cultural values.

This paper therefore, considers the import of African Cultural Values, which is a leeway to Branding Africa. The study adopts a historical research method reviewing past African experiences and social systems. As a result, it relies on both primary and secondary source of data to elicit the study. However, the challenge of peace in Africa calls for branding with indigenous value system uprooted by imperialism and which has remained unresolved years after independence.

The paper concludes that attaining peace is fundamental to achieving the goals of Branding, which is an attempt to attract investment to Africa and make Africa the world destination in trade and tourism.

The paper ultimately views the restoration of African cultural values, synergized with western cultural values and approach as an alternative way to peace which is important to Africa branding.

Key Word: Peace-Building, Democracy, Equality, Principle and Africa

Introduction

The challenges of peace and social integration which are *sin qua non* to sustainable growth and development have remained a subject of discuss by African studies scholars. The types and system of government adopted by African leaders with theories of governance since independence has not help in the desired development and economic patronage, due to its Eurocentric nature and as such, many nations in Africa,

having suffered social collapse have resulted to nation branding to project their image in a more appealing way for development.

The question (now) is how do we achieve the goals of branding in a troubled and chaotic African environment? And must we go on branding rather than look for peace which actually attracts investors and create the enabling environment for business to thrive?

Most of the theories and measures being adopted for branding and peace in Africa do not conform to African cultural values which are by-product of African environment.

Scholars of African studies have examined the challenges of peace and development in Africa from Rwanda to Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Nigeria to mention a few and have concluded that the role of imperialism could not be de-emphasized¹. But, must we continue to ponder on the evils of colonialism or slavery years after independence? Walter Rodney opined that Africa's contact with Europe robbed her of great potentials both in human and material resources. This had caused the myriads of developmental challenges and loss of cultural values because colonialism impoverished Africa's cultural values and imposed 'western culture that does not practice what it preaches' rather an antithesis.

Fanon Frantz believed that "colonialism was a system of racial oppression, all more insidious, because of its impact as well as physical distortion of attitudes and behaviour". This position further reiterates the forceful nature of colonialism which created some complexities in the overall development of the colonized. We should note that where the features enunciated above are present, peace will be non-existence and there is the possibility of the break down of law and orderliness which has been the case in many African states.

Paradoxically, Africans have enjoyed significant peaceful co-existence before her contact with the outside world up to the middle of the fifteen century². These were times when African cultural values were undiluted and untainted with any foreign practices whatsoever.

Trade and communal relationship were built and developed on trust, ably assisted by the various norms and indigenous value systems that any offender or people with anti social behaviours were sanctioned by their various communities through a well spelt out and defined laws. Though African laws were unwritten, but every member of the society must have undergone the process of social integration through initiation ceremony where these values were taught and every one was made to understand the consequence of going against any of the societal values and norms.³

The dimension of indigenous culture and values created a kind of social order that respected other people's rights and values that are geared towards attaining the common good theory within the society. These values is embedded in the people's culture and practices which include religion and their belief system as a tradition. In this sense, Africans did not only respect and honour these traditions but often make sure that it was guided with utmost caution and a high sense of respect, because, it is believed that *Olodumare*, the creator had sanction such values and norms.⁴

More importantly, those African cultural values revolve around their ideology and concept of God, (*i.e Olodumare* or *Olorun*, the owner of heaven and earth) makes most of the norms and laws acceptable to the people. Though, laws and norms differ from place to place depending on the people's culture or religion, the people held them important and attend to them in awe, until their contact with foreign culture, which dispossessed them of their valued system. Hence, there was hardly any need for nation branding, because peace and hospitality was primary to inter-personal relationship in Africa and these are also very important to branding.

It is believed in Africa that visitors or alien should be provided for properly, honoured and revered because he/she might be an agent of *Olodumare*, hence African makes sure that new faces around their communities are well treated. In fact, it is a taboo in some culture not to have food at home for visitor who might visit at down.

Hospitality is a feature of communalism an important African cultural value, which is fundamental to tourism and was the order of the day up till the fifteenth century but for the influence of western culture which introduced individualism and other western values that later, resulted into the civil wars of the 18th and 19th centuries in Africa.

The undercurrent of this has been underdevelopment, corruption, greed and oppression of the citizens by the leaders, consequent upon which is arm struggle against the state and the near absence of peace and security in Africa.

This paper thus focus on African cultural values in pre-colonial Africa as sacrosanct to peace and nation branding in Africa, based on African past experience before colonial rule.

Issues in Nation Branding

Nation branding implies those measures which are targeted at projecting the image of a nation in a better and more promising limelight. It suggests the condition or the environment necessary for peace to thrive and flourish as well as re-engineering

public and international perception of nations, peoples and investors about a nation and its people. It is a way of aiding investments from foreign investors because it determines the strength of the nation in attracting people to either live or work/study in a nation.

Nation branding projects the economic political and social status of a nation to the outside world. This concept was popularized by Simon Anholt in his nation brand index project in 2005⁵ and has since attracted scholarly attentions from different corners of the world. It is practiced by both developed and under-developing nations like Canada, United State of America, Japan, China, South Africa, New Zealand, Nigeria and some Western European nations.⁶ For Example, the Nigeria government has made several attempts at nation branding and re-branding from the inception of the fourth republic in 1999 and 2004,⁷ with her information ministers attempts to project the image of Nigeria in a better limelight due to the battered image emerging from the long years of military rule.

Though, the issue of fraud and corruption has formed the center stage in the country's image project, while several other African states are in crisis due to leadership problems which is a greater challenge to security that is primarily atop any other indices or yardstick for economic attraction and investment. This had resulted to war in places like Rwanda, Liberia and recently in Ivory Coast and Egypt. Meaning that, insecurity in Africa need to be addressed before any project on branding can achieve the desired result.

The passion with which African nations are branding without considering the root cause for their battered images call for concern, this study is therefore an exercise in this direction, while it maintains that the failure of African nations to address insecurity, the basic needs of the people and to enforce an ethical standard is the underlining factors for the bad image and holds the view that a revisit of the cultural values of Africa will alter the present situation.

The fact is that, the failure of government to meet the basic needs of the people had resulted to various social phenomenon, hence the insecurity of lives and property coupled with official corruption, mediocrity, election rigging and excessive manipulation of peoples' will and neglect without adequate punitive measures and sanctions to offenders has actually led to the Africa crisis situations which have ultimately made peace to elude the continent thereby necessitating re-branding Africa.

Scholars like Evan Potter⁸ have conceptualized nation brands as a form of national soft power, a form of 'public diplomacy'. Branding is a marketing strategy

associated with products and services of a corporations and an organization in an attempt to distinguish their products and services from that of other organization and to attract more customers. Many countries have adopted this procedure to shore up the image of their country internationally, particularly in this era of globalization when goods and service are measured in international standards, coupled with the fact that no nation want to be isolated. This has result to increase competition among nations on how to attract foreign investors to meet international standard in trade, tourism and investment.

However, studying the historical trajectories of Africa reveals that African image is embedded in her culture of hospitality, honesty, integrity, clanship and lineage, brotherly love, accountability, sincerity and transparency that was the hallmark of peace in pre-colonial Africa. In fact, these attributes gave way for the Europeans to have inroad into the continent of Africa and this later became their un-doing as a major hindrance to Africa's development because it paved the way for colonial occupation of Africa.

It must be stated here, however, that peace is central to any meaningful development not minding the nature of branding or re-branding. Where there is no peace, there will never be development or progress. The progress made by the developed nations was brought about by the relative peace in those countries and presently African environment does not augur well for any meaningful development for the near absence of peace pervading the continent.

Therefore any attempts to re-brand or brand Africa must look at the pre-colonial Africa cultural values as it relates to leadership, transition or succession processes and mediation with some western values due to culture mix to achieve a sustainable peace which is paramount to social order conducive for foreign investment and tourism. This paper will however focus on leadership and succession process in Old Oyo Empire (i.e Pre-colonial Yorubaland) as a case study.

Cultural Values in Pre-Colonial Africa: the Old Oyo Empire Heritage

African values include community life as bedrock of security, human relations and hospitality, respect for elders and the authority, sacredness of life and religion⁹ among others. These values had assisted in the building of a peaceful society before her contact with the outside world. For example, the African idea of security depends on personal identification with the community, which is the custodian of individual ideas. In other word, "the community offers the African the psychological and ultimate security as it gives its members both physical and ideological identity".¹⁰

Africans valued their community and believe that the community is vital. In fact, the authentic African is known and identified in, by and through his community. It must be noted that in the African mentality, the community as an entity remains, while individuals, as persons, come and go, hence, they believe in maintaining a good name that could be proud off. African believes that good name is better than gold or silver and as such, they are always conscious of what will tarnish their name, particularly because it is a generational name. Hence, every member of the clan/lineage or community must exhibit the cultural traits of either his clan and that of his community and if he behaves contrary to expectation he is referred to as bastard. That is, he/she is not an original child of the family. Bastards don't have a place in African society since he has no clan or patriarchal lineage.

Therefore the Africans emphasize community life and communalism as a living principle of which the basic ideology is community-identity. The aim is to produce and present an individual as a community-culture-bearer. Culture is a community property and must therefore be community-protected and was practically protected by the people. Hence, within the community, clan and lineage is very vital. Outside this ancestrally chartered system, there lay no possible life, since "a man without lineage is a man without citizenship, without identity, and therefore without allies..; *and thus a bastard* or as the Kongo put it, a man outside his clan is like a grasshopper which has lost its wings". ¹¹

The importance of clan and lineage could be well grasped in the Ebi system of the Yoruba people, in which the value and the ideas of respect for elders, clan and lineage (blood relation) and authority are embedded. This structure is the basis for leadership and any deviation is anathema to the cultural values of the people as shall be seen later but a total adherence to these principles enjoys the support of the majority which is the fundamental basis of the law of democracy.

Of course, leadership in pre-colonial Africa was not democratic, as only few people are opportune to access leadership being hereditary and by extension the exclusive right of a clan or lineage. Nevertheless, this system of administration is acceptable to the people because it is also sanctioned by the tutelary god. As a tradition therefore, it revolved around cultural value systems particular religion, while the choice of the institutions responsible for leadership and transition processes (institutions of accountability) is respected by the citizens.

This actually assisted in the various developmental processes before African's contact with Europe around the 15th century. For example, the inhabitants of Old Oyo Kingdom, now in Southwestern Nigeria had a centralized monarchical system of government akin to the western styled democracy with the *Alaafin* of Oyo as the head.

The people had developed a democratic value system based on family kinship as a means of inter and intra-personal relationship of Yoruba consciousness and a means of national and social integration.

The 'Ebi system' is a very popular concept among the Yoruba nation, which was the bedrock of peace brought about by mutual understanding among the family groups.

The issue of succession to leadership position was a matter of tradition, since the concept of leadership revolves round blood ties and kinship ties, the head of any group, family or community is the oldest person within the group, the family or community (clan and lineage). It is the exclusive duty of a group of people and by tradition and practice, to appoint or choose a leader among the kingship family and when this is done, everybody obey the constitution and outcome of the council based on the 'Ebi system' because, decisions emanating from the council saddled with succession and appointment is seen to have enjoyed the will of the majority and the supreme being and thus sovereign. While the council must have explored all the traditional means of making sure that the right person is appointed in line with the tradition through the consultation of *Ifa*¹² Oracle, which is believed to know the future and by extension the choice of Olodumare (God) on all matters.

In 1858, the attempt to overrun the people's cultural value system and constitution of Oyo Kingdom by the emerging city-states of Ibadan and Ijaye degenerated to civil wars in Oyo kingdom, which was only brought to an end by the British intervention in 1893¹³. But before this the Yoruba had built this political culture as a value system through a sense of kinship, a value they could not compromise, such that, in the almost a century of civil wars, alliances were based on blood ties, kinship and relationship. This was the reason why the *Ijesa* supported the *Ekitis* against *Ibadan* hegemony in the *Ekiti Parapo* war of 1887¹⁴, and the Fulani gave their support to the *Ilorin* which was a Muslim dominated area against the Yoruba¹⁶. Tradition also had it that the Yoruba at all time must protect Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yorubaland, hence, the Yoruba people must rally round the *Alaafin*¹⁵. This account for the challenges of unity among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.

Challenges of Nation's Branding

In modern Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, the tradition has not changed. The various political processes since independence reveal political and democratic cultural patterns in line of ethnicity and these have made it difficult to achieve national integration and peace, coupled with the fact that constitutional developments had polarized the polity through the introduction of the 'indigene and quota system'¹⁶ rather than justice, honesty, merit or achievements which were the hallmark in pre-colonial Africa.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*¹⁷ Aristotle noted that ‘social order is hinged on the general concept of justice, which is concerned with the ‘equality or fairness in interpersonal relations’ and obedience to the constitution. This was not contradicted in the Yoruba kingdom, democratic culture in pre-colonial Nigeria was tied to the supremacy of the ‘Ebi Social Structure’ and the divine God who intervene through Orunmila, while, the *Alaafin*, the head of the kingdom is seen as second only to the Supreme Being, thus he is called *Igbakeji Orisa*,¹⁸ and was respected by all, because the *Alaafin* was seen to have derived his power and authority from the people and the supreme being. He therefore, enjoyed the support of all as a sign of respect to the divine will. This had been attributed to the growth and development of Old Oyo Kingdom to become one of the most centralized states in Sub-Sahara Africa due to her system of government and military prowess. This also attracted the missionaries and the explorers in early 18th century.¹⁹

Though the Alaafinnate was considered as semi-divine, yet his power could be checked by the Oyo-Mesi, the council of notables. The Oyo-Mesi constituted the kingmakers and it is headed by the Basorun. The king could be deposed by the Oyo-Mesi, if he acted arbitrarily. On the other hand, members of the Oyo-Mesi were not responsible to the king but to their wards and lineage, the frame work of the ‘Ebi System’. The Oyo-Mesi also acted as mediator for the provincial and vassal chiefs (as oversight functions). It was a system firmly rooted in the tradition of the people but with an efficient checks and mechanism to ensure united and smooth power transition.

According to Davidson Basil,²⁰ ‘the Yoruba structure really has been rigid; but it is certainly very old and its evolution over many centuries has clearly allowed both for the process of change and for checks on the executives’ which are clearly a mix of their traditional value system. Indeed, the attitude of the people towards the protection of their family name and integrity contributed significantly to the democratic culture of the people. The Yoruba uphold the fact that man dies and leaves a name hence, integrity, honesty and probity became a standard for public office or position of leadership while protecting the norms of the land.

The kind of democracy that was operated in Old Oyo depended on the people’s social setting, and is based on ethical standard, rule of law, popular participation, rights and freedom and equality. Notably, it is the events of the last decade of the 19th century that changed the direction of political development within the Yoruba kingdom, Nigeria and the entire continent.

The development is evident by the complete subjugation of the kingdom under British political influence. But culture, being a way of life of people and particularly that the economic system of the people is structured around family and kinship tie, created

a complex situation for the colonial government that attempted to change it, and this has remained a major challenge to national integration and development in Africa. By this, transitional projects have not been an easy one as they have attracted political consequences, which have had significant implication on Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Because the concept was unacceptable to the African cultural system and practices, it is seen as a challenge to the people's culture and tradition, hence, the crisis and conflicts in the troubled African states is a reprisal and indirect attack on what they perceived as irreconcilable to their culture.

Rosamund Billington et al²¹ submitted that much of global conflict could be traced to cultural imperialism particularly in the so called 'third world'. According to them,

“the tribal or small scale societies of Africa areas were often relatively undifferentiated in structure, with economic system closely bound up with kinship structures, these in turn creating a complex political culture frequently misunderstood or ignored by the colonial administrators” (sic)

This is more understood from the fact that African culture was so embedded that any likely change will impact on the people's way of life and this has sparked off various socio-political and economic crisis.

The present political stalemate in one of the most peaceful nation in sub-Saharan Africa up to 2000, that is, Ivory Coast is a backlash of the challenges of culture on the political re-organization of Africa by the imperial powers. The acclaimed winner of the November 2010 election, Alassane Quattara²² is the son of a Burkina Faso migrant and as such the incumbent and many autochthons do not see him as an indigene of Ivory Coast.

Though aliens or foreigners are honoured with honorary titles in Africa but traditional titles is the exclusive right of the indigenous. By extension the presidency position is traditionally the exclusive right of indigenous community. In fact, the 2010 constitution in Ivory Coast generated a lot of controversies on the issue of paternity of would be contender to the position of president, which was not resolved until the election period. The majority having made their stand known see no reason for an alien to come and rule them. Thus, an indication that the blood ties and kinship otherwise called Ebi system by the Yoruba of south west Nigeria is a strong impediment to nation branding and peace in Africa. This is just one among the challenges of imposition of foreign cultures and values. It is a pointer that family ties and relationship are sacrosanct to achieving peace in Africa as against the universal concept of naturalization or indigene by adoption.

African culture as I observe, and in the opinion of Rosamund Billington et al, is closely bound with kinship structure and 'blood ties' which has been very difficult to divorce, not minding the level of cultural diffusions and international conventions, universal values or human right. This is justified by Ebijuwa,²³ assertion that 'the style of administration of African political elites is a threat to peace in Africa, because it is orchestrated by ethnicity, which he refers to as strife between ethnic groups in the course of which people stress their identity and exclusiveness'. Though this was a tool for diplomacy in the colonial period in most African states, one would have expected African political elites to discard this immediately after independence rather than encouraging it.

Another important factor was the process of change or succession and form of transition which was contrary to African culture and belief system. For example, the people's concept of leadership differs markedly from the western style democracy that is timed. To the Africans, death signifies the end of an era and as such it is assumed that a leader must remain in office until he is incapable either by death or deposition according to tradition, hence, the seat-tight syndrome in many African states that has led many into civil wars.

African cultural value dictates that the king is superior to all, as 'nobody dear asks the reason for his action' (Kabiyesi). Nevertheless, he could be removed. In fact, there are several ways of succession apart from peaceful transition. An instance could be found in the Old Oyo system of 'divine rejection' in which an empty calabash is presented to the king, signifying that the people, the gods and Olodumare have rejected him. Consequently, he must take his own life by suicide, although, there had been instances when the *Alaafin* refused but none ever survived it because it was the duty of the council of Oyomesi and by extension 'the Ogboni' cult to intervene and made sure he abided by tradition.

African Cultural Values as Index of Nation Branding

Integrity, sincerity and trust were the hallmark of leadership in the traditional African societies. Of course, the leader was accountable and responsible to the people and thus enjoyed 'people's sovereignty' as part of the peoples moral responsibility which is enforced by culture with religion playing an important role.

The importance of the culture of morality which is embedded in the people's religion can not be overemphasized as an integral and inseparable part of the entire cultural value of Africans.

Religion in the African sense was practical. One's entire action is reflective of one's religious concepts and practices as is seen in the ordering of society. This is because social morality is dependent on religion. According to Bolaji Idowu²⁴, "With the

Yoruba, morality is certainly the fruit of religion. They do not make any attempt to separate the two” until the imposition of foreign rule and foreign culture which attracted a disastrous consequences. This is applicable to all African nations where each society developed her belief systems, technology, forms of participatory governance and socio-economic activities appropriate to its geographical location and needs.

The need for ‘Branding’, in my opinion and based on the concept of branding which indicates the tendency to influence investors and the international community to patronize Africa for sustainable socio-political and economic development and to make Africa the bride of the international community, there must be peace in the troubled African nations, without which Africa may not rise from the socio-political and economic doldrums.

Also, there are a lot of challenges which border on African cultural values that have not been given attention. Scholars have largely concentrated their discussion on western values and ideology like democracy, social and civil equality. Though these are very important to branding Africa in this century, we must also realized the importance of African cultural values that are by-products of African environment, like the clan system, the lineage or Ebi social system. The environment determines people’s culture and to divorce socio-political and economic development of any society from the environment is tantamount to walking on a ‘tight rope’ and that had accounted for the problems of underdevelopment and crisis in Africa. Scholars and leaders should concentrate more on the need to synergize western values with African values due to the new world order of globalization, human right and gender related issues.

Conclusion

African cultural values are traditionally associated with the moral principles and values expected to govern societies and their members. Similarly, the practicing and observance of these cultural values had influenced peaceful coexistence among Africans. It had also assisted in the various inter group relations within and outside Africa, thereby giving the imperial powers foothold in Africa.

The hospitality culture, integrity, sincerity and trust which is the ‘real thing’ in nation branding was indeed a cherished African cultural values that are necessary to good governance which, I think are *sin qua non* to peace, the enabling environment to sustainable investment and tourism must be revisited. African values must be the driving force and basis for African branding as this is the only thing that can make Africa the world destination.

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