

**AFRICAN INDIGENOUS FAMILY
SYSTEM IN THE ERA OF ARTIFICIAL
INTELLIGENCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL
APPRAISAL**

By

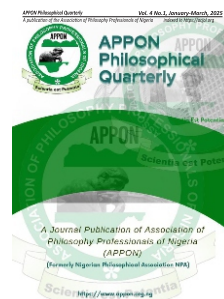
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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates why the western value systems on the African indigenous cultural heritage in the era of AI should be frowned at. It calls for the resuscitation and adaptation of the indigenous African family system as a way of promoting unity through cultural identity, socio-political development, and technological advancement in the era of AI, which is capable of having a negative effect on the African indigenous family system. The author, through critical and analytical methods of philosophical inquiry, notes that the family is a vital agent of norms in the political, social, and technological evolution of a society and therefore believes that the African family system should be oriented to reflect true African socio-cultural personality. While the study acknowledges the gap between the positive role of AI, if effectively deployed, in the improvement of family systems in terms of connection and communication among the family on the one hand and the negative influence it is capable of having on the African family system, if not effectively deployed, in terms of the inadequate human ability to use emotion and creativity in decision-making on the other hand. This paper sets out to close this gap by suggesting some African traditional indigenous moral systems ranging from social and communal orientation to African religious belief systems. The study also notes that western marital practice cannot be conveniently practiced in Africa because of different societal values or environmental conditioning between the two worlds. While the paper does not neglect AI entirely, it cautions Africans to be customarily resistant in order not to go into cultural extinction.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Believe System, Communal Living and Social Order

Introduction

Most debate on artificial intelligence is often centred on economic and social developments. But, it is very obvious that the phenomenon also has some cultural dimension in terms of its holistic approach to social phenomenon. Vital aspects of African cultural practices such as marriage system, child up-bringing, and extended family

practice would surround themes in this study. Central to the discussion is the extent to which artificial intelligent tactically undermines and impinges on the growth and social structure of African family system. Given the effects of AI, (which have defaced and disoriented African social values, including the family system), it is time for African cultural heritage, which has been

mangled by western cultural values under the disguise of AI should be re-addressed.

These systems (African indigenous family system), often centred around communal living, extended kinship networks, and a shared sense of responsibility, have formed the bedrock of African societies for centuries. At the core of this system is the interdependence between individuals, where family members, both nuclear and extended, play vital roles in one another's lives. However, the rise of modern technological advancements, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI), is ushering in a profound transformation across various societal domains

In the era of AI, questions arise regarding the impact of these technologies on the African indigenous family system. AI-driven automation, virtual communication, and even decision-making processes are shifting how families interact, how work is organized, and how knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next. The cultural implications of this technological shift are vast, affecting the roles of elders, community leadership, and the transmission of indigenous knowledge, all of which are central to African family structures.

The study will argue that though, AI has contributed positively to improvement in the era of information technology, it has a lot of negative impact on the existing family system and communal living in African. The paper therefore hopes to provoke further debate among intellectuals since the last words would not be said here on this contemporary issue of artificial intelligent. A philosophical appraisal of this transformation is necessary to understand the nuanced implications AI has on African family life. This involves exploring how AI technologies interact with indigenous values, beliefs, and social norms, and

whether these innovations can coexist with that of cultural heritage that is, Native intelligence (NI).

Conceptualizing African Indigenous Family System

It is often argued that there is no common culture in Africa, being a society of polyglot cultural dimension.¹ However, a careful study of the Africa society would show some common characteristics in African diverse cultural practices. Bassey W. Andah has rightly noted that, "even if they do not constitute a coherent value system, cultural values refer to the subject of identifiable dominant values which are shared by large sectors of the society".² The implication of the above submission is the perfectibility of the communal structure of African society and ever-present consciousness of ties of kinship.

As such, African family structure in this context, one does not referring to the nuclear family, consists of husband, wife and children but to the extended family, consisting of a large number of blood relatives. These blood relatives would trace their descent from a common ancestor and are held together by a sense of obligation to one another. Hence, the African family system maintains a high level of solidarity, mutual supports, interdependence, and deep concern for the wellbeing of all members. This explains why the institution of the family is seen as the bedrock of a society. The family is held as fundamental values that envelop social and moral values.

In African perspective, it should be noted that, it is the responsibility of every member of the family to seek and sustain the cohesion of the family. Marriage in the African context is not only for establishing marital relationship and procreation, but also for creating and maintaining the ties of

¹ V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 4

² Bassey W. Andah, *Nigeria Indigenous Technology* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1992), 9

kinship. Marriage is therefore important to the growth and expansion of kinship ties, which is an outstanding quality of African society. Thus, marriage, in African society is so significant that as part of the puberty rites that usher young ones into adulthood, the young ones are educated in matters of sex, marriage, culture, and matrimonial practice.³ The result is that, before entering into marriage, young people would be expected to have known much about family organization and what it takes to be a wife or husband in African context. In most cases, an intending couple is expected to know at least little about the history of the families of each other as this would guide in accepting or rejecting marriage offer. Pre-marital sex is strictly condemned in the marriage tradition in most African societies. In traditional African society, infertility is considered a very great calamity and any person who fails to bear children suffers humiliation, hence people fervently make requests to God for abundant children. This is so because, the people believe that the more children one has the more blessings, labour supply, respect and security.

Naming of children in traditional African society reflects the background of the family and the circumstance surrounding the birth of the child. Also, the father is a respected head of the family with the woman playing supplementary role. Children are collectively culturally brought up by reflecting in them the societal norms, especially through folktales, oral history, music, games, festivals, proverbs, corporal punishment, and traditional philosophy. The important facts to be accepted here is that, the African family system gives premium to collectivism, moral uprightness, respect and frowns at individualism and selfishness which tend to be western customary practices.

Discourse on Globalization and Artificial Intelligent

There have been various intellectual debates on theories of AI and globalization in the recent years. This 'new' trend has grossly been engendered by the developments which have taken place since the collapse of the Soviet Union which led to the introduction of new world order. There have been divergent opinions on what should constitute the man characteristics and their attitude to AI and globalization. Among analysis and policy makers, there appears to the growing agreement as regards at least four features of AI and globalization. First, it is driven by technological changes that go together with regionalization. It is uneven and means time space compression, that is, it is the experience of shrinking world. On the whole AI attracts controversy than consensus.

According to Lubbers in 1998, over 2822 academic papers were presented on AI and globalization at different period and 589 new books were published on its development and processes. It would be pedantic at this juncture to discuss at these divergent perspectives and views. While some focus on its inherent contradictions; others examine its inability to eradicate worsening poverty among developing countries. While many other writers concentrate on the fundamental link between AI, globalization and formation of regional economic blocs. More to this argument, some scholars examine the devastating implications of some of main features of globalization process on developing countries through the AI. It is still viewed by others as a socio-economic fraud perpetrated on the developing countries by the designers of globalization.

Monism view development in out of context as fundamental changes in the institutional and ideological apparatus of

³ O. M. Ehinmore, "Family System in the Era of Globalization: A Historical Survey," *JAPHIL : Journal of Applied Philosophy* Vol. 1, No. 1, (2007), 72

society and strengthening of these so that members of the society would develop the capacity for autonomous and efficient management of their affairs for their own welfare and happiness.⁴ But in Africa, reverse become the case as African countries are placed at a disadvantaged position in socio-political, cultural and psychological relationship with the west. This had been the trend since the era of colonization, which is currently worsened by the dynamics of the new form of neo colonization, which is known as globalization.⁵ Writing on the process of globalization, Kanter and Pittinsky described it from economic view as a “process in which the worlds countries and their economics are increasingly integrated as a function of rising cross-border economic activity”.⁶ From their views, one can deduced cross-border exchanges that include material transfers of people, things and nearly instantaneous communication enabled by emerging technology.

Kanter earlier in 1995 identified four broad processes associated with globalization as mobility simultaneity by pass and pluralism. Simultaneity describes the increasing extent to which goods and services are available in many places in the world at the same time. That is, the increase degree to which innovators can use alternative channels to reach business consumers around the world often circumventing established players. The last process pluralism refers to the dispersion of activity concentrated in a geo-political area to multiple centres of expertise and

influence.⁷ All said and done AI in globalized world is specific form of international integration being crafted primarily to serve the interests of its designers. It is an orally ideology, socio-political economic and cultural which functions to check resistance in the process of enslavement of the developing societies by bigger powers.

The origin of AI and globalization is difficult to locate specifically or historically because, it is not clear exactly when its development began. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the evolution of globalization is by conceptualizing its development beyond the postmodern era. It should be noted that globalization and the development of AI is not an event but a continuous process. Toyin Falola noted this when she argues that; “history of dispersals and migrations should be treated as the foundation of world history which is the early stage of globalization”.⁸ This presupposes that the origin of globalization and the development of AI belong to distant past since the era of the Trans-Saharan trade.

It should be noted here that the earliest period that fully integrated Africa into World politics stated about 1450A.D, which marked the Mercantilist era. The era at Mercantilism was a period of global campaign for international primitive capitalist accumulation, which had trans-Atlantic slave trade as its integral part.⁹ The adventurist discoveries of early European explorers symbolized the conquest of the globe into two-half to Spain and the other to Portugal.¹⁰ With the abolition of slave trade and introduction of the “legitimate” trade

⁴ K. A. Nonsin, “Globalization and the Future of Africa” in *Harare: African Association of Political Science, Occasional Papers* Vol. 4, No. 1, (2004), 64

⁵ Okpaga Adagba, “The Globalization of Western Cultural Values” in *Harare: African Association of Political Science, Occasional Papers*

⁶ Okpaga Adagba, “The Globalization of Western Cultural Values”

⁷ R. Kanter, “World Class: Thriving in Global Economy” had cited by Simon and Schuster in *Journal of Globalization and International Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (1995), 62

⁸ Toyin Falola, *African in the World Politics*, (London: Taylor and Global Politics, 2014), 5-6

⁹ Toyin Falola “*African in World Politics*”, 7

¹⁰ Toyin Falola “*African in World Politics*”, 7

between 1808 and 1885, the main pre-occupation of the European firms and traders was fervent search for industrial raw materials such as palm oil and palm kernel. The result was that large parts of African territories were occupied through force and tricky treaties by competing European Firms.¹¹ African economy was incorporated into that of Europe and tactically tailored towards the production of raw materials for European industrial needs.¹²

Following the historical background of AI from the above, the power of definition of concepts was adopted by the colonialists to plant their deceitful economic and socio-political ideologies on the colonized. Concepts of nation-state, capitalism and scientific nationalism began to spread as part of the institution of modernity, all coming by way of forced conquest, deceit and imperialism.¹³ While it is true that colonialism has some benefits in Africa, it is still reasonable to argue that, social forces of modernity (in the era of globalization and AI) reached the Africa in general as agencies of coercion, political authoritarianism and economic exploitation.

The era of neo-colonialism that began after the so-called “flag” independence had been granted to most African states marked another stage in globalization process. Neo-colonialism is a crafty act of re-colonization designed by former colonial masters, which ensures continued economic exploitation political repression and state terrorism, including debt domination under the disguise of globalization by their former

colonies.¹⁴ This phase in the process of globalization started in Africa after independence of some states which has diversified to operating through the powerful medium of new information and communication technologies.¹⁵ It is accepted by some and rejected by others as a condition which can guarantee economic and social development. Given this background, it is reasonable to accept that, the evolution of globalization lay deep in the past for the accomplishment of AI in Africa.

A Philosophical Discourse on AI and African Indigenous Family System

In the contemporary world, there is a lot of cultural interaction and influence in the name of AI. In Africa, owing to colonial relations, there has been much western cultural domination. Naturally, encourages assimilation and the imbibing of the cultural values of the colonial masters. This colonial influence has damaging effects on the indigenous cultures of the African society, inform of distorting, degrading and diminishing them.¹⁶ The implication of this is that, there has been mass dis-orientation of the people from their indigenous cultural and values practices. Currently, the situation is made more deplorable by the mad spread of Western cultural values systems through the process of AI. A critical view of the current African values, especially in the area of marriage and family organization obviously shows that African cultural heritage has been battered by the incursion of western cultural values.

¹¹ Armstrong Matiu Adejo, “The Roots of Globalization: A Historical Review” in *Journal of Globalization and International Studies*, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, Vol. 1, No., 1, (2003), 6

¹² Armstrong Matiu Adejo, “The Roots of Globalization: A Historical Review” in *Journal of Globalization and International Studies*, 7

¹³ G. Anna & K. Iroup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in History and Theory*, (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3

¹⁴ D. Tuesday, *Decolonizing African Biblical Studies*, 7th Inaugural Lecture of Delta State University, Abraka, 10th June (2004), 12

¹⁵ M. Castels, “Information Technology, Globalization and Social Development,” *Geneva UNRISD*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2008), 4

¹⁶ K. Ogen, “Globalization and Nigeria’s Quest for Economic Development: An Historical Analysis” in *Journal of Social and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No., 2, (2003), 42-45

It is apparent to note here that one of the effects of AI in Africa is craze for western form of marriage and adoption of nuclear family system. This practice has made women mostly dominate marital affairs, resulting in the reduction of men's control. Today, most ladies, under the pretext of Christianity choose western system of marriage (sometimes fraudulently), a practice in which the power of the wedding ring intoxicates women, reduces the authority of parents and empowers pastors (both fake and genuine), sometimes to the detriment of the groom.¹⁷ Couples are sometimes joined without tracing the history of their family backgrounds. Unlike the traditional African marriage, western system of marriage in its characteristics manner tends to engender selfishness, individualism and it does not encourage sustenance of kinship and extended family system which are striking features of African communal family structure.

In African context, marriage is viewed as not just merely an affair between two individuals who have fallen in love and plan to spend their lives together. It is a matter in which the lineage groups of both the man and woman are deeply interested and involved.¹⁸ This explain that, marriage in the African cultural conception, is practiced as a collective institution and couples are 'inseparable' part of the larger family. Unfortunately, the organic and unifying family organization has almost been entirely eroded by western imposed individualist family practice in Africa through the intervention of AI.

Today, it can be deductible argue that, polygamy, which is most suitable to traditional African has been jettisoned in the name of western civilization that derives its

strength in AI. Afrocentric thinkers has argued perhaps tenably that, infertility, search for male children, adequate labour supply, and ill health are some of reasons for taking more than one wife.¹⁹ As tenable as this argument is, the Euro-centric viewers believe that having more than one wife is like creating more economic problems and working against the new globalization trend. This paper, at this juncture, will submit that, the choice of polygamous can possibly be determined by individuals, socio-cultural and economic environment.

As a result of westernization of marriage, most brides tend to believe that it is a misfortune to have a mother in-law (either physically or by adoption) for she would not allow them total domination of their matrimonial home as their husband's relatives to pay them a visit even when the husband lived on such relatives during stormy weather. Such women may believe that it would not be economically and even moral convenient to practice flexible monogamy.²⁰

It needs to be added that, through imported ideas of marriage via the AI, western system of marriage has made most African men more less stooges to women in the bid to imitate the western marital pattern. The terms such as my dear, my sweetheart, darling, honey, mummy, etc. are now rampant in addressing women by their husbands in African society. Thus, couples tease themselves with these nice names just to give the impression of presence of love when in most cases there is none.²¹ However, in contrary to African idea of family system, western culture has made most African women believe in fighting for liberation without enslavement. This is perhaps a western feminist theory of equality, which can only work successfully in the western

¹⁷ Adagba Okpaga, "The Globalization of Western Cultural Values", 61

¹⁸ D. Tuesday, "Decolonizing African Biblical Studies, 17

¹⁹ K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, (Accra: Sankota Publishing Company, 1998), 75

²⁰ K. Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 79

²¹ B. M. Akinnawonu, "Morality in an Era of Social Transformation and Globalization: The Nigeria Experience" in *Iroro: a Journal of Arts, Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma*, Vol. 10, No. 1&2, (June 2005), 97.

cultural environment.

Another negative effect of AI on African family system is identified in the area of pornography. The books, magazines, films, photographs, pictures on internet show sexual acts and images cause sexual excitement on adults and youths that is leading to early marriage that lack experience of real African family system. The question is, does African have zero action for sex? If this question is considered being negative supposedly, then where is African concept of procreation strength derived from? One of the moral factors of African family system is adequate respect for sex. However, AI influence has put this belief on hold. Most people who are used to using AI are likely to be liable to these immoral acts which are capable of adversely affecting the peace of marital homes.

An area of AI influence in the African family system, which has left much to be desired, is promotion of violence. Some of the foreign films imported into the country from the west and other developed countries have the background of war, tricks and robbery. The upsurge of crime in African countries such as armed robbery, drug abuse, assassination, ritual killing, '419' syndrome and so on, are caused by these negative developments. The result is that, the youths would seek means of acquiring and practicing these skills. All these developments no doubt have negatively interfered with the African cultural realm and therefore relegated the traditional family institution to the background. Given this situation, it is therefore reasonable to argue that, causes of high rate of divorce, conflict among couples, broken homes and juvenile delinquencies which are threat to peaceful existence of African traditional family system could be attributed to these unbridled external influences.

The craze for fashion and music of western orientation is another area of negative AI process in African family system. Today, the forms of dressing and music in the society have deplorable influence on the

African youths. Most messages of the so-called modern music spread immorality and African youths are already fallen in love with them. The result is that, this foreign influence has disoriented the morality of the youths to the extent that most of them assert moral freedom from their parents at premature age and thus usually has telling effects on indigenous African family system. In spite of all of the above negative influences of AI in the African family system, this paper is however, not denying its positive influence as well. AI has helped in terms of family connection, family system new innovation and cross fertilization of cultural values. Thus, this paper is therefore set to use the positive influence of AI to advance NI (Native Intelligent) in the African indigenous family system.

Conclusion

This paper examines the deteriorating state of Indigenous cultural values in Africa caused by the overwhelming impact of AI and how it has impinged on the socio-cultural values of the society. The paper is not set out to condemn all aspects of the effect of western cultural values, which are entrenched in AI, but it only frowns at those aspects of western civilization that are inimical to African or family indigenous cultural practices. The values of any society are standard set by the society, which should serve as guides to what is right and proper for people in that society. They are bases of judgments people make as to what is desirable, correct and good and otherwise. These differ from one society to another. A moral pre-orientation, re-evaluation, decolonization of music, performing arts, dressing, marriage system, and family organization is required since what is being experienced currently negatively affects the morality of the youths and are causing harms to the family system in the society. Africa need not to be told that a well preserved culture can be sued to protect, promote and develop our economy and society as done in developed economies of the world.

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