
Possible Relevance of African Communalism in Rebranding Nigeria and its Educational Implications

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Abstract

One fundamental difference between the Africa world and the Western world is the collectivism/individualism aspects of living. While western culture emphasized the importance of individual freedom and desire, African culture emphasized concern for others and the entire community. African communalism as a manifestation of the collectivist living is presented by this paper as a possible value that can be used to anchor the rebranding of Nigeria. This is particularly relevant given the fact that the rebranding project is expected to return Nigeria back to its cultural values. But for the rebranding project to succeed in accordance to the logo-Nigeria: Good people. Great Nation, leadership at all levels in Nigeria should lead by example by rebranding themselves in accordance to the dictum of communalism. "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am". That is they should tie their happiness and success to the happiness and success of the ordinary Nigerian by eschewing vices, such as exploitation, selfishness, corruption etc. Education at all levels should constitute an important agent of rebranding Nigeria communally right from the classroom teaching to the day to day administration.

Introduction

One aspect of culture that differentiates the African societies and the western world is individualism – collectivism aspects of life. Individualism as a Western culture, emphasizes the primacy consideration for oneself, while collectivism as an African culture expresses concern for others in the community. Before colonialism, collectivism in the form of African communalism dominated people's life. Everybody was a brother's keeper to the other. The happiness and sadness of one was the happiness and sadness of the other; the property and poverty of one was to be shared by the other. The community assets and resources were regarded as the assets and resources of all. Stealing was a serious abomination, especially stealing the community property. In some African communities, stealing was punished by banishment from the community.

Unfortunately, the spirit of African communalism gradually gave way to individualism so much so that today, stealing public property has become so rampant that nobody cares again about the source of wealth of rich men. Consequently, Nigeria right now is among the top corrupt countries of the world. The habit of stealing and corruption have pervaded all aspects of Nigeria within and outside the country. Nigeria's image currently leaves much to be desired. But why is this so! Chief servant and Executive Governor of Niger State offered an answer, thus:

We have found ourselves in this sad situation because we have lost our traditional core social values as Africans and as Nigerians and instead of promoting the virtues and principles of honesty, integrity, hard work, community spirit, love for one another, service, selfishness and sincerity, we all seem to be driven by greed and materialism. We seem to have elevated corruption to the highest level by calling it Nigerian factor (Aliyu, 2008..10).

In essence, should Nigeria think of going back to the old good days in terms of value reorientation? This question is particularly pertinent given the topical issue of rebranding Nigeria. The battered image of Nigeria nationally and internationally must have informed the Minister of Information Professor Dora Akunyili to embark on the current exercise of rebranding. Why rebranding Nigeria? Can African communalism be a possible value base of rebranding Nigeria? What is the educational implication of rebranding Nigeria? These and related questions will be addressed by this paper with the ultimate aim of putting the rebranding programme in a proper perspective with a definite focus on African communalism as relevant value base. Suffice to say that even though the project is gradually being forgotten and almost being trivialized by government and Nigerians, scholars and academics should not forget it because the nation needs it badly.

The Rebranding Project in Nigeria

Re-branding ordinarily may be regarded as synonymous to changing the name of a product. When applied to a country as it is now being applied to Nigeria, it may not necessarily involve changing the name of the country. It may involve changing the national and international projection of the country: changing the way a country is seen by her nationals and nationals of other countries. In the words of Professor Dora Akunyili, the Minister of Information and the initiator of the programme,

Its no news that Nigerians all over the world have been painted with the same brush by the international community and that Nigeria is a country where nothing works. This negative perception about Nigeria was actually foisted on us by the international community and it stuck with us. We know that this is not true. We know that we have good Nigerians, the only way to address it was to rebrand Nigeria and talk positively about Nigeria. (Salaudeen, 2009 p: 23).

There is no doubt about the fact that international community has been very vocal in condemning the negative image of Nigeria, yet, it needs to be noted that the

negative image was not foisted on Nigeria baselessly. It was based on what was practically seen to be happening in the country in virtually all sectors of the nation's development. In the health sector, for instance, the latest UNICEF report ranked Nigeria the eight among the 198 countries with the largest number of under-five deaths in the world. To further confirm the negative image of Nigeria's Health sector, Onumah (2009) stated that:

According to the 2009 state of the world's children report launched by the wife of the President, Turai Yar'Adua at the United Nations House in Abuja, one Nigeria women dies every 10 minutes from complications of pregnancy and child birth, while 500 newborns die daily (<http://www.google.co.uk>)

As long as there are no existing facts and figures to counteract the international community's report of vices in Nigeria, so long, will the image of Nigeria continue to be battered. In recognition of the negative attitudes of Nigerians in their daily lives, the Minister of Information, Dora Akunyili, herself stated that the rebranding will also target reorienting Nigerians, changing the negative attitudes of Nigerians, making Nigerians to believe in themselves, become patriotic and portray our positive image to the world. In further specifying the rebranding exercise, the minister said the core of the campaign "would be a return to the cultural values of Nigerian as people as well as how Nigerians see the nation" (<http://www.co.uk>). In order to give the rebranding project a focus. It was given a logo titled-Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation.

While some Nigerians see the rebranding as waste of time with zero chance of success, others see it as necessary. Bamidele (2009) saw the idea as a wasteful adventure especially in the face of "high level of corruption, collapsing social infrastructure, under-funded education sector, ailing health institutions, crisis-ridden power sector and bad road network." (p. 30). Balarabe (2009) opined that Nigerian image can never be corrected as long as failure of governance continues, corruption continues to be every where and election continues to be rigged. In explaining the supporters' position, Salaudeen (2009) stated that a number of people feel: "it is high time the nation put the hunting experience of the past behind it and begin to mobilize its people to reawake those values which had earlier stood the country out among comity of nations" (p. 29).

From a perspective of what to do, Kayode in Nwosu (2009) stated that "branding is not about polishing up one's image. Its about creating value.... and then you project that value" (p. 29). In the same vein, Abioye in Nwosu (2009) expressed the view that "Nations are known for values, brands are known for values; those values are the starting point when you talk about defining the core essence of... brand" (p. 29) From the educational point of view, Fasoranti in Salaudeen (2009) urged the government to retrace its steps and go back to schools to teach the children good moral values.

An overview of the above comments will show that rebranding is necessary but must be based on a particular value which can then be used to project Nigeria nationally and internationally. Also, education is an important instrument by which the rebranding can be carried out. The value and educational dimensions of the

rebranding is very germane to this paper. In this wise, African communalism will be discussed as a relevant value that can be used as a point of focusing the rebranding project and thus, a value base for changing the mindset of Nigeria leaders in particular and, Nigerians in general.

African Communalism in Rebranding Terms

In Africa, communalism is perhaps a most unique characteristic value by which the people are identified. African communalism has been used by scholars in at least three different but related ways. According to Iroegbu (1996) Nnamdi Azikwe speaks of communals in the general sense of kingship togetherness similar to Nyerere's concept of African brotherhood both of which make cooperation and tolerance imperative. The second usage according to Iroegbu (1996) concerns Ofoegbu's concept of communalism as common ownership of, for example land. Common ownership being a contrast to individualism. The third usage, as stated by Nelson's and Wolpe's view refer to communalism as group assertiveness and identity as a result of common culture, common economic status and common power, (Iroegbu, 1996). Different as these usages can be, conceptually speaking, they are all related in the sense that they refer to the basic community spirit that exists among African peoples in their thought patterns and life organizations.

The community spirit was further explained by Oladipo (2006) to involve three elements: namely (i) appeal to duty and public spiritedness as important factors in the definition of personhood; (ii) abhorrence of all forms of "selfish individualism" such as greed and exploitation; and (iii) reciprocity in social life. What is the relevance of these communal elements to rebranding Nigeria and indeed, what is the relevance of the various conceptual usages of communalism to the rebranding project? In respect to duty and public spiritedness, the personhood is defined by the persons fulfillment of her obligations to the community and to other human beings. A person no matter how elderly, pious, wealthy and powerful would be considered irresponsible and therefore, nominal if he consistently fail in his duties to the community or was too self-centred to care about his obligations to fellow human beings. In other words, the measure of a person is directly determined by his mental and practical concern for the community and the well-being of others. It is also directly determined by communicational and existential relationship with others. Henri Maurier in Iroegbu (1996) stressed this relational identity of the African person thus: "Relation is constituent of the human person. Without it, the human person is isolated, and falls into nothingness" (p. 159). It is important to point out that the community spirit does not mean total absorption of the individual into community to the point of denying him his rights and freedom. Rather, it is an expression of the fact that without the community, the individual's capacity for self-fulfillment will be fundamentally constrained if not impossible.

In rebranding terms, the community can be expanded to include the local government area, the state, and the nation. In these contexts individual Nigerian personhood should now be defined by his sincere and practical commitment to the nations well-being within the context of his profession, position, status and income.

The second element of communalism has to do with abhorrence of all forms of selfish individualism. Greed and exploitation are vices which are opposed to the spirit of communalism because they involve pursuance of individual desires and goals at the expense of other people's needs and survival. When an African's personhood is defined by his greedy and exploitative tendencies, such person is viewed by the community not only with disdain but with hatred and bitterness. In rebranding terms, the element of abhorrence of all forms of selfish individualism implies that the basis of judging wealthy people should be changed to give prominence to their source of wealth. Where the source of wealth happens to be greed and exploitation, the law should not only take its full course meaningfully and genuinely, but the Nigerian community at various levels should treat him with disdain and rejection.

The third elements which is reciprocity in social life was partly captured by Armah in Oladipo (2006) thus: "Giving but only to those from whom we receive... Receiving, but only from those whom we give in reciprocal measure" (p. 141). The spirit of reciprocity discourages parasitic living where free riders often enjoy the benefit of social cooperation without making their own contribution in their own way and to the extent they can genuinely

In rebranding terms, this should involve changing Nigerians' opinion of seeing the government as "father Christmas" that is synonymous to giving always without getting anything in return. It should also change the views of government leaders who see the citizens as instruments of public support for government programmes without asking themselves what they have done for the citizens to warrant patriotic support. Once the citizens on one side and the government leaders on the other hand can get themselves to practice communally based reciprocity through responsible and consistent two-way actions, the rebranding project will be on the right path.

Given the importance of the spirit of brothers' keepers, the importance of community, the importance of peoples collective welfare and well-being in traditional African communal life, Mbiti (1969) asserted that "the individual can only say: I am because we are and since we are therefore, I am" (p.108-109). The dictum means that individual happiness and well-being is derived from collective happiness and well-being of the community. No individual can consider himself happy if the happiness is exclusively his: all others in the community are sad. Many Nigerian leaders at all levels and many well to-do individuals, seem to be viewed by the ordinary citizens as selfish and individualistic. This paper wishes to conceptualize such individualistic tendency of leaders as "we are because I am and since I am, therefore we are" (opposed to Mbiti's dictum of communalism). Once their children can attend good schools, they are less bothered about the schools of majority of Nigeria children. Once they can safely travel by air, they are less concerned with the road transport system which most Nigerians use. Once they can go abroad or go to specialized government and private hospitals for medical treatment and check-up, they are less concerned about the primary health care system which is the common point of call of majority Nigerians.

If the rebranding project must be treated with all the seriousness and support it deserves, Nigerian leaders and politicians at all levels of the governance and politic

need to change their view about the welfare and well-being of Nigerian. They should see Nigerian in their thinking and action as members of one corporate national community whose happiness must be tied to their happiness as leaders. If Mbitis's dictum of African communalism can be imbibed at all levels of leadership, in thought and in action consistently, Nigerians rebranding logo of Good people, Great Nation can become a practical reality.

Educational Implications of the Communalistic Approach to Rebranding

The call of a communalistic approach to rebranding Nigeria has a number of implications for the classroom teachers, educational administrators and students body. Suffice to say that the implications stated by this paper are by no means exhaustive.

It is important that classroom teachers should be creative about the subjects they are teaching in such a way that learners should be encouraged to apply their knowledge to practically solve societal problems. This will be a way of rebranding Nigerian students by way of fostering public spiritedness and community service in learners.

Group assignments and group projects by the students should be used by teachers to foster the spirit of collectivity and reciprocity at the same time in students. Each student should be made to compulsorily defend the group project in such a way as to fish out students who did not contribute to the project, but lazily or carelessly left it for others. Each student should be given mark in accordance to the merit of his or her defense and their contributions. A group of students may therefore write the same group project, but they may have different marks.

Character training which hitherto has not been given enough place of pride in the educational system should be emphasized meaningfully by way of creatively relating every subject to the character aspect of learners. All subjects can be related to rule of law, honesty, diligence, tolerance, contentment and respect for fellow human beings all of which constitute direct or indirect part of communalism.

Teachers and educational administrators alike should in their own ways practicalise the communal spirit of relating to their students with genuine concern for their welfare. Beside classroom interaction, administrators should go beyond notice board communication with students. There should be a combination of one-to-one and one-to-group interaction between students and chief executives so as to forster the communal bond of relationship; the communal bond of love and collective mutual care

Educational laws, policies and curriculum should be drawn with the intent to among other things, foster the various elements of communalism earlier identified.

The National Orientation Agency in conjunction with the rebranding committee should articulate African communalism into the main stream of the practical rebranding exercise. This is with the view to making it an issue of serious and consistent educational exercise over many years to come.

Students Union Governments should evaluate their success on the basis of promotion of students welfare within the context of rule of law not on the basis of cult related influence as is, being done in some cases. This will be a way of rebranding students union governance.

Conclusion

The project of rebranding Nigeria is no doubt a laudable project because no serious nation can stay idle watching her image being battered from all directions without correcting the a normally. But this has to be done consistently and concertedly. Unfortunately, the project seems to be gradually forgotten.

In view of the importance of focused leadership in the affairs of any country and in view of the benefits of African values to African people, this paper concludes that African communalism should be an important value by which Nigerian can be rebranded. If this must be dome successfully, education should not only be considered an important instrument of the rebranding exercise, but leadership at all levels should rebrand themselves in accordance to the assertion of Sharma (2007) that “before anybody can remake society, he has to remake himself” (p. 1). When this is done genuinely. Nigerians will have no choice but to happily and communally make Nigeria a great nation with good people.

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