

Oramedia as a Vehicle for Development in Africa: The Imperative for the Ethical Paradigm of Development

Abiodun Salawu

*Department of Communication, North-West University, Mafikeng Campus,
Mmabatho 2735 South Africa*

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ABSTRACT The paper attempts to study the ethical approach to development. Ethical paradigm believes there can be no genuine development unless the mind is refined and cultivated. The paradigm hinges its argument on the concept of *Civilisation* which is the cultivation of mind for the higher ideals of the society. With *Civilisation*, the society would not even be talking of development again, but *Civilisation*, which is an advanced and organised state of human social development. The equation is: *Civilisation* = *Civilisation*. The paradigm believes this is the foundation for development. For the African society, this foundational paradigm of development is rooted in its Ethics. Significantly, the paper highlights the intrinsic values of African folklores (which, in this instance, we shall refer to as Oramedia) for this Ethical Paradigm of Development. The Oramedia or Oral Arts come in various forms: myths, folktales, proverbs, music etc. These Oral Arts which, intrinsically, are Oral Ethics, however, may not just speak Ethics, they can as well be used to popularise messages bordering on social development.

INTRODUCTION

Frank Okwu Ugboajah was a major proponent of the “culturalist” paradigm (Bourgault 1995: 251) for development which argues in favour of harnessing traditional culture in the service of development. For the purpose of spreading (development) information, Ugboajah (1985: 167-175) pointed out that songs, dance, dramas, drumming, storytelling, and proverbs are useful. Essentially, he advocated for traditional communication processes and the social setting in which such communication takes place. This type of communication is what Ugboajah (1985, 1987) referred to as Oramedia. Oramedia which is interchangeable with folk media, traditional media or oral arts (Salawu 2006) are, according to Ugboajah (1985), grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group. They reinforce the values of the group. They are visible cultural features, often strictly conventional, by which social relationships and a world view are maintained and defined. They take on many forms and are rich in symbolism.

Meanwhile, oramedia are intrinsically oral ethics. In other words, oral arts (myths, folktales, proverbs, songs etc.) speak ethics and therefore may not just be used to popularise messages bordering on social development, they can also, essentially, be harnessed for the ethical dimension to development (otherwise called civilisation) which has been described as the

foundation for meaningful development (See Salawu 2012).

Further; the paper presents the ethical paradigm of development and its epistemology; the oramedia as oral ethics and how they can be used to facilitate the ‘civilisation’.

Essence of the Ethical Paradigm of Development

Despite the various campaigns for development, our society is still far from being developed as there has not been appreciable improvement in the quality of lives of most people. Fundamentally, the society is yet to attain the desirable ideals. Of course, talking about development cannot be said to be wrong; what is probably wrong is our understanding of the kind of development we require. The earlier paradigms of development have looked at development in both economic and social terms, yet our preoccupation with development at these levels for more than three decades has only yielded meagre returns.

The contention of this paper is that something is amiss. Without us being able to fix that we may not have a true, enduring and sustainable development. The conceptualisation of our development is wrong, right from the beginning. Development is a matter of attitude; and without doing something that would, positively, condition the attitude, we may continue to miss it. Attitude is a question of mind; and without the mind being healthy or regenerated, the attitude

cannot be positive. This is where *Civilisation*, which is the cultivation of mind for the higher ideals of the society, comes in. With *Civilisation*, the society would not even be talking of development again, but *Civilisation*, which is an advanced and organised state of human social development. The equation is: Civilisation = Civilisation.

However, we can claim that Civilisation is the foundation for meaningful and sustainable development. For the African society, this foundation paradigm of development is rooted in its Ethics. The present paper proposes that for Africans to surmount the problem of underdevelopment (as evident in hunger, sickness and diseases, ignorance and homelessness), they first need to set right the issue of ethics in our work and social life. Unless there is a right attitude, the paper assumes, Africa will continue to be traumatized with every imaginable malaise. To have the right attitude is to grapple with those good values as prevalent in the traditional African society. Further, to inculcate these values, the African traditional media, which speak the values, must be employed.

Value-Normative Complexes

Even though this paper does not subscribe to modernisation theory, there are certain components of it that are of relevance to the thesis. For instance, certain theories on modernisation argue that it is not the character of society but of individuals that is important (Weiner 1966). This thesis agrees to this with the contention that nothing is called the society but the aggregate of individuals that make it up. While Weiner believed that attitudinal and value changes were prerequisites to creating a modern society, this paper brings out that attitudinal and value changes are prerequisites to creating a civilized society.

David McClelland was one of the important scholars of modernization theory to emphasize individual values and attitudes. Melkote (1991) reported that McClelland (1966) was interested in identifying and measuring the variable that might be the impulse to modernization. McClelland tagged a *mental virus* that made people behave in a particularly energetic way, *n-Ach* or need for achievement. The *n-Ach* has to do with thoughts of doing something better than it had been done before, doing things more efficiently and faster with less labour.

Melkote (1991: 46), meanwhile, noted that McClelland cautioned that *n-Ach* by itself was not enough. The other input which was equally important was social consciousness, that is, working for the common good. Therefore, in summary, the impulse to modernization (for this thesis, civilisation), according to McClelland, consisted in part of a personal variable – *n-Ach* – and in part of a social virtue – interest in the welfare of others. To this extent, the researcher regards McClelland's position to be in consonance with the position of this paper.

VALUE-SYSTEM IN THE YORUBA SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

Yoruba is taken as a case study in this study of the values of the African, nay Nigerian society. It is believed that whatsoever is said of the value-system in Yoruba land will, to a very large extent, be valid for the entire African society. The Yoruba value-system is expressed in a number of proverbs and sayings. Such include: '*Iwa rere l'eso eniyan*' (good conduct is an ornament for a person); '*Oruko rere san ju wura ati fadaka lo*' (good name is more precious than gold and silver); '*Eni ba ja'le l'eeke, b'o ba da'ran bo'ri, aso ole l'o da bora*' (literally means the stigma of a misconduct or misdemeanor sticks forever); '*Eni kan ki i je ki'le o fe*' (ego-centrism cannot benefit the whole society); '*l'se l'ogun ise/Mura si'se ore e mi/l'se l'a fi n d'eni giga/Ohun ti a ko ba j'iya fun, ki i tojo/Ohun ti a ba f'ara s'ise fun ni i pe l'owo eni*' (Hard work is the antidote to poverty/Be hard-working, my friend/Only hardwork can exalt one/Whatever is not laboured for does not last/Only what is laboured for lasts); '*Atubotan alabosi ki i dara*' (The end of the mischievous, the fraudulent, the corrupt is never pleasant). It is believed that the Yoruba cherish good conduct, altruism, hard work and productivity, fairness and honesty more than material wealth. As far as the Yoruba are concerned, these are virtues to be extolled and they are needed for the progress of the society.

For instance, writing about the role of government in the dispensation of justice in the traditional Yoruba society, Atanda (1996:20) puts it thus:

"...in whatever role they found themselves at any given time, members of the governing body were concerned, as *they must be*, (empha-

sis mine) with the welfare and happiness of the generality of the people.”

It is worth mentioning that the traditional African, exemplified in the Yoruba, does not just pick the virtues already mentioned when he gets into public life; he starts imbibing them from home, right from childhood. Contrary to man in the western mass society, the traditional African, as observed by Fadipe (1970: 309) – because of contacts of a more or less intimate character with a much larger circle of blood and affinal relations, neighbours and friends – is conscious of the social control in the form of public opinion which will affect him and everybody connected with him. Therefore, the traditional African does not discountenance the societal ethics in order to preserve the well-being of the society.

The Philosophical Basis for the Ethical Perspective to Development

Among western approaches to Ethics, utilitarianism is closest to the Paradigm as both call for the maximization of good and the creation of greatest goodness for the greatest number. Utilitarianism “is a universal teleological system that calls for the maximization of goodness in society – for the greatest goodness for the greatest number” (Pojman n.d.: 74). Similarly, *ubuntuism*, which the Paradigm affirms, is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interest of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring (cf. Nussbaum 2003: 1). *Ubuntu* is a Zulu (South African) word which is contained in the maxim, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning ‘a person is a person through other persons’ or ‘I am, because of others’. This maxim is also present in different African cultures to mean ‘a person is defined in relation to the community’, ‘that I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am’ etc. Utilitarians typically conceive good as pleasure which can promote some of the values which the Paradigm affirms, but, in general, the Paradigm must embrace a broader notion of the good and the greatest good for the greatest number if we are to capture the full import of the African maxim.

The Paradigm, in its shared interest with utilitarians to promote the good of society, explicitly embraces peace, good health, abundance and progress in all their forms. In short, the Para-

digm equates happiness with civilization. In doing so, it maintains its kinship with utilitarianism while broadening the understanding of the greatest good.

The Ethical/Foundational Paradigm of Development

This Paradigm starts with the premise that there has been little or no progress in the African society because of widespread corruption and fraud, both in financial and behavioural terms. The Paradigm also recognises the fact that at the base of this malaise are the human instincts of egocentrism, greed and mindlessness. The Paradigm believes that it is for these aforementioned reasons that governments in Africa have offered little or no benefits to the people. It is for these reasons that African society has been experiencing prolonged season of anomie. It is for these reasons that African society has been characterised by violence, instability, destruction, hunger, want, diseases and ignorance.

The Paradigm believes there can be no genuine development unless the ‘modern’ African mind is refined and cultivated. This is for the simple reason that the problem of Africa is human and that the African has to be exorcised of the evil instincts earlier mentioned.

As already pointed out, the original African spirit is that which cherishes the virtues of good conduct, altruism, hard work and productivity, fairness and honesty. These virtues are the values the African society holds in high esteem. The original African spirit believes and is committed to the well-being of the society. But, with the incursion of westernisation/modernisation came the spirit of materialism and egocentrism which brought along myriad of vices and traumas to the entire African society. Westernisation/modernisation brought good things like western education and technology, but in acquiring these, the African lost his values, and instead, developed a warped sense of values.

The values prevalent in the traditional African society were then pushed to the background while the whole society gloried in the base values that became the order of the day. Materialism is exalted. What matters to the society is for you to possess, not minding the means. The society that is supposed to provide the social control against all misconduct seems not to be

interested in those exalted virtues again, but rather in material acquisition. This brought about a lot of desperation for the material wealth. The 'commonwealth' that is supposed to be for the benefit of the entire society is appropriated by a few who are fortunate to be in the position of power. Therefore, the craze for power becomes frenzied.

Since those who seize power – either through the barrel of gun or perverted ballot boxes – are not there in the interest of the society, the entire society is thrown into trauma. As a result, every individual member of the society tries to look for ways of making ends meet or breaking even. The rot that characterises the conduct of people at the head of the society soon spreads to the entire body of the society; and this is made manifest in every sector of the society, even in the homes. The education system is nothing to write home about. The social services and infrastructure are not in shape. In business and commerce, there are sharp practices. This is just to mention a few. As a few individuals continue to shine in this morass, the whole society continues to be the worst for it.

This paradigm looks at it this way: even if the European and American nations would continue to fund development programmes in Africa, without the African psyche changed, we may not make any meaningful progress. This Paradigm advocates for a return to the root cause of the problem, the seat of which is found in the mind. Let us cultivate the African mind as a first start. It is when we develop the mind and the man that the whole society will develop. One can talk of development in every sphere of the African society. This position is the foundation for meaningful development in Africa, and indeed, in the entire world.

For now, the Paradigm is advocating: let us talk of civilisation, which is the cultivation of mind for the higher ideals of the society. Therefore, the basic tenets of this Foundational Paradigm of Development are:

- (1) Ensuring the cultivation and regeneration of the mind.
- (2) Embracing the African traditional value system.
- (3) Encouragement of good citizenship and patriotism
- (4) Promotion of virtues of honesty, discipline, sense of responsibility, integrity and hard work.

- (5) Promotion of merit and competence against mediocrity.
- (6) Promotion of learning and intellectualism.
- (7) Promotion of creativity and innovations (Salawu 2004: 66 - 67).

ESSENCE OF ORAMEDIA TO DEVELOPMENT

Oramedia are artistic components of folklore. They are popular arts which include opera, music, dance; and of course, drama, poetry and folktales. Jefkins and Ugboajah (1986: 154-161) assert the inextricability of Oramedia and Folklores:

Oramedia cannot be separated from folk cultures. One can see oramedia as group media but it is better to regard them as interpersonal media, speaking to the common man in his language, in his idiom, and dealing with problems of direct relevance to his situation.

Oral Arts are essential aspects of folklores. They are so fundamental that they may be regarded as synonymous to folklores. They can be described as the vehicle for the transmission of the folklores or as the repository of the folklores. Oral Arts are so called because they are created without the aid of writing, delivered by mouth, and received through the ear.

Finnegan (1970: 28) refers to Oral Arts as Oral Traditions having classes which include myths, folktale, proverb, music, song, poetry. Oral Arts can also be delineated into the following forms: prose (if it is slow, non-rhythmical), poetry (if it is fast, rhythmical) and drama (if it involves actions).

Nzewi (1979) postulates that the purpose of theatre is to inculcate values, ethics and mores in order to ensure build an ordered society. The objectives are to inform everyone in society of their social, moral, and humanistic values; assist governments in popularising progressive policies; and promote peace, human understanding, and the brotherhood of mankind.

Significantly, Dzurgba (1999: 83-91) refers to the Oral Traditions as Oral Ethics because they convey ethical messages for the African people. Bayard (1953: 1-17) accepts that mythological stories, for instance, are told about what constitutes good or bad conduct in society. For good behaviour, there is public honour and commendation while bad behaviour attracts ostracisation, punishment and disgrace.

Likewise, African songs are an important medium of communicating the ethics of the society (Bowra 1962: 82; Jones 1959: 70). The songs are informative and meaningful, having contents that teach ethical values of honesty, dedication to duty, humility, selflessness, justice etc. (Beier 1956: 26; Awe 1974: 29). In the same vein, proverbs communicate ethical values which people need to apply to daily social relations (Boverd 1977, cited in Ayantayo 2001: 42).

Similarly, the Ifa literary corpus among the Yoruba is a storehouse of information on moral matters (Adewale 1986: 60-61). Thus, Abimbola (1976: 1-11) argues that Ifa is a repository of the Yoruba traditional body of knowledge embracing ethics, philosophy, medicine and folktale.

Convinced that national development is only achievable in an atmosphere conducive, in a society where cherished norms and values are appreciated and preserved, Uzochukwu (2001: 114) argues that Oral literature (as he chooses to call it) helps to create this state of affairs in the Igbo society. Referring to a 1985 publication of his where he discloses that the accepted patterns of behaviour in Igbo society are based on the ideal of "live and let live", he asserts:

... this ideal, the epitome of Igbo philosophical view of life is traceable in most verbal art through which some values are expressed in Igbo traditional society (Uzochukwu 1985a: 106).

The objective of praise-poetry in Igbo society, as it is in other African societies, is to bring to focus the admirable qualities expected in the society so that the necessary atmosphere conducive for national development is created. Conversely, the folktale contains some moral lesson which serves as tool for correcting anti-social behaviour. Uzochukwu (2001: 120) remarks: "wickedness does not go unpunished in the moral world of the folktale". He adds that the implication is always a warning to people to adhere to the norms of the society.

We shall highlight some samples of the ethical contents of the African oral arts. We start by considering these two children's poems written in the Yoruba language:

*Ise l'oogun ise,
Mura si se ore e mi,
Ise l'a fi n d'eni giga.
Bi a ko ba r'eni f'ehin ti,
Bi ole l'aa ri;
Bi a ko ba r'eni gb'okan le,*

*A te'ra mo'se eni.
Iya a re le l'owo l'owo,
Ki baba a re l'esin le'kan,
Bi o ba gb'oju le won,
O te tan ni mo so fun o.
Iya n be f'omo ti o gbon
Ekun n be f'omo ti n sa kiri.
Ma f'owuro sere ore e mi,
Ise l'a fi n d'eni giga.*

Translation:

Work is the antidote to poverty,
Be hardworking, my friend,
Work is the ladder of elevation.
Without a sponsor,
One does not appear diligent,
Without support,
One has to be hardworking.
Your mother may be rich,
Your father may be resourceful,
If you depend on them,
You are finished.
Wretchedness awaits the unwise,
Sorrow is the lot of the unserious.
Do not toy with your beginning,
Work is the ladder to greatness.

This poem enjoins us, especially the young ones, to be hardworking, dutiful and diligent, not just for our well-being today, but more as a preparation for our future. This kind of message would produce responsible citizens, and in the aggregate, would bring about productivity and efficiency in the polity, all for the overall growth and development of the nation.

*Ewure je eran ile
T'o maa n j'iya pupo
Nitori aigboran re.
Ti a ba na ewura,
A gbon eti meji pepe,
A tun pada si 'bi ti
O ti ji' ya l'eekean.
Eyin omode, e gbo,
E ma se bi ewure,
Eran alaigboran.*

Translation:

The goat is a domestic animal
That suffers punishment a lot
Because of its disobedience.
If the goat is flogged,
It will only shake its ears
And go back to where it was flogged.
Children, listen,
Do not be like the goat,
The disobedient animal.

This song-poem about disobedience is meant to make children to become law-abiding citizens. If we have law-abiding citizens, the problem of crime and violence in the polity will reduce to a minimal level.

*Ja itanna t'o n tan
T'o tutu, t'o si dara.
Ma duro d'oyo ola,
Akoko sure tete.*

This poem, just in tune with the first one, counsels that the young should make hay while the sun shines. This implies that the young should judiciously make use of their time of youth, in preparation for their future, so that the future can be glorious for them. This poem, which emphasises the fleeting nature of time, indicates that any young one who is not serious with his life may end up being a social misfit, and a servant to his contemporaries. The following song has a similar message. It enjoins pupils/students to be serious with their studies so that they can be in exalted positions later in life. The song goes thus:

*Bi nba mo'we mi,
Bata mi a dun ko ko ka;
Bi nba mo'we mi,
Bata mi a wo perere ni'le.*

The next two songs in Yoruba preach good conduct. While the first one admonishes children to be respectful to their parents, the second one stresses the importance of being helpful to fellow human beings. They go thus:

*Omo t'o mo'ya a re l'aju o,
Osi ni o ta'mo naa pa (twice).
Baba to j'iya po l'ori e,
Mama t'o j'iya po l'ori e.
Omo t'o mo'ya a re l'aju o,
Osi ni o ta'mo naa pa.*

Translation:

Any child who disrespects his/her mother
Will never be successful (twice).

The father who toils for you,
The mother who toils for you,
Any child who disrespects his/her mother
Will never be successful (twice).

*Eniken ti'wo ba ni'pa
Lati se iranlowo fun o,
Oun naa l'enikeji re,
Tooju u re.
Oun l'enikeji re o, ranti,
Ranti o,
Oun l'enikeji i re o, ha,
Ranti o.*

Translation:

Whoever you have the means to assist
Is your fellow,
Take care of him/her.
S/he is your fellow, be mindful,
Be mindful,
S/he is your fellow, be mindful.

It is important to note that these value-laden songs, poems or proverbs are intended to instil the values in children and adults alike. As we have poems and songs enjoining children to honour their parents, so do we have such that enjoin parents and the elderly to take care of their children, honour the young ones and plan for the future of their children.

Yoruba proverbs and wise sayings also have intrinsic ethical values. The following two sayings preach goodness, good conduct:

- 1 *Iwa rere l'eso eniyan* (Good character is an ornament).
- 2 *Oruko rere san ju wura ati fadaka lo* (A good name is better than gold and silver).

The first saying is about the beauty of good character. The second stresses the advantage of good reputation over the abundance of riches. This is a message that a society that thrives on materialism needs to regenerate itself. The worldly riches has tempted many people to get involved in corruption, stealing, robbery, murder and related ills. For making money, people are ready to do anything without minding what image they have in the public. If political office holders, for instance, inscribe this saying on their hearts, they would care more about having good names than the dubious wealth amassed through nefarious activities.

The following Igbo poem stresses the need to aid the helpless, to pay attention to farm work, to settle quarrels promptly so that they may not escalate and disrupt the equilibrium (Uzochukwu 2001: 118).

*Nga o mmiri ji onye mkoumkpu,
Nga ahu ka o ji onje toro ogologo
Onye puta na ndu uzo hu nwa mmadu
Nga o na-arisi imi,
Q buru ukpa n' isi, ya butuo ukpa,
Hichaa nwata imi
Onye ma ihe o ga-aruru na o bilite-ee?
Chukwu new ike-ee.
O buru na I jewe ije, nwa Uzochukwu-uu,
I jewe ije,
Rote mgbe Iga-atugba ji na mbubo.
Na-akowa ji-oo..*

*Ajo onu kpa mmadu n'ezi be gi,
Were uriom okuko chuo aja,
Gbor ha ugu umu ndi mmuo,
Lkpe adiwara Chukwu*
(Uzochukwu 1985b: 96-7).

As the diminutive is liable to be drenched by rain water,

So is the tall person.

When on the road, one sees a child

Unkempt, with mucus running down from the nose,

He should leave all engagement,

Take down the long basket he may be carrying,

And take care of the child

For who knows what he would grow to be?

As God is all-powerful.

When you are engaged in other pursuits, son of Uzochukwu,

In your pursuit of other engagements,

Remember to give due attention to yam farming

When people are embroiled with quarrelling in your compound,

Offer sacrifice with a newly hatched chick,

To forestall the evil temptation.

The following Igbo proverb also encourages selflessness: "*Egbe bere Ugo bere*" (Let the kite perch, Let the eagle perch) (Uzochukwu 2001: 114).

These are just a few examples of the rich African heritage of oral ethics that are largely lost today – a situation that calls for rediscovery and re-application.

CONCLUSION

The argument in this paper is that ethics is the foundation for sustainable development. To mobilise people towards an Ethical Revolution, the deployment of African traditional oral arts which, intrinsically, are oral ethics, is imperative in this regard.

It is the contention of this paper that the cultivation of mind for the higher ideals of society is already embedded in the culture of the African, as encapsulated in *ubuntuism*, and as demonstrated in the culture of the people typified in its songs, poems, proverbs, folktales etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective communication that takes cognizance of the present-day reality and that should appropriate the modern day technological affor-

dances, there should be a syncretisation of the traditional and the new in such a way that the latter is used to fly the former. In other words, the modern means of communication can be used to extend the frontiers of the traditional. The broadcast and the internet media are indispensable in the use of Oramedia. They have the capacity of extending the frontiers of the Oral Arts.

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