



**MODERNITY, ISLAM AND AN AFRICAN CULTURE**DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ft.v4i2.1>

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**Abstract**

The human quest for the meaning of life is an unending one marked by undulating landscapes. In order to confront the flux of experience generated by this quest for meaning, the human embraces science, morality, politics and religion. Religion is said to provide the basis for transcendental values which give humans succour after the physical and material struggles have ended. At the same time, religion also uses the observable social world as the starting point for the embrace of transcendental values. In this essay, an attempt is made to examine the interconnectedness of modernity (which has its basis in the social world), Islam (which provides the human with transcendental values) and an African culture (which serves as a nexus of modernity and Islam). The essay is basically an exercise in analysis whereby the readers are made to draw some compelling inferences.

**Keywords:** Modernity, Islam, African culture, Values, Human happiness

**Introduction**

This paper concerns itself mainly with philosophical analysis of modernity, Islam and African culture, the Yoruba culture to be precise, with a view to showing how the human quest for survival and development has brought modernity, Islam and many African cultures into an interplay of perceived benefits and burdens. The paper, however, concludes that a critical approach towards the interrelationship identified above is a crucial step to developing enduring human values that will lead to human happiness which is the goal of development.

In trying to establish our position here, we discuss in section II the templates of modernity. Here we try to show that modernity is a cognate term of modernism and we proceed to show the different senses of modernity and the major features of modernity. A fact that bears pointing out is that all the different senses converge at establishing the fact of modern life based on the sophistication engendered by science and technology, freedom, and political liberalism. In section III, we look at Islam and modernity. In doing this we examine the attitude of Muslim scholars to modernity and revisit the schools of thought namely modernist/reformers and the fundamentalists. We note that whatever strictures that might be placed on modernity, especially because of its Western European root, the fact of change in human exploration makes modernity a must for all peoples and civilizations. It is also interesting that all races have contributed one way or the other to modernity (IRELE 1982; TAIWO 2011).

In section IV, we examine the influences of Islam on the Yoruba culture. These are mainly in the areas of socio-political life and linguistic orientation. We

summit that the Islamic influence, together with Arabic – its language of dispersal - has been a major basis of the Yoruba life alongside with autochthonous cultural values. Also, a fact that cannot be denied is that the average Yoruba person is westernized. So we can say that this motley of cultures in which the Yoruba person finds himself has tended to redefine his authenticity. It then becomes interesting to note that why the western culture has infiltrated the Islamic culture mainly, both the western and Islamic cultures have superimposed their values on the Yoruba culture leaving the Yoruba culture prostrate most of the time.

In section V, we examine of the confrontation and compromise of values. In doing this, we examine the benefits and burdens of modernity and Islam on African cultural values. The emphasis here is to do a substantial critique of modernity and Islam on Yoruba culture, encapsulated in the concept of ‘olaju’ (an enlightened modern person) and ‘odaju’ (a blunt person).

In section VI, which is the concluding section, entitled: towards a viable interplay of forces and values for human development and African development in particular, we emphasize that modernization which is materially based should provide conducive grounds for the enhancement of transcendental values. This is because human fulfillment may be derived from the adequate reconciliation of material with the spiritual.

The methodology of our discourse is the analytic, critical and constructive methods of philosophy. We analyze the concepts of modernity, Islam and salient features of African culture and engaged in their critical evaluation to determine their benefits and burdens for African society in particular. We then attempt a synthesis of all the positive elements in modernity and Islam as a way of constructing an ideal model for African societies that could facilitate growth development and human happiness.

### **The Templates of Modernity**

We start this section on modernity taking a working definition from Olufemi Taiwo (2009). Of course this definition may not be perfect, but it helps our discussion to take off the ground. According to Taiwo, “modernity refers to that movement of ideas, practices and institutions that originated in Europe, the roots of which are generally traced to Renaissance, moving through the voyages of discovery, the Reformation and the Enlightenment”(TAIWO 2009, 88). To say this however, is not to suggest that human civilization began at this definitive period in Europe, rather it is to imply that modernity had a definite philosophy which served as the foundation of modernity. Generally, modernity is a cognate term of ‘modern’, ‘modernism’ and ‘modernization’. They imply a broad form ‘the present’, ‘recent time’, up-to-date among others (GEDDES & GROSSET 2006, 278). In our discourse we shall be concerned with both the philosophy or philosophical foundation of modernity and its general sense of living in the present, which indirectly implies doing things in a new way that is contemporaneous, whether in terms of technology, governance, economy and social relationship.

At the philosophical level, the watershed of modernity could be traced to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe when both Francis Bacon and Descartes sought a new way of conceptualizing the human and his environment. The major problem that Bacon and Descartes battled with was how to secure a foundation for knowledge. Francis Bacon was a statesman and his chief interest was not religious truth and eternal destiny of humans in the “other world” (as this is a matter of faith, of supernatural revelation deemed to be outside the realm of the reason of humans) but the progress of knowledge and of useful invention and the temporal destiny of humans in this world (KOYRE 1980, xii).

Bacon accepted the skeptical criticism, perfected the criticism and went further to identify various types of human errors, the ‘fallacies’ and ‘idols’ of our mind, their origins and their natural and social varieties. Bacon believed that human reason, discursive, theoretical reason, is not only perverted and diseased, but it is in itself fallacious, weak and unstable. According to him, we are endowed with reason not for the sake of speculation or of spinning out theories about things that are beyond our reach, but we possess reason for the sake of action. For the essence of humans is action not mere thought. Thus, it is action, in practice, in experience that the human finds the foundation of knowledge. Theoretical reason is fanciful and chimerical and it runs widely astray whenever it departs the firm ground of experience. Experience, then, is the remedy that Bacon offers to humankind (FULLER 1966, 40-45).

Although we may say that Bacon succeeded partially in refuting the skeptic’s position, his solution was more or less a social one. As a matter of fact, he was unable to produce the new science he envisaged. One of the reasons for this is that pure empiricism does not lead us anywhere, not even to experience, much less of course, to experiment. An experiment indeed, is like a question we put to nature. It presupposes a language in which we formulate our questions. In other words, experimentation is not the basis of theory, but only a way of testing it. Science, it has been argued, does not result from an accumulation of facts. There are no facts that do not imply concepts. It was because Bacon did not understand this and wanted to follow the order of things and not that of ‘ideas’ that he is deemed to have failed in his attempted reformation of the intellect.

Rene Descartes (1596 - 1650), through what is popularly known as the ‘Cartesian Revolution’, seems to have advanced beyond Bacon by establishing the certainty of human knowledge on reason (KOYRE 1980, xiii). Descartes in his [Meditations on First Philosophy]\_(1614), through the Methodic or systemic Doubt of earlier beliefs, especially those concerning the external world, was able to arrive at the *Cogito* (the I/self) which could not be doubted and which invariably formed the foundation of knowledge. According to him, the fact of his thinking or doubting only affirms and re-affirms the existence of the ‘I’. Hence the aphorism *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am).

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries especially, modernity took a philosophical foundation, on which other knowledge claims are to be based. Descartes, Leibniz,

Spinoza defended the rationalist foundation, while Locke, Berkeley and Hume made a case for the empiricist foundation of knowledge. Kant, the German philosopher, though much of an idealist, tried a reconciliation of the rationalist and empiricist positions through what he called forms of intuition and categories of understanding which make *synthetic a priori* propositions possible.

What then are the features of this modern period in philosophy that helped in the advancement of modernity? One may start with the idea of a grand theory, a foundation of knowledge which may serve as the foundation of other knowledge claims, which anything that is to be regarded as knowledge claim must conform with. This is popularly regarded in many quarters as the enlightenment project.

The next feature is what may be regarded as “the principles of subjectivity”, which showcases the freedom of the human person. Hegel is quoted by Taiwo with regards to this principle thus: “the principle of the modern world is freedom of subjectivity, the principle that all essential factors present in the intellectual whole are now coming into their right in the course of their development” (TAIWO 2009, 88). This principle embodies matured rationality which paves the way for the appropriate choice in all works of life, especially in governance.

From the principle of subjectivity also derives a philosophy of individualism and one of the central ideas of this philosophy is that ‘no government is legitimate to which the governed have not consented’ (TAIWO 2009, 90). In other words, this principle provides that in the modern age no one ought to acknowledge the authority of, or owe an obligation to obey any government in which the individual has not contributed in its constitution. This principle, we are reminded by Taiwo (2009, 90) forms the major subject of the social contract theories of philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacque Rousseau.

Another feature of modernity is what can be regarded as an ideological orientation that has an abiding faith and almost unquestioning commitment to progress. According to Taiwo, there is a continuous gaze into the future and an obsession with what is new. This then gives a special dimension to the relations among the past, the present and the future. For Taiwo, in modernity “change is celebrated for its own sake and the best is forever yet to come” (TAIWO 2009, 90 - 91). What this invariably means is that as an apostle of modernity, modernism, modernization and modern age, one cannot despise change. There would then be some concomitant questions such as: who determines the change? , In whose interest is the change? And who has the upper hand within the circle of change? This tendency to ask such questions will then help assess the interface between some world cultures such as Islam and modernism, African traditional culture and modernism, and European culture and modernism.

One major attribute of modernity that has been implied all along is what can be regarded as “social epistemology in which reason plays a central role and knowledge is founded, not on revelation, tradition or authority, but on conformity with reason”(TAIWO 2009, 91). While it is true that reason is central to modernity, it is also the case that one cannot discountenance in absolute terms the role of faith,

authority and traditions with regard to our being – in the – world even in the modern age.

While we have examined the positive claims about modernity, it has not been spared of accusation and counter accusations. Many have identified it with westernization, imperialism, colonialism and even as a disguised form of globalization. This basket of conceptions has attracted the irk of some scholars and orientations to the phenomenon of modernity. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o laments that “there is no religion, no culture, no nation today that has not been affected by colonialism and its aftermath. Indeed, modernity may be considered as something imported into Africa by Western colonialism (WA THIONG’O 2009, xi). In this work just like in many other works of Wa Thiong’o, an attempt is vehemently made to *speak* to the decolonization of modernity. While this attempt is laudable, one wonders whether it is possible to re-write the history of modernity especially given its colonial basis. Taiwo (2009, 2011) thinks it is difficult to erase the colonial background to modernity but we can re-examine our participation within it such that we appropriate the positive elements. After all, a major factor in the foundation of modernity is the quest to know and conquer nature.

Abiola Irele however tries to engage in what may be regarded as a balancing act by noting among other things that:

The truth of our situation is that the modern institution we operate, the material furniture of our modern universe, the ideas that are making their inexorable way among us, are creating a new context of life and meaning to which every single individual has perforce to relate in one form or the other. (IRELE 1982, 14-15)

Given the above background, Irele underscores the inevitability of science and technology in the modern age, as products of modernity, which no group of people cannot afford to ignore, except at its peril. He writes thus:

We may have no business now sending a man to the moon, but we have to cope with the demands of the modern world. We cannot meet the challenges of the scientific and industrial civilization of today by draping ourselves with our particularisms. The resources in ideas, techniques, and in certain respects values, offered by our traditional cultures are simply not adequate for our contemporary needs and interest. (IRELE 1982, 22)

The above lengthy excerpt from Irele is to underscore reasons why we cannot afford to isolate ourselves, all in the name of nationalism, from the rest of the world. In fact, it is more rewarding to have an expanded vision of our humanity than to recoil to our shells and shut ourselves from happenings in other civilizations. According to Irele:

We could do then with a broader vision of our humanity than cultural nationalism in its present emphasis proposes to us. If we can accept that the scientific and technological civilization which has come down to us, historically, from Europe can improve the quality of our lives, if we can accept that our

modern institutions should be based on political and social ideas articulated elsewhere, there is no reason why we should exclude from our acceptance other valuable areas of experience simply because of their association with Europe. (IRELE 1982, 30)

The foregoing, in a nutshell, has been the analysis of modernity. Suffice it to note that the most sustained critique of modernity has come from the trend known as 'post - modernism'. This is a phenomenon that is out to attack any grand theory as promoted by modernism. Post modernism is a kind of relativistic orientation, which again may be used by antagonist of modernity in its various dimensions. Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that every nation is part of modernization since development is mainly based on change. And this makes every nation a joint-stakeholder in the modernity project. By historical truth, Western Europe and the North America have had the upper hand in the modernity project which has subsequently led to some hegemonic tendencies on their part and the domination of socio-economic, political and technological space. The industrial revolution, freedom and individuality, celebration of reason and liberal democracy are salient features of modernity. It is worthy of note that the 'hijack' of modernity by the West has elicited reactions of other cultures especially the Islamic culture, Asian culture and African culture with the latter being a major consumer of the products of modernity whether economic, political, scientific or technological, or all of them combined.

### **Islam and Modernity**

In this section, an attempt is made to examine the interface between Islam and modernity. As we noted earlier, modernism as a phenomenon has infiltrated all aspects of human existence, of which the religion of Islam, as brought to us by the Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) is not an exception. The major focus of this section shall be concentrated on the exposition of the reaction of the *Ulama* to modernity, especially as encapsulated in the two major schools of modernists/reformers and the fundamentalists. Let us note at the outset that there would not be any religion without humans. God does not need religion. Therefore, since religion is an avenue to get to God by humans, humans should also preserve themselves in order to get to God. In other words, much as humans should keep the sacredness of religion, so also must he have the liberty to capture nature and ask questions about his beliefs. According to Parray:

The European penetration of the Near east and India and the decline of Muslim ascendancy in these regions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century precipitated the crisis that defined the responses of Muslim intellectuals to European modernity. (PARRAY 2011, 79)

Page 7 The import of Parray's remark is that the subjugation of the Muslim world by Europe and the challenge to the veracity of Islam itself attracted a negative response to the perception of modernity itself because it was seen as an instrument of oppression. Let us then attempt an outline of the modernist reformers and the

fundamentalist positions. The position of the Islamic modernists who are also known as the reformers is a two-fold reaction. In the first instance, the Islam modernists are concerned with how the Muslims can participate in the modernity, and modernism by extension and at the second level, they are reacting against the rigidity of the Islamic fundamentalists who believe that Muslims should go back to the rigid traditions of Islamic norms, principles and doctrines that are untainted by unmitigated liberalism of the Western Europe. Our discussion is therefore based on the assumption that the fundamentalists' position is simply based on "emulating the past blindly (*taqlid*)" and that 'western secular elites are insensitive to Islamic tradition'. What then are some of the major strands of the modernist argument?

We start by noting some of the Islamic scholars that have pursued the modernization of Islam. These are "Jamal al – Din al – Afghani (1838-1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905), Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938)" (PARRAY 2011, 80). The basic thrusts of the reformist position include the following:

- (1.) That the Islamic religion is compatible with reason and science.
- (2.) The embrace of the ideas of *Islah* (reform), *tajdid* (renewal/revival) and *ijtihad* (independent judgment and interpretation). This second factor accordingly promoted Muslim unity and resistance to western cultural hegemony.
- (3.) To interpret the teachings of Islam in such a way as to bring out its dynamic character within the context of the intellectual and scientific progress of the modern world.
- (4.) To define Islam by bringing out the fundamentals in a rational and liberal manner and to emphasize among others, the basic ideals of Islamic brotherhood, tolerance and social justice. (PARRAY, 2011: 80-81)

One can then say that the Islamic modernists agree with the fundamental tenets of modernism as enunciated in the previous section of this paper. Their disagreement with the Islamic traditionalists or fundamentalists who embrace *taqlid* is that Islam is a progressive, dynamic and rational religion, though premised firmly in the Holy Quran, but which is constantly catching up with contemporary development in society in all its ramifications. It is these blueprints of change, freedom, rationality that inject into the interpretation of political, cultural and religious spheres. One can also infer that the fundamentalists or traditionalists are opposed to the position of the Islamic reformists in as much as they see these values from the precinct of western values that promote colonialism, imperialism, and ideologies that undermine the Muslim cultural outlooks. From the reformers' view however, while it is important to reject Western imperialist goals and policies, it is important to accept and admire the West or Europe for its scientific and technological strength, its political ideas of freedom, justice and equality.

Given all that the above polemics, it is very easy to assert that one of the grounds for the support of modernization of Islam is that we live in a global world of interconnected and intersecting values, where no society or religion can claim to be exempted or untouched by global events. Furthermore, modernization in Islam is

taken in the less sophisticated sense of being modern, that is, acting in line with modern orientation brought about by science and technology and concomitant values.

The constant antagonism to the West, i.e. Europe and America by the Muslim world is borne out of the fact that the ideology of cultural dominance by the West which views other societies as the 'other' and therefore humiliated entities. Hence, there is the need for cultural respect on the part of Europe notwithstanding her dominance of international relations. Marrouchi captures this thus:

In the long run, it is Islam – especially – the humiliated version of it, that will be the greatest danger to the West unless, of course, in our encounters with other cultures and religions, we proceed with caution and respect for the other, not as other but as part and parcel of the self, and that we should not think like governments or armies or corporations, who lose the thread of themselves a great deal, but that we remember and act on the individual experiences that really shape our lives and those of others. (MARROUCHI 2007, 31)

The emphasis above is on inclusive humanity which means that the West cannot afford to be arrogant if she wants others to embrace the versions of modernity which she has played a prominent role in its development. In a similar vein, Abdul – Rahmon reiterates the fact that modernity with its European garnishing has come to be part and parcel of our life in Africa even though he cautions that our attitude to modernity should not be discriminatory to other cultures, such as the Islamic culture. This he notes especially in the neglect of the use of Arabic language in Nigeria, while English and other European languages are encouraged. He puts this position poignantly thus:

Despite the incalculable damage the colonialist had done to the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies, there is no denying the fact that English has come to stay as Nigeria's lingua franca, and to that extent a must learn for one to be a functional participant in the official circle. It is with a good grasp of the English language that graduates of Arabic and Islamic studies can function optimally with respect to the philosophy and objectives of the Arts disciplines as contained in the NUC minimum academic standard. (ABDUL – RAHMON 2012, 34)

The preceding arguments have been re-echoed to underscore some of the controversies involved in modernity and the modernization project. But in bringing this section to a close, it is pertinent to raise certain questions. Granted that no society or religion can do without modernity, is it the case that all societies and religions have fully appropriated the salutary aspects of modernity? To what extent can we say that Islam in particular has appropriated the positive features of modernity such as freedom and unrestricted questioning of values? What is the situation in some self-acclaimed Islamic nations concerning governance, child rights, education, women rights and political liberty? Why did we have the Arab spring or political *upheavals* in prominent Islamic nations like Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and

others? The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but they provide a veritable food for thought concerning Islam and modernity. We now turn to influences of Islam on Yoruba culture.

### **Islam and Yoruba Culture**

There is no doubt that Islam has been influenced by modernity, especially as propagated by Europe. It is also the case that Islam has also influenced other cultures especially the Yoruba culture within Africa. If this is the case, we may simply assert that the world is a kind of intertwined phenomenon where there are influences and counter-influences. Although we do not imply here that Islam is the only religio-cultural phenomenon that has influenced the Yoruba culture, our argument precisely is that the modern Yoruba culture has been deeply influenced by Islam. In this section, we consider some ramifications of the influence of Islam on Yoruba culture and vice-versa and how this interplay of relationship has affected the being-in-the-world of the Yoruba people within the general context of modernity and globalization.

In brief, the Yoruba people inhabit the Western part of Nigeria and can also be found in some parts of neighbouring West African countries like Benin. They constitute one of the largest tribal units in West Africa and they have a rich cultural history that dates back into time. Much of what is known about their cultural past (religion and cosmology) is contained in the famous *ifa* literary corpus (OLUWOLE 2014, 25-64). In the postcolonial time, the traditional religion of the Yoruba has waned in influence leaving room for the dominance of Christianity and Islam in today's Yoruba cultural area.

It is not out of place to assert that religion (foreign), either in the form of Christianity or Islam is one of the main features African people have in common and this has to a large extent influenced their traditional culture. Just like the colonial intrusion, these two foreign religions have had to make their inroads into the life of Africans such that traditional African cultures, in some instances, have been displaced. In cases where the displacement has not been profound, traditional cultures have had to exist side by side with foreign religions with influence and counter-influence. The Yoruba culture can therefore be said to have been influenced by both religions. A list of the areas of influence of Islam on the Yoruba culture can be presented thus:

- (1.) Islam has been adopted as a religion of some Yorubas together with its associated values.
- (2.) The Islamic culture has influenced the Yoruba culture in the adoption of Arabic language, a language that is often used for Islamic religious purposes by the African adherents.
- (3.) There has been a lot of impact of Islam on the economic activities and political organization of the Yoruba people. In Ibadan land, for instance, the title of Mogaji (which is Islamic one for religious leader heading some households) has

come to stay. In fact, to become an Olubadan of Ibadan, one of the prerequisites is to become a Mogaji. Thereafter, one can move to other elevated titles.

(4.) The family and social settings have also been tremendously influenced by Islamic religious practices. The marriage ceremony among the Yoruba Muslims combines both the traditional engagement practices (Idana) with Nikai. The upbringing of the children is also done under the rubrics of Islamic and traditional Yoruba values. In fact, this has made cultural and religious isolation to be impossible in contemporary society. According to Nasiru:

The average Nigerian Muslim child is a victim of different, but sometimes conflicting cultures, the most predominant of which are traditional, Islamic and Christian. The exposure is usually the result of having parents who belong to different religions (one of which is Islam) or the child being born into a multi-religious environment where he is nurtured. (NASIRU 1998, 120)

It is instructive to note, contrary to Nasiru, that it is not only a Muslim child that experiences this multi-religious phenomenon. All Nigerian children are exposed to this tendency as soon as they get to certain mature age in life. The bottom line is that cultural and religious multiplicity is a product of modernity. Still on the family and social setting, the ceremony performed by a Yoruba Muslim is a mixture of both traditional and Islamic values. For instance, the dead is buried as soon possible within Islamic injunctions, while roles and rites are carried out based on some Yoruba cultural practices.

The education of the average Yoruba Muslim child is a mixture of Islamic, traditional, and Western educational practices. Sometimes, people erroneously equate Western education with Christian education. But the important point here is that right from early ages, the Yoruba child is launched into modernity because he has to embrace educational values that go beyond his cultural boundary. When we narrow this phenomenon further, it is not difficult to agree with Abdul – Rahmon that “Arabic is a common heritage” (2012, 31). If we grant this claim, we must also grant that modernity is a common heritage which Muslims cannot and should not abhor. What is then needed is a kind of discriminating approach in embracing the pot-pourri of values presented by modernity in order not to be lost in the crowd.

When we take a cursory look at some of the practices within Islam which constitute some of the main foundations of Islam such as belief and witness (shahadah), daily prayers (salat), alms giving (zakat), fasting (sawn) and pilgrimage (Hajj) we cannot deny the fact almost all the phenomena have been internalized by Yoruba Muslims.

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Abdul – Rahmon and Uthman (2011) have outlined certain ethical issues in religion from Islamic perspective, which on thorough analysis will be seen to have equivalents in Yoruba traditional culture. For instance, let us consider the goal of education. According to them:

The goal of education in Islam is to lead humankind to become true *ibad* or servants of Allah which is translated into *Khilafah* or vice gerency of Allah. In other words, the search for knowledge in Islam is not essentially for material but divine pursuits and attainment of perfection, orderliness and balance in the order of creation. (ABDUL RAHMON & UTHMAN 2011, 50)

The need to be morally upright and imbibe a positive work of ethic is also stressed by both Islam and Yoruba culture. In fact, the Yoruba believe that ‘*Ise ni Ogun ise*’ (work is the cure for poverty). In similar vein, ‘Islam therefore commands the acquisition of wealth through hard honest and legitimate work. It also enables all humans to discover who they are, why they live and how to live a life of godliness’ (ABDUL RAHMON & UTHMAN 2011, 53). The import of this comparison is that the principles governing humankind overlap from culture to culture. Therefore, it is not an overstatement to assert that humanity is one even though values vary from culture to culture.

Having shown that both Islam and Yoruba cultures have had influences on one another, we can then raise some critical questions bordering on some practices within some Islamic culture and societies. For instance, how would one explain the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria within the Islamic moral system? (see DAWAH 2009). How would one explain the terrorist activities in some of Arab states and some other parts of the world? Of course, these issues are as complex as the parties involved in them, but our burden is that we seem not to be properly disposed to certain values entrenched within modernity that can engender growth, progress and human happiness.

Furthermore, we should also be worried about the level of super-imposition of external cultural influences on pristine Yoruba values. This is important because the uncritical acceptance of these cultural values from without have rendered our cherished traditional values prostrate, ineffective and sometimes chaotic, making us become people with no stable identity. Of course, we are not making a claim for a kind of autochthonous identity being canvassed for by ethno philosophy since that is not possible, but a kind of authentic identity that recognizes change but rooted in the tradition and culture of the people. In the next section we examine the confrontation and compromise of values.

### **Confrontation and Compromise of Values**

Our task here consists primarily in examining the benefit and burden of both modernity and Islam on African culture. The introduction of new value system starts as a confrontation with existing value system. Therefore, it is not out of place to suggest that both modernity and Islam started as an intrusion on the existing African value system, thereby displacing or in some cases forcefully co-existing with traditional values.

As we adumbrated earlier, the spirit of modernity brought with it openness, liberalism, freedom, spirit of inquiry, democracy and science and technology. It is doubtful if any nation can so develop today without these attributes. Modernity has

resulted into globalization, and this involves “stretching of the relations between local and events and process” (TOMLINSON 1994, 117). This is based on Giddens’ claim that although everyone lives a local life, phenomenal worlds for the most part are truly global. Extrapolation from the factors culminating into globalization shows a tendency which aims towards a culture founded on some form of universalism, togetherness, commonness and homogeneity.

Concerning the new religious outlook in Africa, we cannot deny the fact that both Christianity and Islam displaced the traditional religious practices of the people at the initial stage of their introduction. There were resistance, fighting, persuasion and compromises of all sorts between the indigenous and foreign religions. However, the peaceful co-existence and adoption of new religious ethos presupposes that somewhere along the line certain compromises were reached. The point being underscored here is that it was colonial modernity that entrenched both Islam and especially Christianity in the sub-Saharan Africa. We do not need to rehearse arguments concerning the process of the internalization of these new religions rather; the concern should be on their effect, salutary or otherwise, on the African cultural values.

We can also say that technological advancement brought by modernity has been accompanied by some negative dimensions. For instance, Aina opines thus: “this development in Western technologies opened up Africa and exposed it to the destructive impact of colonialism” (AINA 2003, 25). There can be no controversy with regard to the salutary effects of a scientific and technological culture that has largely become sovereign that determines the place of nation – states in international relations. Unfortunately however, technology has also made it possible for weapons of mass destructions to be acquired at will and used at the detriment of weaker nations.

Although we cannot shy away from the negative values which culture contact has imposed on Africans in general, we cannot on this basis dismiss modernity in its entirety as being inimical to African development. There is no doubt that the contemporary African is now a post-colonial and globalized person who shares multiple cultural experiences. Many Africans are wont to attribute individualism, perverse sexual behavior, capitalist ethos and proliferation of arms to globalization and modernity. Omoyajowo lamenting this trend comments:

It is tragic that the institution of the family is no longer the very close-knit that it was. Economic pressures have narrowed responsibilities. We cannot but agree with Taylor that urbanization and a cash economy have smashed the intricate balance of dependence and obligation within the family and that western education has undermined its sanctions. The concept of man in Africa is fast changing. Man is fast becoming individualized. It is becoming fashionable to hold that salvation and refinement consisted in an assiduous, if imperfect, cultivation of European manners and modes. (OMOYAJOWO 1977, 75-76)

Furthermore, moral dislocations and its attendant vices and economic underdevelopment that are concomitant to modernity are issues that cannot be treated in isolation from the religious beliefs of the people. The religious conflicts in contemporary African societies have created conflicts which threaten social order (OYESHILE 2004, 297). The reason for this is understandable: the foreign religions introduced into African societies have not been able to work together towards the same goals of salvation for both the community and the individual. If there is any lesson to be learned from the traditional African universe, such as the Yoruba, it is that there was formerly religious tolerance by adherents of various divinities and deities.

Rivalry between the two foreign religions; Christianity and Islam, has degenerated into open conflicts in countries such as Nigeria, Sudan and Ivory Coast to mention a few. These conflicts have claimed human lives and loss of incalculable material resources which would have been available for development. While these religions seek to promote the welfare of their adherents, neither of these religions has given enough priority to the welfare of other members of the society. The idea of religion is only meaningful within social context because it presupposes among other things a set of people who adopts a certain attitude towards God. Personal salvation, therefore, is only meaningful with the context of societal salvation, and where the two foreign religions oppose each other, African society is being damaged by the resultant conflicts that put religious ideology above the welfare of the society as a whole.

Given our discussion so far, it is very obvious that modernity, Islam as well as other foreign religions have had impacts on Africans and African cultures. In many instances, the impact has been positive, while on some occasions the impact has been negative. The question that bears pointing out is this; do we as Africans maintain our cultural identity in a rigid manner and close our doors to universal values or globalization or modernity? In proffering answers to this question posed above, let us take a cue from Helen Lauer's assertion that:

Appraisal of one's own culture is impeded by the mistaken assumption that all one's thoughts are framed inside an all – encompassing worldview which must be mutually inaccessible to any other cultural worldview. (LAUER 2003, 21)

The assertion from Lauer suggests that even in the pursuit of African identity, we must be cautious not to regard our own cultural standpoint as all in all to such a disastrous extent of closing one's mind to the benefit of modernity and by extension globalization. For Wiredu and many others who believe that Africans must open up, "modernization is the application of the result of modern science for the improvement of conditions of human life" (LAUER 2003, 20). The underlying assumption that Africans have a unique way of looking at reality is punctured by the claim that "worldviews are not isolated monads" (LAUER 2003, 25). If this is true, then what we even regard as globalization or modernity is a result of what Lauer

calls mutual influences between African worldviews and other worldviews that are remote - geographically and economically. This general cross fertilization is a familiar feature of globalization such that it has become truisitic to observe that: “one cannot define exactly where one worldview leaves off and another begins” (LAUER 2003, 20). The foregoing is not to suggest therefore, as many pro-modernization theses are likely to do, that:

Many elements and cultural expressions in the African cultural world seem to refer to a world that no longer exists; to an audience that no longer listens. African culture appears to parade obsolete techniques. (UWALAKA 2001, 31)

Granted then that it is no longer possible to maintain cultural isolation, any attempt therefore at postulating a unique African personality involving sacrosanct African ways of knowing and thinking in moral, political and scientific claims would not only be spurious but also counter-productive to African development (OYESHILE 2008, 276). Although this position is not to suggest that in Africa anything goes and that Africans do not have their cultural peculiarities. The point however is that apart from certain cultural traits that are peculiar to Africans, Africans also share certain universals of culture with others. It is because these universals of culture exist that human communication is possible. In similar vein, any culture that promotes development, caters for the needs of its people, and endures over time must always be a reference point for Africans.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Viable Interplay of Forces and Values for Development**

In this work, we have tried to discuss the interplay of the forces and values of modernity, Islam and African culture. In particular, we analysed the concept of modernity, modernity in relations to Islam, Islam in relation to African (Yoruba) culture and then examined the benefits and burdens involved in these relationships. We noted that modernity is a necessary transition for all societies even though its western development has elicited a lot of misgivings and criticisms. It is also the case that all societies and cultures have contributed to the development and sustenance of modernity; hence it is a common heritage. We also showed that Islam and other religions are part of modernity and vice-versa and that the sustenance of rigid and pure identity is no longer feasible, not only on the part of Africans, but for all the people in a globalized world.

In concluding, we want to note that this interplay of forces and values should only be assessed based on the advancement of human development and happiness. Although modernity is predicated mainly on material values – science and technology – with corresponding effects on governance, economy and society; it must provide conducive grounds for the development of transcendental values which are part of the human quest for a happy life. There is therefore an urgent need for an adequate reconciliation of material development of humans with their spiritual development, which all revealed religions strive after. It is this reconciliation that

will help to enhance our being-in the-world irrespective of our religion, race, colour and culture.

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