

## Globalization and the Transformation of Indigenous Morality: A Philosophical Study of the Yoruba Concept of Omoluabi

MOTADEGBE, Adewale Oluwaseun<sup>1</sup> and IBIYEMI, Sheriff Olasunkanmi<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

Even as globalization has, no doubt, catalyzed or served as a basis for advancements in several spheres of human endeavours across the globe, it is also pertinent to highlight or indicate some of its drawbacks, especially as it pertains to the preservation of culture and morality. Whereas some studies have already attested to the fundamental link between culture and morality, some others have moved on to indicate how globalization may have a negative impact on culture and morality, especially within the African context. The present research queues with the latter group of studies as it investigates the extent to which the moral and cultural values associated with the Yoruba concept of *Omoluabi* has metamorphosed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research relies on philosophical and hermeneutical analyses for its agenda as it discloses how the concept of ‘*Omoluabi*’, has evolved from its original usage and semantics to what now obtains in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Culture, Morality, *Omoluabi*, Yoruba, Globalization

### Introduction

According to Jagdish, (2004:3), globalization is the “integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, foreign direct investment, capital flows, migration and the spread of technology.” Globalization “entails mobility of the world economy, interdependence of national cultures and politics, as well as environmental and security concerns. It is a shift of goods, people, information and ideas from one land to another” (Ihuah, 2006:36). Due to globalization, the world is in a continuous flux, and people’s principles of life are speedily metamorphosing, just as Heraclitus and some other greats had said, change is the only constant

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1. Graduate Student, Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University, Nigeria;  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4515-326X>; [amotadegbe@gmail.com](mailto:amotadegbe@gmail.com)
  2. Department of Philosophy, Lagos State University, Nigeria  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5290-5835>; [sheriff.ibiyemi@lasu.edu.ng](mailto:sheriff.ibiyemi@lasu.edu.ng); [sheriffolasunkanmi@gmail.com](mailto:sheriffolasunkanmi@gmail.com)

thing in the world and globalization continuously spurs it. However, changes in most cases are like a two-sided coin that houses both positive and negative effects (Akande & Motadegbe 2022).

On this note, it is pertinent to disclose that, without a doubt, globalization has been responsible for several success stories, as it continues to connect people irrespective of distance due to the development in the media space, transportation, communication tools, etc (Lasserre and Monteiro 2022:4-15). However, Globalization, on the other hand, also has its drawbacks. One of its negative imprints is on culture. It alters people's principle of life among others. For example, it has been argued by several scholars that it impairs cultural values (Raikhan, et al 2014:8), especially that of Africans (Afisi, 2009:1). To portray this, a study conducted by Mofoluwawo & Ajibade (2019: 382) discloses a connectivity between globalization and moral decadence among Nigerian youth. They contend that moral decadence among young ones in Nigeria has an external influence, known as globalization. In another study, Felix Oludare Ajiola (2016:36) also shared this view when he argued that globalization, as a result of its diverse platforms of expression, opened Nigerian youth to Western weird acts such as violence, corruption, and immorality, among others. Since culture is the way of life of a certain group, changes or alteration in this way of life -behavior, dressing, disposition and so on- becomes an indication to alteration in such a culture, hence, the Yoruba are a people of peculiar culture.

According to Akanbi & Jekayinfa, (2016:13), the Yoruba culture is designed to raise *Omoluabis*; a people of honour, hardworking, diligent, brave, smart, mastery of words. *Omoluabi* is a compendium or conglomerate of virtues and is viewed as a yardstick for differentiating between good and bad moral conduct (Johnson 1921:101). In agreement with the position of several scholars that globalization impairs cultural values (Raikhan, et al 2014:8), especially that of Africans (Afisi, 2009:1), this study seeks to interrogate one of the imprints, precisely the drawbacks of globalization on the transformation of indigenous morality precisely the Yoruba notion of *Omoluabi* as used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This study, hence, submits that globalization has altered some Yoruba culture, which had led to a misuse, jeopardization and alteration in the original meaning of *omoluabi* in terms of usage in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It therefore, becomes crucial to examine the implications of globalization on Yoruba culture and its moral agency in an era of globalization. This paper employs the methods of philosophical and hermeneutical analysis to examine Yoruba culture, its notion of *omoluabi* and its transformative morality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in relation to the impact of globalization. This paper contends that globalization has preached an anti-*omoluabi* ideology which has in most cases been embraced and can be affirmed as a foundation that serves as one of the reasons for the decline in the original *omoluabi* virtues among the Yoruba. On this note, this paper offers some suggestions for overcoming this transvaluation of *omoluabi* in order to account for the restoration and revival of the authentic Yoruba culture as laid down in the ancient past.

### The Yoruba and their Culture

According to anthropologists, what differentiates one group from another is culture. Culture includes material and non-material aspects (see, Aziza 2001:31; Taylor 1871). Material culture includes: artifacts, beads, dresses, and food, while non-material culture includes: language, dancing, belief, and morals among others. Culture entails all structures put in place by a group of people to conquer their surroundings and aid smooth relationships among one another (Bello 1991: 189). It provides structure and significance to their social, political, economic, artistic, and religious norms, setting them apart from their neighbours (see Bello 1991:189; Aziza 2001:31). One essential feature of culture is its transferal. Culture has the potential to be transferred from one generation to another either consciously or unconsciously, and it is what differentiates one group from another (Fafunwa 1974:48; Otite & Oginwo 2016:86). It also gives directives to human conduct (Agbanero & Bonaventure 2019:168-9). Elsewhere, it has been suggested that culture is not biological but ‘self-regulatory’ (Osawaru, 2020:90). It includes the ethics or moral conduct of the society. In essence, culture entails the *modus operandi* of a society.

The Yoruba are a people of culture, known to be predominantly based in Nigeria and to have spread across Dahomey and Togo (Gbadegesin 1984). They occupy the southwestern part of Nigeria. Based on history, there are two records of Yoruba origin: the creation myth and the migration account/theory (Agai 2015:427). According to migration theory, the Yoruba are descendants of *Oduduwa*, a key personality in Yoruba history. History has it that *Oduduwa* was the son of *Lamurudu*, a king in Mecca. *Oduduwa* moved from Mecca to *Ile-ife* in Nigeria as a consequence of religious bigotry between him and his father (see Johnson 1921:101). Johnson (1921:101) put forward that *Oduduwa* hails not from Mecca but from Egypt, however, *Oduduwa* is regarded as the father of the Yorubas (Oyebade 2004:53-4; Lange 2004:39). On the other hand, according to the creation myth, *Oduduwa* is a creator, sent to the earth by *Olorun* to form man (see Akintoye 2004:4; Ayandele 2004:121). However, both accounts majorize *Oduduwa* as an important personality of Yoruba origin (Oyebade 2004:53-4; Agai 2015:427). It is crucial to however indicate that Babajide Dasaolu and Emmanuel Ofuasia (2020:2-17) have disclosed how the Yoruba could have emigrated from ancient Egypt to their present abode. They arrived at this position after rejecting the Mecca and divine origin narratives. Ofuasia (2024) reinstated further this by establishing the similarities between Egyptians and the Yoruba beliefs in the religious parlance and in the aspect of language.

Even when the origin of the Yoruba remains contentious, it is pivotal to point out that just like any other culture, the Yoruba are keen on moral conduct. Yoruba culture entails their mode/style of dress, language, hairstyle, food, greeting mannerisms, wedding rites, music, dancing steps, family patterns, and other lifestyles peculiar to them. The Yoruba male prostrates to greet the elders while the female kneels down, because, for the Yoruba, *iwa ni Ewa* (character is beauty). The Yoruba look beyond the external in pronouncing anyone as a moral

being. They encourage *ibawi* (discipline) which is fading out among them as a consequence of globalization, which exposes the community to weird Western cultures. The Yoruba would say: *Omo ti a bawi, ti o waru ki, o setan ti o parun* (a child who turns deaf ears to instruction gives room for destruction). This saying also makes known one of the duties of the elders, which is to discipline and mentor the younger ones within the Yoruba community. Since there are diverse ways of instilling morality in the culture, the present study does not boast to contend with all of them. For its purpose, it limits its litmus test to the concept of *omoluabi*, which is the crux of the section which follows shortly.

### The Concept of *Omoluabi*

The Yoruba are known for their notion of *omoluabi*, which engulfs good conduct (*iwa rere*), and humility (*iwa irele/iteriba*) (Bewaji 2004:399). Yoruba culture is designed to raise *Omoluabi*'s (Akanbi & Jekayinfa, 2016:15). This has made them to be perceived as a people of honour, hardwork, diligence, bravery, smartness, and wisdom. In essence, *Omoluabi* is a compendium or conglomerate of virtues and is viewed as a yardstick for differentiating between good and bad moral conduct (Johnson 1921:101). Hermeneutically, it is "*omo ti Olu iwa bi*" omo (child) + *ti* (which/ that) + *olu iwa* (chief of character) + *bi* (begot) (see Fayemi 2009:167). For Muiyiwa (2018:3), *omoluabi*, Is *omo* (child)+ *ti* (that/which) *Oluwa* (God)+ *bi* (begot).

However, *Omoluabi* is a social construct that codifies a personality with certain attributes. It is a notion that outlines the virtues expected of people within the Yoruba society. It is not biological. It is a principle that can be learnt and imbibed. Along this line, Fayemi noted that it is possible that a "child may turn out to be an *Omoluabi* while not born by someone with good character" (Fayemi 2009:168). In furtherance, the notion of *Omoluabi* as examined by Sophie Oluwole (2007) has it this way, "*Omo ti o ni iwa bi eni ti a ko, ti o si gba eko*" (A person that behaves like someone who is well nurtured and lives by the precepts of the education s/he has been given)" (cited from Fayemi 2009:168).

*Omoluabi* is a teachable personality who puts to work what s/he has learnt (Oluwole 2007). *Omoluabi* is defined as a "good and cultured person" (Fayemi 2009). *Omoluabi* manifests certain virtues, which are hard work (*ise*), gentleness (*suru*), humility (*irele*), truth (*otito*), intelligence (*opolo pipe*), bravery (*akinkanju*), and respect (*iteriba*) (see Olanipekun 2007). Anyone found exhibiting these characters is pronounced as *Omoluabi* within the Yoruba settings or *omogidi* (real or confirmed child) as used in the contemporary era, even though, I contend that both are not synonymous.

*Omoluabi* is not self-seeking, s/he weighs his actions and their possible consequences for her/him, her/his family, and society. One of the goals of Yoruba moral system is production of an *omoluabi* (Akanbi & Jekayinfa, 2016:13). As already indicated, these are people with good moral characters. *Omoluabi* is gentle, brave, hardworking, and has a mastery of words when convening ideas and information.

Due to the Yoruba stance on the virtues of *Omoluabi*, which encourage hard work and a genuine source of income, the society raises a brow when an individual is engaged in illicit activities. For instance, when younger ones come on board with wealth that cannot be legally accounted for. Yorubas would say thus to the parents or guidance of such person: *Omo yin o she a gbafo, o ko aso wale, eri oju ole eo mu* (your child is not a into laundry business, yet keeps coming home with clothes, you have seen the face of a thief, but have refused to get him/her arrested). In essence, they are saying to the parent that their child is a thief who needs to be arrested and properly dealt with. They are not willing to associate with such a person and his/her wealth. This position can be held as an African hallmark of morality based on Benson Igboin's assertion that within the African community, "anyone who possessed wealth he could not account for was viewed with suspicion. The community scorned such a person" (Igboin 2011:100),

The Yoruba celebrate hard work, which is one of the virtues of *Omoluabi*. *Omoluabi* is a hard-working individual who is both responsible and commands a legal source of income. However, due to the reality of colonization and then the globalization of culture, the concept of *Omoluabi* has metamorphosed and majorly replaced with the notion of *omogidi* in contemporary era which is not synonymous to celebrating atrocities, gains, and moral agency that cannot be accounted for in the past century, due to the fact that the community that scorns such illicit acts is fading away. In the next section, this will be carefully addressed.

### **21<sup>st</sup>-Century Transformation of Indigenous Morality, *Omoluabi* and Globalization Effects on Yoruba Culture**

Globalization refers to the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world. Studies have revealed that the world became globalized before the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Lasserre and Monteiro 2022; Siddique 2018). According to Albrow and Elizabeth (1990:7), globalization refers to the various processes through which individuals from different parts of the world are integrated into a unified global society. Anthony Giddens defines globalization as the process of intensifying social connections between distant locations to the extent that local events are influenced by events happening in remote areas and vice versa (Anthony 1991:64).

The word 'globalization' entered the intellectual fray in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though phenomena such as the transboundary movement of people, goods, information, and so on had found expression during the era of colonialism (see Lasserre and Monteiro 2022). The terminologies used earlier were transnational and international. This earlier movement was halted due to the First and Second World Wars, which led to protectionism (Lasserre and Monteiro 2022:15; Siddique 2018:420). According to Larsson (2001:9), globalization is the phenomenon of objects approaching one another, thereby making the environment more compatible by reducing the distances involved. In essence, globalization facilitates global engagement.

Globalization is a social and cultural phenomenon that has increased interaction between people from diverse cultural origins in all aspects of life due to the development of social media, the internet, and the means of transportation, which have consistently linked the world together (Lasserre and Monteiro 2022:4-15; Siddique 2018:430). As a result of these factors, the world is becoming more exposed to certain patterns of family structures, cultural values, and ways of thinking (Dey 2007) that is alien to their culture. These phenomena that globalization exposes the world to constantly alter certain human behaviours or activities in different locations. For instance, pornography was not something that found expression among Africa sometimes back, howbeit, with the coming of a globalized community, Africans now openly participate in this act, as someone in Africa can view the happenings in any part of the world if posted online, such as the lifestyle and ideology that foster action in another part of the world and then imbibe this act by the way of acting it out, even when it is alien to his/her cultural stands. It is along this line that Maduagwu (1999:65) raised the question as to what is the real intention of globalization especially for Africans. He referred to globalization as a European weapon fashioned to preach and effect European cultural dominance over the rest of the world. Maduagwu (1999:65) noted that due to the activities that globalization fosters, the world is evolving into a single culture- the Anglo-American and the gaps between cultural properties that demarcate or differentiate a group from another are speedily fading away because globalization is the interconnectedness of the world as a whole, giving occasion to the easy transference of dominant ideas that alter other cultural practices and human relations. Based on the above, globalization is altering the cultural standard of relationship within community and diminishing its character in the society as the Yoruba people in recent hardly expect much when it comes to individual disposition or behaviour in respect to *omoluabi* virtues. Thus, *omogidi* (real child) is used to replace *omoluabi* which are not synonymous to one another. *Omogidi* in most cases is subjective while *omoluabi* is objective. Anyone within the community can be referred to as *omogidi* based on his/her generosity or kind act to others without questioning other character-related aspect of such person's life. For example, a fraudster can be referred to as *omogidi* contextually if generous, but not as *omoluabi* because he lacks the *iwa* (character requisite) to attain such. To further portray this, the case of Mrs. Bergmeier, in Joseph Fetcher's (1966) Situationist Ethic, who decided to become pregnant by having a sexual relationship with a prison guard so that she might gain her freedom and reunite with her family, is not an *omoluabi* behaviour for the Yoruba. Hence, the situation is not a pedestal for *omoluabi* to misbehave.

The degradation and scarcity of *omoluabi* virtues is connected to globalization as it opens Africans in general and Yoruba in particular to the episodes of indecency, violence, intolerance, lack of respect, and fraudulent acts, evident among younger ones in contemporary Yoruba community and beyond, hence, indicating the gradual widening of Yoruba culture and its moral agency. On a related note, Osawaru (2020:87) reveals that alteration in behaviour

communicates cultural alteration because culture drives and supervises social conduct. In essence, culture defines attitudes, behavioral habits, and personality types.

Yoruba culture is experiencing alteration due to the influx of other cultural practices and information made available to Yoruba through globalization (Adejumo 2023:1). Falola (2018:1) posits that African culture is in constant flux as a result of colonialism that presented Western culture to Africans. Africans have been alienated from their culture and have embraced the Western way of life (culture) (Falola 2018:1). By implication, colonialism has altered the Yoruba culture and continues to truncate it through globalization, which frontiers the Western ideology, as Maduagwu (1999:65) noted that globalization is a weapon fashioned by European to preach and effect European culture dominance over the rest of the world. Globalization is a cloning system that clones the world, especially Africans, into the Western culture or way of life (Afisi 2009:2).

News and stories about indiscriminate acts, violence, sexual molestations, insecurities, killings, fraudulent acts, kidnappings, robbery, and corruption in Nigeria are linked to the neglect of Yoruba culture and traditions, according to Professor Oyediran, the president of *Egbe Atunbi Yoruba* (see Ogunesan 2017). This has led to embracing Western culture that came through the windows of globalization. The people we view or pronounce as *omogidi* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are not *omoluabi*, but majorly Robin Hood, people who steal, defraud others either directly or otherwise but are able to give part of it to others. For example, prostitutes or fraudsters who give to their parents are referred to by such parents as *omogidi* in the aspect of giving and if the giving were received by the elders, they will likely pronounce such a person as *omodigi* but not *omoluabi*. It is on this note I agree with the submission of Professor Oyediran that the Yoruba need to retrieve the original template of their culture as handed down in generations past and put it into use to curb the discrepancies, such as corruption and indecent acts, to mention but a few. This indicates that the culture of the Yoruba as practised in this contemporary era has been altered, including its standard of *omoluabi* as used in ancient Yoruba settings. The yardstick used in pronouncing people *Omo+ti+olu+iwa+bi* (a child begotten of the child of character) or *Omo+ti+oluwa+bi* (a child begotten of God) has been truncated thereby shifting attention towards *omogidi*. In essence, another standard has been brought into play. What then is this new standard? Fafunwa (1971) harps that the age-long notion of *omoluwabi* is almost no longer in practice. Monetization and the ambition to get rich quickly have infiltrated the fiber of society; *omoluabi* is now an aberration, while corruption is commonly lauded (Fafunwa, 1971) as authentic *omoluabis* are no longer celebrated in a Yoruba setting. Those the community tends to celebrate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are the *omogidis*, who, in most cases, are the Robin Hood of this era.

In support of Fafunwa's (1971) assertion is my experience with a bus driver, Dele by name, who lost his bus conductor to an accident. As narrated by Dele, his conductor was hit by a vehicle on his way home while he was trying to cross the road. As he forges ahead in his

lamentation, he said: “I never knew my conductor gave birth to *OMOGIDI* like that. His children came with cars. If you see his last son, very fresh. He is a Yahoo boy (an internet fraudster). With my age, if I have these kinds of children, I won’t work again”.

His claim, use, and lamentation of the word ‘*omogidi*’ (real child) which is mostly used in contemporary Yoruba settings to connote/replace ‘*omoluabi*’ (a child with good character) indicate that the moral virtues expected of children in the community, which *omoluabi* captures have been eroded or even altered. Howbeit, there is a gap between the word *omogidi* and *omoluabi*, even though *omogidi* is used to replace *omoluabi* by some. Why *omoluabi* is a compendium of behavior, *omogidi* is used subjectively, denoting the child is good or a real child, while this good is subjectively measured. *Omoluabi*, on the other hand, holistically measures an individual’s way of life, and it is the pinnacle of Yoruba education. For instance, a young lad who gives to the elder may be tagged *omogidi* by the same elders without a profound interest in the illicit means he used to acquire such wealth. However, such a person is not worth pronouncing as *omoluabi* because s/he lacks the character or behavioral disposition required of *omoluabi*.

Hence, the way out of this situation is to understand that globalization has not only marred the *modus operandi* of key *omoluabi* virtues, it has also darkened the sight of elders who are the guidance and disciplinarians in the community, as some elders of modern-day Yoruba society are adopting the Western model for child rearing and family patterns. Yoruba would say: *Omo ti a bawí, ti o warun kí, o shetan ti o parun ní* (a child spoken to, that refuses to adhere to instruction is ready to be doomed/destroyed). This reveals Yoruba discipline is failing away even within the educational sector. Punishment which is one of ways of taming the beast in children is currently being prohibited in schools across Africa especially in Nigeria. Punishment is a penalty for doing something wrong, it does not directly connote beating. Another saying is: *Omo ma pami, omo ma pa mi, omo parare* (child do not kill me, child do not kill me, then becomes child do not kill yourself). This is echoed when elders have laboured over a child but the child refuses to comply. The child is then left alone to self-destruction. The Yoruba believe in discipline and it is on such ground a saying is averred thus: *Omo ti a ko ko ni agbe ile ti ako ta*. (a child not well trained/built, will sell the built house). Elders are saddled with the responsibility of training the young ones in the community, in a way they ought to grow, but have left them exposed to globalization to tailor them without proper caution. Young ones now engage in all kinds of immoral acts presented to them through the windows of globalization, which are anti-*Omoluabi* virtues.

As globalization continues to alter the culture and morality of people precisely Nigerians, it is the responsibility of elders according to Yoruba tradition to see that children grow in right knowledge and live as they ought to. This can be captured in some Yoruba proverbs such as *Agba kí wá lójà kí orí omó tuntun wó*.



Agba connotes an elder in Yoruba and serves as the moral compass for the community. Given the diverse environment and the differing objectives of the individuals involved, the society can be likened to both a marketplace (Oja) and a communal space through semiotic interpretation. While *wo* denotes bend. So, the saying: *Agba ki wa loja ki ori omo tuntun wo* denotes, that an elder would not be at the market and things would go wrong with the head of a new child. This saying affirms the position or office of an elder in the Yoruba community. Elders (*agbas*) are responsible for tailoring the head of children/young ones within the community. Through hermeneutical tools, *ori* means head, and it is the seat of the brain. *Wo* means bend (not properly positioned). It is therefore clear that the elders have a crucial role to play in the lives of the younger ones. They are to imbibe morals in them and failure on the elders' part would bring bent morality in young ones as seen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization is bringing to fruition the fading off of true elders within the Yoruba community as elders are also to man the gate of knowledge in Yoruba society.

### Conclusion

Globalization has altered the perception of Yoruba moral agency by imprinting in them, western cultures, that have been linked to unethical acts evident in African societies in the contemporary era. The *agbas* (elders) in the community who ought to set the standard and correct the younger ones have also been victims of globalization. It is, therefore, necessary to return the ancient template of *omoluabi* used in Yoruba setting. The study concludes that alteration in Yoruba culture has altered its ethics or moral standard of *omoluabi*.

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