Coping With Otherness in a Globalized World: Lessons from Islamic, African, and Western Perspectives

Abdulmumini A. Oba*
Received: 20/04/2019 Accepted: 12/07/2019

Abstract

One of the major challenges for a civilization - and a parameter for assessing it - is how it treats those who do not belong to that civilization. The dichotomy between “we” and “them” is made variously across civilizations. In the past, interactions across civilizations are less voluminous and less intense. But things have changed. The world has become a global village. Yet, it remains very pluralistic in terms of religion, culture, ethnicity, and language. The diversity of the contemporary world is due to the existence of concurrent civilizations on the world, each with its distinct culture, world view and values. Western culture, Islamic culture, oriental culture and African culture are some of the more prominent cultures today. Globalization is not without its problems. For one thing, the world is being pressurized into become a monocultural environment patterned after western culture. This position is not because of any inherent superiority of western civilization to the other civilization but because of the cultural invasion of the world by the west. Information flow is the world has been essentially one way - from the west to the rest. The quest for peace in the modern world must therefore address how the diverse cultures of the world are accommodated, first within specific civilizations and secondly in the world at a global level particularly within the context of the United Nations. The past offers a good lesson for the future. This paper looks at how three civilizations – Islamic, African, and western - in their pristine historical and modern forms - have approached otherness. Islamic civilization emerged from a multi-ethnic and multi-religious environment. The

*Faculty of Law, University of Ilorin. Nigeria
Email: obailorin@yahoo.com
Islamic approach is one of tolerance and respect for otherness in spite of the full conviction of the rightness of its religious creed and way of life. Islam recognizes the freedom of religion for non-Muslims and expresses this in a comprehensive and complete manner. It does not impose its laws or culture on them but grants social, cultural and judicial autonomy to these strangers within its borders. This attitude which was in the past is still observable in some modern Islamic countries such as Iran. African culture is a very diverse affair. The common traits amongst Africans include their warm treatment of strangers and their respect for the cultural independence of other peoples. The attitude of western civilization contrasts with the attitudes of Islamic and African civilizations. The West has consistently pursued a policy of domination of other peoples based on its perceived superiority over them. This attitude, for which various ideological and intellectual justifications have been advanced in defense of, remains in contemporary times, a constant source of friction and tension. It is suggested that models provided by Islamic and African cultures be used as a basis for modern interaction by persons belonging to different cultures.

**Keywords:** Globalized World; Islamic; African; Western; Human Rights.