



## PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY IN NIGERIA THROUGH INDIGENOUS CULTURAL PRACTICES/BELIEFS

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### Abstract

Human dignity is an essential concept in contemporary society. This does not mean that it was not important in previous societies. It is to assert that the idea and understanding of human dignity have evolved to what it is today. Human dignity entails recognizing the worth and value in every human person, irrespective of their ethnicity, religious affiliation, socio-cultural background, or economic status. Every human being has intrinsic worth. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights and various other human rights instruments have spelt out clearly the significance of human dignity. Many of these declarations have indicated how human dignity and human rights have been threatened and even degraded by wars, violence, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other forms of atrocities. This paper is concerned with examining how human dignity in Nigeria is threatened and endangered by different indigenous and other cultural beliefs and practices. The paper adopts the methods of critical analysis, hermeneutics, and evaluation. It concludes that there is an imperative to safeguard only cultural aspects that promote human dignity in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Indigenous, culture, beliefs, practices, human dignity, human rights, Nigeria.

### Introduction

This paper is informed by article 21 of the Nigerian Constitution which clearly states that: "The State shall-(a) protect, preserve and promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity and are consistent with the fundamental objectives as provided in this Chapter...." (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023, p. 37). The chapter referred to in this article, 21, is Chapter II, "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy." This chapter mentioned above deals with functions of government in promoting the welfare and well-being of the Nigerian people, promoting national integration, economic progress and development, food security, the social and educational objectives, the functions of the mass media, national ethics, duties of the citizens, and so forth. As important as human culture is, human culture is not infallible and sacrosanct. Culture is not stagnant, but dynamic and can be transformed. There are indeed aspects of indigenous cultures in Nigeria and elsewhere that faithfully promote

human welfare and flourishing. Cultural values such as hospitality, communalism, care, love, compassion, humility, friendship, solidarity, environmental protection, *Ubuntu* (human interconnectedness), *Ujamaa* (brotherhood), honesty, diligence, handwork, etc, which are found in African cultures (Nigeria inclusive) are to be celebrated, cherished, and promoted regardless of the age and season. But it is equally true that there are cultural aspects that are troubling. For instance, in the same African cultures that are found many positive values, there have equally been practices such as female genital mutilation, maltreatment of widows, abuse of childless women, especially those without male children, discrimination against the girl-child, wars and violence, xenophobic attacks against strangers, etc. Recognize that: “While religion and culture may provide moral frameworks that uphold human dignity, they can also perpetuate discrimination, gender inequality, and other forms of social injustice” (Chimaobi & Ameh, 2024, p. 90). These challenging aspects of indigenous cultures in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, could be termed social ills that plague the society.

Human dignity is so important that it deserves to be reflected upon. All human rights depend on human dignity (United Nations, 1984). In light of the social ills that still pervade culture and Nigerian society, the objective of the Nigerian state to “promote the Nigerian cultures which enhance human dignity...” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, art 21) is to be taken seriously. No aspect of culture that is illiberal and hostile to authentic human dignity should be promoted. This paper will use the methods of critical analysis, hermeneutics, and evaluative methods to examine indigenous cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria while arguing that they should enhance human dignity, and those aspects that do not enhance human dignity should be transformed or totally eliminated.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

The key terms that pervade this paper are indigenous, culture, cultural beliefs, cultural practices, promoting, and human dignity. Human dignity refers to “The value or worth that human persons intrinsically possess,” arising from the fact that they are created in the Divine Image and they must sustain all life on planet Earth (Hobgood, 2007, p. 349). Human dignity is the heritage of all, irrespective of human behaviour (Udo, 2024). While originally the word, dignity has to do with a person’s worth and value based on what he may have earned such as royalty, wealth, distinction; the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights turned that meaning around and asserted that all human beings have inherent dignity not based on their status or entitlements but because they are human beings (Soken-Huberty, n.d). Human dignity means the human being has worth and value. Human dignity is grounded in the fact of being human. In many religions of humanity from ancient times, human beings were seen as equally created by the Almighty God, and this can be found in the teachings of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Soken-Huberty, n.d). In the Holy Writ of the Judeo-Christian tradition, God created human beings (both male and female) in God’s image and likeness. No human being is inferior or superior to another. It is a fact that some adherents of the various world religions mentioned above have not always lived out these values in having positive equal regard to all human beings for their dignity. If not, practices such as slavery, racism, Apartheid, ethnicism, gender discrimination, etc, would not have been practiced by these adherents.

The next words that require clarification are culture, cultural beliefs, and cultural practices. Culture could be defined as: “... behaviour peculiar to *Homo sapiens*, together with material objects used as an integral part of this behaviour. Thus, culture includes language, ideas, beliefs, customs, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of art, rituals, and ceremonies, among other elements” (White, 2022, para 1). Culture also refers to:

... shared beliefs, values, traditions, social norms, and behaviours of a group of people who share the same living environment in a specific region of the world. Culture encompasses key aspects of a society, including language, education, religion, government, and the identity and personality of the people who are part of that culture” (Naik et al., 2023, para 2-3).

The most generally understood meaning of culture is that it refers to the totality of the way of life of a people in all dimensions and domains. Human beings are creators of culture, and they are also products of culture. Culture is essential to human existence and life. Without culture, there is no human society. One definition of culture is that it is: “...the historically shared means and ways through which a people unveil themselves (to themselves, and only secondarily to others as human” (Espin, 2007, p. 302). Cultural beliefs refer to the worldviews, opinions, positions, notions, and cherished ideas that a group of people uphold and also put into cultural practice (action). Cultural beliefs often imply that people practice these beliefs. People rarely hold beliefs without practising them or acting on them. In the history of human society, some people, especially from a religious angle, can be dogmatic and even fanatical about their beliefs. And so, in the name of cultural or religious beliefs, some persons have gone to war, perpetuated violence, or even engaged in terrorism. People’s beliefs generally inform their behaviours. Note that: “Cultural beliefs are beliefs that are learned and shared across groups of people. Because the amount of information in a culture is too large for any one individual to master, individuals know different subsets of the cultural knowledge and thus can vary in their cultural competence” (Weller, 2006, p. 579). And “Cultural practices are the shared behaviours, rituals, and traditions that define a group’s way of life, reflecting their beliefs, values, and social norms. These practices shape the identity of communities and influence how they interact with their environment, contributing to diverse cultural landscapes around the world” (Fiveable Inc., 2025, para 1). The word indigenous here is used to mean what is endogenous and internal, originating from the native place. A thing, practice, or reality that is indigenous to Nigeria means that it is not imported into Nigeria from abroad or a foreign land. The indigenous cultural beliefs and practices of Nigeria are from the soil of Nigeria and have been practiced in the land of Nigeria from time immemorial. Since this paper speaks of human dignity, the argument of this paper is that indigenous cultural beliefs and practices in Nigeria should foster human dignity. Cultural beliefs and practices should not violate authentic human values and, by implication, human rights.

### **Ethical Foundations, Features, and Implications of Human Dignity**

In this section, it is imperative to further discuss human dignity. Human dignity is not an accident to human beings. It is an essential aspect of what it means to be human. Human dignity means the human being is dignified, noble, and honourable. It is difficult to discuss the issue of human dignity without relating it to human life. They are closely linked and related. Human life is the basis for human dignity, and this is why the human rights declaration asserts that human dignity inheres in the human person, and it is from this that human rights emanate (Oyeghe, 2023). The following human rights declarations: the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the 1993 Vienna Declaration, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, etc all affirm this linkage.

From a Christian religious and theological perspective, the human being is created in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). In the biblical account of creation, God created the entire universe- plants, animals, birds, the land, seas, oceans, and every other thing in existence.

After creating them, God created humans as the crown of creation. After God created humans, God saw everything as excellent or very good. Humans are unique and distinctive. It does not in any way mean that human beings are to dominate and conquer creation. Rather, human beings are stewards of creation and they have been mandated to till and cultivate the garden (Genesis 2: 15). Psalmist beautifully sings of the nobility and goodness of humans when it asserts that humans are fearfully and beautifully made and God has given them a high place in creation (Psalms 8). Human dignity impels protecting human life on which dignity is built. In the same biblical tradition, the fifth commandment commands, "Thou shall not kill." Respect for human dignity flowing from human life implies human beings should be protected from murder, fratricide, infanticide, and whatever harms human health and wellbeing (Holy See, 1993, no 2269). In Islam, human life is considered to be sacred (Quran 17:33; 6:51). Human beings are not mere things, not mere physical materials, and they are not properties to be possessed. They have moral worth. Human dignity is a strong theme in Catholic Social Teaching as it is affirmed that a human being is *Imago Dei* (God's image and likeness).

Outside the biblical tradition, human rights documents are clear on human dignity and ground human dignity on "human beingness." Animals, plants, birds, and other non-human life do not have the same level of dignity as humans. They have their dignity of a different type. In the history of Western Philosophy, the idea of human dignity has evolved. The following philosophers conceive human dignity in the following ways: Socrates (humans possess dignity as a result of their rationality, which makes them different from non-humans) ; Cicero (ontologically humans have dignity coming from their rationality); Christian medieval philosophers like Aquinas (saw human dignity flowing from rational nature and also the biblical creation of humans in God's image); Renaissance thinkers saw humans as having dignity and because of the value placed on humans, the Renaissance is often called Renaissance humanism); and Kant (lays credence to human dignity in affirming that humans should be treated as ends, not means (Uduigwomen and Udofia, 2018).

It can be said that the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948 is an encapsulation of Renaissance thought and also religious ideas that give credence to the nobility of the human person. And also in the light of the atrocities of the two world wars, the United Nations proclaimed:

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world, whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people (United Nations, 1948, para 1-2).

The declaration is clear that dignity inheres in human beings, and this entitles them to inalienable rights and equality. Human dignity is not given by society, and there are natural rights that accrue to all human beings for being humans. The United Nations asserts that human dignity is the foundation for justice, peace, and freedom. When it is disregarded, all kinds of atrocities and violation of human rights and respect for dignity occurs. Barbarous acts, wars, violence, terrorism, armed banditry, etc, are partly as a result of people failing to accord human dignity its due place.

Ethics, as understood here, deals with how human beings ought to behave. The dignity of human compels and instigates reverence and honour for human beings. It has implications. There is a way that human beings are supposed to behave towards other human beings. Human dignity is not for its own sake. It has functionality. Since ethics speaks of human behaviour in terms of right and wrong behaviour, to behave negatively to human dignity or harm human dignity is an ethical concern because it degrades human dignity. Human dignity inheres in human beings irrespective of their conditions and situations in life, irrespective of their races, ethnicities, social background, etc. Even if a human being suffers from physical or mental disabilities or loses any part of her/his bodily parts, the person is still a human being with human dignity. It can be argued that even in death, the human body still carries human dignity. It will be wrong to think that human dignity has only been espoused in the Western tradition. There is a strong basis for human dignity in indigenous traditions. In African traditional thought, priority was given to the human person because the human person has value (dignity) and human life was seen as sacred; and values like family life, dignity of labour, justice, hospitality, responsibility, honesty, etc were all aimed at enhancing the human person and its dignity (Udo, 2024). African personalism, as championed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other African thinkers, deeply placed emphasis on the dignity of the human person. and other human rights documents are clear on this.

Every human being in Nigeria, both citizens and non-citizens are carrier of human dignity. All indigenous people of Nigeria, no matter their ethnic groups, religious affiliations, political preferences, economic status, or educational background, social positions are possessors of human dignity and have inherent worth. The Nigerian Constitution guarantees a right to human dignity. The Constitution clearly states that: Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly- (a) no person shall be subject to torture or inhumane or degrading treatment; (b) no person shall be held in slavery or servitude; and (c) no person shall be required to perform forced or compulsory labour” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023, p. 43). Dignity is a fundamental human right, and the constitution requires that the human person is protected from torture, inhumane treatment, degrading treatment, servitude and slavery, and forced or compulsory labour. The Constitution is also clear on what does not constitute a violation of this right or an exception to this right, and these include things like court-mandated labour resulting from a sentence for the crime, labour required of the armed forces and the Nigerian Police in their duties, labour necessary for people to do in times of emergencies, labour in the form of national service, communal labour, etc. The labour that violates human dignity is precisely the one that is forced without any just or justifiable cause. Before this section closes, it is essential to note that the ideal is not often the manifest. In human history, even when people affirm human dignity, they have not always accorded this dignity to all human beings. In Aristotle’s Greek society, women and slaves did not have the dignity to be called citizens. Within the Greco-Roman world, there was a big contradiction for women, slaves, and non-citizens were treated with indignity (Uduigwomen and Udofia, 2018). The popular Immanuel Kant did not see Africans or Blacks as equal to whites. Racism and Apartheid were practiced and are still practiced in some places to say that some human beings are not equal to others. Religious discrimination and other forms of discrimination are often practiced based on the notion that others who are different from the one discriminating are either less human or inferior, or not deserving of equal consideration. In Africa, despite all its noble humanistic values, there were practices like slavery, human sacrifice, etc. Some of these dehumanizing practices that impede human dignity are examined below, with a focus on Nigeria.



### **Indigenous Cultural Beliefs/Practices Inimical to Human Dignity in Nigeria**

It is a fact that there is a depreciation of respect for human dignity in Nigeria (Uduigwomen and Udofia, 2018). The depreciation of respect for human dignity can be seen by many things happening in the Nigerian society, such as kidnapping, armed robbery, terrorist attacks, ritual killings, and ethno-religious violence resulting in deaths, police brutality, corruption that deprives the citizens of money meant for their development, etc. Outside of these are cultural beliefs and practices that are ingrained as cultural practices. Nigerians have been denied their dignity as a result of various cultural or social practices. Many Nigerians have suffered from various social ills and social discrimination, which shows that they are either unequal or seen as different. Regarding the situation in the country:

Nigeria has witnessed instances where religious and cultural factors have been manipulated to justify discrimination, marginalization, and even Violence against certain groups. Women, ethnic minorities, and individuals belonging to nondominant religious or cultural communities often find themselves disproportionately affected by these dynamics, facing systemic barriers that hinder their full participation and realization of their rights (Chimaobi and Ameh, 2024, p. 91).

In a place like Igboland, as in other parts of the country, there are many obnoxious practices such as banishment, ostracism, caricature of people in public, valuable property seizure, and fines, often extrajudicially (Iguh, 2020). Other cultural practices that are inimical to human welfare are women's disinheritance, harmful widowhood practices, cannibalism, forced marriage, human sacrifice, the Osu Caste system, and female genital mutilation (Iguh, 2020). Another author corroborates the fact that the Osu Caste system is found in Igboland (Udo, 2024).

Child marriage is a common practice in some parts of Nigeria. Children suffer from all sort of abuses in Nigeria that degrades their dignity and responsibilities. It should be realized that "Child abuse is a violation of the fundamental human rights of a child, either by those to whom the child is entrusted or other adults who may have something to do with the child" (Akhogba, 2016, p. 12). There are female children in Nigeria, especially Northern Nigeria, who are pushed into early marriages, and it is the case that at such ages, they are not psychologically, physically, and morally mature to take the responsibilities of marriage (Olomojobi, 2022). A serious form of child abuse in the country is tagging children as witches and subjecting them to beating, flogging, and denying them food. In Nigeria, where religion suffers from many forms of abuses and some religious people are ignorant of fundamental human rights, people subject their children to abuses. They claim that a child who has not even come to the use of reason can be a participant in witchcraft. Even if it is true that the child has been infested with the spirit of witchcraft, this does not warrant the child being denied his/her rights.

In some cultures, children have also been subjected to child labour. There is nothing wrong with children assisting in work, especially domestic work that is non-exploitative and appropriate to their age and protects their mental health. It is wrong when they engage in exploitative labour that demeans them, diminishes their health, and deprives them of formal education. Exploitative child labour that is harmful to children health is common in Nigeria and takes various forms such as those that make them work as houseboys and house girls without pay, without going to school, no holiday or recreation, with verbal and emotional abuse; force labour, commercial sexual exploitation, street work and life, (Akhogba, 2016). Exploitative forms of child labour, especially domestic service, are ingrained into many cultures. Even when

children complain because of poverty, their parents will insist that the children should continue so that they can support the family. By subjecting children to child labour, they are denied their dignity and worth, their voices are suppressed, and deprived of access to formal education. Child labour affects the employment of skilled labour, affects the psychological and physical development of children as they are affected by various abuses, as they suffer health challenges and even physical injuries (Akhogba, 2016). It is understood that: "...not all work a child is engaged in is a form of child labour, however, child labour refers to all work or employment that may deprive him or her of health, personal development, and education (Olomojobi, 2022).

Another cultural practice that negatively affects women's dignity is that of married women being deprived of inheritance in their husbands' houses. At the death of the husband, only the children are given inheritance, and in some cases, if the woman has not given birth to any children, the man's brother comes in to claim all the properties, depriving the woman of all entitlements. As should be understood from above, whatever makes a person feel inferior, not equal to others, or unworthy to be treated like others, amounts to a degradation of dignity or its violation. Customs and traditions in Nigeria make it difficult for married women to inherit properties, and even females are denied any share in their father's properties as they are told they can struggle for properties when they get married (Olomojobi, 2021). Nigerian culture is patriarchal and promotes many forms of gender inequalities, and this has caused much maltreatment, injustices, and untold suffering to women (Nnamani, 2005). Female children are demeaned and made to feel as if they are nobodies. A common cultural practice that infringes on the dignity of women is the widowhood practices. At the death of a man, there is nothing wrong with a woman mourning her dead husband. But very often during this period, many widows experience abuses and insults. They are even accused of killing their husbands. Among the Yoruba, the man is seen as the glory of the woman, and so when a man dies, the woman is seen as losing her glory and thus deprived of her dignity (Oluwakem, 2017). It is as if the woman has no life outside her husband. And in some places in Nigeria, like in Urhobo culture, the woman is forced to marry the man's brother or a family member.

Women have also suffered from a lot of socio-cultural discrimination in Nigeria. In many cultures in Nigeria, the girl-child has in the past been denied formal education. In some cultures, the girl-child is seen as another man's wife as she will marry one day, and any money spent on educating her is seen as a waste. While the boy-child was sent to school, the girl was to be at home and do domestic chores such as cooking and washing clothes. By denying the girl-child formal education, her dignity was offended. She is not important to be trained. In Nasawa State, many traditional practices discriminate against women, impeding their psycho-social/educational development, and instilling in them low self-esteem; and in particular among the Basa people, girl-child education was not promoted (Mejida, 2008). Though it may be waning down female genital mutilation still happens in Nigeria. There is a deep, ingrained notion in African culture that women are morally inferior, and this informs the need for men to think that they have to dominate women, and one of the ways is to insist on female genital mutilation (Ukhun, 2002).

It is crucial here, though it is not part of indigenous traditional beliefs or practices, to state something on one of the serious abuses in Nigeria that erodes human dignity and personhood. It is a serious threat to human dignity. It is the issue of various police abuses and brutalities. Police brutality is so common in Nigeria. The End SARS protests that took place in Nigeria some years back were over police brutality. Many members of the Nigerian Police take the law into their own hands. There is hardly any road you travel in Nigeria where you will not see the police extorting money from road transporters and travellers. Those who refuse to give

are beaten and threatened. It is a fact that: "Section 34(1) (a) protects the individual from torture and inhumane or degrading treatment. This is probably the most abused section of the Constitution. The act of torturing suspects in Police stations across Nigeria has remained endemic despite the high level of enlightenment given to the Policemen in the form of 'human rights lectures'" (Odikpo, 2020, p. 20).

In precolonial African societies, practices such as the killing of twins, human sacrifices were common in some societies. It is well known that "...the culture of killing of twins was a cultural practice among some ethnic groups in Nigeria, predominantly among the Efik people and some part of the Igbos" (Udo, 2024, p.55). Indeed, these cultural practices of killing twins and human sacrifices have died down. But once in a while, in some communities in Nigeria, one often hears that during some traditional festivals or at the burial of a king, there are Ogbu (warriors) who go in search of people to kill. Whether this information is false or not, it is important to keep educating people on the need to protect the sanctity of human life.

### **The Way Forward**

There is a moral foundation for human dignity. This is the foundation from which discourses on how to safeguard human dignity must emanate. There is a need for a recognition of this moral foundation for human dignity. It is important that this knowledge of human dignity should be spread. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights places duties on various groups to safeguard human dignity. Though these various bodies know their duties, very often it is not carried out. This is why there needs to be more education on human dignity and human rights. At all levels of education and even in non-formal settings, there should be human rights and human dignity education. African values such as *Ubuntu* (I am because we are), *Ukamaa* (I am inter-related to all other life), communalism (one for all, all for one), *Ujamaa* (brotherhood), African humanism, *Ibunanyidanda* (living in complementarity), *Okugbeakpeje* (togetherness of all life), Afroecosolidarity, and many others, all lay credence to the value of the human person and dignity. They are values that should be promoted in all curricula. Afroecosolidarity is an idea that this writer has proposed that affirms the need for humans to recognise the value of humanity while living in solidarity with all other lives on planet earth and the ecosystems (Ikeke, 2022). The concept of *Okugbeakpeje* is still being developed by the present author.

Significantly, Nigerian law and social policy have advanced so far in criminalising some of the above and making various laws to stop their practices. But unfortunately, many of the social ills mentioned above still happen in Nigeria. FGM is still practiced. There are places where the child is still deprived of formal education. Because of the high premium placed on having a male child, infertile women and women who have no male children are seen as "witches" and abused. There are still communities in which women are discouraged from entering the public domain. It is a fact that there are very few women in politics in Nigeria. It is hard to find a female governor in Nigeria, and the days when Nigerians can have a female president seem to be far away. These imply that Nigerian law and social policy have to be strengthened. Enforcement has to be more robust. Many of the obnoxious practices happen in rural places and in the hinterland of the country, where often government presence is very poor. The Federal Government of Nigeria and state governments, and various law enforcement agencies have a grave role to play to ensure that human rights abuses and offences against human dignity are brought to an end in the country. Law is one of the most powerful instruments to protect human dignity. The courts of the land have ruled in the past on various cultural practices that either discriminate or degrade human dignity to be eradicated, and have ruled in favour of victims of human rights abuses. Law is crucially important in curbing the factors that mitigate against human dignity.



Criminal law in Nigeria has played a role and continues still play a role in curbing obnoxious practices in the land (Iguh, 2020).

Recognize that: “By engaging in dialogue, promoting education, and enacting policies that uphold universal principles of human rights, Nigeria can harness the transformative potential of religion and culture to build a society where every individual is valued and respected, regardless of their background or beliefs” (Chimaobi and Ameh, 2024, p. 91). There is a need to engage in a serious campaign and raise awareness on the issues of human dignity. This is where the role of various ministries of culture and information, or government orientation agencies, comes into play. There is a need for them to do more to campaign against these practices that erode human dignity. There are still many people in the Nigerian society who don’t know the meaning of human dignity and the human rights that flow from human dignity.

All who engage children in exploitative child labour need to know and be conscientized on the rights of children. It is wrong to deprive children of their dignity and their human rights. Educational empowerment is important for all members of society. When people are educated to know of their dignity and rights, they are able to stand for those rights and their dignity. A popular saying avers that “knowledge is power.” It is practically difficult, if not impossible, to intentionally stand for what you do not know. With good educational opportunities and knowledge, people will be able to discard the traditional beliefs that women are inferior, the weaker sex, and are only good to be cooks and stay at home (Mejida, 2008). Educational campaigns against human rights violations and the degradation of human dignity are important. There should be a re-conscientization to reclaim human dignity through all academic programmes, civil society organizations, and the government should also engage in human dignity/rights advocacy (Uduigwomen and Udofia, 2018). In speaking of education and the creation of awareness, the role of ministers of religion should not be dispensed. Religions in Nigeria have a large following. Their ministers should help to campaign against the obnoxious practices.

Related to the above is that indigenous cultural practices and beliefs should be subjected to radical criticisms and evaluation. It should be understood that culture is not sacrosanct. Culture is evolved by people or human beings to enable them to navigate through the challenges of life and to create a cohesive social order. People should not treat culture as if it cannot change. Culture is a human tool, a vehicle, and an environment for human to fulfill their purposes. Culture is important. But human rationality is also important. Humans should use the tool of reason to challenge and confront cultural beliefs and practices that offend human dignity. It was the Greek philosopher Socrates who said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” This should apply not only to individuals but also to groups. The people in a particular culture should keep subjecting their cultural beliefs and practices to examination and purification, and refinement. This paper proposes a role for the media in the protection and sustenance of human dignity in Nigeria. The media that is referred to here refers to all types of media, such as mass media, social media, the new media, traditional media, modern media, print media, electronic and online media, etc. The media has a social responsibility to society to campaign for the development of society and the elimination of social ills. Anti-human cultural practices that offend against human dignity should not be tolerated. They should be combated and eradicated.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has examined the crucial issue of human dignity and how some indigenous cultural beliefs and practices erode or degrade the dignity. Some of the key concepts that pervade this study, such as human dignity, cultural beliefs, cultural practices, culture, etc, were It was clearly explicated. human dignity speaks of the nobility, value, and goodness in the human person flowing from human life. This dignity inheres in all human beings irrespective of their social background, economic status, political affiliation, economic status, or physical conditions. Human dignity entitles people to various human rights. The ethical foundations for human dignity were also presented, such as the religious basis that sees human beings as created in God's image and likeness, various philosophical positions that build human dignity on human rationality, and the African indigenous beliefs that see a sacred value in human life and dignity. The paper noted that despite the nobility in human persons, there have been many ideologies such as racism, Apartheid, and practices such as various discrimination that offend against dignity. In Nigeria, the paper showed that many cultural beliefs and practices, such as patriarchal practices, child labour, female genital mutilation, barbaric widowhood practices, Osu caste system, abuse of childless women, discrimination against the girl child in education, etc, violate human dignity. Various proposals were made to safeguard human dignity in Nigeria. These proposals include strengthening the law and effective enforcement against these obnoxious cultural practices, education, and creating awareness on human dignity, the media highlighting the evils in these practices, ministers of religion engaging their members on the evils of these practices, etc. It is believed and hoped here that if these proposals are carried out, they will help to curb these evil practices and build a better Nigerian society. It is hereby concluded that only cultural practices that promote human dignity should be promoted in Nigeria.

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