# AFRICAN CULTURE AND VALUES IN A WORLD OF CHANGE: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL

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## Abstract

*Culture is the defining element of a people and the varieties of culture among the world's populations make life beautiful and interesting. Since culture is often seen as the sum total of the peculiarities shared by a people, a people's value can be seen as part of their culture. In discussing African culture and values, we are not presupposing that all African societies have the same explanation(s) for events, the same language, and some mode of dressing and so on. Rather, there are underlying similarities shared by many African societies which, when contrasted with other cultures, might reveal a wide gap of difference. It does appear that while so-called African culture and values have positive, soul-lifting and humanistic dimensions, it also has some negative and dehumanizing aspects. In this paper, we try to show the relevance of African culture and values to the contemporary society, using Igbo-African society as an example, but maintain that these values be critically assessed, and those found to be inimical to the well-being and holistic development of the society, be discarded. In this way, African culture and values can be revaluated, their relevance established and sustained in order to give credence to authentic African identity. We recommend that there is need to harness the cultural resources of Africa to enrich the process of education, and indeed, greater emphasis is on the need to harness all our cultural dimension towards a common goal of development understood as human wellbeing so as to identify with other civilized populations of the world rather than remaining backward. The method we employed in this paper is the critical method of philosophy.*

**Keywords:** African, culture, change, values, Igbo

**Introduction**

Among the human societies, it is the culture of a people that marks them out and makes them distinct as this and not that people. Culture as it is usually understood entails a totality of traits and characters that are peculiar to a people to the extent that it marks them out from other peoples or societies. These peculiar traits include the people's language, dressing, music, work, arts, religion, and so on. It also includes a people's social norms, taboos and values. Values here are to be understood as beliefs that are held about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. A detailed study of values rightly belongs to the discipline of philosophy. Axiology as a branch of philosophy deals with values embracing both ethics and aesthetics. This is why philosophical appraisal of African culture and value is not only apt and timely, but also appropriate.

Moreover, the centrality of the place of value in African culture as a heritage that is passed down from one generation to another, will be highlighted. We shall try to illustrate that African culture and values can be appraised from many dimensions in addition to examining the method of change and the problem of adjustment in culture. Here we hope to show that while positive dimensions of our culture ought to be practiced and passed on to succeeding generations, negative dimensions of our culture have to be dropped in order to promote a more progressive and dynamic society. However, before we can have an appraisal of African culture and values, it is necessary for us to have an understanding of the concept of culture and its meaning. This will help us grapple with the issues we will be dealing with in this paper.

**The concept of culture**

Culture is the social behaviors and norms found in different human societies. It comprises the range of phenomena that are transmitted through social learning in human societies. Some aspects of human behavior and social practices are said to be cultural universals, found in all human societies. These include culture-expressive forms such as music, dance, ritual, religion, and technologies such as tool usage, cooking, shelter, and clothing. The concept of material culture covers the physical expressions of culture, such as technology, architecture and art, whereas the immaterial aspects of culture such as principles of social organization (including practices of social organization, political organization, and

social institutions), mythology, philosophy, literature (both written and unwritten), and science, comprise the immaterial/intangible cultural heritage of a society (Macionis, 2011, p.53).

According to Edward Casey, the very word *culture* meant 'place tilled.' It goes back to Latin *colere* (to inhabit, care for, till, worship) and *cultus* (a cult, especially a religious one). Therefore, to be cultural or to have a culture is to inhabit a place sufficiently as to cultivate it, to be responsible for it, to respond to it, and to attend to it caringly (Sorrells, 2015). *Culture* should be understood in terms of all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice and knowledge, become fully human (Velkley, 2002, p.11). Hence, Terror Management Theory posits that culture is a series of activities and worldviews that provide humans with the basis for perceiving themselves as person(s) of worth within the world of meaning – raising themselves above the merely physical aspect of existence in order to deny the animal insignificance and death that homo sapiens became aware of when they acquired a larger brain (Greenberg, 2013, p).

In the words of E.B. Tylor, it is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1974, p.1).Alternatively, culture is understood as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses and material expressions, which, over time, express the continuities and discontinuities of social meaning of a life held in common (James, Magee et al, 2015, p.53).The Cambridge English Dictionary states that culture is the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2017).The term is also used to denote the complex networks of practices and accumulated knowledge and ideas that is transmitted through social interaction and exist in specific human groups using the plural form.

The concept of art as an attribute of the individual has to do with the extent to which a society has cultivated a particular level of sophistication in the arts, sciences, education, or manners. The level of cultural sophistication has also sometimes been seen to distinguish civilizations from less complex societies. Some schools of philosophy, such as Marxism and critical theory, have argued that culture is often used politically as a tool of the elites to manipulate the lower classes and create a false

consciousness. Marxism is also of the view that human culture arises from the material conditions of human life, as they create the conditions for (physical) survival, and that the basis of culture is found in evolved biological disposition.

A culture is the set of customs, traditions, and values of a society or community, such as ethnic group or nation. Culture is the set of knowledge acquired over time. In this sense, multiculturalism values the peaceful coexistence and natural respect between different cultures. Sometimes, the term, culture, is also used to describe specific practices within a subgroup of a society. Within cultural anthropology, the ideology and analytical stance of cultural relativism holds that cultures can hardly have objective evaluation because any evaluation is necessarily situated within the value system of a given culture. Yet within philosophy, this stance of cultural relativism can be undermined and made inapplicable since such value judgment is itself a product of a given culture.

In fact, there are as many definitions of culture as there are scholars who are interested in the phenomenon. Culture embraces a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners, morals and so on. It is the patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people that claim to share a single origin or descent. For this reason, Bello sees it as the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenge of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors (Bello, 1991, p. 189). Affirming the notion that culture serves to distinguish a people from others, Aziza asserts:

> Culture…refers to the totality of the pattern of behavior of a particular group of people. It includes everything that makes them distinct from any other group of people; for instance, their greeting habits, dressing, social norms and taboos, food, songs and dance patterns, rites of passage from birth – through marriage – to death, traditional occupations, religious as well as philosophical beliefs (Aziza 2001, p.31).

It should be noted that culture is passed on from generation to generation. The acquisition of culture is a result of the socialization process. Throwing more light on this point, Fufunwa observes that the child just grows into and within the cultural heritage of the people and inhibits it. He made it

clear that culture, in traditional society, is not taught but caught instead. The child, according to him, observes, imbibes and mimics the action of his elders and siblings. Therefore, it is impossible for the child in a traditional society to escape his cultural and physical environments (Fufunwa 1974, p.48).

This is to say, again, that anyone who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly during the process of social interaction. This work attempts to portray culture as the total way of life of a particular group of people; and as Etuk rightly observed, an entire way of life would embody, among other things, what the people think of themselves and the universe in which they live: their world view – how they organize their lives in order to ensure their survival.

As Idiong (1994, p.46) rightly noted, there are some misconceptions that are widely held about culture as a word, which can lead some people to have a negative perception of the term and all that it stands for. "Such persons raise their eyebrows and suddenly frown at the word 'culture' as they in their minds' eyes visualize masquerades, idol worshipping, traditional jamborees and other activities they consider bizarre that go with culture," said Idiong (1994, p.46). This misconception, we believe, does not appear to be widespread but the posture may have arisen from a partial understanding of the meaning of culture because culture as it were is like a two-side coin. It has soul-lifting, glamorous and positive dimensions, yet it is not immune from some negative outcomes.

**Aspects of culture**

Culture has been classified into its material and no-material aspects. While material culture refers to the visible tactile objects which man is able to manufacture for the purposes of human survival; non-material culture comprises of the norms and mores of the people. While material culture is concrete and takes the form of artifacts and crafts, non-material culture is abstract but has a very pervasive influence on the lives of the people of a particular culture. Hence beliefs about what is good and what is bad, together with norms and taboos, are all instances of non-material culture. From the foregoing, it is obvious that culture is shared since it consists of cherished values or beliefs that are shared by a group, lineage, and religious sect etc. Apart from this, culture is dynamic in the sense that

it is continually changing.

**Changing cultural dynamics**

Culture is not static. We are not alone in this observation as Anita (2005, p.17) states that culture is not fixed and permanent. It is always changed and modified by man through contacts with and absorption of other people's culture, a process known as assimilation. Etuk has also observed that cultures are not static; they change. In fact, cultures need to change. Any culture that wishes to remain static and resistant to change would not be a living culture. As we know, culture is carried out by people, and people do change their social patterns and institutions, and beliefs and values and even skills and tools of work. Then culture cannot but be an adaptive system.

Once an aspect of culture adjusts or shifts from within or outside the environment then other aspects of the culture are affected, whether directly or indirectly. It is necessary to know that each element of a culture (such as material procedures, food processing or, greeting pattern) is related to the whole system. It is in this respect that we can see that even a people's technology is part of their culture.

Raimon Panikkar identifies several ways in which cultural change can be brought about. These include growth, development, evolution, renovation, re-conception, reform, innovation, revolution, progress, borrowing, modernization, indigenization, transformation, etc (Strong et al, 1992). *Cultural innovation* has come to mean any innovation that is new and found to be useful to a group of people and expressed in their behavior, but which does not exist as a physical object. Humanity is in a global accelerating period of culture change, driven by the expansion of international commerce, the mass media, and the human population expansion among other factors. *Cultural repositioning* means the reconstruction of cultural concept of a society (Ali 2007, p.79).Cultures are internally affected by both forces encouraging change and forces resisting change – factors which are related to social structures as well as natural events. Social conflict and the development of technologies can also produce changes within a society by altering social dynamics and promoting new cultural models, and spurring or enabling generative action. These social shifts (changes) may accompany ideological shifts and other kinds of cultural change. Cultures are externally affected via contact between societies, which may also produce or inhibit social shifts and

changes in cultural practices. Again, cultural ideas may transfer from one society to another, through diffusion or acculturation. In diffusion, the form of something moves from one culture to another. Acculturation has different meanings but in this context it refers to replacement of the traits one culture with those of another, such as what happened to many parts of Africa during colonization.

## Is there an African culture?

From the foregoing it follows that there can be no people without a culture nor can there be a culture without a people or a society. Culture is selective in what it absorbs or accepts from other people who do not belong to a particular cultural group. To claim that there can be a society without a culture would, by implication, mean that such a society has continued to survive without any form of social organization or institutions, norms, beliefs etc; and this kind of assertion is obviously untrue. This is why even some Eurocentric scholars who may be tempted to use their cultural categories in judging other distinctively different people as 'primitive,' often deny that such people have history, religion and even philosophy, but cannot say that they have no culture.

In this paper, we shall be dealing with African culture and drawing examples from Igbo culture of Nigeria to avoid unnecessary generalization. This is because based on the consideration of culture as that which marks a people out from others, one can rightly say that there are many cultures in Africa. Africa is inhabited with various ethnic nationalities with their different languages, modes of dressing, eating, dancing and even greeting habits. If an individual can have a philosophy (of life) then, each group in Africa certainly have world view as well as philosophy.

But in spite of their various cultures, Africans do share some dominant traits in their belief systems and have similar values that mark them out from other peoples of the world. A Nigerian culture, for instance (if there is any such thing) would be closer to, say, a Ghanaian culture on certain cultural parameters than it would be to the oriental culture of the Eastern world, or the Western culture of Europe. It is true that culture is universal and that each local or regional manifestation of it is unique. This element of uniqueness in every culture is often described as cultural variation. The culture of traditional African societies, together with their value systems

and beliefs are close, even though they vary slightly from one another. These variations are made manifest when we compare an African culture with others. Certainly, African cultures differ significantly from the cultures of other regions or continents, yet we belief that the term 'African culture' is vague and ambiguous. To enforce a belief in collective African culture is a dogma of the Africans.

It will be safe to say that in a debased sense of the word, there is an African culture; but in the strict sense, there is no such thing. And we belief there is no need to over-labor this point since there are sufficient dissimilarities to justify this argument in as much as we still find some similarities to justify our usage of the term 'African culture.'

The culture of Africa, so-called, is varied and manifold, consisting of a mixture of countries with various tribes that each have their own unique characteristics from the continent of Africa. It is a product of the diverse populations that today inhabit the continent of Africa and the African Diaspora. African culture is expressed in its arts and crafts, folklore and religion, clothing, cuisine, music and language (Bea, 2016). Expressions of culture are abundant within Africa, with large amounts of cultural diversity being found not only across different countries, but also within single countries. Even though African cultures are widely diverse, it is also, when closely studied, seen to have many similarities. For example, the morals they uphold, their love and respect for their culture as well as the strong respect they hold for the aged and the kings and chiefs.

Africa has influenced and been influenced by other cultures. This can be portrayed in the willingness to adapt to the ever-changing modern world rather than staying rooted to their static culture. The Westernized few, persuaded by European culture and Christianity, first denied African traditional culture, but with the increase of African nationalism, a cultural recovery occurred. The governments of most African nations encourage national dance and music groups, museums, and to a lower degree, arts and writers.

**Expressions of African culture**

Africa is divided into a great number of ethnic cultures (Haseeb 1991, p.54). The continent's cultural regeneration has also been an integral aspect of post-independence nation-building on the continent, with a recognition of the need to harness the cultural resources of Africa to

enrich the process of education, requiring the creation of an enabling environment in a number of ways. In recent times, the call for a much greater emphasis on the cultural dimension in all aspects of development has become increasingly vocal.

During colonialism in Africa, Europeans possessed attitudes of superiority and a sense of mission. The French were able to accept an African as French if that person gave up their African culture and adopted French ways. During the Roman colonization of North Africa (parts of Algeria, Libya, Egypt and the whole of Tunisia) provinces such as Tripolitania became major producer s of food for the republic and the empire, this generated much wealth in these places for their 400 years of occupation (Maulana 2010, p.19). The French were able to accept an African as French if that person gave up their African culture and adopted French ways. Knowledge of the Portuguese language and culture and abandonment of traditional African ways defined one as civilized (Pankhurst 1997). Mwiti Mugambi argues that the future of Africa can only be forged from accepting and mending the socio-cultural present. For him, colonial cultural hangovers, pervasive Western cultural inundation, and aid-giving arm-twisting donors are, he argues, here to stay and no amount of looking into Africa's past will make them go away. However, Maulana states (2010):

> Our culture provides us with an ethos we must honor in both thought and practice. By ethos, we mean a people's self-presentation in the world through its thought and practice in the other six areas of culture. It is above all a cultural change. For culture is here defined as the totality of thought and practice by which a people creates itself, celebrates, sustains and develops itself and introduces itself to history and humanity. (P.20).

African culture is expressed through many different art forms, such as music, dance, art, etc.

**Arts and crafts in African culture**

Africa has a rich tradition of arts and crafts. African arts and crafts find expression in a variety of woodcarvings, brass and leather art works. They also include sculpture, paintings, pottery, ceremonial and religious headgear and dress. Maulana Karenga states that in African art, the object was not as important as the soul force behind the creation of the object.

He also observes that, "All art must be revolutionary and in being revolutionary it must be collective, committing, and functional.

Certain African cultures have always placed emphasis on personal appearance and *jewelry* has remained an important personal accessory. Many pieces of such jewelry are made of cowry shells and similar materials. Similarly, masks are made with elaborate designs and are an important part of some cultures in Africa. Masks are used in various ceremonies depicting ancestors and spirits, mythological characters and deities.

In many traditional arts and craft traditions in Africa, certain themes significant to those particular cultures recur, including a couple, a woman with a child, a male with a weapon or animal, and an outsider or a stranger. Couples may represent ancestors, community founder, married couple or twins. The couple theme rarely exhibit intimacy of men and women. The mother with the child or children reveals intense desire of the women to have children. The theme is also representative of mother and the people as her children. The man with the weapon or animal theme symbolizes honor and power. A stranger may be from some other tribe or someone from a different country, and more distorted portrayal of the stranger indicates proportionately greater gap from the stranger.

**Folklores and religion in African culture**

Like all human cultures, African folklore and religion represent a variety of social facets of the various cultures in Africa. Like almost all civilizations and cultures, flood myths have been circulating in different parts of Africa. Culture and religion share space and are deeply intertwined in African cultures. In Ethiopia, Christianity and Islam form the core aspects of Ethiopian culture and inform dietary customs as well as rituals and rites (Mwangi, 1970).

Folklores also play an important role in many African cultures. Stories reflect a group cultural identity and preserving the stories of Africa will help preserve an entire culture. Storytelling affirms pride and identity in a culture. In Africa, stories are created by and for the ethnic group telling them. Different ethnic groups in Africa have different rituals or ceremonies for storytelling, which creates a sense of belonging to a cultural group. To outsiders hearing an ethnic group's stories, it provides an insight into the community's beliefs, views, and customs. For people

within the community, it allows them to encompass their group's uniqueness. They show the human desires and fears of a group, such as love, marriage, and death. Folklores are also seen as a tool for education and entertainment. They provide a way for children to understand the material and social environments. Every story has a moral to teach people, such as goodwill, generosity, courageousness etc. For entertainment, stories are set in fantastic, non-human worlds. Often the main character of the story would be a talking animal or something unnatural would happen to human character. Although folktales are for entertainment, they bring a sense of belonging and pride to communities in Africa (Strong 1993).

## Clothing in African culture

There are no general ways of dressing in Africa. Women's traditional clothes in Ethiopia are basically cotton cloth woven in long strips which are then sewn together. Sometimes shiny threads are woven into the fabric for an elegant effect. Men wear pants and a knee-length shirt with a white collar, and perhaps a sweater. Men often wear knee-high socks, while women might not wear socks at all. Zulus like Nigeria wear a variety of attire, both traditional for ceremonial or culturally celebratory occasions, and modern westernized clothing for everyday use. Traditional male clothing is usually light, consisting of a two-part apron (similar to a loin cloth) used to cover the genitals and buttocks. The front piece of the apron is usually made of animal hide twisted into different bands to cover the genitals. The rear piece is made of cattle hide, and its length is usually used as an indicator of age and social position. The longer ones are worn by older men and men of high social status. Zulu men will also wear cow tails as anklets during ceremonies and rituals, such as weddings or dance. In the Muslim parts of Africa, daily attire also often reflects Islamic tradition.

## Cuisine in African culture

The various cuisines of Africa use a combination of locally available fruits, cereal grains and vegetables, as well as milk and meat products. In some parts of the continent, the traditional diet features a preponderance of milk, curd and whey products. In much of tropical Africa, however, cow's milk is rare and cannot be produced locally (owing to various diseases that affect livestock). The continent's diverse demographic makeup is

reflected in the many different eating and drinking habits, dishes, and preparation techniques of its manifold populations (Bowden 2000, p.40).

In central Africa, the basic ingredients are plantains and cassava. Fufu-like starchy foods (usually made from fermented cassava roots) are served with grilled meat and sauces. A variety of local ingredients are used while preparing other dishes like spinach stew, cooked with tomato, peppers, chillis, onions, and peanut butter. Cassava plants are also consumed as cooked greens. Groundnut (peanut) stew is also prepared, containing chicken, okra, ginger, and other spices. Another favorite is *bambara*, a porridge of rice, peanut butter and sugar. Beef and chicken are favorite meat dishes, but game meat preparations containing crocodile, monkey, antelop and warthong are also served occasionally.

In inland savannah, the traditional cuisine of cattle-keeping peoples is distinctive in that meat products are generally absent. Cattle, sheep and goat were regarded as a form of currency and a store of wealth, and are not generally consumed as food. In some areas, traditional peoples consume the milk and blood of cattle, but rarely the meat. Elsewhere, other peoples are farmers who grow a variety of grains and vegetables. Maize (corn) is the basis of *ugali*, the East African version of West Africa's fufu. Ugali is a starch dish eaten with meats or stews. In Uganda, steamed green bananas provide the starch filler of many meals. The main traditional dishes in Ethiopian and Eritreancuisine are stews served with flatbread made from wheat or sorghum as well as paste made form legumes such as beans. After meals, homes are traditionally perfumed using frankincense or incense, which is prepared inside an incense burner. Over several centuries, traders, travelers, invaders, migrants and immigrants all have influenced the cuisine of North Africa. Most of the North African countries today have served similar dishes, sometimes almost the same dish with a different name. To add to the confusion, two completely different dishes may also share the same name. Moreover, there are noticeable differences between the cooking styles of different nations: there is the sophisticated, full-bodied flavors of Moroccan palace cookery, the fiery dishes of Tunisian cuisine, and the humbler, simpler cuisine of Egypt and Algeria (Abdul 1996).

The cooking of Southern Africa is sometimes called 'rainbow cuisine,' as the food in this region is a blend of many culinary traditions, including those of Khoisan, Bantu, European and Asian populations. Basic ingredients include seafood, meat products (including wild game),

poultry, as well as grains, fresh fruits and vegetables. Fruits include apples, grapes, mangoes, bananas etc. There are also several types of traditional and modern alcoholic beverages including many European-style beers.

A typical West African meal is heavy with starchy items, meat, spices and flavors. A wide array of staples is eaten along the region including those of fufu, banku, kenkey, garri, which are served alongside soups and stews. Fufu is often made from starch root vegetables such as yams, coco-yams, or cassava, but also from cereal grains like millet, sorghum or plantains. The staple grain or starch varies region to region and ethnic group to ethnic group, although corn has gained significant ground, as it is cheap, swells to greater volumes and creates a beautiful white final product that is greatly desired. Banku and kenkey (originating from Ghana) are maize dough staples, and garri is made from dried grated cassavas. Rice-dishes are also widely eaten in the region.

## Music in African culture

Traditional African music is as diverse as the region's various populations. The common perception of African music is that it is rhythmic music centered on the drums. African music is polyrhythmic, usually consisting of multiple rhythms in one composition. Dance involves moving multiple body parts. These aspects of African music were transferred to the New World by enslaved Sub-Saharan Africans and can be seen in its influence on music forms like jazz, blues, rock &roll, rap music, etc (Abdul, 1996). Other African musical traditions also involve strings and horns. Dancing involves swaying body movements and footwork. Modern African music has been influenced by music from the New World.

## Language in African culture

The continent of Africa speaks hundreds of languages, and if dialects spoken by various ethnic groups are also included, the number is overwhelming. These languages and dialects do not have the same importance: some are spoken by only few hundred people; others are spoken by millions. Among the most prominent languages spoken are Arabic, Swahili and Hausa…………. Very few countries of Africa use any single language and for this reason several official languages co-exist: African and European. Some Africans speak various European languages

such as English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, German and Dutch.

**Value in African culture**

The value of a thing whether an object or a belief, is normally defined as its worth. Just as an object is seen to be of high value that is treasured, our belief about what is right or wrong that are worth being held are equally treasured. A value can be seen as some point of view or conviction which we can live with, live by, and can even die for. This is why it seems that values actually permeate every aspect of human life. For instance, we can rightly speak of religious, political, social, esthetic, moral, cultural and even personal values. So, there are many classifications of values. For, as people differ in their conception of reality, so do they have diverse ideas of values. Sometimes, life itself seems to force people to make choices regarding their standards of values. Depending on the way we perceive things, we can praise and blame, declare actions right or wrong or even judge the scene or object before us as either ugly or beautiful. This is why Idang (2007, p.4) concluded that each person has some sense of values and there is no society without some value system.

Whether we are aware of it or not, the society we live in has ways of constantly forcing its values on us about what is good, right and acceptable. We go on in our daily lives trying to conform to acceptable ways of behavior and conduct. Persons who do not conform to their immediate society's values are somehow called to order by the members of that society. If a man, for instance, did not think it wise to make honesty a personal value, and it is widely held by his immediate society that truth telling is a non-negotiable virtue, it would not be long before such an individual gets into trouble with other members of the society. This shows that values occupy a central place in a people's culture, making it more down-to-earth and real. The idea of African culture, therefore, means that there is peculiar way of life, approach to issues, values and world views that are typically African, even if, as we have noted, in a loose sense.

Some forms of behavior, actions and conduct are approved while others are widely disapproved of, based on cultural considerations. To show the extent of disapproval that follows the violation of values that should otherwise be held sacred, the penalty is sometimes very shameful, sometimes extreme.

African culture, with particular reference to the Ibibio people, for instance, has zero tolerance for theft. The thief once caught in the act or convicted, would be stripped necked, his or her body rubbed with charcoal from head to toe and the object he or she stole would be given to him or her to carry around the village in broad day light. The sense of personal shame and the disgrace the thief has brought on him or herself, family, relations and friends would be enough to discourage even the most daring thief. Anita (2005, p.17) writes that what a people hold to be true, right or proper with regard to those things, explains much of the cultural traits by which they become identified. What Anita calls 'trait' here could as well be called 'value,' and Etuk (2002, p.22) noted that no group of people can survive without a set of values which holds them together and guarantees their continued existence. Having seen the centrality of value in culture, it can be stated that the values of culture are what gives it uniqueness and identity.

**The Role of values in Igbo-African culture**

A culture is an embodiment of different values with all of them closely related to each other. That is why one can meaningfully talk about social, moral, religious, political, aesthetic and economic values of a culture. Let us now look at these values piece-meal, as this would give us an understanding of how they manifest in Igbo-African culture and the importance being attached to them. As we shall discover, these values are inextricably bound together and are to be understood in their totality as African cultural values. Let us begin with social values.

*Social Values:* These are simply those beliefs and practices that are practiced by any particular society. The society has a way of dictating the beliefs and practices that are performed either routinely by its members or performed whenever the occasion demands. Hence, in Igbo culture, we have festivals, games, feasts, rituals, and dances that are peculiar to the people. These activities are carried out by the people because they are seen to be necessary. Some social values, especially in Igbo-African society, cannot be truly be separated from religious, moral, political values and so on. This is why in Igbo culture, one can see that festivals which are celebrated often have religious undertone. They often ended with sacrifices that were offered to certain deities on special days in order to attract their goodwill, support, and blessings of the members of the society.

Sometimes, social values are backed by customary laws. They comprise of those traditional carnivals that a people see as necessary for their meaningful survival. The New Yam Festival, for instance, as practiced in Igbo land has a way of encouraging hard work and checking famine. It was a thing of shame for a man to buy yams within the first two or three weeks after the festival. Doing so would expose a man as being lazy. Again, no one would dare to eat a yam before this festival, and this is kind of discipline to the people.

## Moral values

African culture, as exemplified in Igbo-Africa, is embedded in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs which every individual ought to keep in order to live long and to avoid bringing curses on them and others. Adultery, stealing and other forms of immoral behavior are strongly discouraged and whenever a suspected offender denies a charge brought against him, he would be taken to a soothsayer or made to take an oath for proof of innocence. In Igbo land, for instance, *ajo chi* (ordeal) is very popular as a method of crime detection. This in turn becomes a means of checking crimes in the society.

African proverbs and wise sayings have a rich repository of wisdom. The proverbs worn the African against evil conduct and, as Mbiti observed, they are a major source of African wisdom and a valuable part of African heritage. Igbo-African culture has a moral code that forbids doing harm to members of the society, a relative, a kinsman, a foreigner and a stranger; except when such a person is involved in an immoral act. And if that is the case, it is advisable to stay away from such an individual and even at death, they would not have dignified burial. Mothers of twins were not welcome and were regarded as the harbinger of evil, hence, unacceptable.

## Religious values

Religion in Igbo-African society seems to be the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. Hence, religious values are not toyed with. Igbo-African traditional religion has some defining characteristics. For instance, it possesses the concept of a supreme being which is invisible and indigenous. It holds a belief in the existence and immortality of the human soul. The Igbo-African traditional religion also has the belief that good and bad spirits do exist and that these spirits are what make communication with the Supreme Being possible. Above all, it holds a

moral sense of justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil (Umoh 2005, p.68).

Igbo-African religious values seem to permeate every facet of the life of the people and the Igbo believes that anything can be imbued with spiritual significance. The worship of different deities on different days goes on to show that the Igbo people hold their religious values in high esteem. Sorcerers and diviners are seen to be mediating between God and man and interpreting God's wishes to the mortal. The diviners, sorcerers, and soothsayers help to streamline human behavior in the society and people are afraid to commit offences because of the fear of being exposed by these spiritual agents.

**Political values**

The Igbo-African society definitely has political institutions with heads of such institutions as respected individuals. The most significant thing about the traditional society is that the political hierarchy begins with the family. Each family has a family head; each village has a village head. From here, we have clan head and above the clan head, is the paramount ruler. Prior to the coming of the Western colonization and its subsequent subversion of the African traditional political arrangements, Igbo-African society had their council of chiefs, advisers, cult groups, etc. It was believed that disloyalty to a leader was disloyalty to the gods; and the position of leadership was either hereditary or by conquest. In Enugu state, Nigeria, for instance, even though the traditional political institution was overwhelmingly totalitarian, there were still some checks and balances. Any ruler who attempted to usurp powers was beheaded by the *odo* (masquerade) cult. Anita observes that such checks and balances were enforced by the existence of secret societies, cults, societal norms, traditional symbols and objects, as well as various classes of chiefs who performed different functions on the different aspects of life (Anita 2005, p.145). From here it is clear that political values are linked with other values in the society.

**Aesthetic values**

The Igbo-African concept of aesthetics is predicated on the fundamental belief system which gave vent to the production of the art. Now art is usually seen as human enterprise concerned with the production of

aesthetic objects. Therefore, when a people try to produce or create objects that they consider admirable, their sense of aesthetic value is brought to bear. Let us take an example. The fattened maiden adorned with beads characterizes the sense of beauty of the Igbo people. This is unlike the Western mode of beauty often pictured as slim looking young lady who move in staggered steps. Indeed, aesthetic value is what informs a people's art and craft as it affects their sense of what is beautiful as opposed to that which is ugly.

## Economic values

Economic values of the traditional Igbo-African society are marked by co-operation. The traditional economy which is mainly based on farming and hunting was co-operative in nature. In Igbo and, friends and relatives would come and assist in doing farm work not because they would be paid but simply to show solidarity and team spirit, and at the same time expect a return of such gesture when the need arises. Children were seen to provide the main labor force. That is why a man took pride in having many of them, especially males. Apart from farming, the people even co-operate in building of houses and doing other things for their fellow members. When any of them was in difficulty, all members rallied around and helped him or her. Hence, we can state that the economic values of the traditional African society, such as the Igbo, were founded on hard work and co-operation.

## The World of change and the problem of adjustment of African culture

It is expedient at this point that we examine some of the changes in culture and the problem of adjustment. Within this context, change means a significant alteration or departure from that which existed before. As we have noted earlier, invention, discovery, diffusion, etc, are some of the ways by which a culture can change or grow. Invention, for instance, involves the re-combination of existing cultural elements to fashion new things. There is no doubt, from our previous discussion, that the culture base or the cultural elements (objects, traits, and knowledge) in the pre-colonial Igbo/African society were limited in types and variation. Therefore, few inventions which could profoundly alter the culture could take place. Most appliances and utensils used then were made of wood and mud, as metal was not a commonly known cultural element of the people.

For example, a canoe was the only available means of transportation and it was wooden in all aspects until it was recently modified. Building materials too were wooden frameworks, sand and leaves knitted into mats for roofing. In spite of introduction of new inventions from other cultures, most houses are still built in the traditional methods using traditional materials, probably for economic reasons and sheer conservatism. Again, the pre-European-contact Igbo-African pattern of exchange was mainly by batter. The need for currency did not arise and so none was invented. Trade by barter, sale without standardized weight and measure and the general non-contractual pattern of exchange, all went a long way to foster, enhance, and sustain social solidarity.

The introduction of currency generated acquisitive propensities and profit orientation among the people, thereby gradually articulating social inequality based on purely economic criteria. This cultural change was bestowed on us through the process of diffusion. Diffusion involves the spread of cultural traits from one society into another through cultural contact. It entails intentional borrowing of cultural traits from other societies with which the beneficiary society comes in contact, or it may be an imposition of cultural traits on one society by a stronger society intending to assimilate the weaker society.

The likelihood of bringing about cultural change (or reducing the period of culture lag) is dependent on the desirability of yielding to change in the non-material culture, the compatibility of the anticipated change with the existing culture, and the nature or magnitude of force available to exact or induce compliance. However, the desirability of yielding to change in the non-material culture depends on whether the people perceive the new mode of conduct to be better that the former. In many cases, a change which calls for the replacement or total abandonment of pre-established and originally preferred modes of behavior is less likely to be accepted than one that is preservative of the status quo – that is, one which either provides other alternatives and/or extends the culture by merely adding new things to it.

Now, it should be known that force has its own limit in bringing about change as it is impossible to spell out every bit of a people's ways of life and formulate legislation to cover them. Most contemporary Igbo-Africans find it difficult to adjust between their primitive beliefs in certain aspects of their culture and the supposedly modern mode of accepted

behavior. For instance, in explaining the phenomena of disasters, deaths, accidents, and other misfortunes in the family, a new Christian convert would run to the Church for explanation and comfort, but if the Church's reaction is not immediate or prompt, the person may turn, in secret, to the native medicine man for immediate remedies. If the relief comes, he or she finds himself having to hold dual allegiance – one to the new found faith, and the other to his primitive beliefs. This form of dichotomy goes beyond misfortune and permeates most aspects of the person's life. In Egede of Enugu state, for instance, a ritual called *ikpa* was performed few days after the death of a male member who has duly identified with his age-grade in order to pave way for his peaceful admittance into the land of the spirit. This practice, of course is not supported by Christian doctrine, yet even the most devout Christian in the community takes this primitive culture to high esteem till date.

The point is that cultures always try to maintain those values that are necessary for the survival of their people. This is because values are integral part of culture and culture is what defines a people's identity. For the Igbo-Africans, for instance, we have seen that close kinship relations are held at a high premium, and this is unlike the Western individualistic model.

In those 'good old days' as some would say, it was usual to see a neighbor, friend, or relative correcting an erring child whose parents he/she knows. This was based on the true belief that the churning of a well-behaved child would be to the benefits of the entire society. In the same vein, it was believed that if the child turned out to be a failure, it is not only the immediate family that will bear the blunt; neighbors, friends, and acquaintances could also fall victim of his nuisance. But today we see people adopting more and more nuclear family patterns and the individualistic style of the West. A friend or neighbor who tries to correct an erring child will in no time, to his/her embarrassment, be confronted with the question, "What is your business?"Kinship ties and love are what characterized the traditional African culture. Love makes a community.

Furthermore, it is part of the Igbo-African world view to treat the environment in which he finds himself with respect. For as Enyi (2013) observes the African co-operates with nature and does not try to conquer it. There were taboos against farming on certain days as a way of checking the activities of thieves who may want to reap where they never sowed. It

was also against the custom to cultivate on certain areas of the community or even fish on, or fetch water from, certain streams for some time. The system may have been founded on a myth but it has a way of conserving and preserving nature.

Nevertheless, if by conquering nature, we mean the transformation of natural resources for man's benefit, then we would encourage the present Africans to rise up and conquer nature by means of technology in line with other civilized populations of the world. And if today, some members of the society have violated the custom meant to check criminal activities and conservation of nature, it is largely for the reason of insincerity on the part of the custodians of culture who would often attribute all things as coming from the gods with consequent calamities as punishment to defaulters. The beliefs were not expected to deter anyone anymore once it was found out that the beliefs were lies and unfounded. Rather than clinging to unreasonable beliefs, the African should endeavor through education and learning to acquire the technological know-how to make his society life-enhancing while retaining and promoting those beliefs and values that have proved significant for his positive identity.

Again, it takes only a little reflection to see that marital rites and practices are usually carried out in line with the custom of the society concerned. In Igbo-African society, for instance, the polygamous marriage was more preferable because of its association with wealth, power, influence, social status and the desire to be surrounded by many children seen as not only gifts from God but as social security and economic assets. So, if a wife is unable to bear children, or unable to bear as much as required, the husband is compelled to take more wives. In this way, marrying of many wives became a demonstration of greatness. Indeed, many women encourage their husbands to take more wives to relief their pains of child bearing and to avoid appearing selfish, as though she wishes to enjoy the husband's wealth all alone.

This practice has become obsolete. Reproduction of children must have genuine desire, and inability to bear children is not sufficient reason to invalidate a marriage which is a loving union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. It should be clear too, that the suspicion for childlessness should not only be directed to the woman as is often the case; instead, the man as well as the woman should undergo proper medical examinations in order to remedy the situation of childlessness

where possible.

Besides this, some societies are still practicing the system that if a man dies leaving behind a young wife, the widow is require by custom to name someone in the family of the diseased husband for whom she will stay on and fulfill the life-time obligation that she owes her dead husband. In some cases, the elder brother of the diseased takes up this right. Very often do they stop to wonder about the welfare of the widow and that of the children left behind by their brother's demise. These instances show that marriage practices and the cultural values that are held about them are due and in urgent need for revision in some African societies.

It does appear that while so-called African culture and values have positive, soul-lifting and humanistic dimensions, it also has some negative and dehumanizing aspects. Prior to the arrival of Mary Mitchel Slessor (1848-1905) in Africa, ignorance, superstition, and negative values made multiple births to be seen as an abomination and a herald of evil. Explaining how twins were looked at in those dark days, Udo (2007, p.103) notes that one of the twins was said to be genuine, the other an imposter. But by sharing the same cradle bed together, they were both infected and cursed. Their parents were equally guilty of defilement, particularly the mother.

The birth of twins was seen as a very bad omen in traditional Igbo-African society. In order to save the community from the anger and wrath of the deities, the twins were killed together – sometimes with their mothers. Since this barbaric custom was stopped by Mary Slessor, multiple births are now seen as multiple blessings. Members of the public freely make donations for their upkeep and we do not experience any wrath of those deities that demanded the heads of twins today. Twins have grown up to become normal, healthy, respected and respectable members of our society contributing economically, socially, morally, politically, religiously, and intellectually to the development of the African society.

**Conclusion**

We observed that while the so-called African culture and values have positive, soul-lifting and humanistic dimensions, it also has some negative and dehumanizing aspects. Our recommendation is that those positive dimensions of our culture: our synergetic society, our conservation of nature and our native arts, dances and games that offer us interesting, and

morally justifiable, sources of entertainment and happiness, should be encouraged given the fact that culture ought to be knowledgeably innovative and instrumentally beneficial to people in such a way that the society can move from one level of development to another. Unfortunately, some of our traditional practices cannot be demonstrated to be development friendly, and such go against the spirit of globalization, science and technology. Therefore, negative and harmful traditional practices that dehumanize people and portray them as primitive, unimproved, and backward people without future, should as a matter of urgency be discouraged and discarded. This can be achieved through the persuasion of religions, enactment of laws by the government, and most importantly, education and enlightenment of the traditional leaders and custodians of culture as well as every member of the society. The African, while retaining those culture and values that positively makes him distinctive, must dance the tune of the world of change in areas where the latter is comparatively apt to uphold the dignity and wellbeing of the human person in the society.

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