

# African Cultural Values and Inter-communal Relations: The Case with Nigeria

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## Abstract

People all over the world have values which at one time or the other could either be appreciated or abhorred depending on their usefulness. Such values, when they pertain to the individual, are termed individual values; to the family – family values; and to the society, they are properly termed societal/social values. In spite of the heterogeneity of Africa, there are still identifiable social standards indigenous to it, like the sense of communality; the sense of the sacredness of life; hospitality; time; respect for authority and the elders, etc. Cardinal among these is the *sense of communality* - the awareness which identifies an individual not as an isolated ego, but as an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality. In the end, all the other cultural values were recognized as postscripts to this basic value. Aspects of these standards which are found to be useful for growth and development of Africa were identified; others which actually hamper inter-communal relations, and in consequence, obstruct peaceful coexistence between peoples were highlighted. Based on these, the author called for more discussions on the relevance of these values in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** communality, cultural values, inter-communal relations, monochronous, polychronous.

## 1. Introduction

Every individual, every family, and indeed, every society has principles and standards which are appreciated and held in high respect, as well as those which are abhorred. When these principles and/or standards are commonly held by peoples, they are termed social values. Social values then refer to the ideas shared by members of a society as to what is good, right, and desirable; things worth striving for. Since no two societies or epochs are identical with each other, social values thus, are different from society to society, and could change from time to time due to acculturation.

African traditional values would refer to those social ideals that pertain to and are indigenous to African people, which have either enhanced or hindered inter-communal relations. The values of a society are significant because they determine the contents of its norms, which help in maintaining social order. Each value has a corresponding norm, or put differently, all norms express social values. Thus, the values which are more difficult to identify because of their abstract nature are more easily inferred from social norms exhibited in actual everyday behaviours. This paper seeks to explore the gamut of African traditional values and how they affect relations between communities with, special reference to Nigeria as a nation.

## 2. What is a Cultural Value?

Up from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both anthropologists and sociologists have come to associate the term culture with the whole way of life of a people, which includes their laws, customs, conventions and values. According to BusinessDictionary.com, it encapsulates a pattern of responses discovered or developed by a group in their interactions with each other and the environment, as they attempt to solve problems of everyday life. These responses which are considered the correct way of thinking, feeling, and acting are passed from one generation to another. They embody what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and encompass all learned and shared, explicit or tacit, assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, norms, and values, as well as attitudes, behaviour, dress, and language. Culture therefore, embodies the totality of a people's response (values inclusive) to nature and social environment.

Values can be seen as assumptions that form the basis of ethical actions; they are “broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes” (Wikipedia, 2013). Thus, values reflect a person's sense of what is right or wrong, good or bad, beneficial or important, useful or desirable or beautiful, etc. People's values elicit certain types of attitudes which generate specific kinds of behaviours. For instance, if you value 'honesty' and you are employed to work in a government ministry where dishonest people are celebrated, the tendency is that you will form an attitude that the ministry is a wrong place to work; and as such, you may not put in your very

best to the work, or may even leave the job entirely. Perhaps, if the ministry adopted a no-tolerance posture to dishonesty, your attitude and behaviour would have been different.

While some values which are physiologically determined, such as the desire to avoid physical pain, are often considered objective, others which are sociologically established vary across individuals and cultures, and are regarded as subjective. With the passage of time, the communal expression of personal values (the basis of internal reference) aggregate to establish the foundations of custom, tradition and law (the basis of external reference). And as thus ossified, these customs, traditions and laws in turn become the yardstick for acceptable personal values. In this way, individual or personal values exist in relation to societal or cultural values, since human life itself is inextricably tied to the community of human beings. Given that a culture entails a social system that shares a set of common values, cultural values then imply the commonly held standards of what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable in a given community or society (BusinessDictionary.com, 2013). They are the things that come from a culture which are important to the members and of which they hold in esteem. Cultural values could be ethical/moral, doctrinal/ideological, social or aesthetic. Irrespective of the nature of its manifestation, it is always a representation of a specific culture, and means something cherished by people within a specified cultural group.

Values, even though are somewhat global and abstract in nature, relate to norms of a given culture. Norms supply rules, standards and guides for what ought to be done in specific situations, while values identify what should be judged as important and worthwhile. The values which a given culture cherishes determine the specific norms that would lead to their realization within the culture. Asking one's neighbour for help when one is struggling is a norm, but it reflects the value of communality; standing still when the national anthem is recited is a norm, but it reflects the values of respect and patriotism. Some values are universal and are recognizable across cultures; others are culture-specific and determine particular norms which generate specific attitudes and behaviours. Cultural values thus, outline the nature and direction of a people's life and interrelationships.

### **3. African Cultural Values**

We have seen that values reflect the totality of what a people stand for, their aspirations and their decisions as to what should be judged as good or bad, right or wrong. Different cultures reflect different values. African cultural values thus, pertain to those social ideals indigenous to African people. This is not to say that there is homogeneity of cultures among various African nationalities. Rather, it means that among the multiplicity of cultures within the continent, there are seminally consistent principles that cut across board. These range from their sense of communality, to their sense of the sacredness of life, hospitality, time, respect for authority and the elders; from their sense of the sacred and of religion, to their sense of language and proverbs, etc. In the following paragraphs, we shall examine some of these values namely, that of communality, time and respect for authority and the elders, using them as representatives of others, and aiming to see what kind of correlation exists, if any, between them and inter-communal relations within the Nigerian nation.

#### **3.1. Sense of Communality**

African value for community-based living and relationships has been recently espoused by various authors (Davidson, 1969; Mbiti, 1990; Okere, 2005; Ogbujah, 2006). The sense of community or communality refers to the awareness which identifies an individual not as an isolated ego, but as an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality. In traditional Africa for instance, it meant that a person is known and identified in, by and through his community. Individual lives move from, and revolve around the community. To a large extent, a man's achievements depend primarily on how much of his community's standards he accommodates: he sees as his community see, and acts as his community acts (Ogbujah, 2006: 34).

Traditional Africans share much of their life in common. For economic reasons, they have communal farmlands, barns, trees, streams and markets. This accounts for why entire community members may distinguish themselves by their expertise in a specific skill or trade as in wood carving, blacksmithing, etc. The communal ownership and relationships guarantee the prosperity of a town which, in African sense, concomitantly guarantee the prosperity of the individual. When a job needed to be done, the entire community turned out with supplies and music and went on to sing and dance its way through to the successful conclusion of each particular chore (Okafor, 1974). The proceeds were commonly shared according to 'family' structures, and each one had something to look on to. In this way, poverty was an alien idea which could only be brought about to the entire community by an adverse climatic condition. Biko (1978) acknowledged that it never was considered repugnant to ask one's neighbours for help if one was struggling. In most situations, there was help between individuals,

tribes, chiefs, etc, even in spite of wars. In consequence, people's basic needs were often met even when they could not be adjudged to be affluent. The traditional communities did not experience roaming beggars, destitute or solitary aged; neither did they give room for modern depersonalising institutions like 'Cheshire Homes', 'Motherless Babies Homes', 'Homes for the aged and handicapped', etc.

For social reasons, traditional Africans have communal squares, masquerades and festivals. During festive periods, for instance, various segments of the town are given the opportunity to showcase their dancing / athletic prowess. This creates a healthy competition whereby the youths not only engage in activities exercising to their bodies, but also indulge in duels that challenge their ingenious capacity. In the end, both the winners and the losers embrace – a gesture reinforcing to the goodwill and brotherly atmosphere the festivals, *ab initio*, were established to foster.

In other to cater for the religious, psychological and political dimensions of peoples' lives, there are communal shrines, initiation rites and ritual objects. In Nigeria, as in most traditional Africa, religion is very central to people's lives and culture. It permeates all dimensions of their lives and infuses the economic, social and political aspects with meaning so pervading that it is often said that the cultural people live, breathe and eat religiously. Central to religion is their belief in the existence of a creator god - *Olodumare* (among the Yoruba), or *Chukwu* (among the Igbo); other divinities, spirits and the ancestors who, Mbiti calls the *Living dead*. The Supreme Being is aloof and awe-inspiring, and thus is often reached through the ancestors and divinities who are his emissaries. These emissaries are charged with the various departments of life. Whenever something untoward happens in the community, specific divinities (deities in charge of such department) are invoked to resolve the anomaly. In such manner, cultural people are able to maintain some level of equilibrium within the cosmic continuum.

Beyond maintaining cosmic order, religion also is central in helping communities realise their ideal of harmonious interrelationships. This, it does, through the transmission of key religious ideas and beliefs, initiation practices, ritual activities, sacred symbols and vital public institutions (Ejizu, 2013). The ancestors are the guardians of family affairs, customs, traditions and ethical norms. Interpersonal disputes are settled within the vicinity of the family *Obi* (place of ritual sacrifice) or the community square where the ancestors are believed to regularly congregate. This is done so that the ancestors – the invisible police of the families and communities could bear witness to the testimonies (Ikenga-Metuh, 1981). An offence against the cherished norms and taboos of the land is ultimately an offence against the ancestors who are quick and severe in meting out retributive justice. In consequence, people are adept in complying with the strict provisions of cultural taboos and norms in order to ensure peace and harmony in their relationship with each other, with the ancestors and with the entire cosmic realities.

Sequel to the cult of the ancestors are the initiation rites and ritual symbols which embody unifying qualities in their own rights. The rites of initiation, whether to manhood (as in *Iwa - akwa* for boys or *Iru mgbede* for girls among the Igbo; the *Egungun* of the Yoruba, and *Poro* for young boys in Liberia, etc), or to cultic groups (as in the masquerade) entail the launching of youngsters into integrated groups that prohibit behaviours inimical to the commonwealth. During periods of initiation, the candidates are taught how to share things in common, and are exposed to the 'treasured secrets', including the historical landmarks, myths and symbols; they are instructed on the norms of acceptable behaviour of their community. The awe and mystery which often characterised the initiation rites were particularly helpful for the successful communication of the accumulated wisdom of the people, including, as Ejizu pointed out, the ideal of harmonious co-existence in the community.

The initiation ceremony is particularly significant not just because it ushers one from the state of 'a no body' to a full-fledged person with all rights and responsibilities, but because it embodies a religious dimension since it relies on the supernatural power and divine authority of ancestors and other spiritual patrons for the validation of its processes. In most cases, the invisible beings are differently symbolized with carved objects enthroned at sacred shrines and altars. These are exclusively handled by the Chief Priests or family/clan heads whose prime duty is to guide their subjects to attract the blessings of the gods through harmonious living.

In a typical African society, the community is understood as a vital community that guards individual lives. Even in modern settings where individuals leave their primary communities for cities in search of work and better life, their extended families and villages continue to exert tremendous influence over them. People frequently return to their villages and home-towns to join members to celebrate important cultural events. At other times, from their residences all over the world, they send financial and logistic contributions to support

various development projects and determine the socio-economic and political landscape of their rural home communities.

The sense of communality showcased in the everyday acts of living together is the basis of the extended family system. For the African, the family, unlike the European or the North American, is not an atomized enclave of father, mother and child(ren). There is much elasticity in the application of the term to include one's direct parents, grand and great grandparents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews; in fact, to all one's traceable blood relations. It is often not out of place for a child to refer to any of his uncles or aunts as his father or mother; his nephews and nieces as his brothers and sisters. A child is not known by his/her personal names but in relationship to the family - the community: 'I am the child of ... from so and so kindred'. This broad conception of the family coupled with close proximity of residences makes it easy for people's lives to regulate and be regulated by others. This in turn promotes the transmission of cultural norms and reinforces communal living.

Associations based on ethnic descent, clan or religious affiliations also abound in modern African societies. These often serve as media of connection with ones' kith and kin especially for those who have left their primal kin groups. It has given rise to the famously touted 'Town Unions' that transverse Africa and beyond. For instance, we have Igbo Town Unions across the states of Nigeria, America and the nations of Europe today. Thus, the sense of community is not a piece of historical artefact, but a vital component of modern African life. Members of identified communities aggregate to support each other in times of difficulty, as well as in times of merriment and joy. Dissenting voices are either ostracised or slammed with heavy fines to beat them back into track. To avoid these, people always go on extra mile to be in union with their clan members. The clan thus has a live force without which individual constituents suffer grievously. Davidson (1969: 55) underscores this point when he noted:

Outside this ancestrally chartered system there lay no possible life, since 'a man without lineage is a man without citizenship': without identity, and therefore without allies..; or as the Kongo put it, a man outside his clan is like a grasshopper which has lost its wings.

A man's being and functionality are ineluctably tied to that of his immediate community: the community of men and women; the community of animate and inanimate beings; and the community of the living and the dead, all come together to shape and are shaped by man's activity. This symbiotic union of the individual with the community was poignantly captured by Mbiti (1990: 106) when he remarked that in Africa, the individual can only say: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man". Here, what happens to the individual happens to the group, and what happens to the group happens to the individual. The individual is a community-culture bearer. Everyone derives his life and sustenance from the community, and in consequence, must maintain a vital relationship with the members of the community. One who loses fellowship with the community, in Achebe's (1958) rendition, is like a fish cast out on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. The community is the custodian of lives and values.

### **3.2. Sense of Respect for Authority and the Elders**

In Nigeria as in most African societies, there is a strong and deep respect for authority and the elders. Even though two broad categories of social formation (centralized authority and segmented system) are identified dating back to pre-colonial times, authority was held by both as sacrosanct. The centralized authority was headed by paramount kings and chiefs as in the ancient Yoruba kingdoms, the emirates of Northern Nigeria, the ancient Benin kingdom, the ancient Ashanti kingdom of Ghana, the kingdoms of East, Central and Southern Africa, etc; while the segmented system was run by the chiefs and clan heads in collaboration with the adult males as can be found in the Igbo and Tiv societies of Nigeria. In either of the systems, the decisions of the authority figures were unquestionable. There were no appeal processes, and so people had to live with the verdict of the elders, right or wrong. In consequence, there hung on the neck of most Africans a high sense of awe and respect for authority which so often was left in the hands of the elders.

The elders have remained the custodians and transmitters of *Omenala*, which is the unwritten instrument of governance that directs human relationships in societies. They are the agents for the implementation of the social, political, moral and religious will of the people. As custodians of the people, they are believed to be in close contact with the ancestors with whom in justice and fairness, they govern the affairs of men. And as such, they occupy a pride of place in people's scheme of affairs, and are accorded with unrivalled respect. Conton (1966: 21) summed this up in these words:

Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy and politeness.

Grey hair was seen as a sign of advancement in learning, experience and honesty. African youths were so accustomed to being taught and directed in life by grey-headed men such that they began to associate grey hairs with wisdom and understanding. Among the Igbo, it is said: *onye nuru olu ndi okenye di ka onye jere n'afa*, - he who listens to the elders is like one who has consulted the oracle. The oracles are believed to express the infallible position of the gods regarding specific situations. In like manner, the elders are seen to be impeccable with regard to their stand on a variety of societal issues, and as such are listened to and obeyed for the promotion of good behaviour and harmonious living amongst individuals within the society.

Old age is admired and honoured because of the ingrained wish of the people for a long life span in spite of the harsh conditions they face daily. For this, the Igbo would say: *onye sopuru okenye, okenye eru ya-aka*, i.e., whoever respects the old would reap old age. Youthful misfortunes and deaths are seen as abominations which could be averted by strict compliance to the dictates of *omenala* and obedience to its custodians – the elders – irrespective of how sublime a contrary rational justification of an individual's reasoning might be. To respect the elders therefore, is both a way of preparing for old age as well as a way of ensuring that one receives respect at old age.

All these come into play to structure African mode of care for the aged. Here, there is no formal institution as is frequently found in Europe and North America. The setting is usually the family homes and the social security is the children/family members. The extended family system makes it imperative for people to assume responsibilities over the care of their traceable aged family members. People age gracefully among their children and grandchildren enjoying the personal touch of their kith and kin, and are never considered unnecessary burdens to the finances of their progenies. Consequently, the introduction of the somewhat depersonalized nursing homes for the aged or old people's homes in Africa is an affront to the African sense of and respect for old age.

### 3.3. Sense of Time

Some commentators on African sense of time, most of them African apologists, have set out the outline of their work through a criticism of this famously quoted passage from Mbiti (1990):

The question of time is of little or no academic concern to African people in their traditional life. For them, time is simply a composition of events which have occurred: which are immediately to occur... The most significant consequence of this is that, according to traditional concepts, time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future. The linear concept of time in Western thought, with an infinite future, is practically foreign to African thinking.

Using the works of Obiechina, Onwubiko and Kato, the author of the article 'African Cultural Values' (no name + date) was at pains trying to disabuse the minds of readers from the 'half Europeanised' and 'half de-Africanised' mind-set of Mbiti and his co-travellers. In the end, his conclusions were at best, more confusing than the project he set out to dismantle, namely: after admitting that 'Africans do have and conceive of time in the punctual sense', he ended with the assertion that "African use of time does not sacrifice social duties and human relations on the alter [*sic*] of the clock time punctuality". What then is the African understanding and use of time?

There seems to be a general understanding that in Africa, time is socialised, that is, it is structured into socio-cultural norms of human activities and relationships among peoples. This is in tune with what anthropologist Edward Hall identified in his *The Silent Language* (1959) as a polychronic culture. According to Hall, some cultures are traditionally monochronic, while others are polychronic. In polychronic cultures, as in Latin America or sub-Sahara Africa, time is viewed as cyclical; it is not important to be punctual, as it is acceptable to interrupt someone who is busy. What matters is the ability to get the desired results irrespective of when. Even the African apologists admit to this, noting that a person can do three or more things within a given period simultaneously. Using the imagery of a typical African woman who could be doing her cooking, at the same time cracking her palm kernel; she may be attending to her baby at the same period, while still open to attend to contingencies as they come up, the polychronous understanding of time is contrasted with 'clock-time' which thinks of them being done successively. Combining responsibilities thus, is a way of life in polychronic cultures.

In spite of the absence of clocks and standardized calendar for measuring events and activities, traditional Africans had a way of reckoning events with simple things around them. Obiechina (1975: 123) was very apt when he noted:

...time apart from being reckoned by such events as the first and second cock-crow, sunrise, sunset, overhead sun, or length of shadow, is also reckoned by meal-times, wine-tapping times, time of return from the farm and so on. These factors are not arbitrary. For instance, the use of meal periods does not imply that all eat their meals at exactly the same time, but that every one has a reasonably accurate idea of what is meant.

Events of life and natural occurrences were used to reckon time. Because of the absence of clock-time categories, historic events were “determined by reference to landmarks in the life of the community, to contemporaneous events or by recourse to a genealogical ‘chat’” (Onwubiko, 1991: 26). Remote events, irrespective of the relative time gap between them are often lumped together through local folklore and symbolic expressions as merely events of a long distant past. Events of the present are recognized in relation to activities of the near future. The lack of adequate categories also made it difficult to fathom events that could happen in the distant future. This may be the wits behind Mbiti’s admission that traditional Africans could look toward events which are immediately to occur. But his conclusion that for the traditional people, ‘time is a two-dimensional phenomenon, with a long past, a present and virtually no future’ seems to negate his initial disposition, and has attracted venomous criticisms. Indeed, it is an affront to a people’s sensitivity to claim they virtually have no sense of the future. However, some of the barrage of responses to Mbiti’s position do seem to be more of dogmatic assertions than of rational reconstruction of a perceived wrong presentation of an African traditional value system.

For instance, the frequent reference to Kato’s (1976: 61) remarks that “we [Africans] absolutely believe in the future. We even believe in a future resurrection. This is demonstrated by burial ceremonies and the contact we maintain with the spirits of the dead”, as the basis for maintaining that traditional peoples had all the categories for infinite future time, seems to be begging the question. Granted that ritualized form of burial is an expression of belief in the ancestors and spirits of the dead, does it mean that the people’s plans for the distant future could only be encapsulated within the structure of burial ceremonies? The question is: how did living (and not dead) human beings programme their remote future expectations?

Even the reference to a belief in a future resurrection must not be confused with the raising of body and soul reminiscent of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Africans believe that ritual burials present the deceased as admissible candidates for ancestor-hood; they also believe that ancestors could reward their loved ones by a return to life in what is called reincarnation; and that those who don’t qualify as ancestors, those who lived bad lives while on earth or those involved in violent or youthful deaths could return to finish their lifespans, reincarnate into lower forms of animals for expiation, or could hover around as bad spirits tormenting the living. In a sense, these could be regarded as pointers to the immediate future with respect to man’s inability to fathom the mysteries of life and death. But the pragmatic and existential notion of the infinite future seems to be a recent addition to the African cultural thought-pattern.

The question of *African time* is a concept which is often misconstrued to mean tardiness in appointments, meetings and events. There is a strong debate as to whether time is something that is purely relativized as to mean different things to different people; whether it is possible to speak of American time, British time, Latino time, Igbo time, Yoruba time, Asian time or Australian time, etc. Common sense would admit that, with requisite technology, specific events are identified and pinned down to definite times in history. Whether one is accustomed to the *Solar Calendar* or *Lunar Calendar*, there is often means of synchronizing times of occurrence of specific events in life. And so, to speak of a time relative to a particular culture without proper qualifications would not only be inaccurate, but misleading.

African time, properly speaking, is used to denote the approach of people in polychronic cultures to time as opposed to that of their counterparts in monochronic cultures. As we saw earlier, people in polychronous societies adopt a more leisurely, relaxed, and less rigorously-scheduled lifestyle. What matters is one’s ability to eventually arrive at one’s destination. To a polychron, ‘switching from one activity to another is both stimulating and productive and, hence, the most desirable way to work’ (Harley, no date). This was vividly pictured by Nwankwo when he noted that punctuality was not one of the virtues of the Aniocha man, since he took time over his snuff and his palm wine and if you attempted to hurry him from either, he would excuse himself by

reminding you of the maxim which says: 'where the runner reaches there the walker will also reach in the long run' (Nwankwo, 1975). Harley went further to incisively delineate between attitudes within monochronic and polychronic cultures thus:

...[W]hile the polychron was finishing a couple of last-minute chores at home, the monochron was at the appointed place five minutes early, anxiously looking at his watch. To a monochron, time is exact and, as he sees it, being late is both rude and disrespectful. To a polychron, any time - even an exact time - is just an approximation. If someone keeps *him* waiting, he doesn't really care. He just figures that something must have happened to hold up the other person, and it's not that big of a deal.

Now, having seen these, it becomes very easy to understand why for polychrons, exact times, and even exact dates are not really important. But this does constitute a major problem for polychrons living in monochronic cultures, or for polychronic cultures deeply socialized with monochronic ideals. Because of the way polychrons see time, they are often late in a more clock-bound pace of daily life in monochronic and deeply socialized polychronic cultures. Unnecessary delays and lateness to events, appointments and work have been a bane to the strides of developing nations. This is the genesis of the pejorative understanding of the *African time*; a time that begins whenever people are ready. If Africans cannot cope with the pace of a fast moving world, they will be late to waking up in the mornings, late to appointments, late to advance in science and technology, late to productivity, and late to development. These, of course, are not virtues that any well-meaning people should be proud of.

#### **4. Inter-communal Relationships / Hermeneutic Recreation**

A systematic appraisal of the various African cultural values would show a dramatic but consistent link to that central value: the *sense of communality*, and by extension, to the enhancement of inter-communal relationships. The sense of communality and the norms originating thereof seem to encapsulate every single acceptable, important, workable and right standard that is common to traditional peoples. The communal spirit engenders a high sense of *respect for authority and the elders* since elders and those in authority positions are custodians of communal life and culture; it stimulates a *polychronous conception of time* where social duties and human relations are not sacrificed on the altar of clock time punctuality; and it propels a sense of *good human relations* since communality as a way of life is emphatically centered on 'humane living' which is characterized by selflessness and care for others.

Furthermore, the African *sense of communality* encourages a high sense of *the sacredness of life* such that in the event of, for instance murder, the antithesis of caring, not only was the culprit executed, his entire family was made to pass through an excruciating process of ritual purification as a deterrent; it is as a result of *communality* that whenever there was food to be eaten, everyone present was invited to participate even if the food was prepared for far less number of people without anticipating the arrival of visitors (sense of hospitality); that religion was seen as an integral and inseparable part of the entire culture (sense of the sacred and of religion); and that speaking a language, does not depend on the peripheral knowledge of the language but on the ability to express oneself adequately in the proverbs, riddles and idioms which are determined by the culture of the community (sense of language and proverbs). Hence, depending on the angle of evaluation, all the cultural values could be appreciated as footnotes to the African sense of communality.

The sense of communality, as thus elucidated, undoubtedly promotes conviviality and openness in relationship between people at the intra-communal level. No other single quality in any culture's value system can be adjudged as more beneficial in terms of encouraging positive intra-communal relations. But this does not mean that, together with other allied values, the African sense of communality has no side effects that, contrary to what have been espoused above, hinder effective relations amongst diverse communities in Nigeria. Among which are bribery, cheating/corruption, slack in productivity, cut-gullet individualism, political instability, communal crises and abuse of power. A detail of these can be found in the monograph by Ogbujah, C. and Opara, C. (2014): *The Idea of Personhood in Nigeria: Implications for National Development*.

Central among the problems created by African traditional values is the question of ethnic and religious bigotry. While the sense of communality, for instance, promotes a high level of intra-communal relations, it does not encourage much of inter-communal affairs. The drive for affection and humane living are often limited to members of one's immediate community at the micro level. The communities being populated by members of traceable blood relations see themselves as power blocks which compete for scarce resources. Irrespective of

how long and how well an individual has assimilated into another community, the indigenes often treat him with suspect, and in most cases, do quickly denounce him at the slightest provocation. The much quoted confrontational pronouncements of Fani-Kayode (2013) with regard to insinuations to the contrary are very apt:

Lagos and the South-west are the land and the patrimony of the Yoruba and we will not allow anyone, no matter how fond of them we may be, to take it away from us or share it with us in the name of "being nice", "patriotism", "one Nigeria" or anything else.

This mindset is archetypal of most people entrenched in the struggle for, and protection of the patrimony of their immediate communities. Beyond the immediate community, there is neither love-lost, nor consideration of the needs of others even within the same enclave. Thus, whether in political representations, resource sharing or citing of development projects, members of individual communities within the Nigerian spectrum band together to outwit each other.

The recurrent communal crises in many parts of the country are frequently traceable to some form of irrational ideological banding of members of specific communities against each other. It led to the truncating of the first republic through a coup led mostly by Igbo army officers; which was followed by a counter reprisal coup by Hausa/Fulani officers. After which many of the Igbo living in the north were massacred in tens of thousands. This eventually led to the attempted secession of the Igbo from the Nigerian mainstream that gave rise to the horrendous civil war in which more than two million lives were lost. Ever since then, there have been countless inter-ethnic, inter-communal recriminations that have led to wars in virtually all parts of the country. Prominent among which include the Umuleri/Aguleri crisis in the East; the Urhobo/Ijaw crisis, Emuoha/Ogbakiri or Okrika/Ogoni crises in the South; the Ife/Modakeke crisis of the West; and the Hausa/Fulani crisis in the North. These are but tiny instances of how the much cherished *sense of communality* has, on the contrary created ideological demagoguery that truncates every effort at inter-communal relations.

Furthermore, the *sense of respect for authority and the elders* admittedly helped in the maintenance of law and order in tribal societies, as well as engendered the creation of some form of social security for the aged. But this form of uncritical respect for authority and elders has become anachronistic and as such is at odds with the modern man's quest for due process and accountability. In modern Nigerian society, there seems to be a disconnect between those who cling to the age-long tradition expressed earlier by Conton that even when there is nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hairs have earned him right to courtesy, and those who insist, like Davidson (1969) and Onwubiko (1991), on the 'complementary roles of the old and the young in the life and affairs of the community' noting that a person lost his right to exact obedience once he abused his office. Such disconnect has created identity and personality crises which have hyped as salutary the 'cult of personalities'.

The phenomenon of 'personality cult' or 'Hero praise-singing' which has bedeviled the Nigerian polity is an offshoot of a bizarre sense of respect for authority and the elders. When a cultural value guards a people to recognize all authority as coming from God and sanctioned by the infallible clout of the ancestors, it becomes increasingly difficult not to accept the will of claimants to power as divinely inspired. So, in spite of naked corruption, inefficiency and megalomaniacal attitude of those in authority positions, people sing their praises, not only for obvious quantifiable material gains that accrue from it, but because doing so is supposedly in consonance with a traditional wisdom: *onye too eze, eze eru ya-aka*, i.e., he who praises/honours a king, will surely receive his own kingship. In this scenario, individuals become more important and more powerful than structures. Institutions are run not by laid down rules and principles, but by the vacillating will of authority figures who perhaps, seem to feel belittled if they were to continue with programmes of their predecessors. In the end what do the public get? - A myriad of abandoned projects all over the country.

Among the outlined cultural values, there isn't any as ambivalent and creating conflict for inter-relationships as the African sense of time. Granted that a polychronic understanding of time gives room for a simultaneous combination of activities, does it not concomitantly offer opportunity for some sort of elasticity that does not care much about punctuality? If there is no correlation, why, in practical life situations are Africans generally noted for tardiness? What is largely responsible for the uncomplimentary understanding of the 'African time'?

The mounted denials and equivocations of some apologists to African values do not attract sympathy from anyone seriously engaged in systematic mode of evaluations. As opposed to monochronic perception which lives man constantly in pursuit of time-bound targets, polychronic conception leaves him a master of time and events. Here, man controls time and not otherwise and as such, whenever time man arrives at an event, is when



it starts. This is a plausible argument especially if man is understood in the generic sense of humanity that structures time categories: everything occurs at a time defined by human classification. But when understood in terms of individual affiliations to time, then man cannot be the master of time without creating a chaotic and frenzied society. A world of seven billion people would have seven billion masters of time with little or no regard for inter-communal relationships.

The attitude of tardiness among many Nigerians thus, could be explained as a consequence of a misapplication of the understanding of the generic man being the master of time to include idiosyncratic leverage of individual men and women to determine things in their own way, even when they must, of necessity, interact with others in the society. If communal events are to be organized; if business transactions are to occur; if humans have to battle nature to create opportunities for growth, productivity and wellbeing, then targets must be set, appointments must be met, and time of action cannot be left in the hands of every individual actor. Leaving time at the discretion of every individual makes room for lack of punctuality to appointments and events, and in consequence, lost opportunities. A Ghanaian writer (2004) observed:

One of the main reasons for the continuing underdevelopment of our country is our nonchalant attitude to time and the need for punctuality in all aspects of life. The problem of punctuality has become so endemic that lateness to any function is accepted and explained off as 'African time...until there is a paradigm shift in our attitude towards time, all our efforts at development will be futile and only stopgap results will be achieved.

This is a common experience in virtually all sub-Sahara Africa. It is not uncommon to walk into a government ministry, department or parastatal one hour after the approved scheduled time for work resumption without seeing anybody in the office. And this is even worse among some educated elites since the 'big man' is expected to show up last in any public function. Thus, the higher one goes up in social ladder, the less punctual one becomes, or so it seems.

The fact that human life is finite, with limited time-frame to pursue its lofty ideals makes it imperative on us to be punctual in dealing with appointments. In its linear progression, time waits for nobody; we wait for time. The Latin would say – *fugit irreparabile tempus, singula dum capti circumvectamur amore*, which means, 'time flies irretrievably, while we wander around, prisoners of our love of detail.' This is a reality which no culture or nationality can reject without doing so at its own peril. For us in Nigeria to assume in this 21<sup>st</sup> century that time is at a standstill and moves only when we design it fit to move, would be the height of psychotic delusion reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*. In daily practical living, an employee's lateness could affect a production line that can knock off the supply value of a company in a competitive economy. Punctuality is a virtue that can push Nigeria out of the present state of poverty, deprivation and economic comatose. Thus, even though we live in a polychronic society, until citizens make timekeeping an absolute requirement for social interactions, we would continue to flounder in underdevelopment and in all the attendant ills, thereby making inter-personal and inter-communal relations very odious.

## 5. Conclusion

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have tried to identify the meaning of cultural value and what constitutes African cultural values. We saw that the various cultural values are, in one way or another, postscripts to that cardinal value – *sense of communality*. And we were able to appreciate how much these values have contributed to unity, cohesiveness and some sort of superlative social bonding that are in themselves ingredients of positive intra-communal relations. For these, everyone would not only acclaim the wisdom of the ancients in nurturing the values, but would crave for their sustainability in the future.

However, owing to the vicissitudes of life and the ever changing dynamics of social existence, a nostalgic attachment to some of these values would both be unrealistic and retrogressive. Specific realities engender specific attitudes, values and norms, and specific norms elicit specific behaviours. When realities that give rise to values which determine specific forms of behaviour change, and individuals/groups continue to relish the (now) obsolete values, the consequences would be identity crises, application of wrong solutions to problems, and a loss of touch with reality. In traditional Africa, Davidson (1969: 57) for instance, noticed that 'balance of kingship relations, seen as essential to the ideal balance with nature that was itself the material guarantee of survival, called for specific patterns of conduct.' One of such patterns of conduct is that individuals might have rights, but only by virtue of the obligations they fulfilled to the community. This, of course, goes contrary to free enterprise individualistic model of the West (that modern Africa has embraced) which supposes that communities have rights only by virtue of the obligations they fulfil to the individuals. Lost in the midst of these

differing ideologies, the African experiences identity crisis, which neither improves productivity nor increases inter-communal harmony.

Furthermore, there is no gainsaying that in earlier times of human existence, closeness to nature, the experience of life in dreadfully hazardous situations, the need for security and improved performance in means of livelihood are some of the key forces that band together to intensify the natural impulse for conviviality and *sense of communality* among different African peoples (Ejizu). Now that most of these factors have been made redundant by new dynamics of social relationships, how much relevance would the values arising thereof be for the contemporary African? An appraisal of this nature therefore, is aimed not to disparage the cultural values of our people that have rich and beautiful meaning-contents, and have fostered peace and unity among specific groups from time long past, but to elicit a renewed dialogue about their significance to inter-communal conflicts, religious and ethnic bigotry, nepotism, bribery/corruption and a host of other social malaise that bedevil contemporary Nigeria, and indeed, modern Africa as a whole.

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