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**MULTI-CULTURALISM
AND THE CHALLENGES OF ADVANCEMENT
IN POST-MODERN NIGERIA IN JUXTAPOSITION
WITH WORLD BEST PRACTICES**

Introduction

Scholars and intellectuals alike have come to the conclusion that there are three (3) main world cultures which are the Asian/oriental culture- the Mongolian race, the western or European culture- the Caucasoid race and the African culture- the Negroid race . (Cornwall, 1960:3) If the above is true and accepted as creditable then it means that the African culture is one of the major cultures of the world and it then does not follow that Africa is a dark and wretched continent. (Fanon, 1981) As mentioned above, this erroneous impression is principally due to the bias and sentiment bone against the African. Africa has been the most negatively portrayed as a backward continent. The contention that Africa is an uncivilised continent is a very erroneous impression because civilization involves the existence of cultural values, traditions, norms, values, taboos, do's and don'ts and a deep respect for human life. Thus, this enquiry would delve into an examination of the under listed cultural and traditional enterprises: viz.

culture, tradition, ancestral worships, new yam festivals, the significance of naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies and burial ceremonies, taboos, etc. This paper will assume that the reader is not so familiar with all of the phrases and terminologies that would be recurrent in this study. So to do a plausible job, it would be expedient to attempt a conceptual analysis.

Africa was discovered a long time ago, in the time of the Portuguese explorers who frequently embarked on voyages around the globe, but the contact and exploitation of Africa began when the industrial revolution occurred in Europe: the modern era of human evolution. (Boahen, 2000: 102) The use of machines was discovered along with the discovery that these machines needed lubricants to make them work or perform continually. The continent has a well organised system of socio-political operation. (Ibid, 17) It must be mentioned that Africans did not live or exist as brutes or salvages. Hence the impression and position that Africa is the wretched of the earth or a dark continent is biased and completely erroneous. Africans and Africa was characterised by industry, peaceful co-existence, civilization socio-political stability etc. having stated this it will be would be scholarly to furnish a working definition of the salient concepts mentioned above.

Culture defined

Culture has been referred to in different ways by different scholars and intellectuals but there is a definition which appears to be timeless and cross-cultural and this is the definition that maintains that culture can be referred to as *the sum total way of life of a group of people*. To simply state that culture is the way of life of any group of people does not paint an adequate picture of what culture is but to say that it is the *sum total way of life* will go a long way in suggesting what the concept is all about. Many scholars often assume that everyone comprehends the meaning of the term culture and therefore do not deem it fit to carry out a conceptual examination of the concept of culture whenever they embark on a discursive of the term culture. This is, however, not the case

because when some people are asked to define or describe culture they end up describing something other than culture. Those that try in their attempts end up defining tradition or norms and values. Such people find it difficult to describe or define what culture is, they find it difficult to paint a true picture of what culture is. Such readers and scholars will find it difficult to compare and contrast culture from tradition, and as far as they are concerned culture and tradition is one and the same thing. This is not true in the least. Hence this study will assume that the reader is hearing of the word-culture, for the very first time. Thus, this humble attempt at defining or describing of culture as follows that culture translates to the way a people do the following which is regarded as their sum total way of life: the way they eat, their peculiar delicacy, their festivals, ancestral beliefs and worship, folktales, dance, dress, songs, greeting, the way they inter-relate, their view of life-existence, the way they worship, in fact the way they live their everyday life etc. and all of these amount to culture. (Ibid, :82) in Nigeria, for instance, the way the Yoruba people greet in a different way from the way the Igbo people greet their comrades. The Hausa man of northern Nigeria dresses in a very different way from the way the Bini man of southern Nigeria dresses. The delicacy of the Bini man differs from the delicacy of the Yoruba or Uhrobo man of Nigeria.

Culture reveals itself in the everyday life of a people and of individuals. A cultural man or individual is one that has an organised way of behaviour and conduct of everyday life. The individual or group adheres strictly to this given practices until such a time that, that kind of living becomes obsolete. The above assertion therefore implies that culture is individualistic as well as communalistic. If there are three major tribes or ethnic groups in Nigeria then the diversity of culturalism can be imagined. Be that as it may, there are well over seventy (70) tribes or ethnic groups in Nigeria. (TVC News, 2016) Hence anyone who concludes that Nigeria is culturally blessed has not made a wrong or blind statement. Sociologists do well in focusing on studying the everyday practices and life of a people no matter how atomic these practices are. (Onwuejeogwu, 1975: iv) It would also not be out of place if anyone were to suggest that culture is relative, hence, it could be concluded that there is cultural relativity. Culture is a

people and a people are culture- there is no peoples without a culture no matter how primitive or advanced. (Abanuka, 1994: 36) Culture is the starting point of civilization and civilization must not be misconstrued for modernity or westernization, as this is often the case when some people attempt to conceptualise civilization.

Meaning of tradition

It has been the case that many people misconstrue culture and tradition to be the same. This position is not true at all. These two are very different enterprises. One transcends the other; one is much deeper than the other although they have very close areas of nexus or relativity. Some people say culture when they actually mean tradition. To understand what tradition is it would be expedient to attempt an adumbrated description of the term tradition. Roughly, tradition can be referred to as the established way or practice of life of a group of people that has been passed down from one generation to the other which must have survived at least four (4) or five (5) generations. A generation in this sense can be regarded as 100 years (one hundred years). In other words, for any practice to be regarded as tradition, it/they must have existed for up to four (4) hundred or five (5) hundred years and above. Tradition is multi-generational unlike culture which is an everyday affair which might not survive even a decade. (See Lauer, 2003)

Tradition determines the origin or decent of a people. It can also be defined as the laid down practices passed down by the forefathers or ancestors. Traditional practices are well established, recognised and accepted by every generation that follows in the strides of their forefathers. Tradition includes those affairs that do not necessarily occur on a daily basis: they are not everyday practices rather they occur at given at given times or periods, such as naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, burial ceremonies, ancestral worships, festivals etc. (Ibid. Abanuka, :49)

Culture and tradition juxtaposed

It has been stated above that culture and tradition are not one and the same. In fact, they are two different concepts describing almost the same entity; hence, anyone can be pardoned if they misconstrue one for the other. Although both of them describe the practices and conducts of a group of people there are areas of divergence and areas of convergence. It would be prudent to attempt a comparative analysis of these two having pointed out that they are not the same. To this end, a tabular comparison would suffice as an adequate attempt. So the distinctive qualities of tradition will be enumerated and discussed and then that of culture will follow.

Tradition and culture compared

1. For tradition to be it must have existed for at least four (4) generations; it must have survived for four (4) hundred years, consistently, before it can be recognised and accepted by the people who practice them. Culture does not have to survive this long before it can be regarded as culture.

2. Tradition is relative but not subjective or individualistic as culture is. Traditional practices affect and concern everyone who shares the same belief system. It is not relative or related to one single person/individual. If it concerns a community then the entire community recognises and accepts it as their conventional way of their lives. In the case of culture it involves the everyday living of the single individual or the entire community or society. Culture could be relative to an individual or a few groups of individuals or the entire community. Tradition is not relative to an individual or person but to the sundry society.

3. Tradition is often very rigid and not easy to change or abandon unless the entire community decides, after some rigorous and slow consideration, that it is in the best interest of the community to change or redefine. In many cases it is impossible to change or abandon completely. For tradition, to change or be abandon, it often involves a revolution since it often meets some very serious

and vehement resistance. This is not always the case as far as culture is concerned. Many individuals and communities jettison their cultural practices and imbibe new ones as they see fit, especially as the evolutionary dynamism affects them. They can easily conclude that this is their new way of life as it now suits them better and make life for them more convenient.

4. Traditional practices do not occur on a daily basis; they are not part of our everyday lives. For example, a man does not marry every day, a child is not named every day of his life, a man is not bury everyday etc. traditional practices have specific periods and times they occur, some occur annually, some bi-annually and other quarterly etc. This is where culture is different from tradition because cultural practices consist of our everyday activities. We eat every day, we inter-relate every day, we dress every day, we greet everyday etc.

5. Traditional practices have definite principles; they have procedures, they have laid down rules and regulations. The people do not perform traditionally the way they see fit; they do it the way their fathers before them did it and their fathers' fathers before them. Traditional practices are not performed to "fulfil all righteousness". It is either the entire *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* is adopted or not and will not be regarded as acceptable. For instance, in traditional burials rights certain requirements must be met otherwise the burial will be postponed or cancelled. Culture does not have any hard and fast rule especially as it can concern an individual or few group(s) of individuals. A person or group of individuals can decide to add spice to their cultural way of dressing or dancing, singing, folktales etc. but no single individual can alter the givens of tradition

6. Tradition is closely related to religion in many ways than one because it has to do with the acceptance, recognition and respectability of conducts and practices peculiar to a group of people. The adherence to traditional dictates greatly resembles the dictates of religion. No one worships God or any god according to his taste and conviction or convenience but strictly according to the standard requirements the belief system. It is regarded as a taboo or abomination when and where any or some traditional or religious principles are ignored or abandoned. Traditional or religious practices are to be passionately and infi-

nately conducted otherwise it amounts to pseudo- tradition or religion. As far as culture is concerned this does not happen

7. Tradition is recognised, respected and accepted by one generation and the next generation in line, and it is capable of relativity; it is capable of having strong resemblance with other traditions. For instance, in Nigeria, the marriage requirement in one community or land greatly resembles the requirement of marriage in other cultures. In fact, Naming, Marriage, and Burial ceremonies in Africa, in general, and Nigeria in particular are traditions common to all cultures. (Oladipo, 2000: 180) It is difficult in Africa or Nigeria to find a people who do not have these mentioned practices as standard norms and values. The only thing is that there are “slight” variations as far as each community is concerned when it comes to traditional issues.

Norms and values in traditional Nigeria

Nigeria is a highly traditional society despite the fact that modernity and westernization has eaten deep into the fabrics of her land and peoples. Many African societies, with particular emphasis on Nigeria, have so many unique qualities that make her and her people highly respected within and without her territories. Besides being traditional the Nigerian nation is very religious, and this accounts for the communitarian and decorous spirit that guide their actions or conducts, and this in turn makes them stand out where ever they go or find themselves.

The traditional Nigerian society is one that strongly suggests that things and events do not happen at random, i.e. that things don't happen by chance. The traditional Nigerian society believes in **cause** and **effects**; whenever anything-unforeseen, happens it simply means that there is a reason for such occurrence. There are traditional ways of determining why and how things and events occur. As far as they are concerned there must be a root cause of all events and occurrences. Besides, the existence of deities, gods, ancestors, forefathers, re-incarnation, the world beyond, taboos, dos and don'ts are all realities that an

average traditional Nigerian cannot feign ignorance of. Certain conducts and actions are considered as forbidden and immoral and any one or person(s) who live their lives in this fashion are regarded as misfits and societal nuisance. In traditional Nigeria a good name—a value merited, is far preferred to riches or materialism. A person's integrity, personality and moral rectitude are what determine whether or not a person should be recognised and respected among his people. Some of these traditional values include the following: *Respect, Honesty, Justice, Kindness, solidarity, liberty and Love-Charity, truth* (See Iroegbu, 2000) etc. each of these qualities will be examined at some length one after the other.

Respect

In traditional Nigeria, Respect is a virtue, and as a virtue, it cannot be compromised no matter what. For anyone to be respected translates to the fact that the person has lived a life worthy being accorded respect. This respect does not come because of the person's wealth or position but purely out of his/her moral conduct. This question therefore is, what kind of life has this person been living and is such life worthy of recognition and respect? What is this person's moral rectitude and what is the level of his integrity? As far as traditional Nigeria is concerned, the elderly are those who are considered to have duly paid their dues and as a result they deserve respect especially from the young ones who would one day become elders. A good name, in many traditional Nigerian societies, is preferred to wealth—riches. Pride and arrogance is loathed in traditional Nigerian communities. In fact it is not one of those qualities inherent in the society's cultural heritage. If an old man walks in to a gathering in the society is customary for the young ones to quickly get up and offer the old a seat and everyone treats and regard him with respect especially when he talks or make contribution(s) to the debate or discussion at hand. For example, among the Esan people those who live vicious and immoral lives do not often grow to have grey hairs. Old age and grey hair depicts and elicits respect. By and large, respect is a virtue while immorality and viciousness means disrespect and dishonour.

Honesty

A cultural norm inherent in the traditional Nigerian society is Honesty. Honesty is one cultural practice that is attributed to men of great integrity. Men of integrity and honesty are highly respected and their life styles are encouraged and recommended to the young ones that are up coming and most probably take over when the honest elderly ones must have completed their journeys or stay on earth and passed on. A man or woman who says things the way they are or should be, without prejudice, is considered incorruptible, blunt and straight forward. Virtue is considered more valuable than material wealth/ riches. Every parent(s) is expected to bring up their offspring morally, teaching them the virtues of honesty and respect. In traditional Nigeria, honest people are regarded as self-disciplined people whose moral rectitude cannot be influenced by money or any other kind of material consideration. Honest people are often decorous people and such virtue is what makes their society respected and recognised at all times.

Justice

Mbiti has rightly concluded that "I am because we are and we are because I am" (Mbiti, 1960: 3)

There is no room for individualism in traditional Nigeria. It is **one for all and all for one**. This very powerful disposition is one virtue that keeps the society together. The injustice meted out to anyone is considered injustice meted to the entire society. The people believe that injustice result in one kind of injustice or the other to the society. The society does not allow the treatment of anyone as inferior or being marginalised, in any and every sense of the word, maltreatment, except off course the person's moral rectitude is seriously under question or in doubt. As far as the traditional Nigerian society is concerned all men are equal and the same. What is due for Mr. A is equally due for Mr. B. no matter his height, size, roots, colour, religion, wealth, position or orientation.

The socio-political structure of traditional Nigeria is one that is built on equity, equality and justice.

It is worthy of note to state here that the system of government customary to Nigeria and many other African nations is monarchy, and in many cases it is absolute monarchy that is practiced among the African people. It is often a situation where the Rex has absolute powers to make laws and in most cases he is the law himself. (Appadorai, 1982: 23) Anyone who derails is wiped back into line with severe sanctions. These sanctions are severe because they serve as deterrents. Ultimately, the knowledge of the existence of stiff sanctions helps keep everyone in line and in obedience. Besides the powers of the monarch is considered divine and unquestionable since they have been handed down by God himself. The Rex erect laws that do not witch hunt anyone except they step out of line. What is good for the goose is equally good for the gander. Like others, discussed above, Justice is a virtue. Hobbes could have given this recommendation if he were talking from an understanding of human nature, like described by Ukagba

Political Philosophers explain to us the relevance of a theory
Of human nature for a theory about how best to organise
society. For one thing, the theory of human nature establishes
the possibility of organizing humans as the theory proposes...
for another thing, a theory of Human nature both suggests goals
for a future world order and can be used in part to establish the
desirability of the futuristic society. (Ukagba, 2013: 39)

Kindness

Like others discussed above, “kindness” is one of the most prominent features which characterise traditional Nigerian as a communitarian society. The act or conduct of kindness is perceived as a virtue which only responsible and respectable individuals possess. It is seen as an instrument of unity and strength.

Hence, it confirms the brotherhood motto which holds that “united we stand and divided we fall”. Kindness is interpreted as a rational and compassionate quality which stands tall any time anywhere.

Kindness is the tenderness of the human heart which sets him apart from other creatures or beings. It is that quality which awakens the individual to the fact that he exists with other creatures or beings, and man is one of these. If this were anything to go by then what Heidegger asserts is true when he says that Dasein is a being unto others: a being-unto-others and a being-with- others. (Heidegger, 1967: 4) Kindness requires lending a helping hand to others who are in need of one form of assistance or the other. It has been contested that there is no human community where kindness is not regarded as a virtue. If this is also true then it would be barbaric and wicked for anyone to contend that that Africa is a dark and empty continent. Among the esan people of Nigeria, and in many other peoples of Nigeria, kindness tends to help eliminate most of the inadequacies and shortcomings in the society. It bridges the gap between the rich and the poor. It is the chance given to the down trodden to find their feet and become like other fellow human beings.

Love – charity

Love is often equated with kindness but that impression is not wholly correct because kindness and love have some variations that set them apart. Kindness is a disposition that can be interpreted in material or token ways while love transcends this in many more ways than one. For one, love might be a purely psychological phenomenon. Care should however be observed in the attempt to distinguish between kindness and love because both have many areas of resemblance. Kindness can mean accommodating and tolerating others when there is no tangible reason to do so, but this is not always true about love. The show of Love comes in diverse ways a great deal of this is psychological and otherwise. True love cannot be withdrawn unlike kindness that can be withdrawn when occasions demands it. Love continues even if the one loving is suffering untold

discomfort from the one he/she loves. If the love is withdrawn due to discomfort then such love does not fall under the category of love known as agape love, which is the purest kind of love. Hence pure love is said not to expect or demand for anything in return. Love in traditional Nigeria involves going the extra mile and being there for all especially those that are not close to you or those who even hate and despise you. This is the kind of love that Jesus had for mankind when he died on the cross of Calvary. Kindness can quickly disappear or deteriorate and become hostility or apathy. The kind of love that exists among traditional Nigerians is the one described in the book of second Corinthians 13:1-end. Agape Love involves expressing genuine concern over his neighbour's predicament and seeking selfless ways of finding solution to them and not merely expressing solidarity over the situation. It goes far beyond that, it means sharing and feeling the pains of your neighbour or those you claim to love even if means suffering inconveniences as a result of trying to empathetic. Those who do not know or are not familiar with the ways of traditional Nigeria might find it very difficult, if not impossible; to digest the fact that true love exists among the indigenous people of Nigeria

The dialectics of traditional Nigeria resemble the dialectics of many African societies and most times they surpass some other world cultures-worldviews. Aspects of traditions in Africa transcend mere practices and norms, they are like the dialectics of (ATR-African Traditional Religion)¹⁸ (Osuntokun, 2002: 134-143) Tradition and religion has a very powerful hold the people, in traditional Nigeria, in particular, and in traditional Africa in general. Hence, the three (3) selected traditional practices which will be discussed hereunder will (largely) create a ground for the juxtaposition between practices by other world conducts. This exposition will prove whether or not Nigeria can be referred to as a multi-cultural state that is as civilized as any other civilized society or group of people. Any set of people that has a well-organized system of socio-political and economic structure is one that should be considered civilized.

Truth

Of all the values mentioned and discussed above, truth is considered to be the greatest of them all. If anyone were to possess all of the virtues above but lack truth then such a person cannot be regarded as a virtuous individual. As far as the Esan people of Nigeria are concerned truth is the foundation upon which the superstructure of the social life of the people is built. For the Esan people, truth amounts to furtherance, peace, friendship, interpersonal relationship, justice, progress, development and advancement, kindness, love, etc. The Esan man expects that when his neighbour says "Good Morning" then it should turn out that the day is morning and not afternoon or evening, nothing more, nothing less. Any individual who is not truthful is always regarded with suspicion whether or not he has not conducted himself in a vicious manner at any particular time. If he is known to be a liar or untruthful then he belongs to the category of those who should never be trusted. He is known as a compromise to continuous existence of the society. One reason that can cause a man to be despised in Esan culture is the virtue of truth. Truth is one feature that the traditional Nigerian society consider an eternal virtue and a tool with which a people can build a moral and descent society which is free from immorality and sin. Truth is a virtue which the adults especially those who have come off age teach and pass onto the upcoming generation. Hence, the average traditional Nigerian values his integrity and image more than any material possession. He that thrives in truth is considered one that will live long because truth is life. He who tells the truth is he who lives long to have grey hair and see old age. Such an individual deserves respect and recognition. Thus, he who tells the truth all the time no matter the situation is he who has life-quality life. (Pa. Alade: 2016) Truth is life, truth is prosperity, truth is the light, truth is the way, truth is progress, truth is wealth, truth is virtue, truth is fulfilment. Everything is truth and truth is everything.

Having highlighted the features of truth, I will examine three (3) major traditions that point to the civilization of Nigeria, in particular and Africa in general. These practices even reveal that Africa is much more organized and

civilized than other cultures regarded as world cultures. These practices will be discussed alongside the significance and rationalization of these accepted norms. These (3) three significant aspects of the peoples inter-relational activities add value to the seemingly complex and mysterious existence of life-man.

Naming ceremonies and its significance

First and foremost, a woman is not considered to have given birth if the baby has not cried at birth. The husband of such a woman cannot go and announce to the world that his wife has given birth. The nurses and mid wives do everything conventionally possible to ensure that the baby cries before the woman is seen to have delivered/given birth. In traditional Nigeria, it is an abnormality if a new born child does not cry at birth. The parents will not celebrate or rejoice that they have a new baby in the family. A child that doesn't cry at birth is not regarded as a normal child like every child that will grow up to be a normal human being. To this end, the parent(s) of the baby try all they can to ensure that the baby cries, like a normal child at birth, otherwise they would be quiet about the delivery of the child, maintaining that the woman has not delivered until the issue is resolved and if they cannot resolve it then the child will not be accepted in to the house.

The birth or arrival of a new born child is seen as the greatest blessing God-Osanobua, can give to those whom he loves. It marks the fruitfulness and success of the marriage contract, and most families celebrate elaborately in this regard. It is an imperative that the baby be named at a given period after some days of birth. In many traditional Nigerian societies the baby is named after 8 (eight) days of birth. The day of the naming ceremony is considered a very special day in the lives of the parent(s) and the entire family. This day is the day the baby is given a permanent identity-a name, it is also the day the child is formally welcomed into the family and community. Prominent members of the family and community are present to witness or participate in the christening of the child. The time of the day in Bini and Esan culture is between 4 and 6 pm of

the appointed day. It is also of significance if some consumable items are presented for the naming ceremony and some of these items include salt, honey, kola nut, yams, oil, etc. In the Esan culture the items provided by the parent(s) during the naming ceremony all have one significant meaning or the other. For example, the salt symbolizes that the child will never be left out of the scheme of important events just like the salt cannot be left out from cooking otherwise the food will not be tasty and desirable. The honey stands for sweetness; that the life of the child should always be sweet and devoid of bitterness and regret, no one tastes honey and spits it out of his/her mouth. In the traditional Esan society the yam signifies the fruits of the womb; kola nut depicts life, while oil signifies peace and fullness of life.

It is also worthy of note to state that all names in traditional Nigeria have on significance or the other. There is hardly ever any traditional society in Nigeria that gives names that have no meaning or relevance to any event in the family or society. For instance, Bini names are mostly parables describing events and occurrences that transpired at one particular period or the other. They also give names that glorify God, deities etc. Some of such names are “Omorotinomwan” which philosophically means “that one’s child is his/her closest sibling, “Omoyemwen” meaning “I love children,” “notalelomwan” meaning “he that gossips others is gossiped by others as well.” “Izogie” means “that which was merely/playfully said becoming reality” etc. in the same Bini culture some names are given and these names acknowledge the awesomeness, mercies, etc. of God. Names like “Osaretin”, “Iwinosa” “Osaivbie”, “Osarienrien” “Osaigbovo” “Osamuyimen” “Osahon” etc. “Osaretin” meaning “God is power”, “Iwinosa” meaning “the work of God”, “Osaivbie” meaning “God doesn’t Sleep especially when you need him”, “Osarienrien” meaning “God is sweet”, “Osaigbovo” meaning God is Never jealous”, “Osamuyimen”, meaning “God has honoured me” and “Osahon” meaning “God hears and answers prayers” etc. By and large, the truth is that there is no name given in the traditional Nigerian community that is meaningless. Any traditional Nigerian name is one that has one significant meaning or the other relating to one event or occurrence or the other. The na-

me is a sort of prayer against one occurrence or event or the other that has or will happen.

Marriage ceremonies and its significance

It is often said that there are three most important days in a man's (person's) life: the day he was born, the day he gets married and the day he dies and out of these three (3) days, the day he gets married is only day he knows or is conscious of. A man is only told of the events which transpired the day he was born because he was not old enough to comprehend the events as they unfolded: and he is never conscious of the day he dies, save the day he gets married, it is only on this day that he is fully conscious, many conclude that it is the most happiest day of his life. The day a man/woman gets married is regarded as the most important day of his/her life. It is not only significant because s/he finds a mate, a companion or a soul mate but a day he is more or less conscripted into manhood for the male and the female into womanhood.

This is considered by many as an important aspect of human existence. A marriage rite in traditional Nigeria is one event that is very, very important among the people if order and decorum were to remain and keep the community together. A man cannot regard or call a woman his wife unless and until he pays her dowry. It is then and only then that he can call the woman his wife because she is legally his. As far as traditional Nigeria is concerned the dowry serves as the bound between the man and the woman who eventually become man and wife. The *ceremony* is only the beginning of the marriage. In traditional Nigeria the love between man and woman is only to be consummated after the traditional rites have been performed. It then and only then that both the man and woman can be regarded as husband and wife, otherwise they would best refer to themselves as the "father" or "mother" of my children or unborn children, as the case may be, or better still "my woman" or "my man" or in the contemporary times as "my mistress"/ "my male or man friend".

It is a taboo if two people were to be together, raise children and live together if they have not being formally joined together in matrimony. The woman would be considered a failure and disappointment that has brought shame upon her entire family especially her father. She would have no place in her father's house nor can she take part in any activity-ceremonies, or festivals that concern the father or the mother, e.g. she will not be allowed to participate in the burial ceremony of the father or mother, and when this happens she will no longer be recognised by the family or community as a member of the family/community. Besides, a woman is dignified by the fact that she is lawfully and legally married. "...a girl becomes a woman and is initiated into womanhood or society the day the traditional marriage which includes the payment of her bride price is done." (Edogiawerie, 2010: 166) No matter the achievements or success of a woman in the traditional Africa/Nigeria, she is nothing/no one without her husband or a man who stands as the crown upon her head, despite all that she has achieved. The Esan people, for instance, consider all the success and achievements of a woman as meaningless if she is not a married or under the authority of man. The woman is not respected, recognised or honoured if she were single. By and large, respect, recognition comes full circle if her marriage were blessed by children.

Burial ceremony and its significance

As stated before at the onset, the traditional African/ Nigerian society believes strongly in causality: cause and effect. Put differently, nothing happens without a cause or something being responsible for an occurrence or event. For example, if an owl cries at night and a baby dies the next morning, the owl is believed to have caused the death of the child. To back up this position, the traditional Nigerian society strongly believes in the existence of the spirit world or better still, the world of the spirits or the ancestors-forefathers. As far as the average traditional Africa/ Nigerian is concerned, man is not the only being in

existence, in fact there are other beings other than man in existence is one that is strongly acknowledged.

To this end, Africans/Nigerians believe that there is a well organised hierarchy of beings. Some beings exist above the realm of men while others exist below the realm of men: some beings are higher on the hierarchy, while others are lower on the hierarchy. At the very top of this hierarchy is the Supreme Being God-Osanobua- for the Esans, Osanobua for the Binis, Chineke-for the Igbos etc. After the Supreme Being are the ancestors or the living dead-the forefathers/spirit beings. It is possible for man to behold at all the Supreme Being. Also the ordinary man cannot behold Spirits Beings save the Chief Priest, Priest or the Keeper of the ancestral realm. The forefathers serve as the link between man and the Supreme Being. Below the ancestors is man-the Mortal being. Below man are lowers beings like animals and plants and such other beings that have *vitae force*, while inanimate objects occupy the lowest level of this hierarchy because they have very little or no force. (Omoregbe, 1991: 20) The truth about this hierarchy is that the higher the position on the hierarchy the higher *vitae force*, when Henri Bergson referred to as *élan vitae*. Since God occupies the highest position the hierarchy, after no other being, then he possesses the highest powers or force vitae.

Man maintains a dual relationship: one with the Supreme Being and the other with the ancestors. Man doesn't have any direct contact with the supreme being but has the ability to have a direct contact with the spirit world if he can harness the powers of lowers being so as to increase his force vitae which enables him ascend in to the spirit realm to communicate with the ancestors who in turn communicates with the supreme being. This ability to harness the force of lower beings is only done by those who know how to do it. Besides, the only knew men who can manipulate and commune with the gods or ancestors are the Chief priests or Priest as the case may be. His communication with the ancestors helps him to know the mind of Osanobua. It is believed that when the Supreme Being is happy or pleased with mortal man he makes things easy and smooth for him-man, but when the Supreme Being is displeased with man

what the gods do to him is better imagined because his life will be characterised by pain, regret and misery.

When a man dies, his Spirit/Soul leaves his body and goes to the spirit world or the world of the ancestors. The Bini tradition holds that when an individual dies, his soul or spirit separates from his (mortal) body and goes to the world beyond to join his ancestors before him. To join his ancestors, the individual is given a befitting burial which would signify the purification of the Soul/Spirit which has separated from the mortal or sinful body. Be that as it may, there are two types of deaths: one that marks the end of his (man) sojourn on earth and the other type is one that was abruptly truncated before the mandated time slated by Osenebula stipulates for him. The latter is considered evil caused by those who have metaphysical powers can and do often use it for wicked means.

In the Bini and Esan tradition, a man can be interred and the final burial rites postponed to another time or date. When a man is interred before the final burial rites is done it sometimes means that the children who have the responsibility to perform the rites are still under aged, or are not readily available-might live far away as at the time of death of their father/mother. This is mostly applicable to the men who pass on. In the Bini/Esan tradition, a man is said to have passed away or transited to the world beyond. It is often rare to hear a Bini or Ishan man say a relative has died.

Further, it is very pertinent that a man, especially one that has come off age, be given a befitting burial otherwise the people believe that the spirit of the man will not be allowed to join his forefathers. His spirit will continue to wander endlessly in limbo, and such spirit is often restless and angry. Hence, it is dishonour to the departed one if he is not accorded a befitting burial. A befitting burial is one that is performed and accepted by the extended family of the departed man. This extended family in Bini and Esan tradition is called and referred to as the "egbe". Any burial not approved and not witnessed by the egbe where all the required rites have been performed is a burial that has not been done. It is a taboo for the child or children of a departed individual do perform the burial rites alone without the presence or approval of the egbe. In fact, there

are consequences for that kind of atrocity is committed. The Bini/Ishan man would say “egbe e aro hiwinne ne” meaning “it is the family that the burial of a departed man is done for”. To say the least, the consequences of such an action are better imagined than experienced. In the Bini/Ishan tradition it is the egbe that the corpse is taken to and it is them that determines where and how the burial rites should be performed. (Pa. Alade, 2016)

After the burial ceremony (rites) the spirit of the department relative is accepted into the realm of the ancestors or the forefathers where his children and future generation will worship him henceforth. It is tradition requirement is the eldest son will become the custodian of the ancestral shrine. It does not matter whether or not the son is not the first son or child among the man’s children. Even if he is the last child, provided he is the man’s son. They believe that it is the voice of the male child that is heard by God in the spirit world, thus they say “urokpia erhon vberenwin.” In most cases it is the male son that performs the earth-to-earth and dust-to-dust rites before other children will follow and accord their late father the same respect that he son has given him.

In the Bini/Esan tradition the burial ceremony of a patriarch normally last for at least three to 21 (twenty-one) days. There is, however, a variation from one culture to the other. In some it is 7 (seven) days, others 14 (fourteen) days and others 21 (twenty-one) days. In cases where the burial ceremony last for 21 (twenty-one) days it simply means that the departed person was a title holder, a chief, a traditional ruler or a well-known custodian of the community’s traditions. There are activities lined up for each day during the course of the burial. In some cases the corpse is quickly interred before the rites begins and this is when the individual was very old and his corpse is not meant for everyone to see especially young ones and children. The first or eldest son must officially inform the “egbe” that his (aged) father has joined his ancestors and he would love the burial to come up at so and so time. It is not enough to assume that the “egbe” has heard even it happens that the died in their arms, he must summon a meeting through the head of the family, through the head of the “egbe” who is mostly known as the “chief” and formally report to them that their brother has passed on.

Critique

It is very difficult in the African/Nigerian society to have a situation where naming, marriage and burial ceremonies are not performed for a person or individual. These practices have been on ground even before the contact with the west-outside world. It would thus be right for one to conclude that these are aged long traditions of the people in the African continent. They consist of the sundry heritage peculiar to the traditional Nigerian society.

There is no contending the fact that a lot has changed since the African people had contact with the west. In fact a great many of the African practices have been over taken by westernization. Put differently, many African societies have been westernized but the bottomline is that the heritage of the African people still remains with the people just like the spots of a leopard remaining with the leopard for the rest of its life. It has been contended that many of the practices of the African people are archaic and barbaric and the need to do away with such practices is long overdue. There is no harm in abandoning those practices that are considered archaic and barbaric if these are found to be so but the problem lies with abandoning the entire features that make up a people. It amounts to taking away that element which makes them what and who they are.

The traditional African society is not same as the western society and hence her people must not be viewed or regarded as such. It is true that the world is always evolving and everyone must evolve with it or be left behind and this is one of the features of modernity that most people misconstrue for civilization. Modernity simply means the evolution of new ways of doing "old" things. If for instance, humans used to calculate with their brains but now rely on the electronic calculator or computer to do that it does not mean that the human brain does not function any more or that what the computer or electronic calculator now calculate is not the same with what the human brain used to calculate. What the invention of the calculator and computer has done is that they have made calculation easier and faster than before but it should not be forgotten that the human brain is the one that invented both calculator and computer.

Africans, being rational creatures, have come to realise that some traditional practices are old and obsolete and as a result jettisoned these aspects that are no longer meaningful or relevant to their heritage. Some of the practices that are considered barbaric and not in the best interest of man have been adjusted and replaced with practices that suit the evolving world.

Conclusion

In any community of people where such virtues such as respect, charity, kindness, love, hospitality, justice, honesty and truth do not exist then that kind of society will be one that is characterised by chaos and anarchy. In fact, it will not be different from the state of nature as described by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Mills. (Stumpf, 1994: 91) Life and existence in that sort of society will be exactly like Hobbes described it to be, it will be nasty, solitary, brutish, poor and short. What a life and society would that be?

Life in traditional Nigeria-Africa, is meaningful and worth living because the qualities of Justice, Truth, and Respect, etc. are qualities that the traditional society is not prepared to compromise in any way. These are held sacred no matter the situation or circumstances and if any individual or group of individuals go against or ignore these virtues it does not translate to the fact that the entire society has compromised these features. They are standards set for everyone to follow and anyone who derails is faced with some very serious sanctions. In the old days some people who are seen to have committed any sort of abomination by way of going against any of the principles of these standards are banished from the community and sometimes the banishment is for life: such an individual is never to return to that community again depending on the magnitude of the offence committed.

By and large, the traditional Nigerian community is a highly decorous one irrespective of the fact that a few renegades have decided to be less human and less Nigerians-Africans. It is not even a marvel because among the 12 (twelve) disciples of Jesus Christ, who is accepted by many as their personal lord and

Saviour, there was one who gave himself to the devil to use. If this is so then it explains the fact that there is always a Judas among and in every group and this is a fact of life that everyone should accept as a reality.

Finally, it is worthy of note to mention that the traditions of naming, marriage and burial ceremonies are activities that Nigerians-Africans are known for. It is true that every other human community give names to their children after birth but what is unique about that of the Nigerian society is that names given to a child are not given in a vacuum; they are names that have significance and memorial. Besides, the names are not given at random but given at given periods/time. For example, no meaningful activity is conducted on a particular day known as "eken" day, (Pa. Alade, 2016) it can be considered the traditional Sabbath day of traditional Nigeria. There is no going to the farm, no marriage ceremony, no burial ceremony, (Edogiawerie, 2007:132) no naming ceremony, in fact, no celebrations of any kind. The name given to a child depicts to a very large extent the mood and kind of life the child will live.

Marriage ceremonies are regarded as fulfilment especially to the individuals and their families. A man who does not take a wife is regarded as an irresponsible man while a woman who is not married to a husband is regarded as a more irresponsible woman than the man. She would not be respected by her family and by the society. She is regarded as a commodity that is available for anyone who is interested to harvest and have his way. She is more or less regarded as a liability and a whore by everyone. The dignity in marriage is in the performance of the traditional rites such as the payment of the bride price. The pride is more on the woman and her family because she is seen to have honoured herself and her family. While the man on the other hand is seen to have assumed responsibility as a man who can be relied upon by his family and the society. The traditions dictates of marriage in traditional Nigeria goes a long way to discourage promiscuity and sexual immorality among the males and females. Above all it encourages responsibility and dependability.

The activities and relevance of burial ceremonies signifies the last respect to a departed member of the family. Before her contact with the outside world Nigerians have been conducting burial ceremonies like other civilized societies

of the world. When a man dies it is not enough to just throw him/her into the ground but to commit his/her soul to the Almighty creator and then to commit his mortal body to mother earth in a proper and decent manner, a manner that depicts that man is unlike every other creature that is not as articulate as he is. It takes civilization to acknowledge that a loved one who has completed his circle on earth should be accorded the very last respected. Only brutes and salvages don't give a thought to the fact that one among them has ended his journey on earth and has returned to his creator. Man is a being-unto-death and so his mortality is established.

The analysis herein has proven the fact that the impression that Africa is a dark and empty continent is indeed a very erroneous and biased one. If the word wretched is well understood it means that there is nothing good or worthy in and about Africa. If there is nothing good and commendable about Africa one thing is sure about the continent and that is the fact that among the three (3) cultures of the world she has the highest level and degree of morality and integrity which no one can deny or take from her. Indeed Africa is where others come to learn morals and how to conduct themselves properly and this is by far no exaggeration.

Summary

Africa at one time was referred to as the wretched of the earth primarily because of the simple reason and belief that the continent is devoid of **civilization**, science and technology. Any intellectual and a right thinking individual would agree with this position that civilization is not relative or connected or tied to the west-Europe and America, or any other culture at that. What "Civilization" actually means is that it is the conventional way in which a group of people live their lives. It amounts to their religions, politics, norms and values, cultural disposition, interpersonal relation etc. It is pertinent to comprehend this distinction because it often erroneously believed when the term "civilization" is used the first thing that comes in to the minds of many is that civilization has to do with Modernity, the way of life of the white man, Science and Technology etc. Civilization can be best referred to as the way of life of a group of people, or a society that has a definite, systematic, consistent and organised ways of living their lives or co-existence. It is against this backdrop that this paper is presented, to inter alia, attempt to clarify the meaning

of civilization and which group of people that can be regarded or referred to as civilized or not civilized. This exposition, hence, will consider those parameters that translate to civilization such as culture, tradition, norms, values, and festivals, ancestral worship etc. especially of the African people with particular attention on Nigerian in juxtaposition with other practices that are considered to be best world practices. This evaluation is necessitated by the fact that there is a need to explore the potentiality and actualization of the black African heritage and be in the position to judge whether or not the African culture can be on the same pedestal with other world cultures and civilizations that are regarded as most recognised and accepted conventions.

Keywords: culture, tradition, norms, values, civilization, festival, black Africa

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