

**THE IMPACT OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE  
INTERPRETATION OF  
AFRICAN VALUES WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE  
TO IGBO CULTURAL VALUES**

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**Abstract**

Value is often regarded as an elusive term, having both relative and referential connotations. Every value is a value of someone, or of an individual, or of a group. It can be a value of a society as a whole, or of a given culture or a value of a larger culture, etc. From this perspective we can speak of African values as those belonging to the entire Africans as a whole. This is especially when we talk of African values vis-a- vis western or Chinese values, etc. African values could equally mean values belonging to a segment of Africa, like the Igbo. In this paper, our effort will be directed towards interpreting philosophically different dynamics of African values but more importantly, of Igbo cultural values. African values can mean African traditional values or African modern values or its contemporary values, etc. All these dynamics involve the issue of interpretation. In this paper, we shall examine the impact of relativity of African values as well as the referential nature of its values. The Igbo is case study here. We shall find out how both African and Igbo values promote the development and progress of African humanities and the communities. Because of emphasis on the philosophical method of interpreting African and Igbo values, we devote time in defining the meaning of values as well as that of philosophy.

**1. Introduction**

Africa is endowed with tremendous heritages often categorized as values and cultural legacies. Some of these values have made

remarkable impacts on African stability and social integration, especially at the grass root levels. Other values have been identified as sources of enduring relationships in African marriages and family lives. African consciousness of religion and impact of its religious institutions are not left out when counting the African values. Religion has remained a continued source of African mobilization, as well as its social lubrication and integrations. In this paper, our discussion on African values will presuppose a fundamental and extensive discussion on the meaning of “values” as well as philosophical interpretation. The need for philosophical interpretation is because the concept of “African values” does not convey only one meaning. Hence, the use of “African values” could mean different things to different people, including:

- i) African values as common values that belong to all African cultures without exception, as in the case of pan-African values.
- ii) African values as values found within a particular African culture or values from any African tribal culture, like the Igbo, the Yoruba, the Hausa, etc.
- iii) African values as values that belong to an African, as personal values. This third category is perhaps not as prominent as (i) and (ii).

Now, these triple connotations have two essential factors in common, namely, “Africa” and “values.” This is true even though their respective contents and scope are never the same. The study of these three levels of African values is necessary as to have a good understanding of the impact of African values. What generally determines values for an individual or group is “the capacity of something valued to satisfy certain needs.” (Nwala, 1985:184). Here, personal values like social values aim at satisfying the demand of utility, usefulness, service, and workability. They confirm such implicit personal yearning concerning whether, such values will be useful or good for me, or, '*o-ga abala m uru?*' This is another way of asking for a group, whether such values will be good for us. That is to inquire whether it will be useful to us that is, '*o-ga*

*abala anyi uru?* In his book, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi argues that “no sincere assertion of fact is essentially unaccompanied by feeling of intellectual satisfaction, or of a persuasive desire and a sense of personal desire and responsibility.” Perhaps, the provenance of social values could be traced to personal values appropriated by the society. This is because values have primarily a major influence on individual's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. Based on these functions, African values are primarily the values tested or cherished by an African and later acquired by the larger African community. To underscore this point, Felix Koikara is of the view that, “values are caught and not taught.” (Koikara, 1995:3). It is an individual that is usually influenced by values.

C.B. Okolo avers that “like education, philosophy banishes ignorance and liberally criticizes people's values, life-options and redirects societal values, goals and pursuits.” (Okolo, 1993:22). Philosophy makes a distinction between certain things valued by (African) culture and the values that ought to be valued by African culture. There are certain projected values that lack the ingredients of genuine values. That is why African values need constant critical interpretations and evaluations. In his book, *the Law*, Plato decrees that it is interpretation brought about through education that determines whether man becomes the tamest or the wildest animal on earth. As a matter of fact, the relevance of values including African values is on their positive contribution towards the development of humanities. John Dewey defines the role of philosophy and education as “an emancipation and enlargement of (human) experience.” Therefore while talking about African or Igbo values it is worthwhile to identify what makes them really genuine and lasting beliefs or ideals. Secondly, it is important to identify whether the lasting beliefs or ideals in question are shared by the entire Africans or just by a tribal cultural group like the Igbo, the Yoruba or the Hausa. The intricacies involved in making these identifications and clarifications fall within the purview of philosophical interpretation or hermeneutics. Paul Ricoeur had

defined interpretation as “an intellectual work which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning (of a cultural symbol) in the apparent meaning, in deploying the levels of signification implied in the literal signification of such symbol.” (Ricoeur, 1969: 26). Kola nut, that is, “oji Igbo” is an example of such a symbol. And it is not just a symbol but also a value that is widely and culturally accepted by the Igbo community as a whole. And that is not without reasons.

In this paper, we are going to find out through philosophical interpretation the inner meaning of what we consider as African values. Why do people desire to possess their values? We know, for instance, that the value of Igbo cultural symbol of kola nut is not found in the outwards appearance of the fruit. If so, in what does the desirability of kola nut among the Igbo lie? What underlines the beliefs, the ideals or the principles that govern, for instance, the kola nut as a symbol of no mean magnitude among the Igbo? Why is the Igbo proverb regarded as a great value? In essence, what is it that makes such beliefs, ideals or cultural symbols to be held as values, not only for an individual but for the group, the Igbo people? Before we go further, it is important to define what a value is, and what philosophical interpretation involves.

## **2. Meaning of philosophy**

So far, certain references have been made to African and to Igbo values but little has been made of the interpretative definition of philosophy and much less of its nature. Down the ages, many efforts have been made to provide a univocal definition of philosophy that would be acceptable to all the scholars. But till date, these efforts have not yielded a desired result. In other words, philosophy has no univocal definition. In fact, according to J. Omoregbe, “if you ask ten different philosophers what philosophy is, you are likely to get ten different answers. The simple question “what is philosophy?” is very difficult to answer.”(Omoregbe, 1990:1). That notwithstanding, many scholars today would still concede that philosophy has to do with some kind of critical, rational and

reflective approach to human life, and existence in general, as well as his overall experience and interpretation of the world in which he lives. Philosophy tries to find a rational meaning and explanation that could account for confused traditional beliefs and multi-faceted universe of man as well as man's experience of his world and the environment in which he lives. (Ekei, 2013: 33). For Richard H. Popkin, “philosophy makes a person think- think about the basic foundations of his/her outlook, his/her knowledge, his/her ideals and his /her beliefs, etc.” Through such examination and evaluation, we may all be better able after due interpretation, to assess our beliefs, ideals and aspirations. This enables us to understand better why we accept these, and possibly whether we ought to accept them (as values) in the first place. (Popkin, 1993: x).

In the case of African culture, there is no gainsaying that certain values, ideals and heritages are mapped out as desirable for both individual and collective wellbeing. These values are often found in their belief system, in their political and social interactions. Others are found in their proverbs, folktales, in their work of arts, in their wise-sayings, their principles and norms. The role of philosophy is to investigate and interpret the underlying reasons for which these age-long values and ideals are accepted as desirable to humanity. That is why Odera Oruka, a Kenyan philosopher defines philosophy as “an art of reasoning.” And “it provides a critical intellectual weapon and methodology for analyzing and synthesizing the basic problems of man, society and nature.” (Oruka, 1978: 119). It has often happened on the contrary that what particular African society had assumed as desirable and worthwhile turned out later under serious intellectual scrutiny to be morally indefensible in many respects. Some traditional African societies attached great deal of value on burying their high profile kings with seven human heads. There were equally values attached to killing twins after as a way to forestall certain calamities in the community of the living. Performance of these obnoxious actions was once held as values in certain traditional African societies. By inquiring into the reasons behind cherished African collective beliefs, principles, values and

convictions, we are in a better position to find out the rational foundation on which these age-longed adherences are built. We are thus in a better position to know whether we still need holding on the 'values' they claim to inspire or to better find an alternative. Philosophy through itself critical and moral interpretation helps us to find out why we should accept them or not accept them in the first place.

It is through philosophical reflection that the element of culture and values is interpreted for the benefit of humanities. In other words, a philosopher is here understood as an individual who is a lover of wisdom in the sense that he makes a systematic effort to interpret and reflect on the data of his culture, and the human experience including his value systems. Through this reflection, a philosopher orders or gives meaning to reality as a whole, (Okere, 1976:6). Philosophy is therefore fundamentally a restless search for meaning, a quest to provide a critical interpretation to all the facets of our human experience, beliefs, ideals and principles. This interpretative evaluation of African values is highly critical today more than ever before due to various incursion of influences affecting African and Igbo societies. It is only when African values are critically scrutinized that they are in a better position to enhance the welfare and progress of humanities in general and African personality in particular.

## **2. “African Values” -as a Concept**

Having introduced the interpretative impact of philosophy on African values, it is necessary to examine precisely what value means in the context of African and Igbo experiences. Value has been described as an elusive term, just as it is relative and referential in nature. Relativity of African values derives from African cultural relativity. This implies that different environments where Africans are located tend to produce not only different experiences they encounter but also their different modes of interpreting those experiences. The relativity of African values emanates as a product of peculiar ways different African environments interpret their

experiences. Hence, Ashley Montagu argues that “values are attitudes of mind. Values represent judgments (interpretation) as to the manner in which the best adjustment may be made to certain conditions.” (Montagu, 1961:38). Although all African environments have their own values, ideological differences among them are differences of value judgment. What then does value mean? In other words, what is value? Value is regarded as “something desirable, something worthwhile, a cause worthy of pursuit, or worth living for and dying for.”(Okere, 1978:6). It is “an important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of a culture about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Values have major influence on a person's behavior and attitude and serve as broad guidelines in all situations. Thus, value provides the needed motivation for deliberate human action.

Today, we often talk about the relativity of values which implies that values are culturally determined and may differ from one culture to another. What is considered valuable in a particular environment or culture could be undesirable in another environment or culture. What proverb says is relevant here, that one man's food can be another man's poison. Being an important and lasting beliefs or ideals *shared by the members of a (given) culture*, values may vary from one culture to another. In some respects, what the Igbo culture regard as their values are different from what Hausa or Yoruba regard as theirs. For instance, in the area of religion, the person of Jesus Christ is considered as a dominant figure among majority of Igbo worshipping community. But among the Hausa, the valued figure remains the Allah. In other words, Christ is a desirable value among the Igbo worth living and dying for. Allah is a desirable value among the Hausa, worth living and dying for. Here, these ideological differences are differences of value judgment concerning what each group considers good, desirable and worth living for. Since there are many cultural enclaves in Africa, there are going to be certain diverse values within these cultures. The role of philosophy is usually to find out through interpretations the underlying reason or reasons for which each tribal African culture

justifies the veracity of its values.

In fact, value variations range from minute to significant differences. Like in the case of cultural variations, differences in values relate not only to certain unique phenomena that are peculiar to some societies but also in universal actions and processes that touch humanities as a whole. Here, we take food and pattern of eating as an example. We know that food is universally a basic human necessity. In other words, all human beings must eat in order to survive. But different cultures attach different values to different types of food and apply different patterns of eating method in consuming their food. Again, what people value as food varies most times from one culture to another, without prejudice to contemporary mutual and inter- cultural borrowing of edible food. Traditionally speaking, African people had a value attached to eating food collectively and with their hands. Chinese on the other hand value eating food with special sticks. Ian Robertson had observed that Yoruba and Tivs attach much value in eating 'amala' and pounded yam respectively. The Hausa value Tuwo as choiced meal while the Igbo value pounded cassava, 'akpu.' The people of Ghana attach great value to 'kenke.' Of course, these food items are merely dominant in these cultural areas and not their exclusive food items. In any case, while the Africans in general value swallowing these mentioned food neither the West nor the Chinese value swallowing food. In other words, values differ even in areas that concern basic human necessity, like food, drinks, etc. We are illustrating the diversity concerning how values differ even among Africans living in different environments and beliefs. R.A. Wright's argument concerning the diversity of African cultures anchored on diversity of African languages could be used to argue for diversity of African values based on language dispersion and differences of environments.

Given the fact that there are over 40 different countries in Africa, each with a number of different language groups (Ghana, for example, has 95 distinct language groups, *we*

*can equally be talking not of African philosophy but of African philosophies.*  
(Wright, 1984:43).

Although this argument was used in an attempt to disprove the existence of African philosophy, it has a merit in arguing that African values are the sum total of diverse values belonging to different linguistic groups in Africa. Here, Igbo cultural values remain an example as we shall consider later.

Yet, African values can mean common values of the entire Africans without exception. We have pan-African values to buttress this view. Here, C.B. Okolo tried to provide one of such pan-African values. He singled out communalism or being-with as a common African identity. According to him,

Whether the African is one people, or many, is insignificant in this essay. We rather assert that the African is easily identifiable ontologically or, as a being-in- the- African

identifiable ontologically or, as a being-in- the- African world. He is not just a being but a 'being-with'. (Okolo,<sup>1</sup> 1993:3).

His argument is that this characteristic of “being-with” is common value that belongs to all Africans as a whole. Therefore, to qualify as a member of African continent one must have inherited this disposition of 'being-with.' It is a characteristic that is peculiar to Africans.

### **3. Pan-African Values.**

One of the most basic pan-African values that mark the Africans irrespective of their cultural and environmental dispersions is the characteristic of “being-with.” We usually refer to African being-with as something desirable and common to the entire members who identify themselves with the title Africans. Apart from giving

them a distinctive mark of identity, as against the west, 'being-with' or communalism has remained with them over the years, being a veritable insurance in justice for their lives and properties. (Ekei, 2007:1). Often skeptics doubt whether there are actually common values that could be traced to the entire African race without exception. There are indeed such values that are really common to the entire race. We categorize them here under pan-African heritages, beliefs, ideals, endowments, etc, in so far as they belong to Africa as a continent. Apart from the underlying value of being-with, there are common values that are associated with African collective endeavors and aspirations towards her total emancipation and freedom. This includes the value of the victory achieved by African successful realization of colonial freedom. It is a victory from her colonial masters, who for many decades held them under bondage and captivity. In other words, one great African value we can hardly forget as a continent is her collective liberation from humiliating clutches of colonial enslavement and exploitation. Pan-African value refers to such collective African “freedom from colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, white imperialism, etc, which according to C.B. Okolo constitutes prime value for the contemporary Africans.” (Okolo,<sup>2</sup> 1993:11). Of course, the concept of freedom is not new to the Africans. In fact, “the idea of liberation and salvation as we know is also central to Christian message but its traditional interpretation has been restricted to the salvation of souls.” However, in African context, it is liberation “in its entire inclusive concept applicable to the whole man in his whole environment. And consequently, it affects his main dimensions of life as an incarnate spirit. For the exploited people, it would mean among other things freedom from the chains of economic poverty and slavery to power and degradation.” (Okere, 1978:12). Perhaps, the greatest pan- African value ever attainable to Africans is that of concrete freedom (“freedom from” and “freedom to”). The effort happens to be the first Africa's collective political aspiration and value. “Indeed, the independent African states met for the first time in Ghana in 1958. Then, they were only eight of them. But they

accepted as their duty, among other things, the total liberation of all Africa from colonialism.” Here, Nkrumah was said to have echoed resolutely that, “the Independence of Ghana was meaningless unless it is accompanied by the total liberation of Africa.” (Mboya, 1963:205).

Another pan-African value, no less important than the first, is her common religious consciousness and the unmitigated power in expressing it. The value attached to religion has given the Africans a unique title of being “deeply religious.” Edward Kama Braithwaite had observed that “the study of African culture reveals almost without question that it is based upon religion- that, in fact, it is within religious framework that the entire (African) culture resides.” (Braithwaite, 1974: 71). He goes on to submit that, “starting from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or core of the culture.” And if it is within religious framework that the entire African culture resides, it means that religion is both a basic and dominant value for the African life and existence. It is a feature that dominates the entire day- to- day lives of the Africans. What this means is that the African is committed to the view that the whole is real. This valued belief in religion reflects the indispensable role it plays in maintaining the unity of all things that are. In other words, the greatest value of religion to the Africans is its provision of unity and integration of all that exist. The belief specifies that the world of man and the world of the ancestors are one but remain different phases of the same phenomenon. Thus, it represents an important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of African cultures as a whole. Besides, religion has got a tremendous influence on African peoples' behaviors and attitudes and serves as broad guidelines in all situations of their lives in the community. From the foregoing, we can say that the significance of religion to the Africans is primarily realized in its penchant for ensuring harmony and co-existent relationship among different levels of being. It influences the way people live, the way they relate to one another and to the higher being. In short, the value of religion

is that it is the soul and the life wire of the entire African culture.

#### **4. Igbo Cultural Values as African values**

This section is devoted to Igbo values as lived out in their existential and concrete situations of their lives. Beyond mere theoretical descriptions, Igbo values are lived experience of their culture. K.C. Anyanwu defines culture of a people as “a common living experience shared by a people.” And for him, “this culture cannot be separated from human experience, and it is this experience that produces it.” (Anyanwu, 1983:25). To talk of Igbo cultural values in the context of African values is to state that though the Igbo are Africans, they have their own unique stories to tell concerning their values. These stories, of course, include the story of their values and the unique way and manner the Igbo interpret them in conformity with their unique experiences that gave rise to them. Ashley Montagu had defined experience as “anything an individual or group of individuals has undergone, or lived, perceived or sensed.” (Montagu, 1961: 20). These definitions as rightly mentioned are highly significant in this section. They express the Igbo culture and values as products of Igbo people's unique experiences. While it is true that Igbo values and culture belong to a larger African values and culture, the former remains the product of Igbo unique experiences. These experiences, since they are most times peculiar to the Igbo, are unrepeatable even to her next door neighbors. We know that culture is a product of people's experiences and the unique ways such people interpret these experiences. And we equally know that the Igbo people like any other ethnic groups, had undergone, or lived or perceived an event that is peculiar to the group. For the Igbo, the experience of Nigeria-Biafra civil war is a unique case in point. There is no doubt that a good percentage of Igbo culture and values are derived from such unique lived experience of civil war. And it is only the Igbo that had passed through such experiences and ordeals could tell the proper story. They are the privileged people to harvest and harness the positive fruits of such experiences, now coming as Igbo values. In

other words, Igbo have certain unique culture and values that came as a result of their common lived experience which they encountered alone as a tribal group. Some of the factors we are going to discuss concerning the Igbo cultural values arose from such lived peculiar experiences. The factors must therefore be seen as lived-values, perceived values, or sensed values in Igbo daily existences. This allusion follows the profound insight of S.B.Oluwole that “every literary convention (tradition) presupposes some set of unwritten norms and principles which generally serve as guides to thinkers and authors working under its influence.” (Oluwole, 1992: *Introduction, np*). In other words, the written tradition only emerges when such convention or tradition becomes established principles of style, methodology and procedures of what is to be regarded as ideal modes of thought within a particular society.

Our effort here is to identify some of the Igbo desirable unwritten conventions that have metamorphosed today as Igbo cultural values. We shall also interpret the underlying reasons why these conventions are so regarded as written values. Just like African values in general, Igbo values are important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of Igbo ethnic community concerning what they regard as good or bad, desirable or undesirable. These values are couched in the principles that guide both their individual and collective lives and existence.

i) *Multitude is power principle (igwe-bu-ike) as value:*

One great principle of action that is widely accepted among the traditional and contemporary Igbo is the value of “multitude as power.” It is an extension of the fundamental African disposition of “being-with” or communalism. This belief derives from two basic principles of Igbo worldview which T.U.Nwala identifies as -the unity of all things, and -an ordered relationship among all beings in the universe. (Nwala, 1985:54). These two principles project for the Igbo the value of order and interaction among all beings in the universe. The aspiration towards ensuring order and interaction in

Igbo community is considered as great because human survival and flourishing depend on a proper maintenance of such order and interaction. In Igbo community, “man is not truly man” according to C.B.Nze “than where he lives and acts as a recognized citizen of the community.” (Nze, 1989: 7).

Consequently, the Igbo share a rare and unshakeable conviction on the principle of “multitude is power” or “igwe-bu-ike.” It is a principle that promotes group action and collective responsibility. Here, the rational foundation is that, through communal co-operation, the limitations surrounding human existence are reduced to barest minimum. The governing principle here, according to C.B. Nze is that, “if a person buries himself alone, one of his hands will be out.” (Nze, 2). There are other wise-sayings that justify these basic principles, as for instance:

-A tree does not form a forest (*'oke osisi adi agho ofia'*). This implies that the tree, no matter how big can hardly, in itself, make a group of trees. Some philosophers like Plato and Aristotle have attributed the origin of the state to individual's inability to arrest by himself alone his many needs. Hence, group action is required to wrestle with his multiple needs and problems. In other words, the philosophical interpretation of this proverb is the need for collective action and collective responsibility. One of the Igbo values therefore is the principle of team work, and the value of group action in wrestling with their social, political, religious and economic needs of man. Another proverb that supports the value of group action in Igbo lives and dealings is that:

-The right hand ought to wash the left hand, and the left hand in turn has to wash the right hand. (*'Aka nni kwuo aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwuo aka nni'*). This proverb means that man is fulfilled by his fellow men who bestow meaning, assistance, honor and recognition to them. This equally implies that the factor (or, group action) that guarantees such values to man has an indisputable vitality and

power. That is why the Igbo hold that the multitude is power. Another implication of this principle is that one's "kindred are power." It means that "*Umunna -bu-ike.*" In the existential situation of their lives, the multitude is power principle presents its concrete relevance in kindred is power- "*umunna -bu-ike.*"

ii) *Human life as value*

It is true that every culture and institution has a respect for human life but traditionally, the Igbo have a profound regard for life in general and human life in particular. Life is for the Igbo a value of no mean magnitude. Hence, the Igbo proverbs are replete with a lot of principle showcasing the indispensable and inalienable place of human life in the scheme of things. Hence, the Igbo would say:

- Life is of more value than wealth and riches. That is the "*ndu-ka-aku*" principle. It can equally translate, "*ndu-ka-ego,*" or life is more important than light, ("*ndu-ka-ife,*") or life has no duplicate, ("*ndu-adiro-ibua*"), etc.
- Life is a primary value- That is "*ndu -bu- isi.*" This is also another principle showing that human life is more important than any other value. It is a principle that comes up during the critical moment of decision. It plays its role when people are confused whether to undertake a certain risk at the detriment of their lives. In fact, this principle of decision which showcases the indispensable importance of human life is highly required today in people's daily discussions, conversations and counseling. Let people for a moment think about how carelessly human lives are wasted in our present day society. Today, the rampant suicide bombing, the incessant terrorists' attacks, the kidnapping and armed robbery have become enemies of human lives and values. When life is lost what else would remain? Consequent on this fact, the willful destruction of human life is regarded as an abomination or "*imeru-ala*" or "*Aru*" in Igbo moral consciousness. It is a highest form of crime, deserving

highest form of condemnation and punishment. In other words, the Igbo people would affirm that in the hierarchy of values ever known to humanity, life is the most primary value. It is an inalienable right and value that belong not only to the person but also to the community. The evil of murder goes beyond the victim of murder to affect the entire community as a whole. Hence, the murderer has declared war with the community or the civil society as a whole.

iii) *Igbo Custom and Tradition as Value.*

From distant past, Igbo custom and traditions (“Ome-n’ala”) have remained an unchallenged sources of Igbo moral actions and behaviors. Custom and tradition, (Ome-na-ala) offers “an unimpeachable answer” according to F.A Arinze, “that returns again and again to forestall the acute probing of the clever philosopher....” (Arinze, 1970: 6). In its literal translation, custom and tradition, ‘ome-na-ala’ implies “as-it-is-done-in-the-land” or as it is done in the community. It provides unquestionable sources of theoretical and practical actions in the community. It offers a constitutional guide to Igbo community and provides a motivation for right conducts. It tries to instill discipline and leaves a pathway to successful life in a community of the living. Hence, the Igbo would say that “ome-na-ala” is not “ome-na-elu.” In other words, custom and tradition do not follow the path of metaphysical principles but adopts and confirms the path of concrete life situations of man. The importance of custom and tradition is attained once we recognize that “man” and not “spirit” is at the center of interest in the community. Igbo custom and tradition is therefore an unquestionable body of communal expectations as they apply to what man ought to do in the land (community). Hence, people are judged in their utterances and actions based on whether they followed the laid down rules as contained in their custom and tradition. Such laid down norms are applied in settling quarrels between parties, quarrels between husband and wife, and dispute between business partners, etc. It is used in commercial bargaining

and speech oratory. Its mastery is used in recognizing those who are devoted and committed to the good of the community. Its value lies more importantly on the provision of guidelines of actions for the community. The major reason why custom and tradition is a great value in Igbo culture is because it inspires people towards positive action and behaviors. If we are to remove the role of custom and tradition, the entire community becomes blind, lawless, chaotic and without directions. What values of no means magnitude are encapsulated in the custom and tradition (ome-na-ala) of the Igbo!

*iv) Rite of Kola nut as value*

Igbo tribal culture has a profound regard for kola nut because of its spiritual, social and moral significance. Kola nut is a valued cultural symbol among the Igbo. It represents the power of unity- indiversity. In its constitution, kola nut fruit is one but is made up of many lobes (parts). This signifies unity in diversity that marks group life. Its significance is far reaching in the sense that it provides also an edible nut that is used for special prayers for social commitments and for the physical entertainment of the host and the guests alike, etc. The rite of kola nut integrates and recognizes different hierarchies of being. It symbolizes a ritual symbiosis between the living and the dead, the host and the guests, young and elderly, etc. Kola nut stands as a source of harmony among different groups of people. Small as a kola nut appears; it is an embodiment of meaning and therefore requires philosophical interpretation for its values to emerge. This is because the significance of kola nut as Igbo cultural value can hardly be determined from its outwards appearance; talk less of its bitter taste. What conveys the value inherent in Igbo understanding of kola nut is the power of philosophical interpretation. Through interpretation, the meaning of this cultural symbol of kola nut goes beyond its outward appearance and points to its inner meaning that represents such values as unity- indiversity, peaceful coexistence, harmony, relationship among various hierarchies of beings. Without this interpretation, the inner significance and relevance of “African values” in general can hardly

be discovered and harnessed. In other words, a search for African values presupposes a prior understanding of the meaning of values and the hermeneutics of African values.

v) *Igbo Religion as value*

Religion is generally regarded as a great value for the Africans. For the Igbo in particular, the phenomenon of religion is specially and culturally celebrated as sources social integration and life. In fact, Igbo world view implies two basic (religious) beliefs: the unity of all things and, the ordered relationship among all beings in the universe.” (Nwala, 54). Possessing a religious vision of life therefore influences an aspiration for the existence of order, mutual coexistence and interaction in the community. In a bid to protect this cherished value of religion as well as the cosmic and social order of reality, a number of prohibitions, taboos, and sanctions are created. Consequent on these “values,” religion is hardly a value that is elusive for Igbo adherents. In fact, it is a concrete and existential reality in their lives. Here, religious values tend to express themselves in the transformation of their lives and existence. Thus, Major Arthur Leonard was quoted as stating that:

They (Igbo) are... a truly religious people of whom it can be said as it has been said of the Hindus, that they eat religiously, drink religiously, bathe religiously, dress religiously, sin religiously...religion of these natives is their existence and their existence is their religion. (Leonard, 1968: 429).

From the foregoing insights, there is no doubt that religion remains an indispensable value in the life of the Igbo, even in this contemporary jet age. Religion has been stereotyped in Igbo land as a special value that represents an important and lasting beliefs or ideals shared by the members of the culture as a whole.

A person without a reasonable religious consciousness within the

environment looks like a fish out of water since it will be difficult for him to fit into the life stream of the community as a whole. The person will hardly influence positively the lives and behaviors of those looking up to him. This is because through its adherers religion tends to impact a major influence on Igbo peoples' behaviors and attitudes. Through them, religion serves as broad guidelines in all situations of their lives. The “ozo” initiates (who are believed to be well imbued with religious consciousness) claim that the continuity of every lineage is linked with the existence of good-living men, who uphold both publicly and privately the laws of the land. Again, to secure the continuity of the lineage, the Igbo communities tend to maintain that there must be harmony between men and men, between men and their ancestors and between men, ancestors and higher being. So, the effects of religion are not limited to individual's welfare but include the entire life of the lineage and the community as a whole. For one thing, the Igbo religious code of conduct constitutes *Ome-na-ala* that prevails in the community. “It normally determines the various types of behavior approved of by the community as contributing towards harmony. In the same way, it proscribes those actions and behaviors which are believed to be opposed to the well-being of the community and consequently, contrary to the wishes of the ancestors.” (Ogu, 1981:45). Now, before we finally conclude this paper, it is important to mention that the Igbo have more cultural values than the few mentioned above due to obvious limited spaces.

## **5. Conclusion**

From what has been studied above, African values, whether they refer to the individual or to Africans as a whole or to Igbo race concern us here just because of their indispensable relevance to the welfare of humanities or African humanities. Now, “when we think of humanity,” according to Akachi T. Ezigbo, “certain attributes immediately come to mind and they include: the human race, the condition and quality of being human; the quality of being humane-benevolence; a humane characteristic attribute, or act.” Values are

veritable instruments at the service of humanities. African, and Igbo values, as we have seen, exert tremendous influence on individual's and community's behaviors and attitudes and serve as broad guidelines in all situations of their lives. In other words, African values matter a lot! This is true, irrespective of, whether these values belong to an African individual, or to a tribal group, or whether they belong to all the Africans as a whole. In the case of the entire Africa as a whole, we easily remember pan-African values which African nationalists realized through their collective liberation efforts. Through their uncommon sacrifices and courage, they secured independence for Africa thereby setting her free from the shackles of western colonialisation. These values have remained a great motivation and inspiration to the contemporary Africans by restoring their collective image, their dignity and their destiny. Again, religion and religious expressions and affinity have become a hallmark of African unity, discipline, integration and progress. In fact, the value of religion to Africa as a whole has become a driving force of other departments of African and Igbo lives and existence. As a value, religion is a fulcrum on which the entire African lives, actions and operations reside. We identified the relativity of African cultures and values leading to the respective attachment to their values on food and the mode of eating it. The relativity of African values shows how various African values have restricted influences often within their own ethnic cultural domains. For instance, in Anambra State or precisely in Agulu, the indigenes eat monkeys but not crocodiles. In Awka rural community, the indigenes eat crocodiles and pythons but not monkeys, etc. Inyi people in Awgu local government area tend to eat monkeys and pythons but never indulge in eating tortoise. Obviously, this diversity in value preferences is the result of variations and dynamism in diverse African experiences and its interpretations. The relevance of our paper therefore is not just that African values are dynamic, elusive and referential but that, they need constant critical interpretations of philosophy in order to be fully understood and better applied for the good of African humanities. African and Igbo values matter a lot as

they remain an indispensable asset and motivation in the lives and existence of the people.

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