

## TRADITIONAL AFRICAN IDENTITY: THE OLD IN A NEW RELEVANCE

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### Abstract

Humans everywhere on the face of the earth have an identity that distinguishes them from others. This identity can be found strategically in some important areas of existence because they have become a way of life of some sort. Since we can identify a people from another, it creates a putative ambience that a people tend to be identified with a culture. Traditional or pre-colonial Africa has weaved an identity that is latent in three core area of existence known as: communalism (social), religious and values (ethics). This is not to say that it is only traditional Africans that can make sense of these aspects of life. But traditional Africa has sublimely instituted her identity into these areas such that if one wants to know African identity, then it must be analyzed from these areas. What distinguishes traditional African culture from that of the Westerners or Easterners is worth investigating especially as they provide a unique identity from the rest. It is from this backdrop that this work adopted the method of critical analysis into the three areas of communalism (social), religious and values (ethics) with the objective of identifying the rationale for traditional African identity to be engraved in those areas and how time has not been able to erode this identity threshold.

**Keywords:** Identity, Communalism, Religion, Values, Culture.

### Introduction

The cultural evolution of a people does not completely leave them without an identity or that which differentiates them from others. The concept of “otherness” suggests a distinguishing identity. The identity of a thing is what sets it apart from another so much so that identity becomes factor to be treasured. Identity can be interrogated through a people's philosophies, beliefs and values. These are non-material variables that add up to forming a people's identity and these

dictate and guide how people perceive reality and respond to same.

Modern or contemporary Africa draws its identity from the traditional wellspring before it encountered colonialism. However, globalization and the postmodernist concerns have not been able to completely annihilate traditional African identity even though a lot of aspects of the African experience have been destroyed. This is why to understand the culture of Africa, one will need to go

back to traditional Africa distant past in order to get the full picture of how traditional African forebears lived their lives and made sense of their interactions with people and the environment. Thus, the role of African Philosophy in this direction, according to Gyekye, is:

To articulate the nature, purpose and methods of the philosophical enterprise, to examine the career of this enterprise from the perspective of its role in the affairs of human society generally; to provide some indications about how philosophy can conceptually interact with and so interpret the African experience with its many-sidedness, including a critical examination of concepts and values in traditional African life and thoughts<sup>1</sup>

That humans have the same anatomy and physiology does not entail having the same culture or *weltanschauung*. To know a people is to know their mode of thought or philosophy as captured in their most cherished beliefs. And these beliefs formed the nucleus of their identity. It is common knowledge that the predominant philosophy of Americans is pragmatism and this encapsulate their identity with the ideals of freedom or liberty enshrined as a traditional culture. In the same way, one can trace the European identity from their philosophy which is deeply ingrained in the conservative and scientific attitude or disposition. From the philosophy of Taoism, the identity of the Orientals can be inferred from how they cohabit with

nature in tranquility. Africa is not left behind in having an identity which is easily recognizable. This identity is one and unique and is common to all the diversities in Africa Hence, Wiredu makes the point that... "Africans see the world as being full of spiritual entities, that Africans are religious in all things, not even separating the secular from the religious, that African thought is true and through, mystical...."<sup>2</sup>

The paper has as its major objective to carry out a critical survey of traditional African identity in order to understand the framework of African culture and worldview. This is important for two reasons. The first reason is that Africa, as a continent and a people, tend to have forgotten the foundation upon which their forebears raised them up and have rather taken to foreign culture and practices on matters that are fundamental to human existence. The second is that people of other cultures have been the ones writing distorting history of the African people and in the process, misrepresenting African identity. This informs why the paper sees the importance of beginning the search for the true African identity from the traditional point of view.

### **Traditional African Identity**

The term traditional is very pivotal as it suggests an era from which African identity can be situated. There are other eras which polemics called the ancient, renaissance, modern and contemporary Africa. A way of contextualizing this is to ask: on what foundation can Africa identity be constructed? In other words,

<sup>1</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *The Unexamined Life: Philosophy and the African Experience* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, "Toward Decolonizing African Philosophy and Religion," *African Studies Quarterly* 1, no.4 (1998), 18-46.

what features can be said to be unique to traditional Africa? There is ample need in actually reflecting on what characterizes African identity in order to understand what makes Africans unique. This reflection is important even as Odimegwu agrees that we, Africans, need “to step out on the street of our daily existence and peep deeply into the corridors of our history as a people.”<sup>3</sup> The best places to access the idea of African identity is to study what different scholars have said about it, while paying closer “attention to the kind of lives our ancestors lived.”<sup>4</sup> African identity will therefore be situated from that era or period in history where Africa has not made contact with the outside world as there was no incursion of religions or colonialism. Africa was in its original state with its ancestors existing and making the most of their existence as they deemed fit.

The term Africa can be understood from a geographical, psychological and practical perspectives. To contextualize the blacks on the basis of colour, geographical positioning or any other indices are all attempts at grasping the fundamental identity of the Africans. Hence, Onyeocha agrees that:

One could draw an analogy between the question of African identity and pulp of onion. To reach the central bud of the pulp requires a gradual, layer by layer unpeeling of the pulp. Thus any

quest for African identity would entail a systematic unraveling that would begin from the most obvious even common place phenomena and gradually progress, to more complex ontological issues. The former would involve simple descriptions while the latter would involve comparison and contrasts. The buildup would then move to epistemological issues requiring complex logical and analytical distinctions.<sup>5</sup>

Unveiling traditional Africa identity entails an excursion into Africa's past. It may not be easy to glean through all the features of this history. But it is undoubted that traditional Africa has an existential lived situation. Oseni Taiwo Afisi asserts that “although the pre-colonial Africa was organized in smaller ethnic groupings, yet the social and political structures were in place. At least, having been home grown, it took care of the local needs, the needs of the people for whom it was primarily fashioned”.<sup>6</sup>

Since the pre-colonial Africa was organized in such a way that it had its own socio-political structure, it then means that Africa had its own defining identity that distinguished it from the rest of the world. The African is first a person; as a person, he has the rational ability to make meaning of his immediate existence as

<sup>3</sup>. Ike F. H. Odimegwu, “How Communalistic is Africa?” *Philosophy and Praxis: Journal of the Nigerian Philosophical Association* 3, (2007). 1-9.

<sup>4</sup>. Izu Marcel Onyeocha, *Africa: The Question of Identity: A Philosophical Reflection on Africa*, (Owerri: Clacom Inc, 1997), 1.

<sup>5</sup>. Izu Marcel Onyeocha, *Africa: The Question of Identity*, 10.

<sup>6</sup>. Oseni Taiwo Afisi, “Rethinking the African identity Crisis”, *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 1, no.2 (2008), 92-93.

well as that of others and the world around him. This suggests that the concept of identity can be extrapolated from personhood. Odimegwu writing along this line notes that “the ontology of being as all that is and ground of being of every being leads to the epistemology of self involvement and reveals individuality, communality and presencing as the basic constitutive elements of integrative personhood.”<sup>7</sup>

The concept of personhood can generate knowledge discourse and this is widespread in traditional African identity. Agbakoba avers that “divination was the main source of theoretical research based knowledge in traditional African societies. There were other sources such as revelation from deities/spirits, dreams as well as some exercise of reason and experimental sources at the level of folk knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> In the search for certainty, it is natural to begin with our present experiences, and in a sense, no doubt, knowledge is to be derived from them.”<sup>9</sup> The experiences that people have in their contact with the external environment as well as with other human beings are what shape a people's culture, tradition and worldview in general.

African identity therefore cannot be delineated without recourse to what her culture, tradition and worldview entail.

Africa's *weltanschauung* would be a complete picture of how her people look at the world. And looking at the world would require some form of logic (whether crude or systematized) in navigating through the wonders and amazement that may bewilder the human mind from where some understanding can be attained. Ijeomah asserts that human beings unlike “lower animals ask the question of “why” for every event, experience or happening around them.”<sup>10</sup>

Traditional African identity therefore, would entail looking very closely at the legacies of the African ancestors which form the core of their beliefs and practices and the wisdom they displayed in the process. For example, the African treatment of time is not like that of the West. As Mbiti observes, “the question of time is of little or no academic concerns to African peoples in their traditional life... What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of “No-time.”<sup>11</sup> What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or potential time.

### **Foundations of Traditional African identity**

Traditional African identity can be sought out from three areas namely: communalism (social), religion and ethics

<sup>7</sup>. Ike Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology*, (Zurich: LIT, 2008), x.

<sup>8</sup>. J. C. A. Agbakoba, “An Evaluation of Knowledge in Traditional African Thought and its Impact on Contemporary Times,” *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa* (eds) Martin F. Asiegbu and Joseph A. Agbakoba, (Ibadan: Hope Publishers, 2004), 96.

<sup>9</sup>. Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, (Oxford: University Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>10</sup>. Chris O. Ijeomah, *Harmonious Monism: A Philosophical Logic of Explanation for Ontological issues in Supernaturalism in African Thought*, (Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2014), 54.

<sup>11</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 16-17.

or values. These are the areas in which traditional Africans left their imprint on the sand of time. The study shall look at each of these three areas in their own merit. The goal is to show them as the rallying points that culminate in what can rightly be termed traditional African identity.

### **Communalism**

While it is true that the principle of communalism is not exclusive to traditional Africa, there is no denying that communalism properly defines the African. While the meaning of communalism could be varied and problematic, Odimegwu simplifies it as he argues that:

The many references to the traditional African land use system; the reference to the marriage rites and family system; the identification of the individual in family relations; the reference to kinship and blood relationship as the fundamental principles; the reference to cooperative work and communal production relations, all these address perspectives of meaning of communalism.<sup>12</sup>

In communalism, every aspect of the African life is mediated by this consideration of the community being prior to the individual. This does not however undermine the individual freedom or autonomy but rather enforces it by providing an already established template of what is an acceptable norm.

This is to say that the community is individual “writ-large.” Odimegwu adds that if one seeks to pursue “the individuating tendency absolutely, he shall find that individuation in human personhood is made possible by the existence of community, by the presence of the other. Identity and definition are made possible in relation, by relatedness. Of course, the community is basically the coming together and being together of individual persons.”<sup>13</sup>

Several African thinkers and scholars have written extensively on communalism as depicting traditional African identity some of whom are Mbiti, Nyerere and Nkrumah. Mbiti's now famous quote “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”<sup>14</sup> seems to be at the very heart of African communalism and captures in a very lucid way the concerns of “Ubuntu.” In traditional African worldview, it is believed that “nature brings the child into the world, but the society creates the child into a social being, a corporate person.”<sup>15</sup>

The deep sense of brotherhood is widespread in Africa and has remained so for a long time despite the multicultural outlook of the world. This “community’ has always helped to shape the identity of the African to the point that knowledge even becomes a community property unlike the West where individual names are behind certain discoveries and innovation. Hence, Nkernkia points out that “just as one cannot remove a fish from the water to talk with it, in the same way, it

<sup>12</sup>. Ike F. H. Odimegwu, “How Communalist is Africa?” 4-5.

<sup>13</sup>. Ike Odimegwu “How Communalist is Africa?” 5.

<sup>14</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 113.

<sup>15</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 110.

is not possible to remove an African from the life of the clan, tribe or family group since he will no longer be an authentic African having lost his deepest identity, his very being.”<sup>16</sup> Even Nkrumah's *Conscientism* is based on the deductions derived from African human conscience. The African conscience is traced to the style of humanism and the communitarian conception of traditional Africa. Conscientism had to defeat the newly emerging capitalism and cancel the colonialist mentality while defending independence and guaranteeing the security of the people.”<sup>17</sup>

Tempels explains that Africans go back to this ancient landmark “...because their ancestors left for them practical solution of the great problem of humanity, the problem of life and death, of salvation or destruction. The Bantu only converted or civilized superficially, return at the instance of a determining force to the behavior atavistically dictated to them.”<sup>18</sup> For Nyerere, his theory of *Ujamaa* is just another word for communalism or African socialism with a strong sense of familyhood. In traditional Africa society, everybody was a worker. There was no other way of earning a living for the community. Even the elder, who appeared to be enjoying himself without doing any work and for whom everybody else appeared to be working for, had in fact, worked hard all his younger days. One of the most socialistic achievements of our

society was the sense of security it gave to its members, and the hospitality on which they could rely. The capitalist, or the landed exploiter was unknown to traditional African society same as the loiterer or idler, who accepts the hospitality of society as his right but gives nothing in return. The *Ujamaa* or “brotherhood” opposes the Western capitalism, which builds a society based on the exploitation of people, and also opposes a conception of socialism as a philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

Etta *et al* note that “African communalism.... presumes pluralism in that it is essentially a voluntary pooling together of independent and differing efforts and capabilities that makes the African communal life what it is. Thus, in the system, the young are not ontologically less human than the elders.”<sup>20</sup> Traditional African communalism is egalitarian as there was no class antagonism or exploitation. Just as the West is known for such ideology as liberalism, capitalism, individualism, elitism, fascism, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, traditional Africa is known for its community relations and ownership. Etta *et al* adumbrate the merits of communalism to include decision making based on consensus and dialogue, freedom of expression for all, community spirit, the role and importance of the individual person, the enhancement of internal security, provision of a living

<sup>16.</sup> Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A step forward in African Thinking*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1999), 112.

<sup>17.</sup> Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia *African Vitalogy*, 60.

<sup>18.</sup> Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann, 1957), 13.

<sup>19.</sup> Julius Nyerere K. *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, (Oxford: University Press, 1968), 12.

<sup>20.</sup> Etta, Emmanuel E. *et al*, “African Communalism and Globalization”, *African Research Review* 10, no.3 (2016), 304.

network of relations, African education and philosophy, rationalism, naturalism and humanism.<sup>21</sup>

### Religion

Religion is at the heart of the African as well as what defines and shapes the African continent. Religion gives Africa its identity that is incontrovertible. At the centre of this religion is the belief in a Supreme Being or Force as God who is the creator and ruler of all things visible and invisible. Mbiti notes that Africans are notoriously religious, and each cultural group in Africa has “its own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices. Religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the people themselves in all the complexities of traditional life.”<sup>22</sup>

Mbiti goes on to aver that, “one should not, therefore expect long dissertations about God. But God is no stranger to African peoples, and in traditional life, there are no atheists.”<sup>23</sup> In today's contemporary Western world, atheism is a growing phenomenon perhaps because of the attraction of empirical knowledge. Does this mean that traditional Africans do not have the aptitude for empirical or experimental knowledge? Of course they do because there were those whose vocation was dealing with material or practical reality. But God comes first

before any other consideration.

There is a hierarchy of force in traditional African worldview with God at the apex, followed by divinities, spirits and the living dead. Man is at the centre of this hierarchy with animals, plants and minerals at the lower rung of the ladder. Religion is at the basis of the African's behavior and discourse. Nkemnkia asserts that Africans experience in their daily lives “something of the divine, something which transcend our abilities. This challenges us to go beyond ourselves... many realities surrounding us show their greatness: the rivers, the mountains, sacred forests, the sun itself together with the planets. Everything seems to have a divine aura inviting us to meditations and contemplations of the reality.”<sup>24</sup>

In African traditional religion, the presence of divinities is very widespread, because this is a people's religion and each tribe or village has its own object of veneration, its own divinity. Thus, Religion becomes a great tool for social cohesion. So, neglecting traditional African religion, according to Naaman, “which is the source of normative meaning that grounds the architecture of infrastructural and super structural institutions of society, is misunderstanding the world process as a whole for religious people.”<sup>25</sup> Although traditional African religion does not have a written corpus or a set of creed or dogmas to adhere to but the tradition that

<sup>21</sup>. Etta Emmanuel “African Communalism,,,”, 308.

<sup>22</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 1.

<sup>23</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 29.

<sup>24</sup>. Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy*..., 145.

<sup>25</sup>. Naaman, Kipsigei Rop “African Traditional Religion: A substructure for Sustainable Development in Africa: A Kenyan Perspective,” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2, no.3 (2015), 2.

makes up the religion has been passed down for generations through the forebears of each community.

According to Mndende, as quoted in Mamganyi and Buitendag, “religion is part of the fiber of society; it is deeply ingrained in social life, and it is impossible to isolate and study it as a distinct phenomenon; therefore when members of a family clan gather together in a sacrificial ritual for the ancestors, that is a religious activity in honour of an ancestor or ancestors.”<sup>26</sup> For the African, God is the explanation for his existence as well as all that can be experienced in thoughts and nature. Mbiti again makes the point that “wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting new crop, he takes it with him to a beer parlour or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician, he takes it to the house of parliament.”<sup>27</sup>

The African obsession with God is the reason why the continent is deeply religious. There are also a lot of religious activities that the African is engaged in. Njoku notes that:

The African man had many taboos to observe, and many daily rituals to perform, either to appease the community or the divinities. If he was not an indirect or unconscious slave of

the dominant conscious, he held perpetual allegiance to one divinity or the other. If he was free with men, he was not free with nature or his environment. Suppose community and environment allow him to live his life with fewer burdens, he would still have to pay the debts owed by his past ancestors.<sup>28</sup>

Religion therefore is at the core of African identity. An African can easily be distinguished by his religion. The identity created by religion for the African is one that evokes mixed feelings. On the one hand, it is seen as a catalyst for society in which certain forces would be absent because of pure reverence for God and his justice. On the other hand, religion is seen as the bane of the Africans and the reason why she is backward developmentally because it reduces every phenomenon to acts of the gods thereby stifling the inquiring spirit for concrete answers and solutions.

According to Kanu, “African traditional religion is therefore a religion that has been with Africans for many generations and with which they have lived their lives and solve their existential problems from time immemorial. It is a religion that is co-terminus with the African people and their society.”<sup>29</sup> So the faith found in Africa is called Traditional African religion, which, “as an aspect of African civilization also suffered from such

<sup>26.</sup> Manganyi, Jele S. and Buitendag, Johan “A Critical Analysis on African Traditional Religion and the Trinity,” *Theological Studies* 69, no.1 (2013), 3.

<sup>27.</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2.

<sup>28.</sup> F. O. C. Njoku, *Development and African Philosophy: A Theoretical Reconstruction of African Socio-political Economy*, (New England: Universe Publishers, 2004), 57.

<sup>29.</sup> Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony, “African Traditional Religion in a Globalizing World,” *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*.1, no.8 (2014), .6

inhuman racial treatment meted out to African people. The religion itself was described with many racial and misleading terms by missionaries, anthropologists, historians, sociologists and archeologists in the attempt to belittle African Tradition.”<sup>30</sup>

### Values

Values incorporate ethics and aesthetics which is why it is often referred to as value theory. While ethics is concerned with the foundation of human actions as right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameworthy, that is, hinged on “morality’, aesthetics is concerned with the appreciation of the good or beautiful whether natural or artificial as it is found in art. Blackburn defines ethics, meaning character, as “the study of the concepts involved in practical reasoning; good, right, duty, obligation, virtue, freedom, rationality, choice.”<sup>31</sup> Also it is the second-order study of the objectivity, subjectivity, relativism, or skepticism that may attend claims made in these terms. On the other hand, Blackburn also defines aesthetics as “the study of the feelings, concepts, and judgments arising from our appreciation of the arts or of the wider class of objects considered moving, or beautiful, or sublime.”<sup>32</sup>

Traditional African values are bounded with the spirit of communalism and religion. Because of that deep sense of familyhood or brotherhood, Africans maintain a high level of moral conduct because of the reason that death is not

annihilation but a transition to the hereafter. According to Odimegwu:

The moral dimension of good name expects that the individual should be kind, fair and honest in his social relations considering that these relations constitute the fabric of the community and the structural foundations of individual existence. Any negative action here would therefore amount to a metaphysical contagion which affects the entire community. This will invariably result in self-destruction for that individual.<sup>33</sup>

Traditional Africans understand that humans are not the ultimate judge of their deeds. Tempels asserts that “transcending the freewill of man is a higher force that knows, assesses and judges human acts... appeal can always be made to the transcendental power, from whom man has received his power of judgment, with the obligation to give account of his use of it.”<sup>34</sup> The understanding that traditional Africans have with regards to a Supreme Force who is the judge of man whether in this life or in eternity is what influences human behavior and actions. When a person commits a crime, he does not only commit the crime to the person involved but to the community and to God invariably. If there are no consequences for actions, then life would be brutish, nasty, purposeless, meaningless and short. Traditional Africans understand that truth

<sup>30</sup>. Nana Osei Bonsu, “African Traditional Religion: An Examination of Terminologies used for describing the indigenous faith of African people, using an Afrocentric Paradigm,” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 9, no.9 (2006), 113.

<sup>31</sup>. Simon Blackburn, *A Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Oxford: University Press, 2005), 121.

<sup>32</sup>. Simon Blackburn, *A Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, 8.

<sup>33</sup>. Ike Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 143.

<sup>34</sup>. Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy*, 75.

so well that one cannot just act *ultra vires* against the moral code that God himself has made available.

### A Critical Reflection

Africa's current underdevelopment predicament can be easily pointed to the individual tendency of members for personal aggrandizement and ill-gotten wealth acquisition, an ideology which is strange and foreign to traditional Africa. The unique thing about traditional African religion is that each generation encounters different challenges and experiences which alter the way of practicing their religion in such a manner that is always evolving. Sunday Awoniyi writing on the concept of African value system asserts that "it is a coherent set of African attitude, behavior and action adopted and evolved by African community as a standard to guide their behaviors and preference. Also the word value is used as an enduring belief that specific mode of conduct of Africa existence is socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct."<sup>35</sup>

Values (ethics) give sanctity to the customs and regulations of the community and Mbiti observes that, "any breach of this code of behavior is considered evil, wrong or bad, for it is ... must be punished by the corporate community of both the living and the departed, and God may also inflict punishment and bring about

justice."<sup>36</sup> The question can be posed that if Africans are morally aware by reason of the checks and balances put in place by the Supreme Being to them, why do we still find records of such cruel-evil amongst Africans? Mbiti, explains this paradox as he notes that "there are many occasions when their feelings of hatred, strain, fear, jealousy, and suspicion also become readily externalized. This makes them just as brutal, cruel, destructive and unkind as any other human beings in the world."<sup>37</sup> But on this paradox lies the necessity of ethics in the first place.

Traditional African ethics without any doubt is robust in that it takes a lot of indices into consideration before an action can be deemed to be moral. Wiredu avers that "although human beings have a core of common interests, they also have conflicting interest that precipitates real struggles. The aim of morality is to harmonize those warring interests through systematic adjustment and adapting."<sup>38</sup> African arts just like its ethics are a vivid representation or symbolism of Africans connection with the community as well as with the divinity. Ozumba points out that "the African aesthetic mentality is elastic enough to accommodate the beautiful and the ugly, the gracious and the bizarre, the serene and the strange, the primitive and the existed, the harmonious and the discordant. It is a mentality rich in opposites and congruent."<sup>39</sup>

<sup>35</sup>. Sunday Awoniyi, "African cultural values", The Past, Present and Future", *Journal of Sustainable Development on Africa* 17, no.1 (2015), 4.

<sup>36</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 205.

<sup>37</sup>. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 210.

<sup>38</sup>. Kwasi Wiredu, "Moral Foundations of an African Culture," *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies* (eds) K. Wiredu and K. Gyekye, (Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 197.

<sup>39</sup>. G. O. Ozumba, "Outlines of African aesthetics," *Sophia: An African Journal of Philosophy and Public Affairs* 9, no.2 (2007), 154.

Arts or aesthetic appreciation in traditional Africa is both spiritual and natural. Situma *et al* observe that such appreciation is also social as art objects "... define and maintain relationships of the sexes, age groups, clans, and with neighboring ethnic groups."<sup>40</sup> Art work in traditional African culture could be found in paintings, carvings, songs, rhythms, poems and stories. Hence, African arts as "a large body of moral instruction, of societal values and norms are preserved for posterity."<sup>41</sup>

African traditional arts or aesthetics are symbolic forms of the social, community or physical life of the African. Because the individual is a member of the community, his work of arts has great correlation to the psychology of the community. Nwala agrees that "the individual artist while creating value through his work expresses not only his individual preferences and feelings but the communal values of the society."<sup>42</sup> African aesthetics just like ethics is value-charged or filled. It acknowledges the reality of beauty and further investigates its manifestation in nature and in art in a critical manner. It is also important to communicate a message whose value may be in the formal, material and final causes or the imagery that is conjured by a work of art. This goes to show the extent of the rationality of traditional Africans to make sense of such technical matters as ethics and aesthetics which alongside communalism and religion, clearly delineate and situate traditional African identity.

## Conclusion

What distinguishes humans from other animals is the ability for clear thinking and reasoning. To deny that all persons have this ability to think is petty. As far as a person is alright without any harm done to his/her reasoning faculty, such a person becomes identified as a human being different from lesser animals. It is this rationality of the traditional African that enables him conceive the Supreme Being or Force. Everything in the traditional African worldview carries a spark of divinity or life force which the Supreme Force supplies. This life force is found in man, plants, animals and minerals. The world created by God manifests itself as a divinity. This has great bearing with the eternal or incorruptibility as a dimension of reality that is known to the African people.

The sophistication in the twenty first century world occasioned by science and technological advancement has not made the core identity of traditional Africa to be obsolete. The principles of communalism (African brotherhood or community relation), religion (social belief in a Supreme Being) and values (ethics in pursuit of morality) that convey the identity markers of traditional Africa is so solid that despite the presence of globalization, postmodernism and multiculturalism, they still provide guides to modern day Africans. This means that some ideals cannot be shaken or put aside by time or age. Traditional African way of life still provides an identity direction or relevance for Africans as a legacy. On this

<sup>40.</sup> Joseph Situma, *et al* "Mapping out the identity of African Arts and Aesthetics," *Aesthetics, Thoughts and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* 7, no.1 (2015), 81

<sup>41.</sup> Joseph Situma, *et al* "Mapping out...", 83.

<sup>42.</sup> Nwala, T. U, *Igbo Philosophy*, (Lagos: Lantern Books, 1985), 213.

backdrop, it becomes incontrovertible that the old ideals of traditional African society can have a new relevance for modern African's continued existence just as Isife avers that "African philosophy is indeed at the forefront of the struggle to restore the humanity of the African people"<sup>43</sup>

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