

VALUES AND GROWTH: INSIGHTS FROM THE PHENOMENAL IGBO APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM

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Abstract

Values—the individual's or group's general predilections regarding results or courses of actions deemed appropriated or otherwise, are not only positively correlated with growth, but do show some form of causation to it: while the right values lead to positive growth; the wrong ones elicit growth deficits. Undeniably, a person's sense of what is right or wrong, good or bad, useful or useless/unimportant, etc., would determine their level of aspiration and progress. Hence, people's values elicit certain types of attitudes which generate specific kinds of behaviours that engender definite sorts of growth. The trajectory of growth is hinged on the undulations of values. In this sense, values and growth could be likened to be two sides of the same coin. This essay highlighted specific historical instances to situate this symbiotic relationship between values and growth. It identified the transformational influence of the phenomenal Igbo apprenticeship system as a cynosure of this relationship amidst the current economic woes of Nigeria. In the end, it recommended the adoption of this 'prodigious system' by other ethnic groups in the nation as a viable means of engendering inclusive growth and peace.

Keywords: Values, Growth, Igbo Apprenticeship System, Development

Introduction

In some academic forum, I had once noted that clarity of mind begets clarity of thoughts, and clarity of thoughts begets clarity of expression. When the mind is bereft of conceptual encumbrances, it often utilizes the liberty to analyse reality in as dispassionate and clearly objective manner as is wont in basic arithmetic summations. In this way, clear and concise expressions are but external signals of internal lucidity—of harmony amongst the often discordant pitches of the internal senses. Baring the anomaly of being plagued by speech defect, persistent manifest of imprecise or ambiguous communicative skill is telltale of a muddled mind.

In similar vein, one can likewise analyse the relationship between values and growth, with the latter being an index for measuring the trajectory of the former. Following Aquinas' classifications, all humans, to fulfill their roles as social animals, are equipped with the capacity for intellection and will. By intellection, we grasp reality as being presented in its pluriformity; and through the will, we are able to make choices amidst the vast options in life. The intellect and will are constantly engaged in a dynamic, complex interaction that enable humans fulfil their social roles. While the intellect apprehends reality, determines the appropriateness of ends, as well as the best options (amongst various alternatives) available for the attainment of the ends; the will, as blind faculty, makes volitions, only to the extent it is enlightened by the radiance of the intellect.¹ If we give credence to the 'tabula rasa' thesis in John Locke's epistemology, the intellect thus, does not operate in a vacuum, in an 'unsituated' ambience. Rather, the capacity to perceive and determine appropriate courses of actions is always influenced empirically by specific societal norms which, themselves are structured by overarching values. Norms and values, for the most part, shape the recommendations of the *Intellect* and the volitions of the *Will*. This is perhaps, the galvanizing force in the claim to perspective relativity of knowledge by feminist epistemologists and postmodernist anti-realist publicists like Derrida, Lyotard, among others. 'Situatedness' in this context means that every choice of the *will* stems from specific illumination of the intellect that is often encumbered by societal norms and values. The communal or societal *will* thus, encapsulates extant acceptable norms and values.

As codes that elicit multi-directional conducts, values are responsible for the actions and inactions of individuals, and are strongly connected with the path to which a society flounders. As determinants of norms that impel actions, values are not only necessary for the sustenance of societies, but are prime determinants of societal evolution or regression: right values lead to positive growth; wrong ones elicit growth deficits. The values a set of people cherish elicit specific types of attitudes which generate certain kinds of behaviours that engender definite sorts of growth. Generally, the trajectory of societal growth is hinged on the undulations of values. Oftentimes, and to their chagrin, this is glossed over by African leaders who set out to achieve reforms merely through the barrel of the gun, or by executive fiat. The worsening security imbroglio in Buhari's Nigeria is a testament to this.

¹ T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, [1485] 1981), Prima Pars, Qs. 79, 82. Here, Aquinas elaborately discusses, among other things, the interaction between intellect and will in bringing about human actions.

In the main, scholars are able to identify differences in people's preferences and beliefs, and have related them to various measures of socio-economic and political growth. The recent applause of the phenomenal Igbo apprenticeship system by the Harvard Business Review, is insightful to this paper: in spite of socio-economic and political challenges of the region, the Igbos are still able to thrive on many indices. Landes could not have been more apt when he noted that "if we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes almost all the difference."² Yes, culture is pivotal to socio-economic growth. The significance of cultural values to human development is underscored in recent researches, which have created valuable datasets, like the World Values Survey (WVS – Inglehart 1997); the Hofstede dataset (Hofstede 1980, 2001); the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS – Schwartz 1994, 2006); and the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program (GLOBE) dataset.³ The invention of these datasets highlights the introduction of culturally based explanations to socio-economic growths.

In this paper, we shall highlight the causational connection between values and growth, by means of exploring past chronicles of specific individual nations. We shall recognize the revolutionary influence of this remarkable Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) on the economic, social and human security profile of the Southeast communities of Nigeria, and in so doing, domesticate this causational relationship between values and growth. Finally, we shall recommend the adoption of this wonderful scheme by other contiguous ethnic groups, as it seems, under the prevailing circumstances, to be the most feasible way by which we can stimulate inclusive growth and peace in Nigeria.

Probing the Dynamics of Values and Growth

The literary world is awash with undulations of the connotations of the notion of value. Scholars of different disciplines use the term to connote seemingly different things. For instance, the economist uses the term to refer to benefits derived from goods and services (monetary value). To the scientist, it is the usefulness of a scientific-technological produce (functional value). To the philosopher, values are desirable qualities that enhance group interactions (social

² D. Landes, Culture Makes Almost All the Difference, in L.E. Harrison & S.P. Huntington, eds., *Culture Matters*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), 2.

³ R.J. House, P.J. Hanges, M. Javidan, P.W. Dorfman, & V. Gupta, *Culture, Leadership and Organizations: The Globe Study of 62 Societies*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2014).

value). The fourth strand that yields psychological value pertains to emotional attachment individuals or groups have regarding an object, person or situation. Unlike the others, objects with psychological value have the capacity to attract or repulse irrespective of monetary, functional or social imports.

Dasein (Man), as Heidegger explains, is a 'being-in-the-world', which proximally, so to speak, is never free from 'being-in.'⁴ Our experience with the world is that of *dwelling*. Dwelling is the experience of being situated in a certain relationship with existence. Because the manner in which we dwell is the manner in which we are, we exist on earth, dwelling then is an extension of our identity, of who we are. Dwelling and being are one and the same.⁵ We are thrown to dwell within the inescapable contingencies of the world, though with some capacity to appropriate worldly goods. About worldly goods, Aristotle insists that to live in a worthwhile and personally flourishing way, that is to achieve eudemonia (happiness), one needs such things as honour, wealth, friends, political power, and contemplation.⁶ These are external and internal goods to which people almost always attach value. Hence, it is germane to say that values are inextricably tied to objects of utility. Whatever satisfies some need or utility whether material or psychological or intellectual, is attached with some form of value.

In social engineering, values are implicit and explicit assumptions or beliefs that constitute the foundation of ethical actions.⁷ The values a person or group of persons cherish will reflect on their accepted norms and rules that guide their realization within a society. In other words, while values constitute the framework for establishing what is right or wrong, worthwhile or worthless, important or unimportant, norms provide guides or standards with which to navigate through what ought to be done within specific situations. Asking one's relative for assistance when in need, is a norm, which, reflects the value of communality; telling lies is a norm which, reflects the value of dishonesty. To the extent that values structure norms of behaviour, to that extent they are central to human choices. Like a rudder that determines the path onto which a ship navigates, human choices define and sustain the trajectory of societal progress. Given that every rational choice springs from an underlying value, and owing

⁴ M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, tr. J. Macquarie and R. Robinson. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, [1927] 1962), 12: 84.

⁵ M. Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971), 150-151.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, BK. I, CH. 6, 1097b 1-4; see also BK. IV, CH. 1.

⁷ C. Ogbujah, African Cultural Values and Inter-Communal Relations: The Case with Nigeria, *Developing Country Studies*, 4/24 (2014), 208.

that norms—being reflective of values, determine what ought to be done in specific situations, values are thus, indispensable tools for the sustenance of societies. They constitute the groundworks for growth or diminution of peoples.

Humans, for the most part, are conscious, value pursuing animals. The values we 'chase' give rise to overall standards and ideals by which we judge our own and others' conducts, with attendant specific obligations.⁸ Sometimes, these obligations impel us to persuade or coerce those with divergent values to drop theirs and accept ours. For instance, the current exportation of capitalism across the globe is borne out of the perceived obligation imposed by the dominant American cultural value of individualism. Individualism, as opposed to collectivism, is here seen as the catalyst for growth and prosperity. This then makes its adoption as societal guiding socio-economic system a responsibility judgment that carries with it the imperative to pressure countries with opposing cultural values to discard their values or face dire consequences.

Values, although significant as all archetypes are in social engineering, do not elicit automatic compliance. There is always the element of choice. Much as nations could reject specific values of dominant cultures, irrespective of pressures and threats of sanctions, every human being is availed the autonomy to choose to live in conformity with specific societal values or not. Society, in turn, reserves the rights to device means of enforcing her values on residents. For instance, honesty is a value held in high esteem in the Igbo traditional society. If one is dishonest, an immediate physical punishment might be necessary to serve as both retribution and deterrence in the short term. But in the long run, the individual will realize that their subsequent views and contentions would not be taken seriously within the society. Through written or unwritten codes, every society enforces her values, not only because of their functional value as ends to which all should aspire, but because they are often means without which specific ends cannot be reached. For instance, the value of honesty is encouraged not just because it is virtuous to be honest, but because it the means to eliciting trust and confidence. Without trust, interrelationships are impossible and communications become an empty verbiage. Trust is the psycho-social grease that lubricates the chain of human relationships. An organization that exudes trust by its elevation of the value of honesty is likely to achieve longevity in profitability. This is why ethics in business which was once seen as an oxymoron, has gained traction in modern scholarship. For this same reason, in probing the crises of development,

⁸ B. Chris & M. Andrew, *Values and Ethics in Social work, An Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 11.

it has become imperative for scholars to pay close attention to the nexus between values and growth.

The term growth is used here in inclusive and functional senses to designate genuine, factual (that is verifiable), original (in the sense of ushering in a departure from the previous), and reliable progress. It is inclusive because it entails a person's integral evolution—body and spirit; a complete growth of society which consists of human capacity development, socio-economic progress, and political (including foreign policy) stability. It is functional in the sense that it uplifts the values that enhance the sociality and happiness of humankind.⁹ Integral growth entails an increase in all sectors of society with direct or indirect bearing on individuals. As we have observed earlier, individual or communal values elicit definite types of outlooks which generate peculiar kinds of behaviours that produce definite sorts of growth. Perhaps, an excursus of this synergy in a few nations' history, will help elucidate this claim.

The Symbiotic Relationship between Values and Growth in World History

Evidently, cultural relativism is a prominent feature of the 21st century. Without conceding to some weird system of autonomy which, under the pretext of promoting tolerance, ends up atomizing societies, it is pertinent to align the trajectory of a society's growth with her cultural proclivities. Recurrent events seem to contradict the old-fashioned finance experts' view that 'people are the same everywhere and will respond to the right economic opportunities and incentives alike.'¹⁰ Instances abound in multicultural societies where some ethnic minorities often excel more than others, even though all are exposed to the same or similar economic opportunities and incentives. Historically, the case of Chinese' economic ascendancy in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines is very instructive. Indeed, multiple datasets highlight the significance of cultural values over and against most other indices in econometrics. Ntibagirirwa observes:

...the economic success of South East Asia on the one hand and the failure of economic development in sub-Saharan Africa on the other, are increasingly proving that the 'economic' argument cannot be taken dogmatically: self-interest and rationality do not seem to be the sufficient explanations for economic development. One other avenue to be taken

⁹ C. Ogbujah, & C. Opara, *The Idea of human Personhood in Nigeria: Implications for National Development* (Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2014), 53-54.

¹⁰ The World Bank and the IMF, *Finance and Development*, (March 1994), 51.

seriously is the link between cultural values and economic development. After viewing the principle of self-interest against its historico-cultural background, I consider this link in the African context, and argue that, although they cannot be taken as the sole factor, people's cultural beliefs and values are crucial for economic development. Economic growth and development need to be a substantiation of a people's beliefs and values.¹¹

In other words, given the right socio-political conditions, the economic path of a polity authenticates the norms and values of the people; or put differently, the espoused values of a set of people always reflect on the direction of their overall growth.

Like the Chinese, the Igbos of Southeast Nigeria have experienced tremendous economic growth within and outside their native land, and beyond the imaginations of other contiguous ethnic groups. But unlike the Chinese, and against a harsh socio-political ambience, they have withstood adversity in their own country to outclass others. Being technically 'vanquished' by the Nigerian forces at the end of the 1967-70 civil war, and having their fiscal assets restricted to only twenty Nigerian pounds (£20) irrespective of their financial standing before and during the war, the Igbos have, within half of a century, established the most thriving business empires in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria and beyond. Currently, they constitute a big chunk of the cultural group that has higher levels of educational attainment than are found in any other community in the United States. In analyzing data from the 2006 American Community Survey (ACS) by the U.S. Census Bureau, Leslie shows that Nigerian immigrants (who are mostly Igbos) have the highest levels of education in the nation, surpassing whites and Asians. Although constituting a tiny portion of the entire U.S. population, they disproportionately tower ahead of whites and Asians, with 37% (bachelor's degrees), 17% (master's degrees) and 4% (doctorate), as against the whites' 19%, 8% & 1% in respective categories.¹² Without discounting other causative factors, it is obvious that Igbo cultural values are strongly implicated in this level of success story.

¹¹ S. Ntibagirirwa, Cultural Values, Economic Growth and Development, *Journal of Business Ethics* 84 (2009), 297-311

¹² C. Leslie, 'Data show Nigerians the most educated in the U.S.', *Houston Chronicle*, ([2008] 2018), <https://www.chron.com/news/article/Data-show-Nigerians-the-most-educated-in-the-U-S-1600808.php>, accessed May 2021.

When one analyzes David Landes' remarks, that some cultures are 'toxic', and as such handicap the people who cling to them,¹³ not only do the images of ravaged northern Nigeria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Rwanda, etc., come to mind, but the acuity of its counterpoise: 'some cultural values are *sublime*, and as such uplift the people who hold onto them', becomes germane. Values and growth are ineluctable sides of the same coin. In all history, their correlation coefficient has remained constant, showing that it is easy to use the experience of a group of people to project the growth trajectory of others in diverse societies, having similar cultural values. In this wise, we don't need to draw up multiple samples from all cultures to substantiate the claim. The following paragraphs will show that besides self-interest and rationality, the link between a group's cultural values and development can be extrapolated to other groups.

To illustrate a group's struggle with values and growth, we shall examine the experience of the Māori—the indigenous people of New Zealand. With a plethora of extant researches, it is easy to harvest scholars' portrayal of the Māori tribe: while some depict them as viewing the world through mainly traditional lenses,¹⁴ others see them as simply being more collectivistic than their European counterparts.¹⁵ For John Reid and Matthew Rout, the Māori embody communal values, esoteric wisdom and environmental spiritualism, which seem to utterly contrast with the Western values of individualism, technology and commerce,¹⁶ that generate strong economic growth. After eliminating other intervening factors, scholars seem to agree that the non-absorption of Western values of individuality, autonomy, freedom, self-interest, and competition among the Māoris, was largely accountable for their slack in growth and productivity. For as long as their *ethnic* individuality was entwined with the values of collectivism, reciprocity, relationality and connectivity to prior generations,¹⁷ it was bound to compel bizarre social identity, and impede their overall growth. In their insightful quantitative study of the Māori attitudes, Houkamau and Sibley acknowledged that in line with the key tenets of identity economics, attachment to traditional values could constitute a barrier to employment and upward social mobility, as in this case, "strong allegiance to being Māori might be a 'poor

¹³ The World Bank, *Culture Counts: Financing, Resources, and the Economics of Culture In Sustainable Development* (Washington DC, 2000), 30.

¹⁴ G. Hook, T. Waaka, & L. Raumati, Mentoring Māori within a Pākehā Framework. *MAI Rev.* 3(1) (2007), 6

¹⁵ J.M. Haar, & D.M. Brougham, An indigenous Model of Career Satisfaction: Exploring the Role of Workplace Cultural Wellbeing. *Soc Indic Res.* 110/3 (2013), 878.

¹⁶ J. Reid, & M. Rout, 'Māori Tribal Economy: Rethinking the Original Economic Institutions', in T.L. Anderson, ed., *Unlocking the Wealth of Indian Nations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 84–103

¹⁷ G. Hook, T. Waaka, & L. Raumati, 'Mentoring Māori Within a Pākehā Framework', *MAI Rev.* 3/1 (2007), 5.

economic decision'"¹⁸ Despite all efforts at endorsing the intrinsic worth of the Māori values, Houkamau and Sibley's findings ultimately acquiesced with this time-tested instructive wisdom: "because identity is fundamental to behaviour, choice of identity may be the most important 'economic' decision people make."¹⁹

The connection between espousing collectivist values and the Māori tardiness to economic prosperity relative to her contiguous European counterparts, is emblematic of the experiences of other ethnic societies espousing similar cultural values. From the West to the Horn of Africa, Cairo to the Middle East, Pradesh to Gujarat (India), Pakistan to Mexico, the story is the same. The success stories of Japan and perhaps, Portugal, which nonetheless, incorporated much of individualistic values, cannot still be equated with those of the United States and the Western Europe. The overriding commitment to 'group membership' (be it family, extended family or clan) over individual aspirations is a bane to economic prosperity. In his attempt to demonstrate the importance of cultural values for outcomes, Greif contrasted the Genovese merchants (with individualistic values), with the Jewish Maghrebi merchants (with collectivist values). Using historical evidence, he exposed how the Genovese merchants reaped larger-scale economies that outcompeted their Maghrebi counterparts.²⁰ Values, indeed matter for economic growth.

Igbo Apprenticeship: A Cynosure of the Influence of Values on Growth

In its bid to account for the complex phenomenon of uneven growth amongst diverse peoples, neo-liberal economics supports the model that the liberty to pursue one's self-interest and rational choice leads to economic prosperity, while the converse leads to poverty. This seems to agree with the thesis we espoused earlier which situates the difference between rich and poor nations on the promotion of the values of individuality (in the sense of individual liberty) as against communality. However, empirical studies in the last couple decades²¹

¹⁸ A.C. Houkamau & C.G. Sibley, 'The Role of Culture and Identity for Economic Values: A Quantitative Study of Māori Attitudes, *Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, 49 (sup1), (2019), 118-136

¹⁹ G.A. Akerlof, & R.E. Kranton, 'Economics and Identity' *Q J Econ.* 115/3 (2000), 717.

²⁰ A. Greif, 'Cultural Beliefs and the Organization of Society: A Historical and Theoretical Reflection on Collectivist and Individualist Societies', *J. Polit. Econ.* 102/5 (1994), 912-50

²¹ See Ntibagirirwa, 2009; Collier, 2017; Houkamau & Sibley, 2019. The works of these scholars acknowledge that the culture of a society can trap an entire nation into poverty or prosperity.

show that though significant in its own rights, this principle of rational self-interest alone is insufficient to boost tangible economic growth, especially in a multicultural society. There is a growing emphasis on the imports of the historico-cultural ambience. This is where we situate the Igbo apprenticeship system in the overall economic growth of Igbo nation.

The Igbos, although situated in the south-eastern region of Nigeria, are found in all parts of the country because of their business prowess. Unlike other major tribes of Nigeria, traditional Igbo society is an acephalous nation without supreme power-wielding monarchs. This accounts for the popular cliché: *Igbo enwe Eze*—Igbos have no kings. It is a decentralized and egalitarian society, with varying layers of authority bestowed on the family, the kindred, the village and the town units. Governance was by the council of elders (gerontocracy), in conjunction with the age grades, titled people, *umu ada* (first born daughters) and ritual priests. Their decisions, which generally were not subject to appellate procedures, were religiously implemented for the good of society. Without institutionalized military or police force, traditional Igbo society enjoyed relative peace and order. Thanks to her rich cultural heritage, she also enjoys economic growth.

The major part of this cultural heritage is manifest in values. Though unwritten in any shape or form, Igbo values are enshrined in the hearts and minds of the people, and are passed down the generations through myth, folklores, legends and proverbs. As Ukeje observed, it is a sacred trust for parents, guardians, relatives and a wider circle of kinsmen in Igboland to discharge their obligations as it concerns the socialization of the Igbo child.²² The training of a child in Igboland is not solely the duty of the nuclear family. The larger community is always involved. This practice is borne out of the communalistic system that sees individual lives as organically entwined with those of others within the community. Unlike the western adjudicatory system, individual lives, for the most part, regulate and are regulated by others. The ideology behind this is couched in the aphorism: *otu aka ruta manu, ozuo oha* (when a finger touches oil, it soils the others). The belief is that if a child is good the community benefits and if the child is bad, the community also suffers the brunt.

This community-based structure of Igbo society, as I explained in *The Idea of Personhood*,²³ engenders a communal spirit that is expressed per excellence, in the

²² B.O. Ukeje, *Education for Social Reconstruction*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1976), 54.

²³ C. Ogbujah, *The Idea of Personhood*, (Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd., 2006), 98-101. In this text, I laid out the foundation upon which the basic structure of Igbo personhood rests, namely: communality.

extended family system. The 'extended family' as the *umunna* (literally children of the same father), seeing that they descended from the same stock, ensure that the love and care due to each are never denied. An individual's success is measured by the number of his townspeople he has set up to succeed, since the glory of the community is in the merry of all. Everyone is carried along and catered for, to eliminate or minimally reduce the phenomena of abandoned orphans, roaming beggars or solitary aged, not by dolling out handouts, but through a system of economic empowerment in apprenticeship.

The Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) is a business philosophy of shared prosperity in which members competitively participate to attain organic economic equilibrium, where market shares are voluntarily surrendered to fund competitors, and success is measured in terms of stakeholders' support rather than on market dominance.²⁴ Usually denoted as *imu-ahia*, *igba-odibo*, *igba-boi* or *imu-oru*, the system is an informal economic model that utilizes the induction strategy to initiate young Igbos into entrepreneurial projects by already established entrepreneurs who, often are drawn from their immediate vicinity. The projects range from as lowly conceived as domestic help, to as highly valued as a vocation, trade or enterprise.²⁵ The structure of the internship is fluid, and its duration period is arbitrarily fixed, depending on the type and / or prevailing circumstances and agreements. The overall motif is for the apprentice to learn and master skills essential for embarking on their own enterprise.

In the domestic scenario, a family might engage the services of a 'house-help' (*nwa-boi*) who takes care of all domestic chores, in exchange for upkeep and vocational training. At the end of agreed period, the *nwa-boi* is released with some resources to establish their own businesses. At other instances, someone who has established himself in some skill, or gained some market share in a particular business could decide to recruit apprentices. Through practical experiences, he instructs them on the skill or the tricks of the business, while they work for him. After some agreed period when the apprentice is expected to have garnered sufficient skills/experience, he settles them by either giving them cash to fend for themselves, or by renting and equipping stores for them. With time, these *novo* entrepreneurs, in deploying the acquired skills, begin to gain their own market shares, and subsequently recruit their own apprentices. Thus, within

²⁴ N. Ekekewe, 'The Igbo Apprenticeship System Article', (February 23, 2021), <https://www.tekedia.com/the-igbo-apprenticeship-system-article/>, accessed June 2021.

²⁵ M. Alike, & I.O. Umunze, Socio-economic Philosophy of Contemporary Igbo Apprenticeship System. *Nnadiesbube Journal of Philosophy*. 3 /1, (2019), 35-48.

a short period, there is an exponential growth in the number of people empowered, leading to meaningful engagement of the youth, economic prosperity and relative peace for the region.

The Igbo apprenticeship system is phenomenal because it has facilitated burgeoning entrepreneurial communities in Igboland. Its aims are 'to spur economic growth and stability, and sustainable livelihood by financing and investing in human resources through vocational training.'²⁶ In the spirit of Igbo *onye aghala nwanne ya* (do not leave your brethren behind), everyone gains something and no one is left behind. No one is super-rich or super-poor. The *Oga* (entrepreneur) recruits and trains apprentices to help build his business empire. In the end, he proportionally shares out his fortune to the apprentices, thereby empowering them to be entrepreneurs in their own rights. This continuous scheme of recruiting, training and settling of apprentices is a phenomenal economic empowerment system that has positively impacted all the nooks and crannies of Igboland.

In the absence of Federal Government's economic establishments in the southeast, and due to their inability to buy into corporations during indigenization period (as all their assets were reduced to twenty pounds [£20] after the civil war), the Igbos understood that the path to survival and prosperity is that of hard-work—*igba mbo*. Even before the ruins of the civil war, and propelled by their age-long cliché that *aka aja aja na ebute onu mmanu mmanu* (soiled hands bring about oily mouth), the Igbo sense of *igba mbo* (hard-work) was resilient in the face of adversities that ordinarily would discourage other competitors. Basden aptly captures this when he notes that wherever the Igbo are and whatever be the conditions, it will not be long before they adapt themselves and make their socio-economic presence impactful.²⁷

Hence, besides the communalistic spirit, hard-work is a value propagated and embraced in Igbo culture. Individuals who succeed through hard-work are exemplars. Society usually regards their views highly, and often bestows them accolades in form of chieftaincy titles. This was why Okonkwo—the central character in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, worked so hard to achieve honour and fame. He was hunted by the specter of his father – Unoka, who was described as 'worthless' because of his lack of entrepreneurial spirit.²⁸ Barely half a century

²⁶ B. Agozino & I. Anyanike, "IMU AHIA: Traditional Igbo Business School and Global Commerce Culture". *Dialectical Anthropology*. **31** /1 (1 November 2007), 233–252.

²⁷ G.T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

²⁸ C. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (New Hampshire: Heinemann Ltd., 1958), 13.

after being decimated at the civil war, the Igbos today, in Maliga's findings, owe 74% of investments in Lagos, while Hausa/Fulani owes 5%, Foreigners (Non-Nigerians) owe 15%; other Nigerians (Non-Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) owe 5%; and the Yorubas which include Mike Adenuga, owe a paltry 1%.²⁹ The statistics is much the same in other big Nigerian cities like Port Harcourt, Kano, Kaduna, Abuja, etc. In his essay: "The Igbo Entrepreneur in the political economy of Nigeria," Olutayo argues that "the Igbo, when compared to the other major ethnic groups in Nigeria, are in the forefront of entrepreneurial activities, especially in the informal sector."³⁰ Indeed, for want of verifiable statistics, the mind-blowing figures arising from Udegbe's unaided estimates,³¹ could only be achieved through hard work, courage, determination, and the sheer will to help each other grow.

In the main, it seems evident that at some level, these twin values of communality and hard-work coalesce in the use of the apprenticeship system in furthering economic growth and prosperity. In its recurrent chain of wealth incubation, today's *ogas* are yesterday's apprentices that had served and were handed resources to begin their own enterprises. The system, as Ekekwe testifies, engineers an efficient economic equilibrium, reduces inequality to the barest minimum, erodes selfishness and greed, and consequently, reduces insecurity significantly.³² This, perhaps, explains why the United Nations' National Human Development Report, 2015 was unambiguous in confirming the Southeast geopolitical zone as not just the most balanced and economically stable part of Nigeria with the least hunger and economic stress on the citizens, but as the most human security secure zone, with the highest level of human wellbeing.³³ Notwithstanding the current state-induced crisis in the region, the *onye aghala*

²⁹ S. Maliga, 2013. 'Igbos Dominate Economically in Lagos because Yorubas are Lazy,' cited in J.J. Orugun & A.T. Nafiu, 'An Exploratory Study Of Igbo Entrepreneurial Activity And Business Success In Nigeria As The Panacea For Economic Growth And Development', *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, Vol. 3/9 (2014), 158-165.

³⁰ O. A. Olutayo, 'The Igbo Entrepreneur in the Political Economy of Nigeria', *African Study Monographs*, 20/3 (September 1999), 147-174.

³¹ C. Udegbe, 'The Igbos have more at Stake in Nigeria', *Vanguard* (July 26, 2013), <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/07/the-igbos-have-more-at-stake-in-nigeria/>, accessed June 2021. Here, Udegbe postulates that Igbos investment in Lagos is not less than N300 trillion; it is double of that in Abuja at about N600 trillion; In Kano and Kaduna, it runs up to N10 trillion respectively, etc.

³² N. Ekekwe, 'The Platform – Why I Said the Igbo Apprenticeship System is the World's Best Business Framework' (2019), <https://www.tekedia.com/the-platform-why-i-said-the-igbo-apprenticeship-system-is-the-worlds-best-business-framework/>, accessed June 2021.

³³ UNDP, National Human Development Report, Human Security and Human Development in Nigeria (2015), <file:///C:/Users/hp/Downloads/2016%2520National%2520Human%2520Development%2520Report%2520for%2520Nigeria.pdf>, accessed June 2021.

nwanne ya (do not leave your brethren behind) value in Igbo apprenticeship system, is a testament that besides rational self-interests, values command a phenomenal influence on societal growth.

Conclusion

By deploying the historico-analytic apparatus, the foregoing investigations have established the link between values and growth. From Germany to Cuba, Russia to the United States, nations that practice western individualistic capitalism have experienced economic prosperity and stability much more than those practicing eastern communalistic socialism. In each of these instances, the value that led to the specific choice of a broad economic system is the key. While some cultural values are 'toxic', and as such handicap the people who cling to them, some are 'sublime', and as such uplift the people that hold onto them.

The Igbo apprenticeship system is a phenome that feeds off the values of hard-work and communality. Given the absence of a lineage of monarchs with accrued wealth from societal tax payments, and owing to non-rehabilitation of her infrastructure after the devastation of the Nigerian-Biafran war, the Igbos understood that the only path to survival is that of hard-work. This explains why they are found in all parts of the country doing all sorts of jobs. Impelled by communality, societal exemplars of success initiate these hard-working youths into entrepreneurial structure through apprenticeship. In spite of the dwindling economic fortunes of the nation, the multiplying effect of this system is what gives the Igbos a cutting edge over contiguous ethnic groups in terms of economic stability, security and overall wellbeing.

Today, Igbos are recognized across the world for their entrepreneurial and business prowess. Only recently, the Harvard Business Review approved the work on the Igbo Apprenticeship System (IAS) as a veritable tool for 'stakeholder' capitalism that has the potential to curb the excesses of traditional 'shareholder' capitalism.³⁴ This feat is worth emulating by other contiguous ethnic groups. The Igbo drive, determination and apprenticeship system are what the Nigerian state needs to push her to a better footing in the globalized world.

³⁴ N. Ekeke, 'Harvard Business Review Has Approve The Work On The Igbo Apprenticeship System', <https://www.tekedia.com/harvard-business-review-has-approved-the-work-on-the-igbo-apprenticeship-system/>, accessed June 2021.

On the surface, this phenomenal apprenticeship system as thus elucidated, might pass off as invulnerable to infractions attendant to human interactions. To the contrary, people, regrettably, have sometimes taken advantage of its informal and unstructured nature to satiate their selfish interests. In the absence of written contracts to enable legal enforcement of agreements and government regulations, some unscrupulous Masters (*Ogas*) do falsely accuse their apprentices penultimate to their graduation years, in order to renege from providing start-up funds after apprenticeship completion. At other instances, some interns have reportedly swindled their mentors, leading to serious financial losses, and sometimes, collapse of business empires. Terrible as these may seem, they are isolated and insignificant cases compared to success stories, and as such, do not detract the phenomenal contributions of this apprenticeship scheme to the development of Igbo region. The reality is, if properly honed, the Igbo apprenticeship framework has the potential to easily stimulate efficient economic equilibrium, which is much needed for national and global peace.

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