

Cultural Values and Norms in Intercultural Communication: Insights from *Icheoku* and *Masquerade*

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Abstract: Different societies and cultures have varying values and norms in interpersonal and intergroup interaction. Where the communication is intracultural, the norms hardly constitute any hindrances, but in intercultural communication, the varying values could pose serious challenges. Significant disparities exist between some interactional norms in black African cultures and their Western counterparts. In this paper, some of such disparities in values are examined as they feature during communication between individuals from an African culture on the one hand and English/Russian cultures on the other hand. The specific issues examined include the use of personal names and honorifics, breaking of kola nuts, curses and insults, culinary practices and gender distinctions. Two mass media comedies which dramatize these challenges among interactants from the different cultures, *Icheoku* and *Masquerade*, are used for illustration. The analysis reveals that these practices which may be of little significance in Western cultures are crucial for successful communication and interaction with Africans. It is demonstrated that an understanding of (and ready adaptation to) the values and norms in different cultures is a *sine qua non* to successful intercultural communication..

Keywords: Values, norms, African culture, European cultures, honorifics, titles, kola nuts, proverbs, curses, gender stereotypes

1. Introduction

The importance of cultural and personal values and norms in communication is well recognized. The two concepts – values and norms – are largely intertwined. Values refer to what an individual or group of people hold to be important, either as a desired end-state or as a characteristic of a person. On the other hand norms are the “guidelines of how we should or should not behave that have a basis in morality” (Gudykunst, 2004, p. 43). Norms refer to attitudes and behaviors that are considered normal, typical or average within the group. According to Satoshi Ishii and Donald W. Klopff (1987, p. 1), “values are the evaluative and judgmental facet of a culture’s ‘personal orientation system,’ helping its members determine what is right or wrong, good or bad, important or unimportant.” While values constitute what should be judged as worthwhile or worthless, norms provide rules for behavior in specific situations. Values are abstract notions of what is important and respectable, while norms are specific behavioural patterns, rules and guides. In simpler terms, the values are the beliefs about what

is important, while the norms are the behaviors and attitudes that support and indicate these values. It can also be said that values are expressed or manifested through norms.

Both values and norms have group and individual dimensions, although most individual values are derived from group values. Values (with their accompanying norms) are also classified in terms of the domains of life involved. Therefore, we have social values, ethical/moral values, doctrinal (religious) values, ideological (political) values, aesthetic values, professional (occupational) values, etc. With reference to personal values, some controversy also exists whether to consider some values as intrinsic (natural or physiological) and others as extrinsic (acquired, learned). There is equally some disagreement whether to consider some values – like ambition, acquisitiveness – as virtues or as vices.

It is also well known that values are relative from one society to another. According to Satoshi Ishii and Donald W. Klopff (2014), “the values which are of primary importance to citizens of a particular country may be of only secondary or tertiary importance to citizens of another country, a difference which can lead to problems in international communication.” While Ishii and Klopff (2014) use national domain to discuss group values and norms, these concepts can as well, or are often better, discussed according to the domains of race, ethnicity, profession, gender or age. However, care must be taken to avoid unnecessary stereotyping because individuals and professional groups may have different values based on their upbringing and innate psychological make-up.

In terms of these domains, significant differences are known to exist between sub-Saharan African cultures and Western cultures. Therefore, certain practices that are considered important among Africans, especially in conversations, appear to be of little importance in Western societies. While some of these differences in values have been discussed, there are a few that require further understanding, especially as enunciated by African scholars. Among the common values in sub-Saharan Africa are respect for elders and nature, marriage, having children, the extended family system, acquisition of personal titles, hospitality and spirituality.

The specific ethnolinguistic society whose values are focused on here as representative of most sub-Saharan cultures is the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. The Igbo are “a closely knit ethnic group, with a population of over fifteen million speakers of Igbo which comprises more than five dialects and several sub-dialects, ranking next to the Hausa and the Yoruba as one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria” (Okolo, 2002, pp. 237). Currently, Igbo intellectuals are also involved in the campaign for retention and promotion of their cultural values, wherever in the world they may be, in the face of erosion of such values owing to Westernization: “though in diaspora, we should try to preserve our culture, norms and values...which appear to be fading... This should be seen as a clarion call for our people to revive our declining Igbo values which originally endeared us to our neighbours in Nigeria and anywhere we found ourselves” (Marchie, 2009, pp. 2, 3)

Josef Schmied has identified discourse as an important but difficult and neglected area of African discourse strategies. He considers it a field that “perhaps only African scholars can penetrate” since “they reflect underlying patterns of African thinking” (Schmied, 1991, p. 93).

In this study, we wish to attempt an incursion into this area. The specific issues identified and discussed here are personal titles, breaking of kola nuts, the use of proverbs, curses and insults, and culinary practices. The central thesis put forward here is that failure on the part of an individual,

including a foreign visitor, to honour the norms associated with these values can constitute impediments to successful communication and all forms of relationship between the parties.

2. Texts and Methods

Icheoku and *Masquerade* are not in print (in their published forms). *Icheoku* is a television series produced by the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, most of the episodes by the Lagos national headquarters and a few by the Enugu national station. Therefore, the texts are in the audio-visual medium (videocassettes). *Masquerade* is both a television and a radio series. Hence, it is in both the audio-visual and the audio media. The episodes in the audio medium – in long playing records, audiocassettes and audio compact discs – have been chosen because this medium presents certain linguistic and paralinguistic features which are not manifest in the audio-visual (where the pictorial props reduce their prominence). The combination of the purely aural in *Masquerade* with the visual in *Icheoku* brings a fuller picture of the patterns and issues in second-language use and the issues discussed here. Relevant texts (of video episodes and audio compact discs) from each series have been faithfully transcribed for the analysis. For *Icheoku* the analysis in this paper is largely complemented by the English sub-titles provided in the videotapes as much of the dialogue is in Igbo. Two bilingual dictionaries – Kay Williamson's *Igbo-English Dictionary* (1972) and H.I. Nnaji's *Modern Igbo-English Dictionary* (1985) – have also aided the interpretations. An interview between Chief Chika Okpala, the man who has played the role of Chief Zebrudaya (Zebi) of *Masquerade* from the 1970's to date has helped in the interpretation of the sociolinguistic dimensions of the texts (Okpala, 1993). The researcher also resorted to Igbo native speakers as informants and resource persons as occasions demanded.

In subject matter, *Icheoku* and *Masquerade* are both comedies that satirize social issues. *Icheoku* deals with domestic and communal concerns in a typical traditional Igbo community during the colonial era. Each episode concentrates on some family squabble or social issue and the effort of the colonialists in the image of the District Officer or District Commissioner to dispense justice in a foreign terrain with the Court Clerk, who is severely handicapped in the District Officer's language (English), as the interpreter from English to Igbo and vice-versa. *Masquerade* deals with contemporary issues in Nigeria with each episode focusing on a specific malaise in politics, religion, social manners, marriage, etc. But the comedies are given a highly linguistic tinge: the works equally ridicule linguistic manners, in that they parody the trials, travails and triumphs of the English language and its users in second-language settings. *Icheoku* aptly captures the intriguing challenges that attended the use of English as a vehicle for communication between the English monolingual colonial masters and the African monolingual populace through the instrumentality of interpreters like the Court Clerk. This suggests the name *Icheoku*, meaning "Parrot," which is the emblem used in the programme. This relates to Kachru's "regulative" function of non-native "Englishes" (Kachru, 1983, pp. 41-42). On the other hand, *Masquerade* is an eloquent demonstration of Kachru's "interpersonal" function of non-native Englishes where the language functions as a vehicle of communication among the members of Africa's multilingual nations and states.

A word also needs to be said about the authorship of these texts. Although the scripts of the

episodes are written by individuals, the authorship is normally ascribed to the body producing and presenting them since the text as performed normally involves much more than what is found on the script. Thus out of the many episodes of *Icheoku* studied, all those produced by the NTA Headquarters, Lagos, are written by Peter Eneh; two of the four produced by the NTA Enugu are written by Emeka Nwagwu while two have no script writer identified. Therefore, the authorship is ascribed to NTA Lagos and NTA Enugu respectively. Secondly, while all the episodes produced by the Lagos headquarters have titles, those produced by Enugu NTA have no titles. We cite the titles of those produced by NTA Lagos. For ease of reference to those by the NTA Enugu, the researcher suggests titles for them [enclosed in square brackets] based on the issues dealt with in them. For *Masquerade* all the texts are named. The LPs, audiocassettes and audio CDs are produced under the names “James Iroha and the Masquerades,” and “Zebrudaya and His Concert Party,” to which the authorship is ascribed. In both series, the years of publication are hardly available; hence the titles are used in the documentation.

On scholarship on such creative works adopting non-standard second language, Braj B. Kachru, while discussing the four functional aspects of non-native “Englishes”, has lamented the lack of research into the “imaginative / innovative” function of “pidginized or ‘broken’ variety” (Kachru, 1983, p. 41). He adds that “this [creative] aspect of non-native English has unfortunately not attracted much attention from linguists, but has now been taken seriously by literary scholars.” Ayo Banjo has specifically called attention to the English spoken by Chief Zebrudaya, especially in terms of “aesthetic considerations” (Banjo, 1979, p. 11). David Jowitt has also made reference to the language of Chief Zebrudaya (Jowitt, 1991, p. 37) in his discussion of varieties of “Nigerian English,” noting it as “severely sub-standard English” (p. 51). While the language used by these two speakers – the Court Clerk and Zebi – may appear idiolectal (even idiosyncratic – for Zebi), it must be emphasized that they are sociolinguistic “types”; hence “the variety of English which is being parodied does exist outside the NTV studios, and in many cases is the only variety its speakers are capable of” (Banjo 1979, p.11). However, lately the non-standard language used in *Icheoku* and *Masquerade* has received considerable academic attention (Teilanyo 2003a, 2003b, 2009, 2010).

The method of analysis adopted in this study is essentially textual content analysis without the invocation of any particular theoretical framework in linguistics, communication studies or discourse analysis.

3. Presentation and Analysis

African culture-specific conversational norms are many, but the discussion here emphasizes the use of personal titles, insults, curses, other invocations and the breaking of kola nuts among the Igbo. In our texts it is essentially Chief Zebrudaya (Zebi) to whom we turn since he, being a true traditional Igbo chief, is quintessentially the repository, the epitome, of traditional Igbo values, norms and rhetoric.

3.1. Names and Honorifics

The importance placed on personal names and honorific titles can hardly be ignored in any discussion

on African culture and lifestyle. People who are proud of their ancestry would normally chronicle their genealogy in public to indicate their nobility, royalty or “rootedness” in their communities. Titles and epithets are invoked to mark the bearer’s successes. The situation is such that hardly any “important” persons, especially men, are contented being addressed as “ordinary Mr.” Hence, most successful men manouvre their way to their ethnic communities to acquire chieftaincy titles, especially where they intend to contest elections into political offices.

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the acquisition of chieftaincy titles is critical as a symbol of wealth, accomplishment and influence. The titles are ranked, with the *ozo* title being the highest after the *eze* who is the community head or king. Thus Ezebuilo Ozohu notes the “leadership and elite symbol of *ozo/eze* title” (2009, p. 9).

Acculturation in Western lifestyles has complicated the trend: most professionals attempt to attach abbreviations of their professions as prefixes to their names, viz: “Arch. Emeka Okeke” (for an architect), Pharm. Emeka Okeke (pharmacist), “Surv. Emeka Okeke” (surveyor), “Engr. Emeka Okeke” (Engineer), “Barr. Emeka Okeke,” “Pastor Emeka Okeke,” etc. Secondly, the multiplicity of titles has been heightened; for people now combine Western titles – including academic, occupational, religious and honorary titles – with native ones, including chieftaincy and personal achievement titles as well as aliases. The result is a long list of titular prefixes (preceding the bearer’s personal names) and postmodifying honorific epithets. Funso Akere (1982, pp. 93-97) and Igboanusi (2002, p. 36) have given a fair treatment of such titles in the address system as an integral part of Standard Nigerian English. They have noted even the syntax of the titles in concatenation, usually the religious coming first followed by the traditional and then lastly the academic (often an honorary doctorate). We add here that where there is a political title, it precedes others, suggesting the relative importance attached to the sources of the titles:

His Excellency Sir Chief (Dr)...

Even religious personages are caught up in the frenzy:

His Eminence Most Senior Reverend Apostle (Dr)...

Besides the titular honorifics, the appellations themselves constitute a major area of rhetorical ingenuity in Zebi’s language.

In *Masquerade*, we have such cognomens borne by Jegede and Zebi himself:

1. I am Prince (Dr) Jegede Shokoya, the Grandson of the Idi of Idiaraba, the Son of the Soil and, by the special grace of God, the only Young Millionnaire in the whole Universe. (Iroha “Governor,” “War”)
2. Chief the Honourable Zeburudaya Okoroigwe Nwogbo, alias 4.30, His Honourable Palmwine Powerless, Talkative Number One of Africa Limited. (Iroha “Governor,” “Visit”)

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Zebi attaches so much importance to his titular paraphernalia that he does not take kindly to anyone omitting any. Hence when in the episode “Aba Market Fire Disaster” Mr Butler, the journalist, addresses him simply as “Chief Zeburudaya” without the other epithets, Zebi is quick to caution him: “And do not be forget ‘alias 4.30’.” Failure to prefix “Chief” or using ordinary “Mister” in its place is

considered a grievous offence that can attract a severe penalty. We notice this among Zebi, Ovuleria his wife and the Russian Mr. Bankrovitch:

3. MR BANKROVITCH: Hello! How do you do?
 CHIEF ZEBI: I am do. Thank you. How are your family?
 MR BANKROVITCH: Fine. God bless you! Are you **Mr. Zebrudaya**?
 CHIEF ZEBI: “Mr gini”? [“Mr what”?]
 BANK: Well, I am looking for the home of **Mr. Zebrudaya**.
 ZEBI: Chai! Chineke God, where are you go that Ekwensu are want to rub me hair-dye in the head, enh? Anyway, Ovuleria, you can be deal with him. Let me go to be continue in the *bea-bea* shaving.
 OVU: Zebi, make you talk to am now, enh. *Na you* the man come to see.
 ZEBI: Ovuleria, *egbe, egbe, egbe piafu kwa gi isi* for me to talk to the man who have come to my house to be assault me. Was you not in the president when he was refer to me as “**Mr Zebrudaya**,” enh? *Mgbo*, Missim Ovuleria. Are you not knows it that that “Mister” which he was call me can be offer him three *dorty* slap of ten ten Naira. That one, price control are does not *dey* in it, enh! And plus on top of that, he was disturbance me in the place where I was shave my morning *bea-bea* shaving. What are he mean?
 Anyway, Missism Ovuleria Uredia Nwogbo, I am does not want to cause any angry to grow too much annoyed this early morning. So therefore, you can go ahead to to be deal with him. Are you hear? ... [*To Mr. Bankrovitch*]
 Look, look here, my friend. What are wronging with you? I am your old?
 OVULERIA: Zebi darling, make you no talk to am now.
 CHIEF ZEBI: Mhm mhn. Ask him: I am his old?
 OVULERIA: Make you no talk so now. The man talk say *im* bring business for you-o!
 CHIEF ZEBI: He are bring business for me. Are that the reason why he are call me “Mr Zebrudaya” [mimicking]. Ovuleria. And upon on top of that he are spoke to me through to the nose: [mimicking] “I have come to see Mr Zebrudaya.” *Egbe, egbe, egbe...Bia*, Mr. Oyibo, if you are does not know who I am yan, try to be ask other peoples. My name are Chief Zebrudaya Okoroigwe Nwogbo, alias 4.30, His Royal Palm-wine Powerless. Are you hear? (Iroha “Visit”)

In the text above it is clear that Zebi is inconsolably offended and insulted by Mr. Bankrovitch’s use of the “ordinary” title “Mr,” such that he would reject any further discussion with the guest, short of issuing Mr. Bankrovitch well well-deserved slaps. Zebi feels the insult so much that he thinks Mr. Bankrovitch does not respect his age (“I am his old?”). It is only when Mr. Bankrovitch accepts to use the proper title “Chief” that Zebi agrees to engage in any more conversation with him. Of course, when they finally sit to talk, Zebi does not fail to ask of the proper title to use for his guest: “Are you ‘Mr’ or

‘Mallam’? Which one I am to refer you.”

Zebi uses similar formulae for persons in his household – wives and houseboys. But in addition to the enumeration of the appellations, Zebi is peculiar in tracing not only the genealogy but also the physical route to the persons’ native homes:

4. Missism Ovuleria Nwuredia Nwogbo of Bakana via Isiokpo of Pracourt. (Iroha “Monkey”)
5. Giringory Akabogu of Ikot-Ekpene/Ikot 4 via Arondiziogu, Honourable Poor Man of Mozambique/of Zimbabwe/of Europea/ of Amsterdam/of Czechoslovakia/of Kaikai Broken, Honourable Senior Ambassador of Kitchen. (Iroha “Governor”)
6. Clarus Mgbuojikwe of Ndiolumbe. (Iroha “Aba”)
7. Gertrude Apolonia God-give Nwogbo of Umudere. (Iroha “Aba”)

In example 4 Ovuleria hails from Bakana, and one gets there through Port Hacourt through Isiokpo. In example 5, besides the peregrinary tracing, the appellation gives a comic insight into Zebi’s view of Giringory’s personality. Expressed in the oxymoronic “Honourable Poor Man,” Zebi considers Giringory a man of low material means, a “poor man,” but still “Honourable” – indeed more honourable than the “Honourable” parliamentarians in the episode “Governor for Sale” – in the light of his dedicated service as a houseboy. In addition, linking Giringory with different countries is probably intended to flatter Giringory and give this lowly houseboy a sense of pride and importance as an international figure, a “Senior Ambassador of Kitchen Constituency” (“Governor”). The product is wry humour.

3.2. Breaking of Kola Nut

In traditional African society, a visitor must be entertained first before any formal business or even general conversation. In some societies it is some local wine or gin that is served. In Igbo society, every visitation and session of deliberation begins with the breaking of (a) kola nut(s) presented by the host. With the species *Cola acuminata* and *Cola nitida*, the kola nut is a symbol of welcome and goodwill because “he who brings kola brings life” (Achebe, 1958, p. 5). Michael Widjaja (2011) further explains the significance of the kola nut among the Igbo in entertaining visitors:

Attending a kola nut ceremony is almost inevitable for anyone visiting Enugu and is Igbo tradition at its best. Elder [sic] agree that once the 5-centimetre nuts are blessed with incantations, the visitors will feel ensured that they are welcome. People are more than willing to explain the ceremony, and where there is no kola nut available, the host will need to do the explanatory apology to his visitors. The kola nut tradition is used for a variety of events, but principally to welcome guests to a village or house.

This sharing of kola nut itself is a ceremony involving certain stages and rituals. Among these is the fact that it must be the most senior or eldest chief, or in the absence of a chief, the eldest native among the guests gathered that breaks this kola. A prayer precedes the breaking itself, a prayer in which the audience is expected to say the chorus *Ise* (“Amen”) to each pronouncement. Finally,

the kola nut is shared (according to seniority) and eaten before the commencement of deliberations. One can hardly be in such a hurry as to abandon this ritual. Until recently, the entire ceremony was conducted solely in the indigenous language, not English, since “kola does not understand English.” In recent times, however, with increasing multilingual gatherings, this prescription is sometimes waved such that the breaking of the kola may now be conducted in English or some other lingua franca.

As a custodian of Igbo tradition, Zebi never fails to perform this ceremony. We cite only two instances. In the first, Jegede, whom Zebi has planned to kill on account of an old debt, requests for kola nut. Zebi obliges him and prays:

8. ZEBI: [*Clearing his throat*] Em, *Chineke* God, you are the Chief Watchnight who are look over the whole world. You have talk it in Job 13:30 that if you the Jehovah of Jacob are does not keep watch over the city, the locally night-watchman are watch it in the *babas*. If old man are hold the property of small pickins to be put his hand in the heaven above, when hand are pain him painful, he will be brought him down, so that the small childrens will be took over their property. *Ka Chineke mezie okwu*; through Jesu Krat our Saviouriser.

JEGEDE: Amen. (Iroha “Death”)

Among fellow Africans, this poses no problem, but with a western visitor the ceremony may appear laborious and cause offence. Thus in “Visit”, Zebi presents a kolanut to Mr. Bankrovitch despite Ovuleria’s advice that he should confirm from the guest whether kola nut is eaten in the visitor’s Russian society. Zebi retorts with the reasoning that it is white men themselves “who was talk it in [their] parabical innuendo” that “if you are go to Rome, do as Roman is does.” The excerpt follows:

9. MR. BANKROVITCH: I’m sorry, Chief. What stuff is this?
 CHIEF ZEBI: It are not stuff-o; it are kola nut and pepper of alligator.
 MR. BANKROVITCH. And how do you eat it?
 CHIEF ZEBI: Oh, oh, oh, so Mr. Bamkrovitch, you have not hear that Africa are chop kolanut, *nde*?
 MR. BANKROVITCH: Never in all my life.
 CHIEF ZEBI: *Mhm*, sometime you are does not know anythings about Africa, *nde*?
 MR. BANKROVITCH: I know that they are a black race who live in kingdoms. Very nice people, I gather.
 CHIEF ZEBI: Thank you. Well, Africa people are begin to be nice in the first of all through by the offering you of kola nut when they are arrival to them house, *enh*.
 MR. BANKROVITCH: Well, we’ll try it; we’ll try it.
 CHIEF ZEBI: Eh, let me be broke it in the customary mannerism [*clearing his throat*]. In the African customer, he who are broughted kola are broughted life. And we the chopperers will chop it in the good condition of healthy. Let monkey chop; let baboon chop. But whichever one that are refusal his brotherin the

partook of the chop, may he get hypertension. Oyibo, again... [*Silence*].

Mr. Bankrovitch!

MR. BANKROVITCH: Yes.

CHIEF ZEBI: Again!~

MR. BANKROVITCH: What?

CHIEF ZEBI: I am say that monkey should be chop; baboon his brother should also be chop in the same plate. But whichever that are refusal his brother from the partook of the chopping, should he get hypertension. Are you hear. He should be get hypertension. Again!

OVULERIA: Mr. Bankrovitch, make you just dey answer "*Ise*."

MR. BANKROVITCH: I...I...*Ise*. What do you mean "*Ise*"?

CHIEF ZEBI: Pussy-cor, or crab in the English interfering, was talk it that he are knows the good journey when rain are start to beat him from his doormot. May it be so in this visit which Mr. Bankrovitch are visited me. Bankrovitch, over!

MR. BANKROVITCH: What do I do?

OVULERIA: Make you just say "*Ise*."

MR. BANKROVITCH: *Ise*.

CHIEF ZEBI: Thank you. But if this visit are bad one, the time you will be going, let *mkpumpu* pontilize you in the back. Mr Bankrovitch, took it!

MR. BANKROVITCH: Well, I'm still to say "*Ise*"?

OVULERIA: Ee-e-o-o; say "*Ise*."

CHIEF ZEBI: *Bia, bia*, Mr. Bankrovitch.

MR. BANKROVITCH: Yes.

CHIEF ZEBI: What are difficurity hard in the concurring of "*Ise*"? Are it heavy you in the mouth? (*Iroha* "Visit")

As the ritualistic prayer proceeds, the white man's problem with African discourse culture emerges as Mr. Bankrovitch gets sick of the intermittent invitation to concur the cumbersome "*Ise*":

10. BANK: But for how long must this continue? I came here for business, not for some kind of African jungle poetry. (*Iroha* "Visit")

The strain in communication arises from this ritual of prayer in the form of a leader-and-chorus-answer session. Mr. Bankrovitch considers it a waste of precious time.

We observe two major innovations in the discourse features of African kola nut breaking. First, kola nut is not supposed to understand English but the vernacular alone. But here Zebi says his prayers in English. Secondly, the prayers were supposed to be addressed to the gods, the ancestors and other spirits of the land. But here Zebi begins with an invocation to "*Chineke* God" and ends by routing the prayers "through Jesu Krat our Saviouriser." This is an indication of the transition and dynamism in African culture, and highlights the fact that Zebi has taken full advantage of his dual cultural heritage in order to make the event meaningful to the interlocutors. This is akin to the incident recounted by Achebe where the youths harvest the new yams and make offerings, no longer to the gods of

the earth in the form of the New Yam Festival, but to the “Son of God” (Jesus Christ) in the form of a harvest thanksgiving (Achebe 1964, p. 230).

The indispensability of the eating of the kola nut comes to light later in the “Visit” episode when Chief Zebi notices that Mr. Bankrovitch is yet to eat the kola nut offered him:

CHIEF ZEBI: ...*Bia*, why are you not chopulate the kola I was give you to chop? *Mgbo*?

MR. BANKROVITCH: Shall I eat it raw? I mean, don't you boil them first?

CHIEF ZEBI: *Egbe, egbe piapugwa gi isi* for me to boil kola nut for you before you are chop it. Look, if you are does not chop this kola, I shall not proceed in the discoursal of this business. O yes, because if you are refusal to chopulate the kola nut which somebody are give you, it are mean that you are have bad things in the heart for him, particular in the early morning kola, *enh!* (Iroha “Visit”)

Mr. Bankrovitch has to oblige, although to his great discomfort as a result of the accompanying very peppery alligator pepper (an African spice), in order to sustain the deliberation with Chief Zebrudaya.

3.3. Proverbs

Proverbs constitute a central place in African discourse so that a discourse among elders without proverbs is rather barren and childish. Each speech is expected to begin with a proverb, be interspersed with proverbs and preferably end with proverbs. Indeed, an elder may make a full speech only in proverbs. Such speech is respected as being full of wisdom. In contrast, proverbs are more incidental in many non-African cultures. Thus, where an African uses proverbs very often or in quick succession in a speech, a non-African may become confused or even upset as he may consider it unnecessarily circumlocutory as the speaker is not making the point directly.

In *Masquerade*, we have already seen the multitude of proverbs used by Zebi in his kola nut prayers. With Jegede his estranged friend, Zebi uses the proverb of who holds up a child's property in his hand. With Bankrovitch, Zebi uses two proverbs: that of the monkey and the baboon and that about the rainy journey. The first proverb brings to light Zebi's state of mind in relation to the ominous verbal exchange he had had with the European visitor at the door. He had considered the white man's manners quite disrespectful and insulting. Therefore, the proverb suggests his misgivings about the chances of success of their future intercourse. Again, the proverb of the rainy journey suggests the uncanny disagreement between Zebi and Bankrovitch over the use of titles at the door.

The discomfort and impatience a foreigner would feel with such concatenation of proverbial indirection is manifest in *Icheoku* where the District Officer had managed to put up with the plethora of proverbs each witness, plaintiff or defender incorporates into his evidence in the court. But he ultimately loses his patience with such indulgence in proverbs. Hence, he warns against an over-use of proverbs:

11. NWADIKE: *Gwara m nwa D.C., na ji anaghi efu ome n'odudu n'o bu n'isi, nke a bu ilu n'obodo anyi.*

COURT Clerk: I want to tell the District Officer my idiom that yam will not get owner in the front, unless for head... In the top of it...

District Officer: [*To Nwadike*] Have I not warned you that I prohibit unnecessary idiomatic expressions in this particular court? (NTA "Inheritance")

In example 11 above, a standard translation of the proverb is given to us by Achebe: "A man who brings ant-ridden faggots into his hut should expect the visit of lizards" (Achebe, 1964, p. 144). But an incompetent interpreter like the Court Clerk has a problem communicating the idea in it. The point of relevance here is that the Englishman, the District Officer, is equally uncomfortable with such circumlocutory rhetoric, judging by his warning. It must be noted that what the District Officer considers "unnecessary" is almost an indispensable oratorical tool among the Igbo (and other African) elders. Therefore, a discourse situation bringing the peoples from these two diametrically opposed cultures is bound to result in some significant friction.

3.4. Insults and Curses

In traditional African societies, insults and curses are normal, especially when one is emotionally upset or otherwise angry with someone else, especially one's junior or younger one. Swear words and curses also obtain in most other societies, but the value attached to them differs.

The use of insults and curses is clearly a derivative from Igbo orature. Insult constitutes a poetic sub-genre *iko onu* among this ethnic group, especially among children. Nwachukwu-Agbada describes *iko onu* thus:

Among the Igbo, *iko onu* refers to verbalized denigration and humiliation. It literally means flogging someone with the mouth (hence *iko*, scold; *onu*, mouth) with the intention to kill the spirit (*igbu muo mmadu*) (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2001, p. 179)

In structure, each insult is in the form of comparison containing a simile between a part of an addressee's body and an ugly or unpleasant object. In each insult, opponents draw the attention to a body part which everybody may know has something unwholesome about it, but may not know what it looks like (e.g. *I jaghawara gi eze (di)ka eghu a huru n'oku*, Your teeth are jagged like those of a roasted goat). Nwachukwu-Agbada has collected and discussed a number of *iko onu* (2001).

While insults hurt in general use, they are largely harmless when used as a game among children where this is "recreational. [sic] Entertaining and unserious...contestants are not supposed to take the insult seriously, for after all the audience of performance knows that the imagery of comparison is bound to be imprecise" (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2001, p. 179). It also serves the social uses of enhancing emotional satisfaction, managing conflict, sportsmanship, endurance of verbal taunting, humility in the recognition that nobody is without bodily faults, imaginativeness in drawing parallels and skillfulness in public speech-making (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2001, pp. 191-192).

Zebi often insults his houseboys, children and others. The insult is often extended to the parents of the addressees.

12. *Ewu, ewu, ewu* monkey choppers. [Goat] (Iroha "Monkey")

13. What I am to do this childhood of *nama, enh?* [cow] (Iroha "Teeth")

Such insults and abuses function as a means of rebuke or reproof, or merely for the expression of

frustration.

Similar and in addition to insults is the oral art of cursing among the Igbo and other traditional African cultures. Cursing is acknowledged to be part of Igbo oral satiric art (Nwoga, 1971; Egudu, 1972; Ugonna, 1982). While on its face value “the aim of cursing is to wish somebody death or misfortune” (Egudu, 1972, p. 78), in practical terms, the intention is innocuous. Thus, Ugonna states:

cursing does not necessarily mean wishing the death of somebody or his misfortune. Parents sometimes curse their children without wishing their death. You often hear people exchanging curse statements without wishing for the fulfillment of what they have said: *Onwu gbuokwa gi, Agu tagbuo gi, Agwo tugbuo gi* etc. (May death kill you. May leopard bite you to death. May snake bite you to death, etc.). (1982, p. 77)

This makes Nwoga state that “self-expression rather than communication is the main objective” of such Igbo satirical curse (1971, p. 34). Ugonna adds that the motivation for such curses is more of “egoistic anger or altruistic attack on vice. It could be to punish or to correct.” Furthermore, the ultimate effect on the audience is deterrent. The social effect is “to restore moral balance, harmony and order” (Ugonna, 1982, p.77).

Zebi and the Court Clerk engage in heaping such imprecations – often in Igbo – on individuals that annoy or otherwise upset them [see also above]:

14. Mgbo, mgbo, mgbo, piafu kwa gi isi. [May bullet chop off your head.] (Iroha “Visit”)
15. Bia, Gertrude, egbe, egbe, egbe, egbe kujie gi olu for, for you to disturbance the die which I was die. (Zebi “Infidelity”)
16. (a). God punish them one by one. (Iroha “Death”)
- (b). God punish you ten times a day. (Iroha “Death”)

These curses may mean little to a non-African because he does not believe in the efficacy of such verbalizations; indeed, he may only feel amused. For example, when Chief Zebi swears that Mr. Bankrovitch should have hypertension and hunchback if he came with a wrong motive, or that bullet should chop off Mr. Bankrovitch’s head, Mr. Bankrovitch may feel no hurt. But, based on the inherent spiritual values, his African counterpart is likely to feel hurt at the invocation of curses since they might have some negative spiritual effect on him. In some contexts, even in Africa however, these vituperations serve not so much to truly invoke supernatural curses on the addressees as to express anger and admonition.

The fact that imprecations, abuses and swear words are part of everyday interaction among the Igbo is further observed in Achebe’s anthropological novels. In *Arrow of God*, we see this between the rivals, Ezidemili and Ezeulu:

All right. Ezidemili wants to know how you intend to purify your house of the abomination that your son committed.’
 ‘Go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit. Do you hear me? Tell Ezidemili that Ezeulu says he should go and fill his mouth with shit...’ (Achebe, 1964, pp.143-144)

Traditionally, to tell someone to eat faeces is the height of insult. But it is used frequently as an expression of abuse or insult; hence telling someone to go and “eat shit” occurs several times in the novel (Achebe, 1964, pp. 24, 54, 138, 140). In many African societies, excrement and other terms associated with the lavatory or toilet are taboo words in the contexts of deities and their priests. Hence to heap the expression on Ezidemili is the height of contempt, bordering on sacrilege. The imperative here, telling or instructing one to go and eat faeces, may cause no offence to a Western interlocutor since the utterance has no perlocutionary effect on the interlocutor, but the Igbo man would feel highly insulted and abused, even dehumanized, since eating faeces is associated with non-human creatures like dogs.

3.5. Gender Stereotypes

It is true that in some (not all) African societies, women are not considered intelligent or reliable enough to be taken as parties in business deals involving men. This is particularly so in a typical Igbo society. It is brought to light in *Masquerade* when Zebi asks his wife and his friend's wife to depart from him and Mr. Bankrovitch and retire to the kitchen as the two (Zebi and Bankrovitch) decide to go into the nitty-gritty of their business. The efforts by the European to let his (Zebi's) wife remain and possibly sign as a witness in the business agreement falls on Zebi's deaf ears.

ZEBI: Missim, this are your own. Akpenor, you can be took that one. You can be took it to chop in the kitchen, *ehn*. Took it to the kitchen. Let me discuss this matter with Mr. Bankrovitch.

BANKROVITCH: No, no, no, Mr. Zebrudaya. It does not really matter, Chief. She can stay around with us.

ZEBI: *Mbao* [No]. We are does not do so in the African customary. They can go the kitchen to be chopulate.

BANKROVITCH: But you might need her as a witness to the documents you have to sign for me.

ZEBI: That one are does not matters not. I am get good friend. They are Mr. Jegede Shokoya and Okoro Maduekwe.

BANKROVITCH: No, no, no. There will be no friendship in business. Your friends should stay out of this. I have my ideas about African friendship in business. Before you know it, your friends have thrown you out of the whole business. And you will be awake to go to them only to lend you money.

ZEBI: *Mba, mba*, Mr. Bankrovitch. Nevertheness, Jegede and Okoro Maduekwe have not disappoint me before, and they can be fit to does it.

BANKROVITCH: Well, let's hope so.

It is obvious that Zebi would rather risk a business scam from his friends than violate the African “customary” of keeping women away from serious issues being handled by men. Zebi considers this exclusion of women necessary since they are considered to lack the courage needed in taking hard

business decisions and the reliability to stand by such decisions.

Ritzer is quoted by Chukwu and colleagues as saying that in traditional Igbo society, women were used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men (Chukwu et al., 2012, p. 49).

The picture painted above may not always be true of Igbo women. Indeed, the woman appears to occupy two diametrically opposed positions in Igbo society. In the nuclear family and as an individual, she is weak and is expected to be submissive to the husband. But at the larger family and communal level, she, in the body of the *umuada* or body of women, wields a great influence in the extended family and the clan (Achebe, 1958, p. 93). We see this dual capacity of the Igbo woman in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, where the women meet to adjudicate on matters of marriage and adultery. In addition, while the Igbo are essentially patrilineal, a man seeks refuge in his mother's community. This place of the mother as the place of refuge is encoded in the name *Nneka* ("Mother is Supreme" – Achebe, 1958, p. 94) popularly given to daughters.

4. Conclusion

The discussion above reveals that certain conversational norms on which African place much value may be perceived as superfluous and unnecessarily circumlocutory by a non-African. In *Masquerade*, the ritual of breaking of the kola nut with proverbial renditions and invocations which irritates the Russian as unnecessary "African jungle poetry" is so critical to Chief Zebi that the latter threatens not to continue, even not to commence, the business transaction unless Mr. Bankrovitch participates actively like any African in the rituals. Again, a Western interlocutor may use certain swear words without attaching much value to them, but an African would feel very much hurt because he believes such curses may have effect on his life. Conversely when the African uses such on a non-African, the cursed may feel no anger, but the African will leave with a sense of achievement as if he had inflicted some injury on the non-African interlocutor. Again, failure to use an earned or coveted title or honorific for an Igbo man or some other traditionally inclined African may precipitate dire consequences.

Thus, should people from these two cultures be involved in a single communicative context, the European may lose patience with the African. Conversely, failure to employ these norms may bring a sense of unseriousness, a feeling of unacceptance or even unfriendliness to the African. This, therefore, calls for the need for peoples having diverse conversational norms and values to make attempts to understand and apply such norms in order to establish and maintain effective intercultural communication.

While the juxtaposition here has been between Igbo (African) and European cultures, similar differences and need for knowledge of and adherence to customs and need for knowledge of and adherence to discourse values and norms equally exist among other societies with cultural differences, such as those discussed by Ishii and Klopff (2014) between the Japanese and citizens of the United States of America.

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