CULTURAL LAG: THE ACHILLES' HEEL OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY WITH REFERENCE TO ARTS, CULTURE, AND THE HUMANITIES

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the phenomenon of cultural lag as the deep-rooted flaw undermining the coherence and sustainability of contemporary society. With a philosophical lens and an interdisciplinary approach spanning arts, culture, science, and technology, the author explores how material progress continually outpaces non-material values, ethical frameworks, and cultural consciousness. Drawing upon William Ogburn's theory, complemented by African wisdom traditions and global scholarly thought, this study identifies and critiques the ethical chasm between innovation and introspection, productivity and purpose. This paper argues for a revitalization of the humanities as a sacred compass, the ethical rehabilitation of institutions, and the reimagination of education as a cultural cure. The goal is not just to critique but to prophetically chart a holistic path forward that harmonizes science, spirit, and society.

Introduction: The Oracle Awakens Culture

1) > *Tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis*. — Latin Proverb
'Times change, and we change with them.'

We live in a world where change is the only constant, yet our response to change has become increasingly unbalanced. As technologies emerge at breakneck speed, societies struggle to adjust their moral compasses, cultural values, and ethical frameworks. This mismatch, what sociologists term "cultural lag", is not just a conceptual dilemma, but a lived, breathing wound in the body of modern civilization.

This paper embarks on a deep philosophical, cultural, and ethical exploration of this wound, not simply to diagnose its symptoms, but to summon a healing rooted in ancestral wisdom and contemporary insight. With a prophetic voice reminiscent of sages and saints, we shall ask not just what is wrong, but what must be done — urgently and profoundly.

To interrogate cultural lag is to enter the deepest chambers of our modern dissonance, where innovation races ahead of introspection, where artificial intelligence outpaces emotional intelligence, where the rituals of humanity are digitized into oblivion. As Very Rev. Fr. Prof. Bonachristus Umeogu has consistently emphasized, the role of culture, especially African indigenous wisdom, is central to reawakening the soul of our institutions, our technologies, and our future.

Cultural Lag: A Conceptual and Historical Framework

The term *cultural lag* was first coined by sociologist William Fielding Ogburn (1922) to describe how material culture — inventions, technologies, and systems — evolves faster than non-material culture — values, laws, ethics, traditions. This temporal imbalance results in social tension, ethical disorientation, and institutional paralysis.

In the 21st century, this phenomenon is heightened. Castells (2010) referred to our age as a time of "timeless time", disconnected from historical and cultural rhythm. Turkle (2015) warned of being "alone together" constantly connected yet emotionally dislocated. Han (2022) described today's society as one that burns out, performs, and forgets to reflect.

African wisdom says:

2) > *Ihe Mbe huru, mere oji gbalaga ụlọ*
'What the tortoise sees made it run home'

The tortoise's retreat is not cowardice but contemplation — the very soul of cultural sustainability.

Contemporary Case Studies in Cultural Lag

Artificial Intelligence and Authorship

Boden (2019) asserts that AI can be creative — but only in a simulated way. In African art, form is never divorced from ritual. Okeke-Agulu (2015) reminds us that African art speaks, sings, mourns, and heals. Can AI generate sacred meaning, or only mimic aesthetics?

3 > *Ọnwụ abụghị ngwụcha, kama ọ bụ ụzọ ọzọ*.
'Death is not the end, but another path.'

Without context and meaning, machine-created art becomes a spiritual orphan.

Gene Editing and Playing God

Jennifer Doudna (2020), pioneer of CRISPR, confessed that editing genomes felt like rewriting Genesis. Who invites the theologians and ethicists to such conversations?

> *Ọfọ* and *Ogu*, the Igbo pillars of justice and innocence, would not approve of life manipulated without reverence.

Surveillance Capitalism
Zuboff (2019) describes how data is extracted, sold, and weaponized. The human person is commodified.

4) > *Ụfọdụ na-eji mkpịsịaka kwụọ ụgwọ ịdị adị ha*.
'Some pay for their existence with their fingerprints.'

Cultural lag persists where technology leads and ethics stumble.

The Role of the Humanities in Bridging the Gap

5) > *Ἠθικὴ τέχνη* — Aristotle
'The art of ethics.'

Nussbaum (2010) argues that democracy depends on empathy, critical thinking, and the humanities. The Igbo worldview affirms this:

6) > *Akwụkwọ bụ ụzọ, okwukwe bụ ìhè, omenala bụ omelu Mmuo na Mmadu*.
'Books are the path; faith is the light; culture is the maker of Spirits and humanity.'

Fitzpatrick (2019) proposes "generous thinking" — academic humility that listens. This is the path forward.

Indigenous Wisdom: Igbo Cultural Principles and Practices

7) > *Nka bụ ndụ mmadụ, ma omenala bụ ihe nketa*.
'Art is human life, and culture is our inheritance.'

In Igbo cosmology, Ọfọ and Ogu are moral compasses, not symbolic abstractions. They enforce accountability with cosmic backing.

The Igbo proverb:

8) > *Onye wetara oji, wetara ndụ*.
'He who brings kola, brings life.'

This symbolizes communion, life, and respect — values lost in a digitized world.

Technological Acceleration vs Ethical Stagnation

> "He pretends to go forward with the machine, but walks backward." — Igbo Proverb

While we edit genes, monitor minds, and simulate creativity, we lag behind in justice, fairness, and wisdom.

9) > *Ala bụ ndụ*.
'Land is life.'

Yet climate change, caused by industrial excess, threatens the very ground of being. The lag between knowledge and policy is fatal.

Education as Cultural Synchronization

10 > *Agwọ anaghi apụ n'oghere belụsọ enweghi ụzọ ọzọ*.
'A snake doesn't leave its hole unless there's another exit.'

Modern education fragments the human person. The Igbo apprenticeship system teaches not just trade but character, community, and reverence.

11) > *E jiri mara mmụọ na-edu mmadụ n'okporo ụzọ, ọ bụghị n'ụlọ akwụkwọ*.
'The spirit guides us on the journey, not just the school.'

Institutional Failures and Cultural Redemptions

12) > *Ụmụaka meruọ ụlọ, ha ewelu data naa aka*.
'Children destroyed the house and shared data to brag.'

Movements like #MeToo expose legal systems that fail to protect. Climate denial proves how power often trumps truth.

But the *Igbo Igba Otu Odu* (women's council) was swift, wise, sacred. Institutions must learn from such indigenous models.

Satire and Humour: Culture's Immune System

From the jester in the king's court to internet memes today, humour reveals truth with grace.

> "Laughing in the market does not mean one has no problems — it means one refuses to die in silence."

Humour is not distraction; it is resurrection.

Sacred Knowledge Systems and the Future

13) > *B'shem Abba w'Brah w'Rukha d'Qudsha*. Amen.

'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

UNESCO (2021) encourages digitizing wisdom, but sacred knowledge is not just archived — it is lived. The future belongs to those who merge logic and liturgy, data and divinity.

A Call for Global Ethical Frameworks

We need Ubuntu, Ofo, Dharma, and Tao — all at once. Ethics must be encoded into AI, science, and governance.

14) > *Γνῶθι σεαυτόν*.
'Know thyself.'

Global frameworks must arise from spiritual identity.

Conclusion: Waking the Spirit of Civilization

15) > *E teta ụla, nro agwụ*.
'When one wakes, the dream ends.'

Wake up, humanity. Technology has awakened — our souls must now catch up.

16) > *Πάντα ῥεῖ* — Heraclitus
'Everything flows.'

Let us ensure that our ethics flow as swiftly as our innovations.

17) > *B'shem Abba w'Brah w'Rukha d'Qudsha*. Amen.
'In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

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