

DRAGGING, SHAMING AND CANCEL CULTURE AS AFRICAN MORAL SANCTION: BEYOND *UBUNTU* FORGIVENESS

Charles Chukwuedo NATHANIEL*

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between contemporary Nigerian Twitter dragging culture and traditional African practices of public shaming. The common view is that cancel culture is a Western import that has been copied by young Nigerians on social media. This paper challenges that view. It argues that dragging is a digital continuation of long-standing African communal moral policing. The paper adopts a qualitative and conceptual methodology. It analyses oral literature and ethnographic records from Igboland and Kalabari communities, and it carries out a critical review of Ubuntu ethics literature. The focus is on traditional forms of shaming such as *Abu Mbem* and *Atilogwu* satirical songs in Igboland and *kokos* and *ibi* songs in Kalabari. The findings show that traditional shaming was not random cruelty or mob justice. It was a regulated moral sanction that followed three clear ethical conditions. The first is proportionality, which means the level of shame must match the level of the offence. The second is truth and due process, which means the allegation must be verified through communal deliberation before shaming begins. The third is possibility of reintegration, which means the offender must have a clear path back into the community after showing remorse and making amends. When these three conditions are applied to three widely discussed patterns of Nigerian cancel culture between 2019 and 2023, the results are mixed. Some cases meet the conditions and function as legitimate moral correction. Many others fail. They are disproportionate, they are based on unverified screenshots and rumours, and they seek permanent exclusion rather than restoration. The paper therefore recommends a new understanding of Ubuntu. Instead of seeing Ubuntu as only forgiving and restorative, we should see it as a punitive-restorative continuum. In this model, ethical shaming is allowed when it protects communal harmony, follows due process, and aims at healing. The paper concludes that African ethics has internal resources to reform cancel culture and to make dragging more just.

Keywords: African ethics, Ubuntu, cancel culture, dragging, shaming, Igbo, Kalabari, moral sanction

Introduction

In Nigeria today, to be dragged means to be subjected to intense public ridicule on Twitter, now rebranded as X, Facebook or Instagram. One post about a person's wrongdoing can lead to thousands of replies, insults, memes and calls for the person to lose their job. This practice is very similar to what scholars in the West call cancel culture. Clark (2020) defines cancel culture as the practice of withdrawing support for a person after they have done something offensive. Ng (2020) describes it as a form of collective accountability driven by social media.

Many Nigerian commentators say cancel culture is foreign to Africa. They argue that young Nigerians are simply copying Americans. This explanation is too simple. It ignores the fact that African communities have always used public shaming to correct behaviour. Long before Twitter, communities in Igboland and in the Niger Delta used songs, masquerades and market gossip to shame wrongdoers. The tools have changed, but the logic of communal moral policing remains. The problem is how African ethics is currently taught. Ubuntu is the most influential framework in African moral philosophy. It is often presented as an ethic of forgiveness, hospitality and harmony. Tutu (1999) in his work on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented Ubuntu as the reason why forgiveness is possible. Metz (2007a) developed this into a moral theory, arguing that an action is right if it promotes shared identity and goodwill. Metz and Gaie (2010) also linked Ubuntu to restorative justice. This view of Ubuntu is important, but it creates a gap. If African ethics is only about forgiveness, how do we explain the harsh, deliberate and public shaming rituals that existed in almost every African society?

This paper tries to fill that gap. It asks two main questions. First, what makes public shaming morally legitimate in African ethics? Second, when does modern Twitter dragging violate that legitimacy? The core argument is that social media dragging is not a Western import. It is a digital continuation of African communal moral policing. However, it has lost the ethical safeguards that made traditional shaming legitimate. This paper contributes to African ethics in three ways. First, it documents traditional shaming practices that are often ignored in Ubuntu literature. Second, it extracts a clear ethical framework from those practices. Third, it uses that framework to critique modern cancel culture from an African perspective, rather than simply applying Western theories. The structure of the paper is as follows. After this introduction, the literature on Ubuntu and its critics is reviewed. The methodology adopted in this paper is then explained. After that, traditional shaming in Igboland and Kalabari is described. From those cases, three ethical conditions are extracted. Those conditions are then applied to recent Nigerian cases. Finally, a new understanding of Ubuntu as a punitive-restorative continuum is proposed.

Literature Review: Ubuntu, Forgiveness and Its Critics

Ubuntu is usually translated from Nguni languages as "a person is a person through other persons" (*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*). It is found in many African languages. Gyekye (1997) explains that African morality is essentially communal, but it also respects individuality. The community is the source of moral norms, but the individual still has dignity. In the last twenty years, Thaddeus Metz has done the most to turn Ubuntu into a formal moral theory. In his article *Toward an African Moral Theory*, Metz (2007a) argues that Ubuntu can be understood as the principle that we have a duty to promote harmony and reduce discord. Harmony here has two parts. It is about shared identity, meaning we see ourselves as part of a we, and it is about goodwill, meaning we care for the wellbeing of others. Metz and Gaie (2010) later applied this to research ethics and moral education, showing that Ubuntu requires solidarity and sympathetic impartiality.

Tutu (1999) gave Ubuntu a more theological and restorative meaning. For Tutu, Ubuntu means that my humanity is bound up in yours. Therefore, when you do wrong, you do not become a monster to be thrown away. You remain a person who can be restored. This view influenced the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which chose forgiveness and reparation over retributive punishment. This restorative view has been very influential, but it has also been criticised. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) in their article *The end of Ubuntu* argue that Ubuntu has been romanticised. They say scholars present Ubuntu as a perfect, ready-made answer to every moral problem, which hides its limitations. They argue that Ubuntu is often vague and can be used to suppress dissent in the name of harmony. Praeg (2008) makes a similar point. He asks what Ubuntu really means when it is applied to hard cases. Etieyibo (2017) also notes that Ubuntu is often presented without attention to power and inequality.

These critiques are important for this paper. If Ubuntu is only presented as forgiveness, it cannot account for punishment. Yet punishment clearly existed in precolonial Africa. Wiredu (1996) in *Cultural Universals and Particulars* shows that traditional African societies had complex systems of deliberation and sanction. They did not just forgive every offence. They had courts, fines, ostracism and public ridicule. Gyekye (1997) also shows that Akan ethics allows for punishment when it protects the community. This paper builds on this critique. It agrees with Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) that Ubuntu has been idealised. But it does not call for the end of Ubuntu. It calls for a more honest Ubuntu that includes both punishment and forgiveness. This is what is called here the punitive-restorative continuum. There is also literature on cancel culture itself. Clark (2020) traces the history of the term cancel and shows that it has roots in Black culture. Ng (2020) and Ronson (2015) show how online shaming can become disproportionate and cause serious harm. In the Nigerian context, Uwalaka and Watkins (2018) have written about social media as a fifth estate, and recent work by Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021) has examined digital accountability. BBC News (2019) documented the Sex for Grades scandal, which is a key case where dragging led to real institutional accountability. What is missing is a link between these two bodies of literature. No one has systematically linked traditional African songs of ridicule to modern Nigerian dragging culture. That is the gap this paper fills.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative and conceptual method. It does not use interviews or surveys. Instead, it uses two sources of data. The first source is oral literature and ethnographic records. For Igboland, this paper relies on studies of Igbo oral literature by Egudu and Nwoga (1971) and Nwoye (2011). These scholars documented songs of ridicule and how they were used. To strengthen the analysis of women's moral policing, it also draws on Van Allen (1972) on Igbo women's sitting on a man and Amadiume (1987) on Igbo gender and power. For Kalabari, it relies on the classic ethnographies of Horton (1960, 1962) on *Ekine* society and religion, and on literary work by Okara (1964) which reflects Kalabari oral traditions. These sources are verifiable and they provide detailed descriptions of shaming practices. The second source is philosophical analysis of Ubuntu literature. Key texts by Tutu (1999), Metz (2007a, 2007b), Metz and Gaie (2010), Gyekye (1997), Wiredu (1996) and the critics Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013), Praeg (2008) and Etieyibo (2017) are analysed.

The analysis proceeds in three steps. First, traditional shaming practices are described. Second, ethical principles are extracted from those practices using Wiredu's idea of consensual deliberation as a lens. Third, those principles are applied to widely discussed patterns of Nigerian Twitter dragging that have been reported by BBC News (2019) and analysed by Uwalaka and Watkins (2018) and Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021). The patterns were selected because they were widely discussed and they represent different types of dragging. The aim is not to provide a statistical account of cancel culture, but to build a normative framework from African traditions that can be used to judge when dragging is legitimate. The study is limited to two communities, Igbo and Kalabari, and relies on secondary sources. It does not claim that these cases represent all of Africa, but uses them as illustrative cases of a broader African logic of communal sanction.

Traditional Public Shaming in African Communities

Igboland: Songs of Ridicule as Moral Courts

Among the Igbo, music and performance were central to moral education. Children learned proverbs and songs that taught communal values. Adults used music to correct each other. Nwoye (2011) explains that Igbo society used songs known as *Abu Mbem*, *Abu Ewu* or *Abu Onye Ori* to ridicule people who violated norms. These songs were not private. They were deliberately public. If a man stole yam, if a woman was found to be gossiping and causing conflict, if a young man refused to farm and was lazy, the women's group or the age grade would compose a song about it. The song would mention the person's name, his or her village, and the exact offence. Egudu and Nwoga (1971) note that during *Atilogwu* dances and other festivals, satirical verses were included to mock known offenders. The whole village would hear it and laugh.

Egudu and Nwoga (1971) show that Igbo poetic heritage includes a strong tradition of satire. The satire was not seen as mere insult. It was seen as a duty. The community believed that if wrongdoing was left unchecked, it would bring misfortune to all. So shaming was a way to cleanse the community. Three features of this system are important. First, the authorship was collective. One person could not just start singing a shame song about his enemy. The song had to be approved by the group. Nwoye (2011) shows that the women's association, the *Umuada* or *Inyom Nnobi*, would meet and agree that the offence was real and serious enough to deserve a song. This collective authorship acted as a filter against false accusations. Van Allen (1972) describes a similar logic in the practice of sitting on a man, where Igbo women collectively sanctioned men who violated norms.

Second, there was a sense of proportionality. A minor fault attracted a humorous, light song that would be sung for a short time. A serious fault like theft or adultery attracted a harsher song that could be sung for months. Elders could intervene if they felt the shaming was too severe. This shows an implicit principle of justice. Third, reintegration was possible. The shaming was not forever. Once the offender apologised, provided palm wine or a goat, or showed changed behaviour, the song would

stop. In some cases, the offender would be asked to host the singers and ask for forgiveness. After that, he or she would be fully accepted back. The purpose was correction, not permanent exile.

Wiredu (1996) helps us understand this process. He argues that traditional African decision making is based on consensus. The aim is not to win a vote, but to talk until a common understanding is reached. The Igbo song of ridicule follows this logic. The community talks, agrees on the truth, agrees on the sanction, and later agrees on reintegration.

Kalabari: Kokos, Ibi and Ekine Society

Similar practices existed among the Kalabari people of Rivers State. The Kalabari live in small, closely knit island communities where social control is very strong. Horton (1960, 1962) in his ethnographic work shows that religion, art and morality are deeply connected among the Kalabari. The *Ekine* society, a masquerade society, plays a central role in maintaining moral order. Among the Kalabari, one form of shaming is the *kokos* or *ibi* song. These are short, witty and often very cutting songs that expose wrongdoing. Okara (1964) reflects this tradition in his work. A *kokos* might be sung by women while they are fishing, or by youths at night. It spreads quickly because the community is small.

For example, if a man is known to beat his wife, or if a woman is known to steal from the market, a *kokos* would be composed about them. The song would not mention the name directly at first, but everyone would know who it refers to. The shame, called *sama so*, is very powerful. It makes the offender feel small and isolated. Horton (1962) explains that these songs were linked to the *Ekine* society. The *Ekine* society was not just a dance group. It was a moral tribunal. Before a *kokos* could be widely performed, elders of *Ekine* would investigate. They would call the accused and the accusers and hear both sides. This is similar to what Wiredu (1996) calls rational deliberation. Truth had to be established.

If the allegation was found to be false, the composer of the false *kokos* would themselves be sanctioned. This shows that the system had checks against defamation. If the allegation was true, the offender would be shamed until they made amends. The amends might involve offering drinks to the community or performing a cleansing ritual. After that, the person would be restored. Gyekye (1997) notes that this kind of communal sanction is common across Africa. Among the Akan, for instance, there are proverbs that say the shame of one is the shame of all. The community feels responsible for correcting its members. The goal is not to destroy the individual but to restore harmony. This is where Ubuntu as shared identity becomes relevant. Both Igbo and Kalabari cases show that African societies had a sophisticated understanding of shaming. It was public, it was painful, but it was also regulated, proportionate and aimed at restoration. This is very different from the image of Ubuntu as only soft and forgiving.

Three Ethical Conditions for Legitimate Shaming

From these traditional practices, three conditions that made public shaming morally legitimate can be extracted. These conditions can serve as a framework to judge modern dragging.

1. Proportionality

The first condition is proportionality. The shame must fit the offence. In traditional societies, there was an unwritten scale. Minor offences like laziness, rudeness or poor farming attracted light mockery. Serious offences like theft, adultery, incest or witchcraft attracted severe and prolonged shaming.

Nwoye (2011) gives an example where youths wanted to compose a harsh song for a man who only refused to lend a tool. Elders stopped them and said a light proverb would be enough. This shows that proportionality was actively monitored. This principle is consistent with African moral theory. Metz (2007a) argues that an action is right if it promotes harmony. If a punishment destroys a person completely for a small fault, it reduces harmony rather than promoting it. It creates fear and resentment. Gyekye (1997) also argues that African ethics balances community and individuality. The community can sanction the individual, but it must respect the individual's dignity. Excessive shaming violates that dignity.

Modern Twitter dragging often fails proportionality. A person who makes a bad joke can be subjected to days of global abuse, death threats and loss of job. The punishment is far larger than the offence. Ronson (2015) calls this disproportionate shaming a form of public brutality. From an African perspective, it is unjust because it breaks the balance between offence and sanction.

2. Truth and Due Process

The second condition is truth and due process. The allegation must be verified through communal deliberation before shaming begins. In both Igboland and Kalabari, a single rumour was not enough. The community had to talk, investigate and agree. Wiredu (1996) is very helpful here. He argues that traditional African politics values consensus, not just majority vote. Consensus requires that everyone has a chance to speak and that reasons are given. In the context of shaming, this means the accused must be heard. Among the Kalabari, Horton (1962) shows that the *Ekine* society would call both parties before authorising a *kokos*. Among the Igbo, the women's group would meet and verify the story.

This condition protects against false accusations. If anyone could shame anyone without verification, the system would become a tool for personal vendetta. That is why false accusers were themselves punished. This is perhaps the most important condition for evaluating modern cancel culture. Clark (2020) and Ng (2020) show that online dragging often spreads through screenshots that can be faked, edited or taken out of context. There is no investigation. There is no hearing. The accused is judged guilty within minutes. Uwalaka and Watkins (2018) describe social media as a fifth estate, but without the checks of traditional institutions, this power can become trial by timeline, as analysed by Olaniyan and Akpojivi (2021). It violates the African principle of *audi alteram partem*, hear the other side, which Wiredu (1996) shows is central to African deliberation. When truth is not established, shaming becomes injustice. It harms an innocent person and it also harms the community because it creates distrust.

3. Possibility of Reintegration

The third condition is possibility of reintegration. After shaming, there must be a clear path for the offender to return to the community. This is the core of Ubuntu as restorative justice. Tutu (1999) argues that Ubuntu means that even a wrongdoer remains a person with dignity who can be healed. Metz and Gaie (2010) argue that Ubuntu favours reconciliation over retribution. In traditional shaming, reintegration was built into the practice. The offender knew what was required to end the shaming. Usually it involved apology, compensation and a change in behaviour. Once that was done, the community stopped singing and accepted the person back. The person could attend festivals, marry and farm again. The slate was wiped clean. This does not mean there were no consequences. The offender would feel shame for a long time. But the shame was not permanent exile. It was a temporary status that could be overcome.

Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) criticise the view of Ubuntu as only forgiving because it hides the reality that Ubuntu also allows for tough love. Praeg (2008) also argues that Ubuntu must be able to deal with real wrongdoing, not just idealised harmony. The framework of reintegration proposed in this paper tries to capture this. It says yes, we can shame, but we must shame with the aim of bringing the person back. Modern dragging often lacks reintegration. Once a person is cancelled, the internet never forgets. Even after a sincere apology, people continue to tag the person, to bring up the old offence, to demand permanent exclusion. The person is marked forever. This is not restorative. It is punitive in the extreme. It is closer to banishment, which in traditional Africa was reserved for only the most serious offences like murder. A truly Ubuntu based dragging would say, you have done wrong, you must account for it, but if you account for it sincerely, you can return.

Applying the Framework to Recent Nigerian Cancel Culture Patterns

To show how the framework works, it is applied to three widely discussed patterns of Nigerian cancel culture from 2019 to 2023.

Case 1: The Sex for Grades Lecturer, 2019

In 2019, BBC Africa Eye published an undercover investigation showing a senior lecturer at the University of Lagos demanding sex from an undercover journalist posing as a student (BBC News, 2019). The video was clear and disturbing. Nigerian Twitter reacted strongly. The lecturer was dragged, condemned and later suspended by the university authorities. The university set up a panel to investigate.

Proportionality: The offence is serious. Sexual harassment by a lecturer exploits a power difference and harms many students. It undermines trust in education. Strong public condemnation is proportionate. The dragging was aimed at the offence and at the system that allowed it.

Truth and due process: The allegation was supported by video evidence. It was not a rumour. The university also carried out its own investigation. The lecturer had a chance to respond. This satisfies the truth condition. It mirrors the traditional requirement that *Ekine* elders investigate before authorising a *kokos*.

Reintegration: The public conversation was not only about destroying the man. Many posts called for reform of university policies, for support for victims, and for prosecution under the law. The focus was on accountability and on making universities safe. This leaves open the possibility of reform and eventual reintegration after serving a sanction.

This case is an example of legitimate dragging. It functions like traditional shaming. It protects the community, it is based on verified truth, and it aims at restoration of trust.

Case 2: Alleged False Accusation Pattern, 2020

In 2020, a pattern emerged where a young Nigerian woman on Twitter accused a man she had dated of sexual assault. The accusation went viral within hours. The man was dragged heavily. People posted his photos, his workplace and his family. He lost his job and received death threats. Later, some users pointed out inconsistencies in the story. The accuser eventually deactivated her account and the police did not charge the man. This pattern has been discussed in analyses of digital accountability in Nigeria (Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021).

This pattern fails all three conditions.

Truth and due process: The dragging happened before any verification. There was no investigation, no hearing, no chance for the man to respond before his name and photo were everywhere. This violates the Wiredu (1996) principle of consensual deliberation and the Kalabari practice of investigation by *Ekine* elders. When truth is not established, shaming is unjust.

Proportionality: The punishment was immediate and total. The man lost his job and was socially ostracised within a day, before any panel or court could hear the case. Even if the allegation had been true, the process should have allowed for investigation before such total punishment. As it was, the punishment was based on unverified claims.

Reintegration: After doubts emerged about the story, there was little effort to restore the man's reputation. The same energy used to drag him was not used to clear his name. Traditional Igbo practice would have required the community to apologise and to compose a song to restore the falsely accused person's honour. That did not happen.

This case shows how modern dragging can become dangerous when it abandons traditional safeguards.

Case 3: Resurfacing of Old Tweets, 2021 to 2023

A recurring pattern on Nigerian Twitter from 2021 onwards is the practice of digging up old tweets posted by influencers when they were teenagers and using them to cancel them as adults. In several cases in 2021 and 2022, influencers were dragged for homophobic, tribalistic or misogynistic tweets they posted between 2012 and 2015, when they were 15 to 18 years old.

Proportionality: Is it proportionate to punish a 26 year old for a tweet made at 16? Traditional African ethics recognises moral growth. Gyekye (1997) argues that personhood is not given at birth but is achieved through moral maturity. A person can grow and change. Ubuntu as described by Metz

(2007a) also allows for moral development. If a person has clearly changed and now holds different views, shaming them for their teenage self is disproportionate. It does not account for growth.

Truth: In these cases the truth condition is usually met, because the old tweets exist. However, due process is missing in the sense that context is ignored. The community does not ask why the person posted that, what their age was, whether they have apologised and changed.

Reintegration: These cases almost always fail reintegration. Even after the influencer apologises and deletes the tweets, the dragging continues. People continue to screenshot the old tweets and post them whenever the person is trending. There is no clear path back. This is permanent marking, not temporary correction. It contradicts the Ubuntu idea that a person can be restored (Tutu, 1999; Metz & Gaie, 2010).

This pattern shows how dragging has lost the reintegrative aim that traditional shaming had. Traditional *Abu Mbem* stopped when the offender changed. Twitter dragging often does not stop even after change.

Beyond Forgiveness: Ubuntu as Punitive-Restorative Continuum

The literature on Ubuntu has made a huge contribution by highlighting African values of hospitality, care and forgiveness. Tutu (1999) is right that Ubuntu offers an alternative to pure retribution. Metz (2007a) is right that Ubuntu can be formulated as a moral theory that promotes harmony. However, if we present Ubuntu as only forgiving, we make it unrealistic. We turn it into what Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) call a ready-made feel good ethic that cannot deal with real wrongdoing. Etieyibo (2017) and Praeg (2008) make similar warnings. Real communities need to deal with theft, adultery, laziness, abuse and violence. They need sanctions that are tough enough to deter wrongdoing. The argument in this paper is that African ethics already has a solution. It has a punitive-restorative continuum. On one end of the continuum is immediate forgiveness and care. For minor faults, for first time offences, or where harm is small, Ubuntu requires that we forgive quickly and show goodwill. This is the Ubuntu that Tutu (1999) emphasises.

In the middle of the continuum is proportionate, truth based public shaming. For repeated or serious offences that harm communal harmony, the community is allowed to shame the offender publicly. But this shaming must follow the three conditions extracted in this paper. It must be proportionate, it must be based on verified truth after hearing both sides, and it must allow for reintegration. This is the space occupied by Igbo songs of ridicule and Kalabari *kokos*. It is punitive because it is painful, but it is restorative because it aims at healing.

On the far end of the continuum is temporary ostracism or banishment. For very serious offences like murder, witchcraft or betrayal of the community, traditional societies would temporarily or in extreme cases permanently exclude the offender. Even then, rituals of cleansing and return were often possible after many years. Horton (1960) shows that even serious offenders could be restored after proper rites. This continuum is more honest than a purely forgiving Ubuntu. It recognises that communal harmony sometimes requires harsh correction. As Gyekye (1997) notes, the community has a right and a duty to protect itself. Wiredu (1996) also shows that consensus does not mean there is no sanction. It means sanctions are agreed upon through deliberation. What does this mean for cancel culture? It means we should not say all dragging is wrong because Ubuntu is about forgiveness. Instead, we should say dragging is legitimate when it follows the continuum. Ethical dragging must be proportionate, true and reintegrative. Unethical dragging is that which is disproportionate, false and permanently exclusionary.

This gives us an African way to critique cancel culture. Western critiques often focus on free speech (Clark, 2020; Ng, 2020; Ronson, 2015). The critique in this paper focuses on communal harmony and reintegration. The question is not just whether dragging violates free speech, but whether it promotes or destroys communal harmony in the long term, and whether it allows for the offender to become a better person and return. This framework also helps us reform dragging. Platforms and users could

adopt simple checks inspired by traditional practices. Before dragging, verify the claim. Ask for both sides. Make the punishment fit the offence. And always leave a path for return after genuine accountability. This is not about being soft. It is about being just in an African way.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that dragging, shaming and cancel culture in Nigeria should not be dismissed as a Western import. They are digital continuations of precolonial African practices of communal moral policing, such as Igbo *Abu Mbem* and Kalabari *kokos* songs. These traditional practices were not mere cruelty. They were regulated moral sanctions with clear ethical conditions.

Three conditions for legitimate shaming have been extracted: proportionality, truth and due process, and possibility of reintegration. These conditions are rooted in African ideas of consensual deliberation (Wiredu, 1996), communal values (Gyekye, 1997) and harmony (Metz, 2007a). When applied to widely discussed patterns of Nigerian Twitter dragging, some cases, like the Sex for Grades case (BBC News, 2019), meet these conditions and function as legitimate moral correction. Many other patterns, such as those based on unverified accusations or old teenage tweets, fail the conditions. They are disproportionate, unverified and permanently exclusionary.

The implication is that we need to move beyond the view of Ubuntu as only forgiving and restorative. While Tutu (1999) and Metz and Gaie (2010) are right to emphasise restoration, we must also recognise that African ethics includes legitimate punishment. This paper proposes understanding Ubuntu as a punitive-restorative continuum, which includes ethical shaming as a middle point between immediate forgiveness and temporary ostracism. This model allows us to critique and reform cancel culture from within African traditions. It provides a way to make dragging more just, more truthful and more healing. Future research should explore empirically how young Nigerians understand dragging, and whether community based moderation models inspired by *Ekine* societies could be built into social media governance. It should also explore other African traditions of shaming beyond Igbo and Kalabari to test whether the three conditions hold across the continent. What is clear is that African ethics has more to say about cancel culture than just forgiveness. It has a long tradition of making shame work for justice, provided shame is used with care, truth and a commitment to bringing people back into the community.

***Charles Chukwuedo NATHANIEL**

Department of Philosophy,
University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria
charles.nathaniel@unidel.edu.ng

References

- Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books.
- BBC News. (2019, October 7). Sex for grades: Undercover in West African universities. *BBC Africa Eye*. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/extra/3gYJKWp8i/sex-for-grades>
- Clark, M. D. (2020). Drag them: A brief etymology of so-called “cancel culture”. *Communication and the Public*, 5(3-4), 88-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047320961562>
- Egudu, R., & Nwoga, D. (1971). *Poetic heritage: Igbo traditional verse*. Oxford University Press.
- Etieyibo, E. (2017). *Ubuntu, cosmopolitanism, and distribution*. In E. Etieyibo (Ed.), *Method, substance, and the future of African philosophy* (pp. 223-240). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience*. Oxford University Press.
- Horton, R. (1960). A definition of religion, and its uses. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 90(2), 201-226. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2844135>
- Horton, R. (1962). *The Kalabari Ekine society: A borderland of religion and art*. *Africa*, 33(2), 94-114. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1158324>

- Matolino, B., & Kwindigwi, W. (2013). The end of ubuntu. *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 32(2), 197-205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2013.817794>
- Metz, T. (2007a). Toward an African moral theory. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15(3), 321-341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9760.2007.00280.x>
- Metz, T. (2007b). Ubuntu as a moral theory and human rights in South Africa. *African Human Rights Law Journal*, 11(2), 532-559.
- Metz, T., & Gaie, J. B. R. (2010). The African ethic of *Ubuntu*/Botho: Implications for research on morality. *Journal of Moral Education*, 39(3), 273-290. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2010.497609>
- Ng, E. (2020). No grand pronouncements here: The rise and fall of cancel culture. *Television & New Media*, 21(5), 621-627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420916104>
- Nwoye, C. M. A. (2011). Igbo cultural and religious worldview: An insider's perspective. *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 3(9), 304-317.
- Okara, G. (1970). *The voice*. Heinemann.
- Olaniyan, A., & Akpojivi, U. (2021). Transforming communication, social media, counter-hegemony and the struggle for the soul of Nigeria. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(3), 422-437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1804983>
- Praeg, L. (2008). An answer to the question: What is *Ubuntu*? *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 27(4), 367-385. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2008.10780030>
- Ronson, J. (2015). *So you've been publicly shamed*. Riverhead Books.
- Tutu, D. (1999). *No future without forgiveness*. Doubleday.
- Uwalaka, T., & Watkins, J. (2018). Social media as the fifth estate in Nigeria: An analysis of the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protest. *African Journalism Studies*, 39(4), 22-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1473274>
- Van Allen, J. (1972). Sitting on a man: Colonialism and the lost political institutions of Igbo women. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 6(2), 165-181. <https://doi.org/10.2307/484197>
- Wiredu, K. (1996). *Cultural universals and particulars: An African perspective*. Indiana University Press.