

Okolo's Conception of Personhood and the Question Of Human Rights: An African Perspective

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Abstract

The African personhood has taken many dimensions some of which could be normative, social cum communitarian, etc. Okolo has equally participated in the discourse by upholding a communitarian view depicted in the term 'being-with'. By this, the community and the individual and the influences one draws from another become a central focus of what is to be African. That suffices that Okolo believes that all there is to be truly African person is the socio-ontological attitude of 'being-with' which expresses nothing but the communitarianism of the African person. The question now is: what is the fate and position of the individual's right and freedom in the existential attitudinal disposition of 'being-with' others in the community? Do the community have a limit in influencing the attainment of an individual's personhood? In addressing these questions, this paper argues that Okolo's perception of (the African) personhood alienates individuals from their inalienable human rights hence it is derivative in nature from the community. Following this, the paper recommends that Africans should critically analyze their cultural values which intrinsically influence their perceptions in order to

ensure a holistic development that acknowledges the uniqueness of individuals and their rights. The expectation from this paper is an exposition of Okolo's weaknesses vis-à-vis his personhood conceptualization. The paper shall adopt conceptual analysis and contextual clarifications as methods to critically evaluate Okolo.

Key Word: Personhood, African, Being-with, Individual, Right, Freedom

Introduction

The concept of personhood has been very dominant in history, especially in metaphysics. It has raised questions such as whether the human person is physical, spiritual or quasi-material. It has also raised questions about the worth of individuals and how they should be treated. Several ideas have been developed by different philosophers. More often than not, these views have been in constant conflicts thereby offering no consensus on what constitutes a person.¹ The question of personhood (which is also problematic) is an old-age one in philosophy centred on the nature of the self, its status and place in nature. This question has commanded a lot of attention and importance among philosophers. In fact, Kant states that it is the most profound problem facing philosophy.² But, earlier than Kant, the question of the self had been given serious attention by Descartes when he asked: “what is man?” Much even before Descartes,³ Socrates had marked the beginning of philosophic studies for

¹ E. Adekanye, “A Critical Analysis of the Yoruba Conception of a Person,” accessed on 10/10/2020, 1, https://www.doria.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/176231/adekanye_esther.pdf?=&isAllowed=y

² C. B. Okolo, “Self as a Problem in African Philosophy,” *The African Philosophy Reader* (2nd edition), edited by P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J. Roux (Great Britain: Routledge 2003), 247

³ R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated and edited by J. Cottingham (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1996), 24

self-examination/assessment, self-knowledge and discovery.⁴ However, from the African perspective as expressed in Okolo, the African personhood is community-based; in the sense that one's personhood is dependent on one's 'being-with', that is, socialization with other community-members. Okolo's concept of personhood thus becomes social or community-derivative through the exhibition of the attitude of 'being-with' and equally stands as that which makes one truly African. By this, his idea of personhood inheres his idea of personality which are all acquired through the attitude of 'being-with'.

This raises questions as to: What does it mean to be a person? Is there a special set of criteria that must be met in order for one to be correctly called a 'person'? Do we regard individuals or things as 'person' because the individual has certain qualities: mental or physical? Are all humans persons? What distinguishes human beings from the rest of other beings? All of these questions aim at discovering the nature of a special entity called 'person' and determining the kinds of entities that can properly be considered 'persons'. In addressing these questions, this paper argues that Okolo's concept of personhood alienates the community-members from their unalienable rights hence its community-derivative nature.

Adopting the conceptual analysis and contextual clarifications approach, this paper sets out to expose the flaws in Okolo's position and generally in the African concept of personhood. It shall equally interact with the Western perspective of personhood so as to juxtapose with the African's for a balance interaction between the two perspectives.

⁴ C. G. Emeka and E. E. Chukwudi, "Inauthenticity in Development: A Philosophical Study of Nigerian Unsustainable Development," *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, 6, no. 1, (March 2018), 9-10

Western Conception of Personhood

Personhood is a concept derived from the root word 'person'. The term 'person' has roots in Latin *persona* which denotes the idea of hiding behind or assumption of another character. Personhood covers features such as thinking, experiencing, acting and culpability or moral value.⁵ It also refers to someone possessing legal status within the Roman Empire.⁶ 'Human being' as a concept has often been associated with biological characteristics shared by all *Homo sapiens*. On the other hand, the concept of 'person' itself when analyzed in relation to human beings has always appeared problematic. The term is often used to denote the idea of rationality, consciousness and freewill.⁷ Nevertheless, 'person' is defined by the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* as a "man, woman or child."⁸ The implication for such definition is that entities that lack the biological or physical characteristics that classify them as man, woman or child are denied the status of person. Notably, the definition added that the term 'person' also denotes someone's character. Consequently, that an individual is kind, mean, capricious is relevant in evaluating if an individual can be granted the status of personhood.

In the ancient period, philosophers proposed the existence of something unique about the human self. Plato, for instance, portrayed the *Psyche* as the most essential attribute of human beings without distinguishing it from the *Nous*. Plato recognized as distinctive of human beings in the *Phaedrus*, the power over their own being through choice. In choice-

5. N. Bunnin & J. Yu, "Person," *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 2004), 512

6. M. Clifford, *Beyond Foucault: Excursions in Political Genealogy* (Basel: Mdpj, 2018), 43

7. M. F. Goodman, "Persons," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2nd edition), 7, edited by D. M. Borchert (Detroit: Thompson Gate, 2006), 237-244

8. P. Procter (edited), *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002), 1052

making, the soul takes on a special character thereby leading to a distinction between what one is and who one is. Other aspects which he recognized of the human being are self-consciousness, responsibility, relatedness and friendship. Aristotle argues against Plato positing that knowing differs from doing because doing comes from repetition of particular habit overtime. It is Aristotle's argument that people could act against their knowledge out of ignorance and also out of incontinence. Aristotle therefore argues that the human being possesses a distinct function that other animals did not have.⁹ For him, man alone has the capacity to distinguish 'what is' from 'what merely seems to be'. He therefore conceived rationality as that attribute that defines what man essentially is; provides a standard for man and therefore ranked it as the highest life to be aspired.¹⁰

At the rise of Christianity came the introduction of the concept of 'person' to designate man's beingness. This was in attempt to discover a term which could effectively be applied to the Trinity without dissolving their individuality and thereby making them three divinities. The Bible writers therefore translated the Latin *persona* to mean something singular and individual.¹¹ For Christianity, only human beings are created in the image of God after his likeness.¹² Subsequent upon this, man is conceived as a person endowed with body and soul and specially equipped with intellect. Even though the term 'person' has taken other meanings today such as being used to depict one who is recognized by society as

⁹. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1097b25, translated and edited by Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11

¹⁰. N. Levy, "Introducing Neuroethics," *Neuroethics*, 1 (2008), 2, doi:10.1007/s12152-008-9007-7 Accessed 9/10/2020

¹¹. F. O. Ndubisi, "Hermeneutics of the Ontological Basis of Igbo Identity," *Nnadiesube Journal of Philosophy*, 1, Iss., 1, (2017), 123.

¹². Holy Bible, Genesis 1:26-27

belonging to the human species,¹³ this term in Christianity carried a connotation of a higher sense of selfhood where even spiritual entities could be described as persons. But, this sense of person has never been used strictly to express that which is unique about the self. Notwithstanding, Tertullian, an early Christian thinker carried on this language of personhood. He applied the concept of person as enunciated by biblical tradition to explain the nature of God thereby clothing it with a metaphysical foundation. Tertullian used the concept of person to describe the relationship that existed between the Trinity.¹⁴ A doctrine which the Council of Nicaea in AD321 confirmed noting that though the three persons—God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—possessed identical natures, yet they are distinct in an unexplainable way (the mystery).

In modern philosophy began by Rene Descartes, the discourse of selfhood descended from the divine discourse to the human as subject who enquires. Descartes shifted attention to the human subject thereby making the beginning point of philosophical investigation to be rested on the confirmation/certainty of the existence of the *ego*.¹⁵ In so doing, he built everything about the individual subject upon the foundation of self-certainty. Cartesian position was the affirmation of reason as the distinguishing feature essential to all humans. He identified the self or personhood with the mind.¹⁶ Howbeit, a problem encountered in

^{13.} B. Mondin, *Philosophical Anthropology-Man: An Impossible Project* (Rome: Urbania University Press 2011), 243-245

^{14.} Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* cited in *The Ante- Nicene Fathers, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian* (Vol. III) edited by Alexander Roberts & James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1963), 598, 621

^{15.} R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated and edited by J. Cottingham (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press 1996), 17

^{16.} Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, 3-4

Cartesianism is the making of self-consciousness an essential attribute of the person. Therefore, he employed a psychological notion thereby making children who have not reached the age of reason non-persons. Also, adults during sleep or humans in comatose conditions are no longer human persons. This takes away the absolute value of the person and reduces them to 'moments', pure 'Is'. John Locke further developed this line of thought. For him, person is a term used to appropriate actions and their relevance. He accorded personhood to only intelligent agents capable of a law, happiness and misery.¹⁷ On this note, Locke combined Cartesian position- that person is identified as an ontological entity (the thinking being), with Hobbes' political conception of personhood. What he achieved is that person becomes neither just a thinking thing nor only a political representation, but also a creature that is inspired by both reason and desires (passions). For Kant, 'person' is a word that designates ends in themselves. As he wrote, "every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrary used by this or that will...rational beings are called persons inasmuch as their nature already marks them as ends in themselves."¹⁸ Kant regarded persons as autonomous because autonomy is the condition or state of being ruled only by reasons.

Edmund Husserl then integrated these views in his discussion of person but associated the problem of personhood with his project of phenomenology. A person for Husserl possessed desires which he must integrate into his life. A person also is a rational agent who possessed deep commitment to his ethical vocation. Person in Husserl is historical and embedded in intersubjective-community. He made the first-person

¹⁷. J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1975), 346

¹⁸. I. Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1785/2012), 428

experience of subjectivity the beginning point of enquiry employing words such as intentional consciousness. Thus, the attitude of an individual defines the person or self; or amounts to what an individual is. John Rawls without giving a definite meaning to the term 'person' associated it with certain features such as reason and autonomy.¹⁹ Rawls continued on the personhood-perception as laid down by Locke and Kant by holding that the only persons worthy of political protections are 'persons' and added that justice gives every person a fundamental and inalienable right.

Generally, what is common in the Western historical tradition was the designation of persons as subjects(agents). These philosophers associated personhood with rationality, individuality and autonomy.

African Views of Personhood

Turning to the Africans, Theophilus Okere²⁰ remarked that the conceptualization of the Self (*Onwe* or *Ike* or *Ogwe*) is not entirely abstract hence incomplete without the essential elements of the human being which include *Muo*(Spirit), *Obi*(Heart), *Ahu* (Body) and the personal *Chi*. Ugwu's view²¹ finds alignment with Okere's hence his anthropocentric madjvuruism which holds a substantive humanistic perception of every individual thereby maintaining a universalist view of human dualism with complex components nature. This explains the fact that for Africans, the individual is never a pure isolated being, but a

^{19.} J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999), §40 and 85

^{20.} T. Okere, "The Structure of the Self in Igbo Thought," *Identity and Change: Nigerian Philosophical Studies 1*, edited by Theophilus Okere (Washington: Paideia, 1995), 159-160

^{21.} A. K. Ugwu, "An Igbo Understanding of the Human Being: A Philosophical Approach," *Conatus Journal of Philosophy*, 7, no. 1. June 2022, 151-78. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.25223>

'being-with' individual. Didier Kaphagawani in support of the above view noted that while the Western philosophy defined personhood and personal identity in fairly static term, African peoples think of personhood as more dynamic. Ifeanyi Menkiti²² exemplified these views by canvassing in strong terms that the western conceptions particularly that of Descartes, is a minimal definition of person or a reduction of the person to "some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory." Menkiti therefore perceived the African conception of person as entailing a maximal definition. For him, the identity of the individual is dependent on and determined by the society. He abrogated to the community the right to affirm personhood; hence, personhood is not static but momentary or in gradations. What this means was that he tied personhood to the individual's capacity to order his life according to the dictates of community. He maintained that the fact that I am born of human seed does not make me a person. Consequently, fetuses and children, particularly the ones that are yet to attain adolescence are denied the status of person. This is because they have not acquired the attitudes, values, moral requirements of their society. In contrast, older people who have passed through stages of integration and held in high standing by their community are regarded more of persons or have achieved full personhood. This was an extreme form of communalism in which communal values are a necessary condition for personhood and as such has been heavily criticized.²³

Before Menkiti, Placide Tempels²⁴ had stated that it is the community that defines a person. He conceived his notion of personhood from the

²². I. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," *African Philosophy: An Introduction-3rd edition*, edited by Richard A. Wright (New York: University of America Press 1984), 170-1, 9

²³. A. K. Ugwu and H. C. Ngwoke, "Against the African Normativists," *Academia Letters Journal*, (Article 4055, 2021), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.20935/AL4055>

²⁴. P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (USA: HBC Publishing 1959), 100

ontological relationship that existed among beings— God, spirits, ancestors, kinsmen, family and children even to the unborn, as well as non-living creatures— the environment. He therefore defined personhood according to this relational interaction. Unlike, Menkiti, Tempels had held that relationship is the essential element of personhood. A similar perspective was taken by John Mbiti who maintained that the individual depends on the group such that he is a product of society. A distinct addition of Mbiti is that person undergoes several rites in order to be absorbed into the entire society. Thus, he ascribed essential role to the community in the transformation of an entity into personhood. This process of integration went beyond the natural or physical life. Initiations and passage rites become mediums through which an individual learns about and experiences the channels of relationship in order to become a person. To be human is to be in a community, participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community that gives one a sense of belonging. Concerning the autonomy and rights of the individual person, they are enjoyed in exercise of his obligations.

In line with these African philosophers N. K. Dzobo described the conditions under which one attains personhood. These include achievement of creative personality, a productive life and the capacity to have and maintain a productive relationship with others. He also mentioned models of this creative life to be the chief, elders and the ancestors.²⁵ What united these African philosophers is the claim that an individual's self is inseparable from the *telos* of the community in which he lives.. Thus, without the community, the individual lacks personhood. Tom Mboya surmised this position of the self being essentially social, a

²⁵. N. K. Dzobo, "The Image of Man in Africa," *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies*, edited by K. Wieredu & K. Gyekye (Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy 1992), 171-2

being-in-community, by regarding the self as a-group-affair. Thus, an African person is an individual to the extent that he is a member of a family, clan, community. The implication of this line of conception is the denial of freedom on the individual. To this effect, Mtata negated the communitarian conception of personhood. He even denied personhood to children since they have not yet experienced these 'challenges'.²⁶

The Conception of Personhood In C. B. Okolo

Okolo posited that there was an obligation on the part of the African to know himself as Socrates also commanded; and to know the environment in which he lived. Through this knowledge, the African attains the truth about reality. For Okolo, it would be a great contribution of Nigerian philosophers to throw the needed light on the nature of man to determine for instance, the cause of his ills, whether it is within or without self or society or both. Thus, discussing personhood from the standpoint of Okolo is notably a discourse on African worldview. This position is given impetus on the ground that the African worldview is largely conceived communalistic in nature. Moreover, Okolo's philosophy is a quest to defend the 'African person'. It should be said that Okolo did not use the word 'personhood' but 'self'. However, as already established the question of personhood is the problem of the self. For him, the issue of personhood is the problem of *homo Africanus* (the African human being), his nature and status as an individual. In other words, he viewed the problem of personhood from the African perspective of reality.²⁷

^{26.} G. C. Asadu, "A Critical Examination of African Normative Notion of Personhood: Implications for Abortion," *Amamihe: Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 18, no. 3 (2020), 10. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.15971.99366 https://www.igwebuikerresearchinstitute-org/o_journals/amamihe_18.3.1.pdf

^{27.} Okolo, "Self as a problem," 248

For Okolo, the African view of reality is dualistic; identified as the invisible world and the visible world. He identified in the invisible universe: God—the Highest Being, the ancestors, nature gods/spirits. In the visible world, he identified human beings, animals, plants and inanimate beings. These two levels of existence relate and interact with one another. What this mean, he explained, is that nature, 'Africanly' conceived, is a series of interactions and interconnections. This intercommunication between these two worlds is made possible through only human beings. For this reason, Okolo called the human being “the ontological mean” between the two worlds. This means that man is the centre; and possesses intimate and personal relationships above and below him. So man is influenced by these beings as he also influences them. He is the link between the spiritual beings and the physical beings; the 'knowing being'. Man's communication with the spirit world is made possible through sacrifices, rituals, prayers, incantations and so on. Thus, the world of the spirits, human beings and other lower organic and inorganic substances form a tandem totality of existing, are ontologically interacting beings.²⁸

The consequence of this view of reality noted by Okolo is the belief in continuous interactions (for instance, reincarnation), communication and permutations between the living, and the dead; spirits and human beings. For him, the African man, particularly the Igbo man, strongly believes that his good ancestors are reincarnated into the family. These ancestors do not actually come back to life in their persons but only in their qualities and influences. These qualities include identity marks and behaviours exhibited by the perceived reincarnates.²⁹ African reality then

²⁸ Okolo, “Self as a problem,” 250

²⁹ C. B. Okolo, “The Igbo Experience of Christian Values: Dimensions of Dialogical Encounter” cited in *The Igbo Church and Quest for God*, edited by C. B. Okolo (Obosi: Pacific College 1985), 36

was viewed as dynamic. Okolo however differentiated the African conception of reality from western conception as expressed in, for instance, the Aristotle's account. He mentioned that Aristotle's substances are individuated and they exist by and in themselves, and separated from other substances. In contrast, for the African, each entity is distinct but interacts with each other. Both the spiritual world and the physical world are real. For Okolo, the universe is not merely 'thrown' into being but is caused by the Supreme Being. Having conceived the African view of the universe as a series of interaction, communications and interconnectedness, Okolo noted that the same is also used to understand the self.

He was therefore propagating the view that interconnections create the human person. Personhood is a community-derived status through the attitudinal disposition of 'being-with'.³⁰ It is his position that individuals become real only in their relationship with others. Without the community the individual has no existence. Thus, the self is essentially social, person-in-relation-to-others, an interconnection and relationship that extend to the spirit world. The 'African self' was defined in terms of 'we-existence' or through social interactions. Uzukwu captured this stance of Okolo in this manner, "one is human because of others, with, and for others, and since we are, therefore I am. I belong, therefore I am."³¹ This supported Okolo's claim that the individual's life finds meaning only in the community. Further, this sense of personhood portrayed Okolo's view that the African is a being-with-others; a position that exalted the primacy of the community over the individual. Nevertheless, Okolo's conception of personhood is a critique of the

^{30.} C. B. Okolo, *What is to be African? Essay on African Identity* (Enugu: Cecta Nig. Ltd., 1993), 5

^{31.} E. E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches* (New York: Orbis, 1996), 37

African relational perspective of personhood. He noted that the African traditional stance on the self downplayed the uniqueness of the individual.

Having observed this flaw, Okolo conceived personhood as possessing a “double status: one, as a being-in-relation-to-others, and two, the other as unique and unduplicatable.”³² For him, personhood is social although it also has existence outside the community. This second status emphasized the uniqueness and discreteness of self as an individual entity. Okolo established this fact of uniqueness and identity through African names. He conceived African names not as mere labels of distinction, say, Anayochukwu from Ikechukwu, but, inherently as depicting special meaning for each individual, the family or even explaining circumstances surrounding one's birth, life or even family history. These include names like Onwubiko, Ahamefuna, Ozoemena, Chidindu, Onwugbufo, Nwokoabia, Obiajulu, Ibegbunam, Ilohamaka, Amujiri, Obiechina, Onwuemerie, Taabugboo, and so on. These African names pointed to the self as an individual, to a particular person.

Thus, his conception of personhood even though it recognizes individual autonomy and personal liberty, does so mainly for the preservation of the collective life. In this regard, the drive for individuality and individual rights is conditioned by the enjoyment, security and warmth an individual enjoys from his community. Notably, however, Okolo's conception remedies the flaw in the general African understanding of personhood. This is the problem of autonomy and freedom. The conception of personhood in Okolo is an acknowledgement of personal identity, individual right and freedom in communal life. Individuals are

³². C. B. Okolo, “Self as a problem in African Philosophy,” *The African Philosophy Reader* (2nd edition), edited by P. H. Coetzee & A. P. J Roux (Great Britain: Routledge, 2003), 253

free even though their will is determined by their community. Okolo accounted for this individual's freedom and autonomy through the reciprocal relationship that exists in African communalism and distinct names. The position of Okolo on personhood made sure that the individual is not ultimately lost or annihilated in the community. It buttressed the fact that the individual sometimes takes a stand that is not in tandem with the decisions of the community by application of his rationality. In fact, his position will help to defend individual rights to a certain measure. However, even Okolo realized the defectiveness in this freedom calling it a 'derivative freedom'. This is because such freedom is dependent and highly conditioned by the other, the community. Consequently, the individual lacks initiative, spontaneity, auto-decision and auto-determination. These, Okolo remarked, are the hallmarks of liberty and autonomy.

Conceptions of Personhood and Implications for Individual Human Rights

Evidences can be provided to show that Okolo's conception of individual rights, dignity and liberty does not meet the paradigm of individual human rights claims. It is instead authoritarian and sexist and the reality of the systems of governing status and rights of women throughout Africa support this stance. By sexist, it meant the denial of women of inheritance rights, education, equal career opportunities, participation in public communal politics, whom to marry, and determination of the future of women. This is based on the fact that every human society is characterized by a particular social structure which reflects a certain public perception of personhood and also of human rights. Those who have raised concerns about human right fall into two camps: liberal and communitarian. Liberalists are of the opinion that the individual has autonomy and dignity. For this reason, the individual should be free to express unique qualities and dispositions, and these should be respected

by the community or state. In other words, an individual must be protected against the oppression of the state and collective authoritarianism. On the other hand, communitarians place value on communal practices as the ultimate creator of values. Therefore, individual rights are only derivative and those which are not in harmony with the ethos of the community can be banned. This can be done to secure the 'good' of the community. Okolo, like all other African intellectuals, held that humanism is the conceptual framework upon which the African notion of human person is founded.

He also located his conception of autonomy, freedom and individual human rights and justice by extension, on the notion of egalitarianism which is the equality of all members of the society. Okolo may have been borrowed his stance from Gyekye who thought that respect for human dignity applies to all persons as enshrined by communal structure. For that reason, he asserted that individual rights cannot be violated and negated.³³ Unfortunately, there is no link between respect for human dignity and recognition of individual rights as the former does not generate the latter. The claim can therefore be said to contain a logical jump.

Nyerere³⁴ had noted this inequality and violation of individual rights even in traditional African society, especially with regard to women. Women, he observed, were to some extent inferior. That years have gone by after the propagation of African humanism and egalitarianism, yet inequality still thrives and lives with us, could actually be a clear

^{33.} K. Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought," *Person and Community*, 106-118

^{34.} J. K. Nyerere, "Socialism and Rural Development," *African Philosophy: A Classical Approach*, edited by E. Parker & K. M. Kalumba (Upper Saddle River; NJ: Prentice Hall 1996), 312

indication that these thoughts were fabricated or exaggerated. Florence Dolphyne captured the condition of women particularly in her study area, Ghana. Her study bespeaks the voice of women regarding their place in society and how they perceived themselves. There is even the stark pervading mental reality regarding women that no matter how great they are, they are always dependent on a man. Statements such as: 'if a woman is beautiful, it is because of her husband', 'the ugliest man can marry the most beautiful woman', all carry the connotation of the status of women generally. These no doubt put on display the derogatory conceptions about women.³⁵ Further, Isichei had mirrored the life of women through their day-to-day activities: rising early to go to the stream, sweep the house, make fire, cook for her family, go to the farm, gather firewood, and so on. In the modern era, this is seen in large number of women been relegated to 'housewives' and 'home managers'.³⁶

Likewise, the Muslim tradition of marriage especially in the under-developed countries exemplifies this phenomenon of women even the more. Adolescent girls are married off just for the sole purpose of reproducing and to obey their husbands. The potency of women towards contributing to human welfare in terms of politics, religion, socialization, public affairs management, intellectual productivity, many a times, has been downplayed among Africans without taking significant cognisance of the loss. From an Igbo experience, Ezenweke³⁷ noted that Igbo women, like the majority of African population, are subjects to inequalities in the political, social, economic and cultural field. More so, African scholars

^{35.} A. B. Dolphyne, "Polygamy and the Emancipation of Women: An African Perspective," *Readings in African Philosophy: An Akan Collection*, edited by S. Kwame (New York: University Press of America 1995), 261

^{36.} E. Isichei, *A History of Nigeria*. (New York: Longman 1983), 100

^{37.} E. O. Ezenweke, "African Ethos: A Hindrance to Women's Potentials for Achieving Millenium Development Goals in Sub-Sahara Africa," *Journal of Arts, Sciences, Technology*, Iv, (2009), 1-7

often neglect this discourse of the conception of women. After all, most of these scholars are males. Many might even tag the issue of 'women right' a no issue at all. One even wonders if African women would embrace this communalistic social structure if their opinion was sought. Okolo failed to pay attention to the subordination of women by chauvinistic men in traditional African society, amounting to non-recognition of women as individuals or persons with rights. Besides, at the moment, studies of African scholars tend to be conservative as long as they do not address the issue of women as 'beast of burden'. It can be held therefore that it was not only slavery, racism, colonialism or imperialism that undermined the humanity and individual rights of blacks. We need to also acknowledge domination and oppression existing in our families and communities. These therefore pre-empt the advice of Achebe that we should walk back in time and rediscover our self.³⁸

Besides, Okolo's prove of the individual's autonomy is inadequate. This is because he cited names of individual's to defend the thesis that the individual is unique and unduplicable. The names of people only identifies that this person or that person and has nothing whatsoever to do with individual human rights. Further, the issue of rights is ultimately a discourse on human relations—a reflection, on what should count as the legitimate interpersonal relationship, between humans as social and interconnected rational agents, living in a specific community. Okolo by subsuming the notion of individual human rights to the community thereby making the individual's right a derivative one and not inalienable, because it is based on belongingness and relationship, which are guaranteed by community does not make a distinction between rights (a claim that people are entitled to make on others, or on society by virtue

³⁸ C. Achebe, *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann 1975), 44

of their status) and human rights (claims that people are entitled to make by virtue of their status as human beings). The rights which Okolo, seems to propose are duties based on participation and entitlement making rights extrinsic and context-sensitive. This is a general Afro-communitarian view, which Chimakonam and Nweke³⁹ among others, argue were initiated by Menkiti and Gyekye. It is their position, that such view does not give much needed attention to a basic difference between the prevalent conceptions of rights, traceable to the enlightenment project. The enlightenment project, in relation to rights, refers to the conception of human rights, as inalienable rights of an individual human being. Okolo, on his part, basis his discuss of human dignity, on the subject of personhood.

Conclusion

Even though the question about the nature of person is a universally fundamental question, its description and interpretation differ from one philosopher to another and obviously from one culture to another. This paper after analyzing all the views considered, argued that we should also pay attention to the existential phenomena that define a person. Each culture develops a conception of personhood according to its everyday living. Pope John Paul II confirmed this fact when he declared that people should awake, stand and walk from their natural self, detaching themselves from foreign colourations.⁴⁰ The paper highlighted this fact by making a distinction between Western conception of 'personhood' and the African conception of 'personhood'. Further, the paper exposed the view of Okolo which conformed to the African way of conceptualizing personhood since he abrogated to the community the right to grant

^{39.} J. O. Chimakonam and V. C. A. Nweke, "Afro-Communitarianism and the Question of Rights," *Theoria*, 65, no. 4, (December 2018), 78-98

^{40.} N. S. Onuigbo, "Africa: The Future is Bleak," *Essays in Philosophy*, edited by C. Umezina (Nigeria: Afri-Orbis Publications Ltd., 2005), 20-36

personhood to the individual. Even though Okolo proposed a double notion that he held gives right and autonomy to the individual, the paper made it evidently clear that his version only conformed to Gyekye's conceptualization called moderate communalism, which in no wise gives room for individual human rights. The paper found loopholes in Okolo's foundation of personhood, which is egalitarianism by positing that even in the traditional communities Okolo makes reference to, that there existed inequalities. Further, Okolo's proof of individual autonomy through African names is not adequate enough and does not capture the difference between human rights and entitlements accruable to an individual by his/her community-belongingness. Finally, it has been shown that personhood as a concept reveals the evidence of man's dignity and value.

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