

ON THE AFRICANITY OF COMMUNALISM AND THE COMMUNALITY OF AFRICA: AN ONTO-EXISTENTIAL READING OF OGUEJIOFOR AND ODIMEGWU

Joseph N. Agbo & Stephen C. Nwinya

Abstract

The question of the defining characteristics of Africanness, as is the nature of all philosophical questions, has remained intractable. The idea that Communalism provides the best characterization of the African's ontological mode of being has equally been rejected by some scholars, in spite of its popularity. This paper is an exploratory and onto-existential analysis of the views of two great African philosophers, J. Obi Oguejiofor and Ike F. H. Odimegwu, on this argument of the relationship between Africa and Communalism. Although this essay does not have a strict comparative objective, it observes that within the expressions of their essays, "How African is Communalism?" and "How Communalist is Africa?" respectively, there is an obvious ontological and existential conception of communalism. Using the expository and analytic methods, this paper, however, rejects Oguejiofor's analysis of Communalism and his conception of it as a "system", which resulted in his blurring and denial of its ontological import. The paper, then, accepts Odimegwu's view, which is a preferable and correct conception of Africa's communalist ontology, that individualism and communalism are tendencies of the same human person. The essay concludes by arguing that communalism is exclusively African because it is exclusively human.

Keywords: Africa, Communalism, Ontology, Oguejiofor, Odimegwu.

Introduction

Reflections on the Africanity of Communalism and the Communality of Africa, especially the latter, are awash in scholarly literature. Many scholars have taken Africa's communalist ontology for granted. In fact, for some of them Communalism is a defining characteristics of Africanness.¹ Some

¹ Apart from Post-Independent African leaders such as Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Kenneth Kaunda, Kwame Nkrumah, etc, for who communalism was an attempt to chat an exclusive and distinct positive identity for the African at the critical period of

scholars have seen in communalism something that defines Africanness, while others reject this claim.

This paper is provided a fillip by the reflections of two of Africa's renowned scholars: J. Obi Oguejiofor and Ike F.H. Odimegwu. Incidentally, both of them are academics at the Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa, Nigeria. Their reflections on the communalist ethos have given rise to this paper. However, those who are familiar with their works might wonder why we should be discussing Communalism and then pick on Oguejiofor and Odimegwu.

For Oguejiofor cannot be really regarded as a scholar of communalism. That explains why in a festschrift in his honor², none of the contributors felt it necessary to wholly discuss any topic on communalism. But the same cannot be said of Odimegwu. He has made a lot of contributions to the communalist discourse, especially as it concerns Africa, as we shall see in this paper.

However, as we say in local parlance, one does not need to kill several leopards before one can be branded a "leopard killer". Oguejiofor's essay, "How African is Communalism?"³ (contributed incidentally in a work on communalism edited by Odimegwu) is such a punchy critique of the African Communalist credo, that it is a basis for this paper.

Although this is not a comparative analysis of Oguejiofor and Odimegwu on communalism, our interest in looking at both of them is buoyed by Odimegwu's essay (asked in the opposite direction) "How Communalist is Africa?"⁴ This current paper is largely a critique of Oguejiofor's rejection of the exclusivity of communalism to Africa. In the process, we would agree more with Odimegwu's understanding of the relationship between communality and Africanity.

Finally, what this essay hopes to achieve is to show that the relationship between communalism and Africanness is valid and correct because there is a relationship between communalism and humanity; and this relationship is ontological. However, before we draw this conclusion, via an expository analysis, we would first separately capture their reflections. But,

decolonization, there are many other seminal scholars of African communalism. See, for example, J. C. Ekei, *Justice In Communalism* (Lagos: Smagh and Co. Nig Ltd., 2001); Chukwuemeka, Nze *Aspects of African Communalism* (Onitsha: Veritas Publisher, 1989); C. B. Okolo, *What is to be African? Essay in African Identity* (Enugu: Cecta Publishers, 1993).

² Ike Odimegwu, Martin F Asiegbu, and Maurice O. Izunwa (eds.) *Discourse in African Philosophy: Celebrating the Genius of J. Obi Oguejiofor* (Akwa: Fab Anieh Nig. Ltd., 2015).

³ J. Obi Oguejiofor, "How African is Communalism?" in, Ike Odimegwu (ed) *Perspectives on African Communalism* (London: Trafford Publisher, 2007).

⁴ I. Odimegwu. "How Communalist is Africa?" *Philosophy and Praxis*, vol. 3 (2007), 1-9.

before we carry out this capturing, it is apposite to give a brief explanation of the concept “Communalism”.

Conceptualizing Communalism

When any phenomenon is seen simply as a “word” or as a “term”, it can hardly become a matter for philosophical interest or disputation or both. However, the moment a phenomenon is said to have acquired the status of a “concept”, all intellectual and scholarly attention stand at alert. The questions of whether the concept is developed in totality and “systematically”, whether its application meet the criteria for even its very conception, the way it relates to or differs from earlier more “approved” and accepted concepts, etc., are raised almost simultaneously and intensely. The above observation fits the idea of communalism like a cloak.

Ike Odimegwu takes a swipe at those who, in an attempt to prove that there is no communalism in Africa because of the absence of the word or term; imagine that the concept does not exist (scholars like J. Ekennia). For Odimegwu “even though the word or term may not and indeed could not have been here prior to the arrival of the language whose unit and property or part this word or term is, it would amount to mistaken semantic extension to thereby argue that there was no notion or the idea of the reality which, in the English Language, is symbolically expressed by the term, communalism.”⁵ It does appear, therefore, that even before we come to say anything about what is meant by the term “communalism”, problem seem to have begun, and may, perhaps continue endlessly.

Although “communalism” has many attributes, applications, perspectives, principles, etc., that make it interesting and difficult, it has been noted that:

As a philosophy of lived and living experience, it is fluid in its meaning and apprehension. As the expression or articulation of the cultural philosophy of a people, claimed by a people or claimed for a people, it is highly personal, personalized, possessed and possessively owned. As a philosophy of struggle and liberation, it is deeply emotive and bears the imprint of the context of its formulation and articulation. And as a philosophy of self-retrieval, self- consciousness, self- actualization and self- assertion, it is

⁵ I. Odimegwu. *Integrative personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical Anthropology* (Zurichi: LIT Verlag Gmbh and Co. Ka Wien, 2008), 136.

characterized by reactionary and/ or revolutionary invectiveness and committed avowal.⁶

If indeed, communalism connotes or denotes or has the above (and perhaps more) areas as its universe of involvement, there is no doubt that conceptualizing it would be a challenging task.

Almost everyone that has had to say or write anything on communalism, especially for and within the African context, usually begin with the early reflectors on and developers of the idea conveyed by the concept. These early reflectors, whose ideas were propelled by the struggle against colonialism, include post independent African leaders like Leopold Seda Senghor of Senegal, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, etc., and Seminal scholars such as Placide Tempels, John Mbiti, Chukwudum B. Okolo, J. Ekennia.

While some conceive communalism in social or economic terms, others look at it from the point of view of the political or the ethical, yet many tilt towards the cultural and the ontological (meta-physical) in their rumination. But what is communalism? How did the concept develop and what ideas/ideals are contained and conveyed by the concept? Communalism stresses the primacy, priority and fundamentality of the community over other individual existents within the society, the world, the universe and the entire gamut of reality. In communalism, “community” is not a mere association of individual persons, existing in atomistic separateness but a symbiotic, integral, relational existence that make each one see himself as part of the other without a loss of identity. The compounding nature of the communalistic chemistry ensures that individuals retain their uniqueness without exclusivity. John Mbiti’s often quoted mantra or dictum “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am”⁷, is meant to contrast with the Cartesian “*Cogito ergo Sum*” (“I think, therefore, I am”). Much of the criticism leveled against Mbiti has basically emanated from this conception of the African mode of being as distinct from the western mode. Perhaps, only Senghor’s view on the African mode of knowing which conceives Reason as Hellenic and Emotion as African⁸ has been so much debated.

When one looks at some of the ways communalism has been conceived, one is taken aback and left to wonder what their authors hope to

⁶ I. Odimegwu. *Integrative personhood*, 134-5

⁷ J. S. Mbiti. *African religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1968), 108.

⁸ L. S. Senghor. *Prose and Poetry*, edited and translated by J. Read and C. Wake (London: Heinemann, 1976), 32.

achieve. For instance, what do the conceptions of communalism as “believe in or practice of communal ownership, of goods and property”⁹ or as “strong devotion to the interest of one’s minority or ethnic group rather than those of society as a whole”¹⁰ hope to achieve in the overall understanding of the concept? These definitions are too narrow, restrictive and reductive; and certainly betray the ontological ignorance of their authors.

For J. Obi Oguejiofor, communalism is simply the primacy of the community over the individual. He joins those who see it as “a system of governance” but was quick to add that it is a system of social relationship in which “the claims of the individual generally take the second seat before the demands and claims of the community.”¹¹ The employment of the phrase “second seat” already betrays Oguejiofor’s intension to criticize this understanding of communalism. We would return to his claim of the individual’s second-seatness later. People like Augustine Shutte who looks at communalism against the backdrop of socialism quickly edit their position by arguing that the “socialism” in use is not European, rather communalism is an attempt to update “the traditional emphasis on the community as an ethical and religious ideal”¹², which portrays a quality of life bonded by similar attitudinal and loyal possibilities. Perhaps, even the Marxists see in communalism something original to humanity. That may be an explanation for their acceptance of what they call “primitive Communalism” as the first stage in the “history of all hitherto existing societies”, which is characterized as the history of class struggle.¹³

Except for the idea of the “communal” having a relationship with the “social”, communalism is certainly not socialism, at least it is not Marxian socialism, although some analysts tend to relate them together.¹⁴ Many of the scholars who discuss the question of communalism or communitarianism from a much more serious perspective do so meta- physically or ontologically. And in the spirit of our own focus, we would examine some of these ontological views.

⁹ “Communalism” Available at <http://www.wordnik.com/words/communalism>. Accessed 3/6/2014

¹⁰ “Communalism” Available at <http://www.wordnik.com/words/communalism>. Accessed 3/6/2014

¹¹ Oguejiofor, 6

¹² A. Shutte. *Philosophy for Africa*. (Milwaukee: Marquette University press, 1995), 110.

¹³ K. Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, with an Introduction by Stefan T. Possony (Chicago: Henry Regnery company, 1954), 13

¹⁴ E. Amaku. “Are Africans Truly Communalistic, Socialistic and Hospitable by Nature?”, in *US Open Sociological Science Journal* vol 1 No 1(August 2014), 1-10.

Ikechukwu Ogugua¹⁵ sees “communalism” as something that goes beyond the physical to embrace and incorporate the mental and spiritual. As far as he is concerned, “our ontology is at the rock-bottom of our communalism.”¹⁶ From a highly integrative, connected and intuitive cosmo-ontological world, Ogugua proceeds to conceive Igbo communalism as ontological and that “although there is duality expressed, each side co-exists with the other and is inseparable from it... realities, thought, everything is in every other thing, each dovetails into the other.”¹⁷

Bona Umeogu uses the concept of *Oha* to express his understanding of communalism as typology of Igbo being. He describes *Oha* (which for him means Unit, life, being) as “a relation function which establishes multi vocal positions with univocal definition”.¹⁸ He argues that despite the fact that *Oha* is always plural, it is usually understood in the singular. For him, therefore, “reality organized in terms of communalism is invariably such that integrally organizes the meanings of persons, places and things by unit functional relations of such persons, places and things.”¹⁹ This understanding portrays the same integral relationship which Ogugua had expressed earlier, except that the concept “Oha” is employed. On his part, J. C. Ekei²⁰ tries to distinguish Fraternalism (Family Care) from Communalism, by arguing that the latter is a wider concept which has bearing on humankind’s welfare as “a being- with”.

The 1996 Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy does not have the word “communalism”, but it has “communitarianism” which it defines as “a model of political organization that stresses ties of affection, kinship and a sense of common purpose and tradition.”²¹ Since this definition was supplied by somebody, the definition betrays the author’s limited knowledge of the concept to just the “traditional” and the “Political”. Thus, “communitarianism sees the human person as an inherently intrinsically communal being embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never isolated atomic individuals”.²² There may, consequently, be some degree of

¹⁵ I. Ogugua “The Metaphysical basis of African Comunalism” In Odimegwu, (ed) *Perspectives on African Communalism*, 26- 35.

¹⁶ I. Ogugua “The Metaphysical basis of African Comunalism”, 26.

¹⁷ I. Ogugua “The Metaphysical basis of African Comunalism”, 27.

¹⁸ B. Umeogu. “Ohazuruume: A philosophical Definition of Communalism as the Typology of Igbo Being” In I. Odimegwu (ed) *Perspectives on African Communalism*, 107- 112.

¹⁹ B. Umeogu. “Ohazuruume: A philosophical...”, 107.

²⁰ Ekei, *Justice In Communalism*, 193

²¹ S. Blackburn (Ed), *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd edition revised (New York: OUP, 1996), 68.

²² C.P. Okolisa. “African Communalism and the Freedom of the Individual: A Philosophical Analysis”, an M. A. Dissertation to the Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka, April, 2012, 43

ontological validity in the view of those who believe, think or posit that communalism is a mode of being for the African.

Oguejiofor on the Africanness of Communalism

J. Obi Oguejiofor's, "How African is Communalism?" is very articulate and punchy in addressing the very concept of "communalism" as it relates to Africa. The aim of his paper is to ask in what sense communalism is African and inquire on the justification of attributing this system to traditional Africa."²³ The paper looks at three different senses in which communalism is said to be African. The first sense sees communalism as one of the many qualities that characterize Africa, with Africa possessing other qualities and with other cultures also possessing the communalistic ethos. The second sense looks at communalism as being exclusive to Africa, with other cultures and continents excluded from it. The third sense, the essentialist sense, views communalism as essential in the definition of anything African and without which anything, anyone, any institution, etc., cannot be conceived or perceived as "African". Consequent upon the above, Oguejiofor argues that communalism is African "only in the first sense; that is, that it is not exclusively African, and thus, it would be erroneous to think of that system as being a defining characteristic of Africans and African socio-cultural institutions".²⁴

It is important for us to note that the paper weaves together the need for conceptual analysis of the concept of communalism; the ontological consideration of its place in Africa and the moral value of its place in contemporary Africa. As the paper says, "even though communalism was beneficial to Africa of yester years, there is no need to presume that it is still really beneficial to the Africans of today".²⁵ But the moralizing and, personification of communalism, in good and bad terms, blurs the ontological import of the term and downplays the basis of the consideration in the first place.

The paper's simplistic definition of communalism as "the primacy of the community over the individual"²⁶ betrays a limited understanding of the idea of communalism for and in Africa. That communalism is "a system of government" and that in it "the claims of the individual generally take the second seat before the demands and claims of the community"²⁷ further displays a classic misrepresentation of what communalism means in Africa.

²³ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 5.

²⁴ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 5-6

²⁵ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 6

²⁶ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 6.

²⁷ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 6.

For as can be seen in the works of other analysts and scholars, African communalism does not make such a rigid distinction between the individual and the community.

In a sub-heading titled, “Expressions of African Communalism”,²⁸ the paper makes an explorative and historical analysis of the way African communalism has been expressed, from the Belgian priest, Placide Tempels to Egbeke Aja. The other scholars considered in this exploration include John S. Mbiti, Leopold Senghor, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere and C. B. Okolo. The Paper’s conclusion, after this exploration, is that:

[I]t is evident that communalism is regarded as a system or an ethos that is undoubtedly African. With the exception of Kwame Nkrumah, the rest of the authors present it as if the system is still very much operative. Of the seven authors, whose views were touched, Placide Tempels, John Mbiti, Leopold Senghor, Nyerere and Chukwudum Okolo, regarded it as “African” in the first two of the three senses which we outlined above, that is, as though communalism is the defining feature of Africanity. The rest of this essay argues against this conception.²⁹

The basis of the essay’s argument on the Africanity of communalism is that communalism is “circumstantial or contextual”. Having given communalism the limited designation of being just a “system”, Oguejiofor argues that “it seems obvious that communalism arose in Africa from the fulcrum of the continent’s pristine, socio-political and economic conditions”.³⁰ The implication of this claim is that instead of the communalist ontological being creating the “conditions” upon which socio-political, economic relations rested, the cart is put before the horse when the paper argues that it is vice-versa.

The impression that communalism or what it calls “the dominance of the collective” is for “simple societies” gives the false impression that the modern “sophisticated” societies are (and indeed should be) individualistic or anti-communalistic (or non-communalistic). Relying on John O. Donohw’s interpretation of Emile Durkeim’s concept of “conscience commune” (collective consciousness, “the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society”), the paper then submits that “as society advances in technology, in division of labour, it becomes more and more peripheral, even though it is never completely absent in any society”³¹

²⁸ Oguejiofor. “How African is Communalism?”, 8-15

²⁹ Oguejiofor. “How African is Communalism?”, 15

³⁰ Oguejiofor. “How African is Communalism?”, 15

³¹ Oguejiofor. “How African is Communalism?”, 16

Although the paper agrees that Durkheim's view is guilty of over simplification the way the views of African communalists are guilty of romanticization, it still submits that communalism is an evolutionary product or system: "all societies with comparatively low-level technological development have also comparatively huge range of interdependence of the members. This should be seen primarily as an adaptive mechanism and its end is survival."³²

The false implication of Oguejiofor's position here is that when societies become technologically "sophisticated", it does not require the interdependence of its members who, as it were, have "survived". Perhaps, our sophisticated individuals, societies, and nations do not need themselves as they grapple with the corona virus pandemic in April, 2020, which is neither true nor possible, as I write this paper. The essay examines some modern contrivances that are ending the communalist "system" in Africa, such as hotels, communication equipment, Tenement flats, fencing of houses, etc. All these points are made to show that "the contest of life necessitates certain manners of behaving and certain norms in the society... it is not correct to say that communalist way of life is essential to the nature of the African."³³

Although the essay argues so vehemently that there is nothing essentially and exclusively African about the communalistic ethos, it still declares that communalism is still largely a determining factor in today's Africa. The greatest problem with Oguejiofor's essay is that he sees communalism as a mere "system", as something "contingent" and "circumstantial" as something historically determined, instead of an ontological basis for being. Also, he did not pause to consider whether this literal, individualistic state would be the "final stage" or even if there would be a possibility of "return" to the so-called "simple" societies. Again, if the essay had followed its evolutionary (historical) argument to a logical conclusion, it would have realized that Africa is the birth place of humankind, as we shall support later in this essay. These cultures cannot but be included in the lineage of communalism. One of the arguments that this work would attempt to prove is that man is communal by nature and no individualistic ethos can obliterate that fact. The essay's essentialist inclusivist-exclusivist distinctions are, therefore, pseudo and would collapse when we realize that man is essentially a communal being. We would take a break from this essay here because at the concluding part of this work, we will still make more critical comment on it.

³² Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 17

³³ Oguejiofor. "How African is Communalism?", 17-18.

Odimegwu on the Communalism of Africa

In an essay obviously inspired by Oguejiofor's article, Ike Odimegwu chooses to ask: "How communalist is Africa?"³⁴ The paper discusses communalism from a historical or periodical perspective and agrees that traditional African society was essentially communalistic. Odimegwu understands communalism as:

The spirit of being one community, of being one with one's community, of belonging fundamentally to one another and to the community, communalism would advocate a basic disposition to altruism, the tendency to a consensus one characteristic philanthropic attitude³⁵

The essay seeks to take the discussion of the issue of communalism in Africa from either creed to be believed or an ideology to be rejected to a "philosophic theory to be studied, critically appraised and distinctly understood for rational justification or refutation".³⁶

After examining three classic African communalist thinkers (J. S. Mbiti, C.B. Nze, and Kwame Nkruma), the essay asks various questions, part of which emerge from the basic question as expressed in the title: How Communalist is Africa? Some of the questions that emerged from the main question include:

Does communalism consist, for instance, in the social structure or social relationship of the people? Does it consist in principles and concepts? Does it consist in social precepts or in personal convictions? Could there be a communalist society of individualistic persons? Or individualistic society of communalistic persons?... How is Africa communalist? A question that may be understood to mean: what brand of communalism does Africa practice? What is the level of Africa's communalist practice? What are the dimensions, spread and proportions of communalist practice in Africa? Or even is African communalism theory or praxis? Or both? Does the theory derive from the practice and vice-versa? Is the practice built-up, articulated and consciously possessed at the theoretical level?... How communalist is the contemporary Africa?

³⁷

³⁴ Odimegwu, "How Communalist is Africa?", 1-9.

³⁵ Odimegwu, "How Communalist is Africa?", 2.

³⁶ Odimegwu, "How Communalist is Africa?", 1-9.

³⁷ Odimegwu, "How Communalist is Africa?", 3

The reflection that followed these questions is interesting. What emerges is the call for caution in the attempt, for whatever purpose, to accentuate any of the two major tendencies in humankind: Individuation and association. Individualism and communalism are tendencies of the same human person. Thus, Odumegwu says that “identity and definition are made possible in relation, by relatedness”.³⁸ The paper opines that the descriptive aspects of the communalist discourse as found in cooperative work, the land use system in Africa, marriage rites, family relationships kinship and blood ties, communal production relation etc., have tended to result in “conceptual confusion”. However, it is necessary to immediately respond here that even though we agree that these descriptive analyses should not constitute absolute and exclusive grounds for the understanding of communalism, the truth is that these interpretations would lose their anchor and degenerate into mere abstractions without them. Without these practical manifestations, communalism would be a concept that scholars ruminate on in order to get promotions and enlarge the volume of their resume.

The pressure on the extended family system is also calling to question the level of communalism in contemporary Africa. Yet, Odimegwu agrees that in spite of all these challenges, Africa is still at the psycho spiritual level, “largely communalistic”. However, the question of how communalist today’s Africa is, is only relevant at the level of scholasticism. But it is not a scholastic question. The question is raised at all because there seems to be something wrong in the Africa of today. Africa does not become communalistic because some scholars say so, she is communalistic because she represents the “spiritual” foundation of integrating humanity.

But if Odimegwu’s immediately considered essay was motivated by Oguiejofofor’s, then it is necessary that we refer to another more critical, crucial and more comprehensive work, with the title: *Personhood: A communalist metaphysical Anthropology*.³⁹ Our interest in this book stems from Odimegwu’s claim that the theory has its root in dialogics as a method of Integrative personhood. Thus, it is conceived as a contemporary theory that would meet the communalistic aspirations of the African as well as explain reason why pristine African communalism cannot be adopted wholesale given the existential exigencies of contemporary Africa. From the onset, the author states the purpose of the book thus:

The current work posits the theory of integrative personhood as an authentic and consistent onto-anthropological conception of the communalist world view. In this concept, the personhood perceives

³⁸Odimegwu, “How Communalist is Africa?”, 4

³⁹ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*.

and presents himself as the enduring self-presence of being constituted in the unity of individuality and communality by the dialogics of presencing. Applying principally the method of dialogics, the work conceptualizes the journey of human personhood, from crisis of existence to presencing of being.⁴⁰

As “a conceptual expression of African communalism”,⁴¹ Integrative Personhood is seen as the self presencing of being and specifically, the human being who seeks to become within the possibilities and limitations imposed by the community where he is an emerging presence.

Seeking to “abstract and theorize on a communalist concept of the person”,⁴² the book reviews some of the contributions by scholars beginning with the nationalist ideological school (which sought to reject the European conception of the African in subhuman terms), through the community structured school (that sees the African person as a being in the community), to the systematic theorization that is the hallmark of recent reflections.

However, in spite of the need to give particular manifestations of the crises of African personhood, the book insists that as a theory, Integrative Personhood is an attempt to break loose from and then transcend the particularity of previous attempts to explain the nature and structure of the African person. With the human person seen as an “infinite intendancy”, the author desires to present an “intellectual philosophical schema that is characterized by projective universalism without which the personhood of man would become a mere given, an object”.⁴³ With the goal of philosophy conceived as the search for holistic reality, Odimegwu hopes that not only does the necessity of developing an African conception of personhood imply its possibility, but that this person ability can be systematized in such a way that it can be consistent with the being of man *as such*.

The work in a comparative analysis, posits further that as “a theory of human personhood, integrative personhood develops authentically and consistently from the African communalist world view”.⁴⁴ This is interesting because the implication is that integrative personhood is consistently African because it is consistently human, in other words, it is both particular and holistic. The author argues that before the coming of the Europeans to Africa the people understood the idea or notion conveyed by the term “communalism”, in their various languages. He disagrees with analysts such

⁴⁰ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, x

⁴¹ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, xi

⁴² Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 13.

⁴³ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 105.

⁴⁴ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 134.

as Justice Ekennia and Mbonu Ojike, who advance this position; Odimegwu thus says that their position is certainly contentious.

The implication is that Africans couldn't have known the term "communalism" since Africans are not English language speakers in the first language (L1) situation. No Englishman or woman could have understood the Igbo language term "Njikoka" ("being together is better"). But it does not follow that the concept or idea inherent in these terms would not be understandable when they are translated.

The relationship between integrative personhood and African communalism, as articulated by the author, requires us to subject his analysis to critical examination. Is it true that the theory has met the demand "by various foundations for communalism in which the modern African and indeed, the contemporary person lives"?⁴⁵ By and large, especially with the employment of the method of dialogics, the author seriously attempted to ride that bull across the Atlantic.

However, we think that his final understanding of "communalism" as "essentially a social, political or sociological theory" and "integrative personhood" as "an onto anthropological theory" is blurred by his insistence that "the dual relation of integrative personhood to communalism is both a product and a foundation".⁴⁶ His understanding of communalism is truncated, for communalism is not just a socio-political theory, it is an ontological ground for the being of the (human) African.

We think, however, that what Odimegwu has achieved is to show that the integrating of persons is an inevitable "aspect" of the ontology of communalism. Integrative personhood can indeed be a contemporary articulation and interpretation of what Africans are; that is, the mode of being for the Africans. It is a "product" of communalism, an aspect of that ontology, but it is certainly not its foundation.

On How African Communalism Is

Oguejiofor's essay provides a near- perfect exposition and argument for and on behalf of those who reject the view either that there is nothing exclusively African about communalism or that there is nothing communalistic both in Africa of yore or of today. The eventual aim of this paper rests squarely on proving that Africans are ontologically communalistic. In an earlier essay, "The Ontological Basis For the Failure of Liberal Democracy in Africa: A

⁴⁵ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 156.

⁴⁶ Odimegwu, *Integrative Personhood*, 160.

phenomenological Rescue”⁴⁷, we had tried to bear this burden of proof by arguing that the failure of liberal democracy in Africa is manifestly ontological.

Our interest in the communal ontological basis of pristine Africa is neither for the purpose of dogmatic romanticization or fantasizing⁴⁸ nor to paint an “idealistic picture of an Africa of [my] fantasy, which (we hope to) contrast with everything western”⁴⁹. In that essay, we tried to show that we cannot wish away, abandon, ignore or downplay our ontological foundation and then hope to conceptualize or systematize a social theory or philosophy that would be an anchor for our existential survival. Ideas of romanticizing, idealizing, fantasizing, etc., have become blackmailing concept for those who want to discuss traditional African thoughts, words and works, no matter how systematic, critical and rigorous such discussions are. However, this challenge or problem is largely a problem of our orientation; that is, our exposure to colonial (mis)education⁵⁰. Granted that we cannot beat a mental or practical return to Africa of our past (it would not be feasible, even if it is plausible), we should not act, talk, or live as if it has been a complete, total and essential disconnect from the past.

Before we address the question of how African Communalism is and/or how communalist Africa is,⁵¹ we need to clear some unnecessary clog usually thrown in the part of progressive understanding of the issues. In the first place, many of the antagonists of the idea of African communalism react in ways that seem to suggest that there is something wrong with comparative analysis. They talk as though there are no differences between cultures, peoples, places, ideas, thought patterns, weather, language, etc. The fact of difference is an undeniable part of our world. In the midst of the interconnections and interrelatedness that characterize reality, there are inevitable differences. In fact, the idea of relation, connection or interconnection suggests that there are different things that relate, connect and interconnect, respectively. Paradoxically, those antagonizing the idea of

⁴⁷ J.C. Agbakoba And Tony C. Ajah, *Universalism, Relativism and Intercultural Philosophy* (Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016) 79-104

⁴⁸ Amaku, 1-10.

⁴⁹ I. I. Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complimentary Ontology* (Zurich: LIT VERIAGE GmbH Wien, 2007), 175

⁵⁰ This issue has recently been discussed by Joseph N. Agbo, “The Question of the West and the Rest of Us in African Philosophy”, in Jonathan O. Chimakoam (ed.) *Atuolu Omalu: Some unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy* (New York: University Press of America, 2015), 219- 239

⁵¹ Odimegwu “How Communalist is Africa?” 1- 9,

African communalism do so partly because they want to be “different” from the very large number that believe in it. Consequently, one can ask; is it that there is nothing whatsoever that makes the African different from, say the Easterner or Westerner? Or is it that communalism is too poorly systematized and articulated to play that role of differentiation?

A second point that we would like to make is that communing, communion, ‘community-ing’ or communalizing is an indispensable attribute of humankind as a specie being, and this is where it concerns Africa, the acknowledged birth place of humanity and civilization. Against the backdrop of the prehistoric and historic origin of man, our contention is that communalism is African because it is human. It is not exclusive to Africa; it is exclusive to humankind. Cultures that have lost that focus or downplayed it are paying dearly for it. The loss of the communal and all that flow from it, is the cause of the multi- faceted crises engulfing our world.

Without getting into unnecessary sophistry and bizarre hermeneutic analysis, we believe that we all have an idea of what “community” means, from where “communal” is derived and from where “communalism,” “communalist” sprouts. Kwasi Wiredu⁵², argues that, African morals are “communalistic” in the sense that the interests of the individual need to be adjusted to that of the society. He proceeds to say that “when the Akan [an ethnic group in Ghana] or in general, the African traditional social outlook is described as communalistic, it is usual to contrast it with that of Western society by calling it individualistic. There is a certain obvious anthropological validity in this comparison”⁵³

If communalism has a certain degree of “anthropological validity” to the African, we argue that at this point anthropology and ontology collapse. For if the African is anthropologically communalistic, then, he is ontologically communalistic. The social or associational expression of communalism is obvious to anyone that lives or has lived in a traditional African setting.

The issues surrounding the communalistic tendency and propensity in and for Africa is not that contemporary Africa should be as communalistic as its pristine past, for this would not be plausible even if feasible. Rather, the issue at stake is that in the fashioning of socio- political and economic stratagem for the existence of Africa in this contemporary time, that communalism is either ignored, dismissed or downplayed to our detriment. Our contention is that unless this communalism is recognized and given a

⁵² K. Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy, 4 Essays by Wiredu*, Selected and Introduced by Olusegun Oladipo, (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995).

⁵³ K. Wiredu, *Conceptual Decolonization*, 45.

place in all spheres of life for contemporary Africans, these theories and their practices would amount to nothing other than swimming against the tide.

The argument relating to the question of “exclusivity to Africa” when the issue of communalism is thrown to the fore is, to our thinking, a very clever, theoretical way of belittling the point at issue, that of all people’s on earth today, thoughts and works of communalism predominates in Africa more than anywhere else. The truth is that there is something communalistic, something collectivist and other-directing about humankind *as such*. No doubt, it is the individuals that make up the community, but it is the community that ensures that humans are so defined. That Aristotle defined man as “a political animal” lends credence to the fact that it is within the *polis* (the city-state) that his or her potentials are realized. Without the community, the social, as it were, man can neither develop speech nor even consciousness. This fact appears indubitable. What appears to be disputed is the fact that communalism is not an exclusive African trait.

Our argument is that communalism appears to be exclusively African, because it is exclusively human. And in this sense both “African” and “exclusivity” is geographical and biological. And for those who seem to forgotten, it would be necessary to remind them that it is no longer disputed (even disputable) that Africa is the “birthplace” of the human species. In the words of Mogube Ramose:

There is no ontological defect inherent in the indigenous African people by virtue of which they may be excluded from the membership of *Homo sapiens*. Furthermore, we suggest on scientific grounds, specifically biological anthropology, that if Africa is indeed the cradle of *Homo sapiens*, then it is the indigenous African people who are the first members of and the very root from which the tree of *Homo sapiens* took shape and grew⁵⁴

The implication of the foregoing is that communalism in other cultures are just species of the original human (African) communalism, the birth place of *Homo sapiens*.

If there is nothing ontological about communalism and the humankind, there would not have arisen all the theoretical and practical opposition to the thorough-going individualistic conception of reality, even in the western world. Why do we require social capital to rescue individualistically ruined capital? What is the world wild web (www) for? Why did we form the League of Nations and then United Nations?

⁵⁴ M. B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 2005), 39.

There are many attitudes and dimensions to the intellectual and theoretical battle against Africa's communalistic ontology. Scholars like Ejiogu Amaku belong to the extreme, non-compromising group. For him, the idea of African communalism is a "romantic postulation... overdogmatized... [and] the result of myopic cognition of the pedigree of ethnic racism and hatred in the continent". Amaku did not just reject African Communalism but even went to the bizarre extreme of arguing that "Africans are anti-communalistic by nature."⁵⁵ Joseph Agbo has addressed the Amaku position in his paper, "A Critique of Ejiogu Amaku's Rejection of Africa's Communalist Ontology"⁵⁶

Once again we raise the question, how and what would or can define Africans? Or is there no need to define the African? May be we should adopt the inclusive approach of Oguejiofor and then request that he follows us back to history so that we show him how Africa birthed other cultures and how these other cultures cannot but be "included" in the communalist lineage. Thus, when analyzed properly, the inclusivity, exclusivist and essentialist distinctions collapse into essentialism: humans are communal by nature and definition, Africans are the progenitors of humans (That is, the *Homo sapiens* began in Africa). Therefore, Africans are communalist because humans are communalist.

Oguejiofor's understanding of communalism as a mere "system", instead of a condition, a mode of being African, vitiates his overall interpretation of its place within the African definition. If communalism is "contingent", "circumstantial" and "contextual", as a stage in the historical evolution of Africa from the so-called "simple societies", if we grant that there is a tilt toward individualism in today's Africa, If we agree with Oguejiofor that there are certain communalist tendencies that need to adjust to the needs of contemporary African societies, did he also assume that this seemingly current individualistic state would be the final stage for both Africa and the global society? Joseph Agbo in an earlier essay, "Liberal Democracy and Globalized Capitalism in Africa; perspectives from Heidegger"⁵⁷, discusses how capitalism (the classic economic expression of individualism) arrived in the West during the modern period, and the shock with which it was received. From his analysis, we then see that what Wiredu calls "austere individualism" is antithetical to human definition, not just for Africans alone. According to Heilborner:

⁵⁵ Amaku, 1

⁵⁶ J. N. Agbo, "a Critique of Ejiogu Amaku's Rejection of Africa's Communalist Ontology" in, *Philosophy And Praxis* vol.11 (2021) 135-145

⁵⁷ In *Integrity Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol.2 no.3(2021)36-47

It may strike us as odd that the idea of gain is a relatively modern one. We are schooled to believe that man is essentially an acquisitive creature, and that left to himself he would behave as any self-respecting business man would. The profit motive, we are constantly being told is as old as man himself. But... it is only as old as the modern man. Even today, the notion of gain for gain sake is worrying to a large portion of the world population... The early capitalists were not the pillars of society, but often its outcasts.⁵⁸

The implication of the above is that the idea that “if you do not grab enough for yourself from the society or community and store for yourself, there would be no hope in the future” was not part of the constitution of the world before the modern period. And our contention is that it is still not.

Conclusion

As we conclude this reflection, it is important to note that the invading culture of a certain degree of exclusive individualism in Africa today or the citing of certain examples of individualist manifestations cannot obliterate the ontological condition of communalism inherent in the mind or prevalent in interaction in an average African community. Besides, if we point to the fenced houses and the land acquisitions on individualist bases in Africa today, and we somewhat celebrate it, have we stopped to consider the effect this would have on the rest of society if few individuals end up appropriating to themselves most of what the rest majority of the people should live by, for or with? Would society be able to survive the anarchy that would result there from? Although we would not back any attempt to muzzle individuals or individuality, the truth is that in African communalism, the muzzling of individuality by the community is impossible since they are inherently co-existent.

Although Kwame Nkrumah posit, and we agree with him, that there is no need (even if possible) to do a wholesale return to the pristine African way of socio-political organization, but the truth that he declares is that “... the basic organization of many African societies in different periods of history manifest a certain communalism and philosophy and humanist purpose of that origination are worthy of recapture”.⁵⁹ Our contention is that it is this failure to partly and indeed fully “recapture”, to take into consideration, this tendency to ignore, to reject this manifest communalist basis that is at the root of the

⁵⁸ R. T. Heilbroner, the *Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Clarion books, 1947), 21, 23

⁵⁹ Kwame Nkrumah, “African Socialism Revisited” available at <http://www.marxists.org/subject.Africa/nkrumah/1967/african-socialism>, accessed 21/8/2014

equally manifest failure of a wholesale adoption of western developmental options in Africa, even the Africa of today. Our interest in and concern for the communalist ontology of the African person or reality is not, in contradistinction to Oguejiofor, a moral one. We are not focusing on whether communalism is good or bad- for communalism is not a person. Our interest is to prove that the characterization of the African (human) ontological and existential reality as “communalist” is correct, true and valid. The existential fact of the presence of the liberal individualist attitude in Africa today neither shows that Africa is not nor was not communalist.

Moralizing or perceiving communalism in advantage-disadvantage terms is unnecessary. Community is what individuals *are*, “comm-uniting” is what people *do* as they inevitably relate. And communalism or communitarianism is our conceptual way of capturing that process.

Bibliography

Agbo J.N., “A Critique of Ejiogu Amaku’s Rejection of Africa’s Communalist Ontology” in, *Philosophy and Praxis* vol.11 (2021) 135-145

Agbo J.N., “Liberal Democracy and Globalized Capitalism in Africa: Perspectives from Heidegger” In *Integrity Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol.2 no.3 (2021)36-47.

Agbo, J.N., “The Ontological Basis for the Failure of Liberal Democracy in Africa: A Phenomenological Rescue, in Agbakoba J.C. And Ajah T.C. (Ed) *Universalism, Relativism and Intercultural Philosophy* Washington D.C: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016, 79-104.

Agbo, J. N., “The Question of the West and the Rest of Us in African Philosophy”, in Chimakoam J O. (ed.) *Atuolu Omalu: Some unanswered Questions in Contemporary African Philosophy* New York: University Press of America, 2015, 219- 239

Amaku E, “Are Africans Truly Communalistic, Socialistic and Hospitable By Nature?”, in *US Open Sociological Science Journal* vol 1 No 1 August 2014, 1-10.

Asouzu I, I., *Ibuanyidanda: New Complimentary Ontology* Zurich: LIT VERIAGE GmbH Wien, 2007.

Blackburn Simon (Ed) *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* 2nd edition revised
New York: OUP, 1996.

“Communalism” Available at <http://www.wordnik.com/words/communalism>.
Accessed 3/6/2014

Ekei, J. C. *Justice in Communalism* Lagos: Smagh and Co. Nig Ltd., 2001

Heilborner R T., *The Worldly Philosophers* New York: Clarion books, 1947,
21, 23

Marx K, *Communist Manifesto*, with an Introduction by Stefan T.
Possony, Chicago: Henry Regner Company, 1954.

Mbiti J.S., *African religions and Philosophy* London: Heinemann, 1968.

Nze Chukwuemeka, *Aspects of African Communalism* Onitsha: Veritas
Publisher, 1989.

Nkrumah K, “African Socialism Revisited” available at
[http://www.marxists.org/ subject.Africa/nkrumah/1967/african socialism](http://www.marxists.org/subject.Africa/nkrumah/1967/african%20socialism),
accessed 21/8/2014.

Odimegwu, Ike, Asiegbu M.F, and Izunwa M. O. (eds.) *Discourse in African
Philosophy: Celebrating the Genius of J. Obi Oguejiofor* Akwa: Fab
Anieh Nig. Ltd., 2015.

Odimegwu I, “How Communalist is Africa?” *Philosophy and Praxis*, vol. 3
(2007), 1-9.

Odimegwu I, *Integrative personhood: A Communalist Metaphysical
Anthropology* Zurich: LIT Verlag Gmbh and Co. Ka Wien, 2008.

Oguejiofor, J.O “How African is Communalism?” in, Ike Odimegwu (ed)
Perspectives on African Communalism London: Trafford Publisher, 2007.

Ogugua I, “The Metaphysical basis of African Communalism” In Odimegwu,
(ed) *Perspectives on African Communalism*, 26- 35.

Okolisa, C.P, “African Communalism and the Freedom of the Individual: A
Philosophical Analysis”, an M. A. Dissertation to the Department of
Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikwe University, Awka, April, 2012.

Okolo, C. B., *What is to be African? Essay in African Identity* Enugu: Cecta Publishers, 1993.

Ramose M.B., *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* Harare: Mond Books, 2005.

Senghor L.S *Prose and Poetry*, edited and translated by J. Read and C. Wake London: Heinemann, 1976.

Shuse, A, *Philosophy for Africa*. Milwaukee: Marquette University press, 1995.

Umeogu B, “Ohazuruume: A philosophical Definition of Communalism as the Typology of Igbo Being” In Odimegwu I (ed) *Perspectives on African Communalism*, 107- 112.

Wiredu K, *Conceptual Decolonization in African Philosophy, 4 Essays by Wiredu*, Selected and Introduced by Olusegun Oladipo, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1995.