

Afro-Humanistic Ethic: An Alternative to 'Africa's Two Ethics' for Nigeria

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Abstract

Vices [corruption] are so flagrantly integral and deeply entrenched in Nigeria's lived life, it is incontrovertible its social intercourse is governed by a wrongful ethical regime. The persistent economic catastrophe, hardship and social malaise occasioned by the dominance of wrongful operational *ethos* in Nigeria, ultimately, necessitate investigation into the identity of the ruling *ethos*, its principles and *modus operandi*; and for solution, the search for a viable alternative ethic. The problem, therefore, is: what kind of ethic with apparently inherent defects rules the social intercourse of the Nigerian state? Which alternate ethic potentially holds remedy for its anomalies and how is it to overcome the existing apex ethic? In this article, I aver that neoliberalist ethical egoism is the presently dominant *ethos* in Nigeria. To reign supreme, it conquered Afro-Communitarian and African Humanistic ethics, indigenous ethics herein commonly identified and labelled variously as “Africa's Two Ethics,” “Africa's Two-Prong Ethics,” “Africa's Siamese Twin Ethics” or “Africa's Conjoined Ethics” (whichever best describes their mutual relationship.) For resolution of Nigeria's ethical menace, I suggest strict and meticulous implementation of Afro-humanistic ethic, an improved version of African humanistic ethic. I adopt critical analysis for the article's methodology of study.

Keywords: Afro-humanistic ethic, Africa's Two Ethics, Neoliberalist ethical egoism, Community, Individual, Nigeria.

I. Introduction

As the Association of Professional Philosophers of Nigeria (APPON) planned for its 2023 Annual National Conference and General Meeting to be held in Rivers State University of Science and Technology, (themed: “Philosophy, Values and Good Governance”), it demonstrated awareness of Nigeria's deplorable ethical situation. One of APPON's sub-themes invites its members to search for an alternative ethic laden with capacity to resolve the shortcomings of Nigeria's dominant *ethos*. This article is my response to APPON's invitation to seek solution to this national epidemic.

The problem is: what is the identity of the internally faulty, yet dominant ethic in Nigeria? Which alternate ethic can correct the anomalies of Nigeria's prevailing ethic? How is it to overcome the existing dominant ethic?

By its characteristics, I have no doubt that the prevailing ethic is neoliberalist ethical egoism. I posit that to become supreme, neoliberalist ethical egoism conquered Afro-Communitarian and African Humanistic ethics, two indigenous ethics that I herein commonly identify and label variously as “Africa's Two Ethics,” “Africa's Two-Prong Ethics,” “Africa's Siamese Twin Ethics” or “Africa's Conjoined Ethics.” I suggest Afro-humanistic ethic, an advanced version of African humanistic ethic, as solution to the menace of neoliberalist ethical egoism.

In order to appropriately address the tasks at hand, I have divided the article into five parts. Part I introduces the work. Part II identifies and deals with The Dominant Ethic. Part III, 'Africa's Twin Ethics,' exposes/reviews the Natures and Limitations of Africa's mother ethic (Afro-communitarian ethic) and her brother(African humanistic ethic)by determining the internal weaknesses and contradictions that occasioned their amputations before ethical egoism. In Part IV, Thinking Afro-Humanistic Ethic for Remaking Nigeria, I propose an offspring – Afro-Humanistic ethic – by combining the virtues and strengths of Africa's Twin ethics to fashion out an indigenously novel ethic that has the vigour of neoliberalist ethical egoism, yet superior to it in character. Part V concludes the work. For methodology, I shall use the crucial tools

of exposition, critical analysis and heuristic interpretation.

Part II: The Dominant Ethic: Characteristics, Identity and Consequences

In Nigeria as elsewhere, ethics intricately intertwines with politics and economics. It is a triad of relationship, where the hegemony of politics dominates economics and determines ethical choices. Central to this reality is the role played by Nigerian politicians. These latter are the rulers and movers of the state ship. Politics is a business venture – money spinner for an average Nigerian politician; not about governance or service; therefore, not about leadership ethics. So, all over the Nigerian state, self-seeking politicians seize political leadership via force or deception, impose unhealthy legislations, spin out bad policies and lord it over citizens. Thus, justice as 'desert' or 'fairness' loses out in Nigeria's politico-ethical lexicon and praxis.

The first characteristic of Nigeria's operative *ethos* is Thrasymachianism. This conception of justice proposed by Thrasymachus to Socrates in Plato's dialogue, *Republic*, defines justice as the “advantage of the stronger” party. Here, justice is not about 'what is just' or 'what is right,' but about who is 'fiercest,' 'brutest,' 'wittiest,' or 'crudest' getting what they want and how they want it; an idea well-developed in Thomas Hobbes' acquisitional commonwealth theory. Here, the most ruthless individual(s) forcefully acquire(s) the vastest states. Hobbesian ethic considers it just when men “for fear of death or bonds do authorise all the actions of that man or assembly that hath their lives and liberty in his power.”¹ This ethic approves surrendering sovereignty to the stronger party. Hannah Arendt, John Branstetter points out, observes that Hobbes advanced a theory of “psychological interiority of subjects dominated by the Leviathan.”² Further, Branstetter says: Arendt alleges that “Hobbes divorced the

¹. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: British Philosophy* – Hobbes to Hume (New York: Continuum, Vol. 5, 2010[1959]), 42.

². John Branstetter, “The Leviathan's Conscience: Hobbesian Human Nature and Moral Judgment,” *Political Research Quarterly* 1, no. 12 (2017): 1, sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav, doi:10.1177/1065912177817

public from the private, and by channelling people's endeavors into material self-interest, he eliminated any resistance to state power.”³

Another of Nigeria's operational ethic is Niccolò Machiavelli's “the end justifies the means.” Accredited with the title of most incredulous and dubious philosopher ever, Machiavelli taught political leadership how to masterfully elevate deceit of the masses to a phenomenal height of insensitivity and impiety. His best-known work, *The Prince*, espouses “the unscrupulous methods of ambitious leaders like Cesare Borgia.”⁴ In it, Machiavelli instructs the art of deceit saying:

Universally men judge more by the eyes than by the hands since seeing touches everyone while sensing touches few. Everyone sees what you seem, few sense what you are, and these few are not so bold as to oppose the opinions of the many, who have the majesty of his estate for their defense; and in the actions of all men, and princes most of all, where there is no tribunal to which to make appeal, one focuses on the results. Let, then, a prince act in such a manner as to conquer and maintain his estate, and the means will always be judged honorable, and they will be praised by everyone – since the crowd is always going to be taken in by appearances and results, and in the world, there is no one but the crowd....⁵

Nigeria's professional politicians welcome and practice Machiavelli's counsel, but ignore Immanuel Kant's practical imperative which commands: “So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own self or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.”⁶

³. Branstetter, “The Leviathan's Conscience,” 1.

⁴. Niccolo Machiavelli, “*The Prince*,” in Steven M. Cahn ed., *Political Philosophy: The Essentials with Introduction by Roger D. Masters* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 253

⁵. Niccolo Machiavelli, “*The Prince*,” in Stanley Rosen ed., *The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings from Plato to Kant* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2000), 79.

⁶. Immanuel Kant, “Fundamental Principles of Metaphysics of Morals,” in *Ethics: The Essential Writings*, ed. Gordon Morino (New York: Random House, Inc., 2010), 224.

So, for them, it is immaterial how elections are won; what matters is that they gain victory. They apply the Hobbesian strategy of separating the public and private spheres in individuals' lives which dig up gulfs between community and *selves* so as to reduce communalism and objective rightness to irrelevancies. Meanwhile, their policies foster individualism, liberalism and capitalism, which encourage 'self-love' and promote extreme 'self-interest,' raising 'selfishness' as standard for justice. They wear out communal bond, ethical goals satisfy 'ego' with utter disregard for the means by which 'self-love' is fulfilled; the 'end' of 'political action' is what matters in accord with Machiavelli's tutorial.

The crucial question, therefore, is: which ethic exhibits the aforementioned characteristics? Put otherwise: Which ethic abhors Kantianism, i.e., objectivity, impartiality and a sense of fairness, but ostensibly embraces Thrasymachianism, Hobbesianism, Machiavellianism and promotes extreme 'selfishness?' To my thinking, simple and short, that ethic is Neoliberalist Ethical Egoism – the combination of “Neoliberalism” and “ethical egoism.”

Ethicalegoism, a normative theory, prescribes “what we ought to do, how we ought to act.”⁷ A version of it, individual ethical egoism, holds that “I ought to look out only for my own interests. I ought to be concerned about others only to the extent that this also contributes to my own interests.”⁸ Its implication is that 'other selves' too 'ought to do what is in their own best interests.' This way, this ethical theory, sometimes referred to as 'universal ethical egoism,' proposes that “everyone ought to look out for and seek only their own best interests. As in the individual form, ... people ought to help others only when and to the extent that it is in their own best interest to do so.”⁹ This theory has an economic version developed by Adam Smith, who advocated for laissez-faire and pushed for a 'government-hands-off capitalism.' Smith's theory with those of John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Friedrich von Hayek formed the tradition of classical liberalism out of which neoliberalism sprung up.

⁷. Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues* (Belmont: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 6th ed., 2009), 35.

⁸. MacKinnon, *Ethics*, 35.

⁹. MacKinnon, *Ethics*, 35.

Neoliberalism is thought of as the offshoot of liberalism. Like its ancestor, neoliberalist ethical egoism holds that 'self-interest provides the best economic motivation.' MacKinnon writes: "The idea is that when the profit motive or individual incentives are absent, people will either not work or not as well. If it is my land or my business, then I will be more likely to take care of it than if the profits go to others or the government."¹⁰ In Smith's thinking, a system in which each member of the community looks out for their own personal benefit, rather than seek to satisfy the interests of everyone in the community is the best. He believes that each person watching out for their own benefit has a way of generating an "invisible hand" that surreptitiously regulates economic affairs for the community.

What then is neoliberalism? According to Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie:

Neoliberalism is, as we see it, a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights.... This conviction usually issues, in turn, in a belief that the state ought to be minimal or at least drastically reduced in strength and size, and that any transgression by the state beyond its sole legitimate purpose is unacceptable.¹¹

One consequence of the neoliberalist ethic is its rejection of the objective and impartial authority of the state to regulate economic activities. The "invisible hand" replaces the state authority. This sneakily smuggled in and faceless regulator of the market is without doubt an interested agent(s), deeply involved in market affairs and, possibly, partisan; therefore, could be a biased and partial controller of the market for some selfish or sectional interests. Consequently, the neoliberalist state is without capacity to fulfil certain care functions towards its vulnerable

^{10.} MacKinnon, *Ethics*, 35.

^{11.} MacKinnon, *Ethics*, 35-36

and seriously disadvantaged citizens. Often, neoliberal actors collapse and privatize public institutions, loot state treasuries, execute poor contracts, sponsor terrorism and use banditry to arm-twist states, exploit natural resources, control behavioural patterns to drive their businesses, and indulge in other corrupt practices.

The neoliberalist ethic flagrantly opposes communitarian ethic. Its values are: 'self-love,' 'selfishness,' 'individualism,' 'solipsism' and 'atomism.' For it, collaboration is best between similar kinds; thus, the big, strong, rich and smart form upper classes, exploit and abuse other kinds – lower classes derived from the small, weak, poor and dull. It opposes a 'sense of community,' 'neighbourliness,' 'fellow feeling,' 'human sympathy,' 'kind helping hand,' 'solidarity,' 'togetherness,' 'care for the other,' etc. The language of this masculine, bold and highly aggressive ethic differs from the feminine one of Afro-communitarians; thus, it splits communication and provokes repeat of the biblical experience of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1 – 9). Udoidem captures this insight when he says, in Nigeria there is “no shared grammar and the semantics have no common reference. This is why, when our politicians speak, the electorates do not understand and when the electorates speak, the politicians do not listen or understand,”¹² It is neoliberalistic ethic's masculinity that inspires it to see “economic behavior as primarily guided by the fundamental force of self-interest,”¹³ conceive the economy as a system in which regular patterns emerged from people interacting in markets on their own accord, without interference from outside authorities,”¹⁴ as well as made it wage war against Afro-communitarian and African humanistic ethic, 'Africa's conjoined ethics,' overwhelmed and relegated them into residuality and oblivion – stashed away in the womb of memory.

^{12.} S. Iniobong Udoidem, “Understanding Nigeria's Political Grammar” in *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa*, eds. Martin F. Asiegbu and Joseph A. Agbakoba (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2006), 187.

^{13.} Udoidem, “Understanding Nigeria's Political Grammar,” 187.

^{14.} Alan B. Kruger, “Introduction” in *The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Bantam Classic, 2003), xi.

Part III: Africa's Twin Ethics, Characteristics and Limitations

Two major traditional ethics, Afro-communitarian ethic and African humanistic ethic, have been identified as indigenous to Africa. Although different by way of norms, these ethics substantially share the same ontological value, they can be described as 'Conjoined' twins or 'Siamese' twins or, even, 'Two-Prong,' ethics. Both ethics believe in the ultimacy of *self* or person, but differ in their normativity towards self. In its normativity, Afro-communitarian ethic attribute moral standing to community – i.e., the ensemble of selves, while African humanistic ethic promotes norms that directly benefit self.

Some African scholars (Nkrumah, Senghor, Praeg, Biney, etc.), show that both ethics share the same set of normative values (fellow feeling, interdependency, solidarity, harmony, live-and-let-live, etc.). Consequently, the demarcation between these ethics thin out and obfuscates their ethical boundary. A reason for this development is that owing to the intricate relationship between their subjects – “we” for “community” and “I” for “self” – the “I” and “we” overly entangle. Menkiti explains it thus: “The relation between the individual and his or her community is an intricate one. The “we” involves the “I” and the ‘I’ involves the ‘we.’”¹⁵

Nevertheless, despite their sharing of a natural bond, a serious tension remains between them springing from the inordinate desires and excessive ambitions of the “I” to satisfy itself always, even when self-satisfaction potentially threatens the continual existence of the community and, ultimately, its own survival. An age-old problem, to cater for this challenge Africans developed their Siamese ethics. These sibling ethics are designed to resolve the perennial tension between *self* and *community*, personal interest and community interest, selfishness and altruism. The African humanistic ethic, a masculine ethic, dealt with ethical issues by protecting the interests of the individual, while Afro-communitarian ethic, a feminine ethic, safeguarded the interests of the community by subjecting, constraining and restraining *selves* under the

¹⁵. Ifeanyi Menkiti, “Person and Community – A Restrospective Statement” *FilosofiaTheoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* VII, no. 2, (2018): 165.

authority of the community.

Thus, Afro-communitarianism ensured harmony in the community, while African humanism motivated personal enterprise. It appears a combination of the two ethics had efficient tendency of resolving ethical issues in traditional societies, albeit imperfectly, despite the problematics hitherto of properly balancing both ethics. Nonetheless, for pragmatic and utilitarian purposes, African societies maintained these 'conjoined' twins or 'Siamese' twins or, even, 'two-prong,' ethics (until the devastating onslaught of western neoliberalist ethical egoism during colonialism.)

Incidentally, an art motif, a product of the Akans of Ghana captures the philosophy and significance of 'Africa's Two Ethics.' Wiredu explains that the Akans of Ghana are habituated to employing art motifs to express deep and profound philosophical conceptions. Hence, they employed art work to provide answer to the question about what constitute the rationale of morality? The art motif, he says, is: “a crocodile with one stomach and two heads locked in combat.”¹⁶ Furthermore, Wiredu informs that:

(1) Although human beings have a core of common interests, they also have conflicting interests that precipitate real struggles. (2) The aim of morality, as also derivatively of statesmanship, is to harmonize those warring interests through systematic adjustment and adaptation. The one stomach symbolizes not only the commonality of interests, but also a natural basis for the possibility of a solution to the existential antimony.¹⁷

I think the Akans' fine art perfectly symbolizes Africa's 'Two-Prong Ethics,' or 'Siamese Twin Ethics' or simply Africa's 'Two Ethics' in the sense that the crocodile's “two heads locked in combat” represent the eternal war between the 'virtue of altruism' and the 'vice of selfishness;'

¹⁶. Kwasi Wiredu, “Moral Foundations of an African Culture” in *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies 1*, eds. Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu, (Washington D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 197.

¹⁷. Wiredu, “Moral Foundations of an African Culture,” 197.

the crocodile's "one stomach" represents the cauldron of collaborative relationship between Afro-communitarian ethic and African humanistic ethic. It is here that "a natural basis for the possibility of a solution to the existential antimony" is worked out using the contents of the predator's stomach: the normative values – 'solidarity,' 'neighbourliness,' 'toleration,' 'live-and-let-live' philosophy, etc. – that both ethics share.

Importantly, in precolonial African societies, the efforts of Africans to overcome the 'existential antinomy' between the diverse and conflicting interests ('altruism' versus 'selfishness,' 'communalism,' versus 'individualism' 'orthodoxy' versus 'liberalism,' etc.) within and between *selves* culminated in communitarianism (i.e., relative egalitarianism, benevolence, tolerance, harmony, care-giving, etc.) and orthodoxy (i.e., rule-based, restrictive, coercive, conformist, cohesive, etc.) societies that guaranteed permanency of minimal comfort and the life lived was good, albeit not necessarily in El Dorado. However, following internal weaknesses of Africa's two ethics, African societies slid into complacency and churned out mostly 'weakened,' 'botched' and 'bungled' individuals, reason why neoliberalist ethical egoism easily subdued Africa' two ethics, each of which we now turn to briefly examine beginning with the dominant one – Afro-communitarian ethic.

(i) Afro-communitarian Ethic

This ethic upraises community and obligates members to abide by its norms. 'Radical communitarian ethic,' a version associated with Edward Blyden, Jomo Kenyatta, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, but especially, John. S. Mbiti and Ifeanyi Menkiti as its foremost theorists, in its conceptualization, significantly reduces reference to *self*. The diminutive status granted *self* here is clear: communitarians hold that it is community that gives existence to *self*; therefore, *self* is subordinated to community, and because there cannot be *self* without community, community is adjudged superior to *self*, although community exists for *self*. In Mbiti's words: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am."¹⁸

^{18.} Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought" in *African Philosophy: An Introduction*, ed. Richard A. Wright (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 3rd ed., 1984), 171.

As a matter of fact, 'radical' also called 'unrestricted' communitarianism absolutizes community; it reserves to community the power to recognize human beings as persons, implying that a human being is not recognized and treated as person until community makes pronouncement. For example, the “often-repeated maxim of the Nguni peoples of South Africa, '*umuntungumuntungabantu*' – that is, a person is a person through other persons.”¹⁹ This shows that the premium placed on community by communitarians is significant. For instance, Menkiti writes:

... as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these may be. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also in regard to epistemic accessibility. It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that the individual comes to see himself as man, and it is by first knowing this community as a stubborn perduring fact of the psychophysical world that the individual also comes to know himself as a durable, more or less, permanent, fact of this world.²⁰

Accordingly, Menkiti proceeds to say: “personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse;”²¹ thus, the community reserves the right to withdraw personhood from an individual. He says further:

... the African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e., become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies

^{19.} Ama Biney, “The Historical Discourse on African Humanism: Interrogating the Paradoxes,” in *Ubuntu: Curating the Archive*, ed. Leonhard Praeg and Siphokazi Magadla (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2014), 29.

^{20.} Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” 171-72.

^{21.} Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” 3.

implied by the term.²²

The view above show that communitarians demand conformism with community's social rules²³ for attainment of personhood; therefore, compliance with social rules rewards with personhood, while consistent interrogation, repeated objection, or/and frequently open flouting of certain traditional practices incurred denial of personhood to *selves*, say, thinkers, adjudged as nonconformists. Hence, it comes through that overemphasis, over reliance and over appliance of the strategic criterion of social rules in traditional societies for determination of personhood tended to suppress rational inquiry, personal curiosity, scientific spirit and inventions, adventurism, risk-taking enterprises, etc.

Now, in traditional African societies, social rules closely bond with ethics and share common identity with it. For instance, the following communitarian social rules or ethical norms: 'a sense of community,' 'respect for elders,' 'fellow feeling,' 'solidarity,' 'compassion,' 'brotherhood,' 'interdependence,' 'group welfare,' 'care for neighbour,' 'community service,' 'human dignity,' 'cooperation,' 'reciprocity,' 'live-and-let-live,' etc., compel duty from individuals with respect to the community and its members."²⁴ The principles of 'compassion' and 'reciprocity,' for instance, conjure up tacit similarity with Kantian Golden Rule: 'Do to others as you would wish they do to you,' which Makinde believes is "essentially a corollary of the Biblical injunction: Love thy neighbour as thyself."²⁵

This ethic requires each individual to demonstrate concern for the interests of others.²⁶ It disdains insatiable lust for materialism and

²² Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought," 173.

²³ Hasskei M. Majeed, "Moderate communitarianism is different: A Response to J. O. Famakinwa and B. Matolino," *Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 6, no. 1, (September 2018): 4.

²⁴ Kwame Gyekye, "African Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL=?<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/African-ethics/>? .9. The Ethics of Duty, Not of Rights.

²⁵ Moses Akin Makinde, *African Philosophy: The Demise of a Controversy* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo Press Limited, 2007), 294.

²⁶ Gyekye, "African Ethics," 9.

limitless accumulation of wealth by one or few members of the community, such that accumulation leads to the disadvantage and marginalization of others in that community. Because it does not encourage 'selfishness,' Afro-communitarian ethic detests corruption, especially, looting of public treasury for self-enrichment. It promotes the principles of fair distribution of social goods and advocates for equality among citizens. Rather than steal from the public treasury, Afro-communitarianism demand *selves* to 'make sacrifices' or 'weighty contributions' towards the common good.

Gyekye and Matolino, especially, criticize the historical, classical conception of communitarianism advocated by Menkiti and defended by Molefe, which “prioritises the sociality of the self.”²⁷ Its high standard of morality notwithstanding, radical Afro-communitarianism excessively empowers community over and above *selves*. Search for communal acceptance and offer of personhood from authorities, does, often, shift all of an individual's rational faculty and emotional energies away from creative thinking, generates 'self-humbling,' subdues 'self-interest' in most cases, and vitiates chances of serious engagement in personal profitable enterprises. Consequently, while the individuals' attentions stay locked on that singular purpose of pleasing communal authorities for the purpose of being rewarded with personhood; they lose sense of initiative, personal self-development, self-worth and reduced capacity for competitions. Accordingly, neoliberalist ethical *selves* out compete Afro-communitarian *selves*. The success of neoliberalist ethical egoism against Afro-communitarian and African humanistic ethics owes to the feminine virtues of the latter.

The motive of Afro-communitarian ethic is simple: to mould and shape human character in alignment with community values. It is to orientate individuals to uphold community over and above self, since each individual's well-being depends on the well-being of the community, considering that without the community, the individual lacks existence. This welfarist view makes 'duty' a most basic value as

²⁷. cf. Tosin Adeate, “Limited Communitarianism and the Merit of Afro-communitarian Rejectionism,” *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 12, no. 1 (2023): 49.

against the secondary status it attaches to 'rights' of the self. This communitarian account seems non-exclusively African. Kant, for example, developed an ethic, deontology, based entirely on 'duty,' but long before him, Aristotle had presented a communitarian view reflective of the Greek thought of his days when he wrote: "he who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god."²⁸

Overall, Afro-communitarian *ethos* tries to produce effeminate selves characterized by love, tolerance, peace and humility and manly communities notable as healthy, strong, virile, rich and happy. It was mistaken: effeminate individuals can only produce epicene communities, not manly ones. This truth is concretized in African history: traditional African societies which painstakingly lived the communitarian ethic had their hopes for evolving communal and personal bliss cut short unable to defend themselves against invading externalist ethics, firstly, of Islamic Arabs and, secondly, of Western European Judeo-Christianity. Feminization of the African humanistic ethic was partly responsible for these adverse historical outcomes.

(ii) African Humanistic Ethic

African humanistic ethic, twin to Afro-communitarian ethic, and with it predates western imperialist incursion into Africa. A few modern notable articulators and curators of this ethic are Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sédar Senghor, Sophie B. Oluwole, Kwesi Wiredu and Olusegun Oladipo. Godwin Azenabor, especially, AmaBiney, Elejo, etc., also share keen interest in the subject. These scholars all agree that the practice of African humanistic ethic dates far back into Africa's antiquity. Wiredu posits that ample anthropological studies exist which provide sufficient evidence to back up this claim. He writes: "African conceptions of morals would seem generally to be of a humanistic orientation. Anthropological studies lend substantial support to this claim."²⁹

²⁸ Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon with introduction by C. D. C Reeve (New York: The Modern Library, 2001), 1130.

²⁹ Wiredu, "Moral Foundations of an African Culture," 193.

However, unlike its counterpart, Afro-communitarian ethic which emphasizes community, African humanistic ethic gives primacy to *self*. It pursues the welfare of '*selves*' as beings necessarily within 'community;' hence, it collaborated with Afro-communitarian ethic to achieve stable, progressive and happy communities – reason I describe them as conjoined or Siamese twin ethics. Nkrumah says: “The traditional face of Africa includes an attitude towards man which can only be described, in its social manifestation, as being socialist.”³⁰ Nevertheless, unlike Mbiti and Menkiti, who stripped man of excellency and dignity from birth, Nkrumah says “man is regarded in Africa as primarily a spiritual being, a being endowed originally with a certain inward dignity, integrity and value.”³¹ Because of these qualities of man, Nkrumah says: “The welfare of the people was supreme” in traditional African society.

African humanistic ethic has values and principles which constitute its philosophy. Biney lists them as “interdependence, dignity, self-respect, respect for others, co-operation or communalism, forgiveness, sharing and equality.”³² Actually, they are no different from those of Afro-communitarian ethic due to the feminization, *ab initio*, of this ethic. That the feeble (men, women or children) in society should cope with the ethical rigours and vigours of strong men, manly values needed to be womanized or regulated by the softer and effeminate qualities and standards of womanhood.

Thus, African humanistic ethic converts the male's bullying might and actions to communal protective power. The excessive vigour of the male is tamed and channelled from destructive use into community service: rather than batter wives, brutalize weaker men, carnibalize children, rape damsels and violate people generally, the man of valour is indoctrinated to not be source of social disorder and mayhem, tagged a social misfit; instead, he is persuaded to put those overly energies into the security of lives and properties of members of the community in exchange for

³⁰. Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization* (United States of America: First Modern Reader Paperback, 1970), 68.

³¹. Nkrumah, *Consciencism*, 68.

³². Biney, “The Historical Discourse on African Humanism,” 29.

honour, heroism and leadership. Strong Cain is cultured from being Abel's killer to becoming his guard. This ethic values strength, but tames the wild lion into a domestic cat for the safety and tranquil of the human community.

Consequently, it is shaped byfeminism, i.e., by Afro-communitarianism's social values: 'interdependence,' 'respect for others,' 'cooperation,' 'communalism,' 'forgiveness,' 'sharing,' 'being-a-brother's-keeper,' etc. It encourages personalized values ('self-respect,' 'decency,' 'gentility,' 'good reasoning,' 'industry,') and virtues ('prudence,' 'fortitude,' 'courage,' 'boldness,' etc.) These personalized values define an individual's character based on how much of them or not can be associated with their person; ethically, they constitute the distinctive characteristics of African humanism. While African humanistic ethic is praiseworthy for its ability to harness the utilitarian worth of otherwise dangerous characters for the harmony of society, its internal weakness lies in its impotence against internal and, especially, external ethical predators. Succumbing to the lead of the womanly Afro-communitarianism, the inner drive for valour among the African youth is slid into slumber; the senses and urge for separateness, identity, exploration and exploitation were sacrificed on the altar of sameness, conformism, sycophancy and submission. It empowered western neoliberalist ethical egoism to overrun, *ipso facto*, subdue Africa's Two Ethics.

Challenged, Africa's Two Ethics could not make good balance between the social and personal spheres of life, 'community' and 'self' interests. Practical wisdom, therefore, suggests a balancing of 'self-interest' with 'community-interest'. Overcoming the disadvantage of Africa's 'two-prong' ethics vis-à-vis ethical egoism requires developing an indigenous *ethos* capable of counter-balancing the roles of 'inclusivity' and 'exclusivity' in rational ethical calculations. This is how this ethic can overcome the excesses of neoliberalism: first, by allowing the blossom of self-interest, but not its degeneration into 'selfishness;' second, effectively marries its valorous virtues with the benignity of communitarian ethic without undermining the rights of *selves*. This new indigenous *ethos* is Afro-humanistic ethic.

Part IV: The Way Forward: Thinking Afro-Humanistic Ethic as National *Ethos*

The ethical aporia caused by the conflict between the externalist (specifically, the western neoliberalist egoistic) ethic and Africa's Two Ethics (Afro-communitarian ethic and African humanistic ethic) individually and collectively hurt Africans. Overall, it leaves Africa and Africans at crossroad trapped in the quagmire of underdevelopment occasioned by excessive corruption. In my view, neither Afro-communitarian ethic nor African humanistic ethic, already defeated and deadened by neoliberalist ethic possesses the innate capacity to revitalize, re-engage and effectively overcome the masculinity of neoliberalist egoistic ethic. The superintendence of the feminine Afro-communitarian ethic over the masculine African humanistic ethic has over time has stripped the latter of its independence and manly vigour. The effeminacy of Africa's Siamese twin ethics makes them an underdog before neoliberalism.

Afro-humanistic ethic, a masculine *ethos*, is a radical version of African humanistic ethic. It prioritizes the right of selves by developing a strong sense of balance with community spirit. This ethic encourages selves to pursue their personal interest similar to African humanistic ethic, but differ from this latter in the sense that its 'self-interest' is not fully regulated by community interest. This is because its self-seeking adventures, unlike neoliberalist ethical egoism, are not motivated by 'selfishness,' but by rational calculations, strenuous self-discipline, hard and diligent work. While neoliberalist ethical egoists steal from the public coffer in pursuit of maximum profit-making, Afro-humanists disdain selfishness as honour, integrity, hard and well work form their basis of social cooperation. Despite placing personal interests prior to communal duties, Afro-humanistic ethic never undermines the cruciality of community to *selves*; Afro-humanists are devoid of exploitative actions against other selves. Two characters in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* largely portray Afro-humanistic personalities. They are Okonkwo and Nwakibie. Of Okonkwo, Achebe writes:

When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo

was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was clearly cut out for great things. He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a wealthy farmer and had two barns full of yams, and had just married his third wife. To crown it all he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two inter-tribal wars.³³

Afro-humanistic ethic motivates *selves* to rise to success via hard work, reasonability, decency, excellence, etc. Consequently, it detests effeminacy, failure and weakness. Laziness, stealing, otherwise, called corrupt practices, failure, weakness, etc., are to it condemnable vices. Achebe captures this fact as follows:

Even as a little boy he had resented his father's failure and weakness, ... Okonkwo first came to know that agbala was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title. And so, Okonkwo was ruled by one passion – to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved. One of those things was gentleness and another was idleness.³⁴

The foregoing quotation expresses a commonality between Afro-humanistic ethic and neoliberalist ethical egoism. They idealize noblemen, people of valour and strength of character, a sort of the Nietzschean superman, which Okonkwo's aversion for gentleness and slothfulness encapsules. Nietzsche's nobleman:

... does not look outside of himself for any approval of his acts. He passes judgment upon himself. His morality is one of self-glorification. This noble individual acts out of a feeling of power, which seeks to overflow. He may help the unfortunate, but not out of pity, rather from an

^{33.} Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Modern Classics, 1959), chap. 3.

^{34.} Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chap. 3.

impulse generated by an abundance of power.³⁵

But they differ still: the western neoliberalist ethical egoist sparsely helps the ill-fated; when he helps, he does so out of overflow of power rather than pity or compassion; the Afro-humanist, on the contrary, grants assistance based on communitarian thoughts: 'solidarity,' 'neighborliness,' 'kindness,' etc. Nonetheless, the Afro-humanists, deriving their success from extreme hard work, diligence and prudence, detest slothfulness and insipient laziness and may treat the lazy with disdain. Nwakibie, says Achebe, "was a wealthy man in Okonkwo's village who had three barns, nine wives and thirty children." He made his wealth from sheer hard work, perseverance, diligence, etc.; not via exploitation of other selves, ritual killings, stealing, corruption, prostitution, looting government treasury, inflation of contracts, sales of fake goods, etc. His dialogue with Okonkwo sums up the *ethos* of Afro-humanism, which summarizes as follows:

Okonkwo:

I have come to you for help... Perhaps you can already guess what it is. I have cleared a farm but have no yams to sow. I know what it is to ask a man to trust another with his yams, especially these days when young men are afraid of hard work. I am not afraid of work.... I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mother's breasts. If you give me some yam seeds, I shall not fail you.³⁶

Nwakibie:

It pleases me to see a young man like you these days when our youth has [sic] gone so soft. Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they would just dump them in the earth and leave them to be choked by weeds. When I say no to them, they

^{35.} Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chap. 3.

^{36.} Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chap. 3.

think I am hard hearted. But it is not so.... I have learnt to be stingy with my yams. But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you. As our fathers said, you can tell a ripe corn by its look. I shall give you twice four hundred yams. Go ahead and prepare your farm.³⁷

The dialogue above demonstrates that Afro-humanistic ethic promotes cooperation, solidarity, kind helping hand, but not out of pity for the idle and slothful neighbour, rather, for the serious-minded, hardworking, well ordered, principled, non-corrupt, self-organized and enterprising person.

Conclusion

The neoliberalist ethic places *self* as supreme good; thus, fundamentally and aggressively promotes personal profit with near total disregard for communal values. This way, neoliberalist ethic profits *selves* at the expense of community and its values. Its highest values – strength, wit, swiftness and bullishness – testimony of its masculinity, extreme devotion to *self* that culminates in selfishness. Its masculinity overwhelms the feminine Afro-communitarian ethic and its effeminate brother, African humanism, each of which, respectively, exalts either 'communal' or 'personal' interests, but attempts to moderately satisfy both with mutual reciprocation. On account of the moderation and temperance of these indigenous ethics, an excessively aggressive neoliberalist ethical egoism gains dominance and control of African societies. Its consequences reflect in: justice becoming 'the advantage of the stronger' party, politics reduced to 'the unscrupulous methods of ambitious leaders' that hurt community (state) and injury inflicted on *selves* deriving from the lies and misdeeds of leadership. Ultimately, neoliberalist ethical egoism breeds extreme corruption – an abominably dangerous sociopolitical and economic cancer – into the polity; thus, necessitating quest for rebirth of a responsible ethic.

In this work, I have suggested Afro-humanistic ethic as replacement of the neoliberalist ethical egoism. Like Africa's Twin Ethics, Afro-

³⁷. Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, chap. 3.

humanistic ethic safeguards community interest and provides a better model for personal advancement. It disdains the greed of neoliberalist ethic, despises the lethargy and tardiness of Afro-communitarian ethic and loathes the effeminacy of a masculine African humanistic ethic. It esteems integrity, honour, self-discipline, good reasoning, hard work, collaboration, solidarity, etc. It abhors corruption and dissociates from all forms of theft. Finally, while Afro-humanistic *ethos* shares in the virtues of the other three ethics, it jettisons their vices. Consequently, it possesses the strengths of the other ethics, but avoids their weaknesses, which is key reason I favour and recommend it—not Afro-communitarianism and, not African humanism – to replace neoliberalist ethical egoism as Nigeria's new ethic, nay, Africa.

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