
BEYOND THE LIBERAL- COMMUNITARIANISM OF OSENI AFISI: A COMPLEMENTARIST RECONSTRUCTION OF INDIVIDUAL-COMMUNITY RIGHTS

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Abstract

One of the existential issues confronting the socio-political philosophers has to do with the problem of individual-community rights. On the relationship between the rights of the individual and community, the liberal individualists uphold individual rights but seek for governments' intervention on the protection of individual's rights. On the other hands, the communitarians hold that community rights precede individual's rights and their positions are based on the social values of the society that is external to man. Nonetheless, the liberal-communitarian, particularly Oseni Afisi, holds a complementarity idea on the problem of individual-community rights. While strengthening the position of Karl Popper to justify his liberal-communitarian idea, Afisi argues that Popper places individual rights ahead of the community rights but the social dimension of the individual makes him a liberal-communitarian. However, this paper critically examines the liberal-communitarianism of Afisi; it shows the biases that are embedded in his liberal-communitarian idea. Through conceptual analysis and complementarity methods, the paper shows that Afisi is yet to address two issues: community welfare and clashes of interest. On this ground, nevertheless, the paper suggests an alternative liberal-communitarianism,-a mediated communitarianism -that is based on interdependency, intersubjectivity, and critical dialogues.

Keywords: Afisi, Asouzu, Complementarity, *Ezumezu* logic, Liberal-communitarianism,

Introduction

One of the perennial issues confronting socio-political philosophy has to do with the individual-community rights; there is a debates regarding how the tension between the rights of the individual and the community will be addressed.¹ In response to this challenge, three different groups have been established: liberal individualism, communitarianism and liberal-

^{1.} Saheed A. Agunbiade, "The Problem of Individual-Community Rights in Bernard Matolino's Limited Communitarianism," *APPON Philosophical Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2024a).

communitarianism. The liberal individualist, like John Rawls defends individual rights ahead of the community rights; he argues that individuals possess inalienable rights, and the government's authority stems from the consent of the governed, as established through a social contract.² This contract is based on individuals, not group representation, showing the importance of personal autonomy and individual rights in the relationship between the governed and the governing bodies. Hence, liberal individualism believes that individual rights precede that of the community. On the other hand, communitarianism holds that community rights precede that of the individuals and this is based on the shared values of community; It holds that individuals, by nature, are social beings, their identities are determined by the community, and on the basis of these, the community values precedes the values of the individuals.³ Nevertheless, liberal-communitarianism has been suggested by the contemporary scholars as a remedy to the perennial issues between the liberal individualists and the communitarians. One of the advocates of this complementarity idea is who complemented the arguments of the liberal individualists and the communitarians through his complementarity theory of Karl Popper; While strengthening the position of Karl Popper to justify his liberal-communitarian idea, Afisi argues that Popper places individual rights ahead of the community rights but the social dimension of the individual makes him a liberal-communitarian. It is on the basis of the Afisi's idea that the paper therefore examines the biases that are embedded in the liberal-communitarian idea. Nonetheless, the paper shall start with the debate between liberal individualism and communitarianism.

A Debate between Liberal Individualism and Communitarianism

The debate amongst the liberal individualists and the communitarians on individual-community rights is one of the perennial issues confronting the socio political philosophers.⁴ Liberal individualism holds that individuals' right should precede that of the community; It argues that individuals should be given autonomy and rights to make choices in the community; the duty of the state or community is to protect the rights and properties of the individuals. The positions of the liberal individualists are categorized into three segments: individual right, the role of the community and issue of interest. On the first one, individual rights, the liberal individualists argue that a person possesses an identity and value that precedes and is separate from society. For instance, Rawls holds that the principles of justice must be seen as the fair choices of abstract, rational individuals reflecting from a starting point without knowing their personal backgrounds due to a veil of ignorance. Robert Nozick on his part argues that people have rights before political society, and this society can only be valid if it respects these natural rights. On the second one, the role of the community, the liberal individualists argue for the importance of

². John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 45.

³. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴. Agunbiade, *The Problem of Individual-Community Rights*, 111.

individualism over collectivism, self-interest over the common good, a government that protects individual rights, and the market's role in distributing goods rather than heavy state control. They also promote a state that stays neutral when it comes to different personal views on a fulfilling life. Rawls emphasizes that the principles of justice should come before personal ideas of a good life. In a neutral liberal state, individuals have the freedom to shape their life goals and engage with others for mutual gain within a structured environment.

On the issue of the establishment of objective principle, some liberal individualists aim to establish a neutral or objective basis for political principles to guarantee their broad and consistent application. Rawls in *A Theory of Justice*, points out that the individuals in the original position are rational decision-makers who select neutral principles of justice that all rational individuals can accept.⁵ He also stresses the importance of prioritizing what is right over personal notions of the good. Rawls, in *Political Liberalism*, shows signs of accommodating communitarianism and clarifies that justice should be viewed as a political rather than objective metaphysical concept. Despite this, he upholds the idea that justice should be impartial towards different moral and religious beliefs. On the other hand, Nozick views individuals as having inherent natural rights and explains the formation of the state based on the voluntary choices of individuals. Nevertheless, the communitarians criticized the three position of the liberal individualists on the basis of social value. In reaction to the first argument, the individual rights, the communitarians suggest that people are shaped by the societies they belong to, and the principles guiding their actions and the interpretations of their lives come from their community. They argue that individuals are deeply connected to their communities and are burdened by community bonds. Alasdair MacIntyre defends this view by arguing that:

... we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given way of my life, my moral starting point.⁶

In the same vein, Charles Taylor opposes atomism, which prioritizes individual rights and views society and the state as formed by individuals to protect their rights. In contrast, Taylor supports a communitarian view that emphasizes humans' social nature and argues that individuals can only enhance their rational and moral abilities within a societal framework. He asserts that:

^{5.} Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

^{6.} MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 160

What has been argued in the different theories of the social nature of man is not just that man cannot physically survive alone, but much more that they only develop their characteristically human capacities in society. The claim is that living in society is a necessary condition of the development of rationality, in some sense of this property, or of becoming a moral agent in the full sense of the term, or of becoming a fully responsible autonomous being.⁷

From the first reaction of the communitarians, it can be argued that Rawls's idealized depiction of how hypothetical individuals select principles of justice and Nozick's hesitance to provide a philosophical basis for the existence of natural rights could make them susceptible to criticism from communitarians. However, in reaction to the second position of liberal individualism, the role of the community, communitarians argue that individualism and self-interest harm social bonds, community unity, and solidarity. They argue for a common good that surpasses individual interests and suggest that the state should prioritize this common good over neutrality. Charles Taylor asserts that a successful society relies on promoting a shared common good. He asserts that:

there are ... significant differences between ... liberals ... who believe that the state should be neutral between the different conceptions of the good life espoused by individuals, on the one hand, and those who believe that a democratic society needs some commonly recognised definition of the good life, on the other—a view which ... I ... defend.⁸

Michael Sandel corroborated this view when he argued that when politics functions effectively we can identify a shared good that is beyond individual understanding when alone.⁹ On the third position of liberal individualists, the establishment of objective principle, Communitarians believes that political philosophy should reveal the community's shared values and meanings rather than proving non-existent objective or neutral universal principles. Therefore, political philosophy focuses on interpretation rather than validation. Michael Walzer corroborated this position by arguing that:

One way to begin the philosophical enterprise—perhaps the original way—is to walk out of the cave, leave the city, climb the mountain, fashion for oneself (what can never be fashioned for ordinary men and women) an objective and universal standpoint. Then one describes the terrain of everyday life from far away, so that it loses its particular contours and takes on a different shape. But I

^{7.} Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, 190

^{8.} Ibid, 190

^{9.} Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, 183.

mean to stand in the cave, in the city, on the ground. Another way of doing philosophy is to interpret to one's fellow citizens the world of meanings that we share.¹⁰

From the above views on liberal-communitarian debates, it can be deduced that while the liberal individuals focuses on the protection of individual rights; community also focuses on the protection of community rights. On the basis of this, it can be argued that the two antagonistic advocates of the liberal-communitarian ideas are extremists. However, the fundamental questions that follow are: in the face of the parallel views on liberal-communitarian issues, in what way can the issue be addressed? Is it possible to have a society that accommodates both the liberal individualists and the communitarians? In order to answer these questions, the liberal-communitarianism of Oseni Afisi will be considered in the next section.

The Liberal-Communitarian Critique

In his 2016 work Popper, *Liberal-Communitarianism, Beyond the Politics of Liberalism*, Oseni Afisi develops a complementarity idea on individual-community rights. He seeks to strengthen Karl Popper's philosophy by demonstrating that it combines elements of both liberal individualism and communitarianism. Afisi uses the epistemological and ethical principles underlying Popper's ideas on freedom to support this view. The paper is structured in four sections. In the first, Popper on Freedom, Afisi explores Popper's approach to freedom, highlighting his recognition of both negative and positive freedoms. Negative freedom involves minimizing external interference, while positive freedom pertains to an individual's ability to discover personal values and purposes. Afisi argues that Popper finds a middle ground, integrating both liberal individualism and communitarianism. For Popper, freedom involves not only personal autonomy but also critical engagement with others, with societal interaction playing a key role in shaping one's values. Afisi asserts that:

...Popper's concept of freedom is a balance between negative freedom and positive freedom. It is a balance between elements of individualism and communitarianism. It is a balance which operates at a more sophisticated. Popper's concept of freedom requires that individuals can act consonantly with values of their own, bearing in mind both the emphasis in this upon the individual, and yet also that individuals cannot author their own values without engaging critically with others.¹¹

Hence, this balance between individual autonomy and social interconnectedness is central to

^{10.} Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), xiv
^{11.} O. T. Afisi, "Popper, Liberal-Communitarianism, and Beyond the Politics of Liberalism," *Philosophia: E-Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 11 (2016): 2–3.

Popper's idea of “social freedom,” where individuals' freedom is framed within an open and critical society.¹²

In the second segment, *Beyond Popper's Liberalism: The Social Dimension*, Afisi contrasts Popper's liberalism with other thinkers, particularly emphasizing the epistemic value of social interaction. Afisi critiques collectivist ideologies for prioritizing collective good at the expense of individual rights, while also arguing that Popper's liberalism promotes individual autonomy alongside social cohesion. This integration of social dimensions into liberalism brings attention to the importance of social harmony, balancing individual will with collective interests. Afisi draws on Philip Pettit's “I-thou” relationships to show how Popper's liberal-communitarian idea respects individual autonomy while also acknowledging the interdependence that binds individuals in society.

In the third segment, *Differentiating the Social Dimension from Cultural Dimensions*, Afisi critiques Will Kymlicka's cultural liberalism. Kymlicka emphasizes culture as a basis for social relationships in multicultural societies but Afisi points out the challenges this raises, especially in heterogeneous societies with ethnic and tribal divisions. He argues that cultural membership can sometimes create social fragmentation and political instability, especially when the demands of indigenous communities conflict with liberal values. Afisi advocates for a moderate liberal-communitarian approach, drawing on Popper's ideas to highlight the interdependence of individual autonomy and social values. Afisi supports Popper's philosophy as a more flexible framework, where individualism and social cohesion coexist. He provides an example to illustrate the point: if an individual, stranded on an island with others, relies on cooperation for survival, their rational self-interest would align with collective effort. Afisi suggests that individualism does not exclude cooperation, but rather emphasizes that personal goals may require social engagement to be fully realized.

In the fourth segment, Afisi references Popper's philosophy of language to justify the social dimension of his liberalism. Popper's critique of physicalistic theories of language, which neglect the higher functions of human communication, supports the idea that human interaction is inherently social. According to Popper, engaging in argumentation and critical discussions allows individuals to recognize and engage with other minds, reinforcing the social essence of language and identity.

According to Afisi the liberal-communitarian approach in politics aims to foster a sense of community in social and political structures while enhancing citizen involvement in shaping

^{12.} Ibid

^{13.} Ibid

policies and governing the state.¹³ Through active citizen participation, individuals can voice their opinions on various issues impacting society, including political, social, economic, and environmental matters. Jürgen Habermas' concept of the public sphere is pertinent here, acting as a conduit for public opinion to connect the state with societal needs. Notably, citizen engagement in politics, particularly through discursive democracy, complements rather than undermines the critical stance in politics as described by Popper. This form of political participation empowers citizens to influence power dynamics, even those existing beyond the visible framework of the liberal state, by promoting public involvement in decision-making and reinforcing government accountability to the public. Also, it emphasizes a fresh perspective in political philosophy, introducing a more profound social aspect to liberal ideologies. This approach combines the benefits of economic efficiency in private businesses with a focus on preventing totalitarianism through liberalism's transparency and responsibility. Simultaneously, it integrates the communitarian notion of social unity essential for personal growth and societal improvements. This political framework ensures active participation of both individuals and the community in societal progress. It aims to address issues of freedom and equal rights effectively, striving to reduce political and economic disparities within society. This endeavor aligns with the principles of freedom, rights, and equality advocated by Popper in his concept of the "Open Society", aiming to foster a more open and inclusive society.

From the above views, it can be argued that Afisi establishes a liberal-communitarian ideology from the philosophy of Popper. He holds that his liberalism possesses both elements of liberal individualism and communitarianism; the former is based on the individual autonomy while the latter is based on the sharing of values with others in order to validate one's individuality. He also argues that individuals rights precedes that of the community since the individuals determines the values of the community.¹⁴ Nevertheless, some of the fundamental questions that can be raised are: what then is the role of the community in social welfare? Is the community an abstract entity without its own values? How does a clash of interests be addressed in a situation whereby there is a decision to be taken between the minority and the majority? Are there no biases in the liberal-communitarian idea of Afisi? These questions will be critically examined in the next section.

Binary Opposition, and Biases in Liberal- Communitarian Theory: The Response of Ezumazu Logic

The presence of biases in philosophical reasoning often arises when individuals conceptualize reality through a divisive mindset that prioritizes those perceived as close while disregarding those seen as external. This tendency manifests in how individuals and societies structure relationships, particularly in the distinction between individual rights and community

^{14.} Ibid

^{15.} Saheed A. Agunbiade, "On the Definition of African Philosophy: An Interrogation of Analytic and Traditional Schools," *LASU Journal of Religions and Peace Studies* 6, no. 6 (2024b): 92.

obligations.¹⁵ As Ezugwu explains, bias is deeply rooted in the way individuals form group identities, leading to an inherent preference for proximity over broader inclusivity.¹⁶ Asouzu traces these biases to binary opposition, a fundamental structuring principle in Western thought, particularly influenced by Aristotle's philosophy.¹⁷ Binary opposition categorizes concepts into strict dualisms, such as good/evil, male/female, truth/falsehood, and particularly relevant to this discussion, individual/community. These dichotomies create rigid divisions, reinforced by the law of excluded middle, which asserts that a proposition is either true or false, with no middle ground.¹⁸ In this framework, individual and community are positioned as mutually exclusive rather than as interconnected aspects of social reality. This binary mode of thinking has significantly shaped liberal-communitarian discourse, leading to entrenched biases in philosophical debates on individual-community relations. Asouzu critiques how Western philosophy, by privileging dichotomies, fosters a mindset of exclusion rather than integration.¹⁹ This is particularly evident in contemporary debates, where liberalism prioritizes individual autonomy, while communitarianism emphasizes collective identity. However, both frameworks remain trapped within the limitations of binary opposition, failing to recognize the possibility of a complementary middle ground. However, to move beyond the limitations of binary opposition in liberal-communitarianism, *Ezumezu* logic provides an alternative framework that embraces complementarity rather than division. Developed by Jonathan Chimakonam and rooted in Igbo ontology, *Ezumezu* logic challenges the either-or structure of Aristotelian thought by introducing a trivalent system of truth: *Ezu* (truth) *Izu* (falsehood) and *Ezumezu* (complemented truth). Unlike classical logic, which demands that a proposition be either true or false, *Ezumezu* logic allows for context-dependent truths, acknowledging that opposing states can coexist in a complementary manner. This complementary approach is crucial in addressing the biases embedded in liberal-communitarian discourse, where individual and community rights are often framed as mutually exclusive rather than mutually reinforcing. *Ezumezu* logic introduces two key reasoning methods: *Arumaristics*, which moves from periphery to center, emphasizing inclusivity and interconnectedness and *Ohakaristics*, which begins at the center and moves outward, maintaining contextual sensitivity in reasoning

Chimakonam's *Ezumezu* logic introduces three key laws—*Njikoka*, *Nmekoko*, and *Onana-etiti*—as alternatives to Aristotle's classical laws. *Njikoka* emphasizes relational context, *Nmekoko* introduces a third truth value (C), and *Onana-etiti* allows propositions to be both true and false depending on context. These laws create a dynamic, relational framework, prioritizing

¹⁶ U. J. Ezugwu, "Ethnocentric Bias in African Philosophy vis-à-vis Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda Ontology," *FilosofiaTheoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 3, no. 1 (2014).

¹⁷ Innocent Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World-Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction, and Impositions* (Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2007).

¹⁸ G. E. R. Lloyd, *The Philosophy of Logic* (London: Routledge, 2004); Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 11th ed. (Pearson, 2002).

¹⁹ Ibid

lived experience and embodied knowledge over rigid rationalism. While some critics view *Ezumezu* as culturally specific, proponents argue for its universal applicability, with Chimakonam positioning it as a global system. Scholars like Amara Esther Ani and Emmanuel Ofuasia support this vision, though Ofuasia suggests that synthesis in *Ezumezu* logic should be context-specific, with possible refinements to its traditional laws. *Ezumezu* logic and complementarity theory share a trivalent approach, challenging Western assumptions that difference implies conflict. Instead, they highlight mediation and reconciliation, where imperfections are refined through complementarity. However, in cases of deep-seated differences, resolution may be necessary, as contact can sometimes intensify tensions. Thus, both perspectives reject absolutism, advocating for continuous critical engagement to explore the fluid possibilities within human and social dynamics across epistemic, normative, psychological, and sociological domains.²⁰

Asouzu expands on *Ezumezu* logic with his concept of *Ibuanyidanda*, which emphasizes mutual dependence and complementarity.²¹ The term, meaning “no load is insurmountable for *danda* the ant,” reflects the idea that, like ants working together, humans achieve more through collaboration. *Ibuanyidanda* ontology seeks to overcome divisive thinking by recognizing the interconnectedness of all things, fostering a harmonious whole through mutual service. A core aspect of this ontology is the idea of “missing links”—gaps in knowledge and existence that relate in time, space, quantity, and quality.²² By engaging in complementary interactions, humanity can attain greater certainty in knowledge. However, division and polarization limit progress, reinforcing Asouzu's call for unity and collective purpose. To fully grasp this interconnectedness, Asouzu introduces “transcendent existential conversion”, a process in which consciousness evolves to a higher level of understanding. This shift moves the mind from fragmentation to wholeness, challenging ethnocentric tendencies and fostering a global, inclusive perspective. It transforms thinking from a “we-them” mentality to a unified “we-we” approach, breaking down barriers of exclusivity.²³

Through this conversion, the harmonizing faculty emerges, allowing individuals to integrate differences rather than succumb to polarization or ethnocentric biases. Instead of dividing reality, the mind aligns with Asouzu's transcendent categories—unity, totality, universality, comprehensiveness, and future reference—enabling a broader, more inclusive vision of

^{20.} Adeolu O. Oyekan, "Some Reflections on Binary Dualism, Complementarity and Afro-Communitarianism in Contemporary African Metaphysical Thought," *Palgrave Macmillan* (Cham, 2024).

^{21.} Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World-Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction, and Impositions*

^{22.} Ibid

^{23.} Saheed A. Agunbiade, "Eurocentrism versus Afrocentrism: Asouzu's Response to the Fallacy of Dogma in African Identity," *LAJOP* 5, no. 1 (2024c): 51–53.

knowledge. By embracing this perspective, humanity can shift from competition to cooperation, fostering inclusivity and collective progress.²⁴

However, from the complementarity idea so far, it can be argued that there are biases in the position of Afisi on his liberal-communitarian idea. One of the biases hinges on Popper's theory of freedom, particularly his blend of negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom, which emphasizes the absence of external interference, is closely associated with liberal individualism. Positive freedom, on the other hand, focuses on an individual's capacity to pursue their purpose and values. Afisi asserts that Popper's freedom strikes a balance between these two, providing a nuanced approach that accommodates both individualism and communitarianism. He writes, "Popper's concept of freedom is a balance between negative freedom and positive freedom. It is a balance between elements of individualism and communitarianism."²⁵ While Afisi acknowledges that Popper's theory allows for the interplay between personal autonomy and social engagement, his argument leans heavily toward individual autonomy, particularly the importance of the individual in shaping their own values. The claim that "individuals cannot author their own values without engaging critically with others"²⁶ presupposes that the individual is the central agent in all forms of value creation. This perspective overlooks the potential for community values to play a more active role in shaping the individual's moral framework. By emphasizing the individual's need to critically engage with others, Afisi risks reinforcing an epistemological bias where individual autonomy is the primary source of both personal and social freedom, sidelining the communal contribution to the formation of values.

Moreover, the epistemological bias in Afisi's argument is especially evident in his critique of Kymlicka's cultural liberalism. Afisi critiques Kymlicka for overemphasizing the role of culture as the basis for social relationships, dismissing it as "radical communitarianism."²⁷ He fails to fully acknowledge that culture, in Kymlicka's view, is not merely about restricting individual autonomy but serves as a contextual backdrop for individuals to interact and build shared meaning. Afisi's criticism of cultural membership as a "radical communitarian" notion reveals a tendency to dismiss the social dimensions of identity, instead placing excessive weight on individual rights and autonomy. Afisi's attempt to reconcile liberalism and communitarianism inevitably leads to ideological biases that favour liberal individualism over communitarian values. His critique of Kymlicka's cultural liberalism is emblematic of this bias. Kymlicka argues for the integration of cultural membership into the liberal framework, asserting that culture plays a crucial role in forming individuals' identities and political self-understanding. He writes that

^{24.} Asouzu, *Ibuanyidanda: New Complementary Ontology Beyond World-Immanentism, Ethnocentric Reduction, and Impositions*

^{25.} Afisi, Popper, Liberal-Communitarianism, and Beyond the Politics of Liberalism, 2-3

^{26.} Ibid, 2-3

^{27.} Ibid

“culture is the basis of the relationship between the individuals in the multicultural society,” proposing that recognizing cultural diversity is essential for the flourishing of individuals within a society.²⁸

Afisi critiques this idea by labeling it as “radical communitarianism.” He suggests that Kymlicka's emphasis on culture poses challenges for liberalism, particularly when it comes to balancing individual freedom and the demands of collective group membership. Afisi's ideological bias becomes apparent in his dismissal of cultural membership as too communitarian, implying that the emphasis on culture potentially undermines individual autonomy. He argues, “Kymlicka's cultural membership idea is a form of radical communitarianism because he believes that culture serves as the basis of the social relationship.”²⁹ In doing so, Afisi aligns more closely with an individualistic interpretation of liberalism, where individual rights and autonomy trump the importance of communal ties, even in a multicultural society. This bias becomes more pronounced when Afisi critiques the potential social fragmentation caused by ethnic, tribal, or nationalistic tensions that may arise from Kymlicka's approach to cultural diversity. Afisi suggests that these tensions could lead to political instability, social fragmentation, and economic downturns.³⁰ While such concerns are valid, they do not necessarily invalidate the communitarian premise that culture plays a vital role in shaping collective identity. Afisi's argument dismisses the possibility that cultural recognition, while presenting challenges, might also foster solidarity, respect, and tolerance in multicultural societies, thus benefiting both individual autonomy and social harmony.

Afisi's liberal-communitarian framework, as articulated in his work, tends to marginalize the role of the community in social welfare, focusing instead on individual autonomy and the individual's right to determine their own values. This bias is evident in his assertion that “individual rights precede that of the community.”³¹ While this view aligns with classical liberalism, it raises important questions about the role of the community in ensuring social welfare and addressing collective needs. Afisi's argument assumes that individual autonomy is the ultimate guarantor of personal and social well-being. He writes, “Popper's liberalism acknowledges both individual autonomy and social values. The social components in Popper's ideas stem from the inter-subjective principles in his critical rationalism, establishing a connection with non-liberal beliefs that shows social unity and community cohesion,”³² yet, this emphasis on autonomy risks downplaying the crucial role of the community in providing social infrastructure, welfare, and

^{28.} Will Kymlicka, quoted in O. T. Afisi, "Popper, Liberal-Communitarianism, and Beyond the Politics of Liberalism," *Philosophia: E-Journal of Philosophy and Culture* 11 (2016).

^{29.} Afisi, Popper, Liberal-Communitarianism, and Beyond the Politics of Liberalism, 2-3

^{30.} Ibid

^{31.} Ibid, 2

^{32.} Ibid, 3

collective goods. For instance, issues such as health care, education, and poverty alleviation require a communal approach that transcends individual autonomy. By prioritizing the individual's role in defining and shaping values, Afisi's argument risks overlooking how communities, through collective decision-making, can play a vital role in promoting social welfare.

This marginalization of the community's role becomes more pronounced in his critique of Kymlicka's cultural liberalism, where Afisi suggests that Kymlicka's communitarian framework is unable to address the challenges of multiculturalism. He fails to consider that cultural communities may offer solutions to social welfare issues within their contexts, such as providing networks of support and solidarity that contribute to individual well-being. Afisi's failure to engage with this potential is a critical bias in his argument, as it limits the scope of communal contributions to welfare and society at large.

Finally, a significant bias in Afisi's argument lies in his inability to fully address the complexities of conflicts of interest between the minority and majority within his liberal-communitarian framework. Afisi presents Popper's concept of social freedom as a balance between individual autonomy and social interconnectedness, but he does not clearly address how to reconcile competing interests when the rights of individuals or minority groups come into conflict with the collective will of the majority. For instance, when Afisi discusses the hypothetical scenario of an individual stranded on an island with two others, he uses this as an example of how individual survival might depend on cooperation.³³ While this scenario illustrates the pragmatic need for social interaction, it oversimplifies the complexities that arise when individual rights or cultural practices come into conflict with the majority's decisions, particularly in multicultural societies. In situations where individual autonomy clashes with collective social values; such as in cases of minority rights, religious freedoms, or cultural practices, Afisi's framework does not offer a clear resolution. His emphasis on individual rights and autonomy may undermine the ability to address such conflicts in a way that respects the diversity of values and needs within a society.

Nevertheless, having considered the various biases that are embedded in positions of Afisi on Popper liberal communitarianism, what then is the way forward? This next section will focus on the possible solution to the problem.

Liberal-Communitarianism and Complementarity: Any Alternative?

From the preceding section, it can be established that the liberal- communitarianism of Afisi is yet to address the debate between the communitarians and liberal individualists; his idea ended up placing individual ahead of the community. However, in this section we shall propose an

^{33.} Ibid

alternative idea- mediated communitarianism- rooted in *ezumezu* logic and Asouzu's ontology, based on interdependency, critical dialogue, cooperation and inter-subjectivity. The Western concept of binary opposition has not only shaped western and African scholarship but also limited the understanding of the relationship between the individual and the collective or the individual and the community.³⁴ While this approach may present new challenges requiring further reflection, the primary message is the need to move beyond rigid binary explanations of social and metaphysical phenomena. Such dualistic thinking, with its ontological and ethical consequences, shapes how we view the world and the multicultural societies in which postcolonial world live. Embracing a mediated communitarianism allows for the coexistence of contradictions and solidarity, which is crucial for understanding the fluid and evolving identity in a constantly changing world. This perspective does not claim that the African experience is unique; rather, it reflects the broader global trend of evolving social realities and identities. Thus, the traditional dualistic framework is becoming an outdated and potentially harmful approach to metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical understanding.

A typical example of mediated communitarianism can be found in Covid 19 pandemic that was declared in year 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic revealed complex dynamics between individuals and communities. As a highly contagious and deadly virus, Covid-19 underscored human vulnerability. With the understanding that the virus spreads through contact with infected individuals or surfaces, strict measures were put in place to limit unnecessary interactions. These restrictions, while necessary for public health, often left individuals feeling frustrated and challenged by their personal goals and freedoms. For example, lockdowns restricted people's movement, while travel bans disrupted personal plans, forcing individuals to cancel or delay important engagements. Unless deemed essential workers in the fight against the virus, many people had to work from home or cease working altogether, creating significant existential burdens.³⁵

On one hand, the community's responsibility to enforce protective measures for individuals also benefits the community. On the other hand, the individual's adherence to these restrictions is both self-serving and altruistic. By following safety protocols, individuals help reduce the spread of the virus, protecting both themselves and others. In this sense, the individual's safety is intertwined with the safety of the community. For example, wearing a mask not only shields the individual from potentially infected people but also safeguards others from potential exposure. However, when an individual neglects to follow such protocols, they compromise both their own safety and that of the broader community. This situation reflects a reciprocal, not hierarchical,

^{34.} Agunbiade, "The Problem of Individual-Community Rights in Bernard Matolino's Limited Communitarianism

^{35.} Ibid, 120

relationship between the individual and the community. Neither side is superior; their actions equally impact each other. This idea is central to the *Ibuanyidanda* ontology, which argues that communities do not exist independently of individuals. Communities are merely networks of relationships between self-interested individuals seeking mutual benefits. From this, we see the individual caught between the responsibilities to self and community. Survival requires both personal effort and cooperation with the community. The individual is responsible for their hygiene, productivity, and preparation for the future, while also respecting and supporting others in the community. It is on the basis of this, a mediated communitarianism is established.

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it can be therefore argued that the liberal-communitarian debate, as articulated by Afisi, has yet to fully address the complexities of balancing individual autonomy with communal responsibility, often placing the individual above the community. To overcome this limitation, the paper proposes an alternative framework: mediated communitarianism, grounded in the principles of *Ezumezu* logic. This model emphasizes interdependence, critical dialogue, cooperation, and intersubjectivity, challenging the restrictive binary opposition prevalent in both Western and African scholarship. By moving beyond rigid dualistic thinking, mediated communitarianism allows for the coexistence of contradictions and solidarity, offering a more nuanced approach to understanding the dynamic relationship between individuals and communities. The Covid-19 pandemic serves as a practical example of mediated communitarianism, where the tension between individual freedoms and collective well-being became starkly apparent. The pandemic highlighted the interconnectedness of individuals and communities, showing that personal safety and communal health are inseparable. The reciprocal relationship between individual actions—such as following safety protocols—and the broader community's health demonstrates the importance of cooperation without hierarchical superiority. This mutual dependency reflects the *Ibuanyidanda* ontology, which asserts that communities are networks of relationships between self-interested individuals, whose survival depends on both personal effort and collective support. Mediated communitarianism, therefore, offers a more holistic and flexible framework for understanding the evolving nature of identity and social dynamics in a changing world, moving beyond outdated dualistic paradigms.

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