

PARTIALITY IN AFRICAN ETHICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

OBIOHA, Uwaezuoke Precious, PhD

Department of Philosophy
Akwa Ibom State University
preciousobioha@aksu.edu.ng

&

ADEGBOYEGA, Oluwayemisi Oyekunle, PhD

Department of Philosophy
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja
oadegboyega@noun.edu.ng

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Abstract

Actions and inactions of our political leaders, like all other members of our society, are subject to moral consideration since what they do or fail to do affects governance and our quest for social good. However, the morality or otherwise of their actions is not judged outside our moral intuitions if we must be fair to them. As Africans, is our ethical framework best captured and defined in terms of impartiality or partiality? In this work, we defend the idea that African ethics is defined in terms of partiality. Adopting Molefe's defense of partiality as characterizing African ethics but beyond his characterization, we argue that African ethics defined in terms of partiality rests fundamentally on human nature/personal identity. Given that our public office holders involved in governance are members of our society, then it is only natural to expect them to live and operate within this ethical framework. But then, the questions that agitate the mind are, what are the implications of an ethic of partiality for good governance? In administering the peoples of Nigeria and managing her resources for the good of all, has partialism fared well and if not why? We argue that strong partialism defeats our quest for a just society, fans the embers of disunity, separation and above all hampers development because of its proclivity to moral myopism and parochialism. However, based on the African maxim of 'charity begins at home', we argue that partialism is not averse to good governance based on the principle of permeable boundaries.

Keywords: African ethics, governance, partiality, impartiality, personal identity, social well-being

Introduction

From the moment the civil society came into being, through the collective and conscious will of the people to leave the state of nature in order to secure a better atmosphere for the preservation of their lives and properties, the question of governance became imperative. The people willfully chose the government to help streamline and give direction to their actions, set up laws, enforce the laws and manage the affairs and the common resources of the people for the common good of all. The people did not surrender their power to the government but rather delegated it to the government in a social contract form, for the mutual preservation of their lives, estates and liberties (Locke 94). Thus the government is the creation of the people and therefore a servant to them. This is definitive of true majority rules. As a servant to the people, it is required that the government should be accountable to the people in running the affairs and managing the resources of the people. This view underscores the existence, activities and expectations from government in human society and African society is not an exception. To this end, the actions and inactions of the handlers of government, in African society in particular, as members of our society become subject to moral evaluation and judgment in view of the objectives and expectations of the social contract.

Be that as it may, their actions and inactions cannot be interpreted and appraised outside our prevailing moral norms, to do that would not only throw up confusions but would also smack of unfairness against them. We must all live, operate and be judged by the same ethical rules. Talking about ethical rules, certain questions are pertinent; what is the nature of our ethics as a people? Is African ethics defined in terms of partiality or impartiality as argued by some philosophers? What is partiality or impartiality in moral considerations? Partiality is the view that we have immediate or stronger moral obligations to our own personal ties or special relationships, like friends and family, than we have to strangers (Molefe 104; Cottingha 45; Metz 67). Partiality bespeaks of agent-relativity in which case A is acting towards B based on A's relationship with B. On the other hand, impartiality is the claim that we owe equal moral consideration to all moral patients without any consideration to the so-called special relationships. In this moral consideration, an agent is expected to dispense of moral goods from an indifferent, impersonal and ideal point of view (Molofe 105). Impartiality, in this view, bespeaks of agent-neutrality in which case A is acting towards B not based on any relationship whatsoever but on neutral ground. In this work, we

defend the view that African ethics is captured in terms of partiality rather than impartiality.

Our argument in favour of partiality as fundamentally defining African ethics is underscored by Motsamai Molefe's understanding and support for partiality. However, we do not accept the moral intuitions on which he grounds his support for partiality. This is not to say his idea of moral intuitions for partiality are not correct or not forceful, rather we intend to locate the foundation for partiality on something else which we believe to be more fundamental than the three moral intuitions of Molefe and which is human nature/personal identity. To our mind, Molefe's moral intuitions of the high prize usually attached to family, the veneration of ancestors and the normative notion of personhood all rest on a deeper understanding of human nature or personal identity.

Although, we defend partiality as defining African ethics, however we do not subscribe to strong partialism which is synonymous to extreme egoism/selfishness. Our contention is that African understanding of partiality as that which defines their ethical framework does not support or endorse strong partialism which amounts to moral myopism and parochialism. In managing the affairs and resources of our Nation Nigeria for the good of all, it is argued, in this paper, that strong partialism defeats our quest for a just society, encourages disunity and the continued clamor for self-determination and above all hampers development. However, based on the African maxim of 'charity begins at home', we argue that partialism well understood and practiced is not averse to good governance based on the *Principle of Permeable Boundaries* (PPB).

The idea of Good Governance

Every state is faced with challenges from time to time. These challenges may range from politics to economics; from social problematic to religious idiosyncrasies. The effects of these challenges on the generality of the state is determined by the quality of its leadership. The ability of the state to harness available natural potentials and resources both internal and external to manage her affairs for the common good of all is what good governance entails. Thus, governance is the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. It is also seen as a process of exercising political, economic and administrative authority, especially over a state. As a concept central to democracy, governance refers to structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment and broad-based participation (Imoukhuede 122). The concept of governance

embodies mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (Okeke 12). Very apposite is the meaning of governance given by MO Ibrahim Foundation which sees governance as the provision of the political, social and economic goods that citizens have the right to expect from their state and the responsibility of the state to deliver same to their citizens (Ibrahim 54). Accordingly, governance refers to the range of policies public officials enact and actions they take to manage the affairs of society.

From the above explications on the concept of governance, it shows that governance is a human activity and therefore can be practiced in a manner that could make or mar the society. It is from this perspective that the concept of good governance is conceived in our political discuss. Thus, as a concept, good governance underlies how public institutions and political actors conduct public affairs and manage public resources for society's well-being. When a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate; when it is committed to the pursuit of public good and interest; when it is able to create an enabling environment for productive activities and is equitable in its conduct, then good governance can be ascribed to such a government (Lawal and Owolabi 15). The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2016) acknowledges that good governance has eight major characteristics. According to this Commission, good governance is: participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and respects the rule of law. These characteristics help to ensure and assure that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities and the voices of the weak in the society are considered in decision making, the basic needs of the citizens are met and their well-being constantly being improved, human rights, equality and justice are guaranteed. Aside all these, politics and governance are hinged on modicum of morality.

It is in the light of the above consideration that we brought to bear the Nigerian state. Nigeria, no doubt, is blessed with natural and human resources in abundance. These resources must be harnessed and equitably shared or judiciously used to cater for the needs of all the sections and regions that make up the country without any sentiments of tribalism, ethnicity and nepotism. Nigeria practices Representative Democracy which means that periodically, political leaders are elected from various geopolitical regions, ethnic groups and political parties to represent the people at various levels of governance. These

representatives, once elected, they are expected to jettison the pursuit of private, group or ethnic interest, but rather the general or public interest.

The question however is, given the fact that these representatives are first and foremost members of various ethnic groups, political parties, geo-political zones et cetera and as it were, defined by certain familial, socio-cultural and religio-political relationships, what should be the best moral intuition and framework that should guide the discharge of their duties and obligations to their constituencies and the Nigerian state at large? And perhaps the more fundamental question is, as Africans, what moral intuition best defines our ethical framework? Or to be more precise, is our ethical framework best captured and defined in terms of impartiality or partiality? This question is posed because whatever happens, the actions and inactions of our political leaders and administrators are expected to be assessed and judged within this ethical framework otherwise we will be unfair to them.

African Ethics and Impartiality

Earlier before Molefe (110), Gyekye (10) uses the notion of 'African ethics' to refer both to the moral beliefs and presuppositions of the Sub-Saharan African people and the philosophical clarification and interpretation of those beliefs and presuppositions. In his own contribution, Molefe uses the notion "African" in the phrase 'African ethics' to refer to general and salient moral intuitions that are considered to be salient below Sahara. To him, the phrase does not presuppose absolute agreement about African moral thought but rather refers to sufficient commonalities, among Sub-Saharan Africans, about their moral thought.

In what way must we define or construe morality – utilitarianism, deontology, egoism, care ethics et cetera? All these are grouped either as impartiality or partiality. Impartial theories generally suggest and instruct that in our moral judgments and considerations, we must ignore personal relational features such as family ties and communal proximities and that our moral judgments of what ought to be done should not regard such features as being intrinsically significant (Wareham 129).

Two prominent impartial theories are deontology and utilitarianism. Ethical deontology of Kant, for instance, favours (impartiality) a universalization of our action as the basis for its morality – act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. By this he means any action that one cannot will (under any circumstance) to universally apply to everyone including oneself, is not a morally permissible action. Utilitarian theories

also capture impartiality – approving actions that generate greater good for the greatest number of people. Overall, impartialists hold the view that the interest of all should not only count but must count equally in moral considerations because all human persons are equal and thus their interests and welfare must be treated equally (Rachels & Rachels 101; Wolf 243). Akin to the universalizable maxim of Kant, Peter Singer through his impartialist thesis calls on us to go beyond the “I” and “You” to the universal law, the universalizable judgment, the standpoint of the impartialist spectator in moral judgment and considerations (Singer 11). Going beyond the “I” and “You” presupposes an abstraction and detachment from a personal point of view or self-interest to a moral standpoint where the interest of all is equally considered (Molefe 108; Wolf 204-206).

Impartialists are against the tendency by humans to be more concerned with their personal interests or the interests of their close relationships. Given the fact that man faces a lot of limitations – limited resources, limited information, limited intelligence, limited rationality and the most crucial one which is “limited sympathy” and which is the most devastating to the general human well-being, Warnock is optimistic that if individual human sympathies could be enlarged or expanded, then humans could better cope with the limitations of other factors (Ekei 151; Warnock 71). Expanded sympathy encourages the sharing of limited facilities and resources but, according to impartialists, this is what partiality does not allow due to its egoistic tendency – the tendency to be concerned only or primarily with one’s self or special interests.

One good and most famous defense of impartiality in African ethics is provided by Kwasi Wiredu. He defends the thesis that African ethics is defined in terms of impartiality through his theory of ‘sympathetic impartiality’ (Molefe 112; Okeja 20). In order to make sense of Wiredu’s sympathetic impartiality, Molefe begins by noting Wiredu’s definition of morality according to which what is ‘good in general is what promotes human interests and correspondingly, what is good in the more narrowly ethical sense is, by definition, what is conducive to the harmonization of human interest. According to Wiredu, ‘Every Akan maxim about the specifically moral views that I know... postulates the harmonization of interests as the means, and the securing of human well-being as an end, of all moral endeavours’ (Molefe 110; Wiredu 334; Wiredu 65; Wiredu 194).

From Wiredu’s characterization of morality, it is clear that ‘the good’ is human well-being and this is the end which must be pursued; but the process and the means of reaching this end, is the harmonization of interests. Human well-being is the intrinsic good which is good in and of itself whereas the harmonization of

interests is the instrumental good. What this means is that ‘the good’ cannot be achieved without harmonizing interests.

Individuals qua individuals have personal interests that are most times conflicting one with another and in other to escape a drifting back to the Hobbesian State of Nature, there is need to harmonize these interests for the sake of the common good. Herein lies the morality of the ‘harmonization of interests’ as a process and means of achieving ‘the good’. Selfishness has the capacity to turn a man a wolf to his fellow man thereby tearing the society apart. This makes selfishness, as an attitude, and disposition morally reprehensible. Given this reprehensibility and undesirability of selfishness as a sound moral intuition and disposition, what then is the best principle ‘for the survival of human society’ and the achievement of its (society) well-being? Wiredu sees ‘sympathetic impartiality’ as the principle capable of harmonizing conflicting individual interests ‘for the survival of human society’, a principle which he equates with the golden rule in its different formulations – negatively (do not treat others in ways you would not want them to treat you) or positively (so act towards others in ways you would want them to act towards you) (Wiredu 29, 41,170; Wiredu 198).

Thus, Wiredu’s sympathetic impartiality shows that in taking a moral decision or making a moral judgment, we must consider the interests of others guided and motivated by sympathy and show neutrality towards our personal interests or the interests of our special relationships. Molefe enunciates this when he writes:

It appears that sympathetic impartiality is also ‘agent-neutral’, that is, moral decisions must not proceed from any locus of focus: a moral agent must be indifferent and detached, in some sense, from herself and special relationships, when dispensing the good (Molefe 112).

Suffice to say here that Wiredu’s impartiality theory that we have considered above disregards the moral relevance we naturally attach to our special relationships and their attendant obligations. Any reasoning that claims the irrelevance of one’s affiliations or downplays the relevance of certain familial or close relationships one maintains, is obviously making such relationships lose their moral relevance which we normally and naturally attach to them. Kant’s deontology, as an impartial theory, runs contrary to his belief in and defense of the autonomy of the individual. The claim, in impartiality that particular features of individuals have no intrinsic significance in moral decision-making is self-stultifying to the thesis of autonomy. Treating the autonomous individual as an end in himself, and not as a means, presupposes respect to the dignity of the

individual and this further means a recognition and respect to what (features that) defines the individual. It is rightly so, that the individual's special relationships are to be considered intrinsic to what constitutes his/her dignity. Thus, any claim that these particular features of the individual have no intrinsic significance in moral decision making is bizarre and against our moral sensibility and this also amounts to paying lip service to so-called autonomy of the individual.

The claim that one should not prefer one's own interests or the interests of his/her closer relationships to the interests of any other person or persons, or Peter Singer's defense of what he calls 'temporal impartiality' – the view that one should exclude temporal information from one's moral calculus, is utopic (Singer 91). We do not naturally, normally and justifiably so, live and act as such. It amounts to saying that one should save money for one's yet to be born great grand- children at the expense of his/her presently existing children whom he/she could barely feed, in the name of not preferring the well-being of presently existing people over people that will live in the future.

African Ethics and Partiality

Partial theories in ethics uphold the particularity of relationships as being central in moral consideration and decision-making. It is the view that one ought, in principle, to act preferentially towards people in certain types of relationship with one (Wareham 130; Metz 49-58). Partialists are of the view that it is against common sense morality not to recognize and prioritize our special relationships like family and friends in moral considerations and decision-making. It is against this, they problematize impartiality (Molefe 116; Wolf 242). In relation to the individual, 'family and close relationships unquestionably rank among the greatest goods of life and any conception of morality that is in tension with their maintenance and promotion is unacceptable' (Wolf 243). Their position is corroborated by the saying among the Yoruba people that *Ebi mi o se eni, eeyan mi o se eyan ko see fi we alaroo lasan* literally translated as *my person is not good. My relative is not nice. He/she cannot be compared with an ordinary stranger.*

In his defense of partiality as the defining mark of African ethics, Molefe invokes three aspects of African culture (moral intuitions) to ground his defense. These moral intuitions are: 1) the high regard accorded to the family, 2) ancestor veneration and 3) the normative concept of personhood (Molefe 113). Concerning the high premium accorded the family, Molefe observes from many great African scholars that the family is regarded as the best school for moral education (Appiah 122; Wiredu 133). It is seen as the best model for African community and as being

intrinsically good (Shutte 50; Shutte 29). Given this intrinsic goodness of the family, *Ubuntu* as a moral theory requires that one prioritizes her extant relations, specifically her own family, before she extends kindness to a wider society (Molefe 114; Ramose 20; Ramose 386).

In addition to the premium accorded the family in African tradition, Molefe locates partiality in African ethics on the ubiquitous practice of ancestor veneration among African peoples and that ancestor veneration functions within a partialist, family blood-line. Again, Molefe invokes the moral intuition of personhood in African tradition which is normatively construed (Molefe 116). We must say, at this juncture, that we do not reject these moral intuitions as characterizing partiality in African ethics since we see them as supporting partiality. However, we do claim that partiality is intrinsically human. It is inherent in human nature.

In personal identity such questions as, who am I? or who are you? What defines me or what makes me who I am, are asked. The answers given to these questions are what define the content of personal identity. Some scholars have argued that at the root of the characterization of personal identity is sociality or relationality (Mbiti 69; Menkiti 150; Ikuenobe 118). Mbiti's popular maxim, 'I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am' is a classic example. In the same vein, Eze recognizes the relational constitution of personal identity when he asserts that my subjectivity is in part constituted by other persons with whom I share the social world (Eze 386-399). Personal identity connotes individuality. Individuality is a world which needs certain structures to make the individual self-sustaining, self-developing and self-realizing. These structures are made possible by relational and other regarding relationships (Ikuenobe 188-189; Menkiti 154).

There is no autonomy without relationship thus making the line between individuality (autonomy) and sociality very thin. In this regard, one can ask, in what sense is personal identity 'personal' and not 'social' and in what sense is social identity 'social' and not 'personal'? Personal identity and social identity are defined by and within each other. Discussion about personal identity is broad and multifaceted and extends beyond the limits of one's physical body. This is underscored by William James in his definition of the 'me'. He says:

In its widest possible sense, a man's me is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank accounts. All these things gave him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they

dwindle and die away, he feels cast down not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in the same way for all (James 177).

In the same vein, Belk expresses similar idea in his concept of extended self, which signifies the identification of one's self not only with one's individual physical and psychological characteristics but also with significant others, groups, or social categories, material objects and places (Belk 98). The significant others are psychologically important to the individual because he/she identifies with them personally experiencing them as part of the self or part of his/her answers to the question who am I? Although, the significant others are separate from the individual, however, it is because they are closely associated or because of their cognitive interchangeability with one's sense of personal identity, that they matter so greatly (Vignoles 17).

It has been shown through series of experiments that the significant others are treated as interchangeable with the self when allocating resources and in memory and reaction-time tasks. It is equally shown that self-other overlap manifests in romantic relationships with strong feelings of closeness and love. Arising from these experiments is the development of the Inclusion of the Other in the Self (IOS) scale which is now being widely used in personal relationships research (Aron et al 91). The IOS scale shows that our close relationships are an important reflection of who We are, and the extent to which these relationships are positively treated (acknowledged as being significantly relevant) in our moral considerations and decision-making, contributes to self-fulfillment and self-perfection.

In evaluating the actions of a moral agent, consideration must be given to how his/her actions are conducive, first of all, to the perfection of his/her self, then to the well-being of his/her familial and close relationships (the extended self/significant others) and then to the larger community. It is a (moral journey) progression. His/her actions must be in tune with the extended self which is an extension of his/her self. What the above shows is that African ethics is definable in terms of partiality. This position finds support on the popular African moral intuition that says, 'charity begins at home'. The Igbo and Yoruba versions of this moral intuition are for us quite instructive – *a na esin'ulo mara mma puo ezi* and the Yoruba version *ile ni a ti n k'eso r'ode* which both literally interpreted means "goodness starts from the homestead and reaches outside". Here, home refers to the self, extended self that is, family and friends while outside means beyond the familial and close relationships.

It is therefore, unacceptable morally speaking (especially from Igbo and Yoruba cultural point in view) to ignore the significance of the 'home' and concentrate on the 'outside' (in moral consideration and decision-making) in the name of equalizing all moral patients. Hence; the Yoruba saying *akii ta ara ile eni lopo* or *eni to ta ara ile eni lopo* and the Igbo saying, *egbelegbe na ada mkpuru n'ezi* attests to this moral unacceptability. *Egbelegbe na ada mkpuru n'ezi* literally means 'a tall palm tree whose kernels do not fall at the base of the tree but fall far from the tree'. The kernel of a palm tree should fall at the base of the tree to be benefited FIRST by those at the base of the tree before being accessed by outsiders. In the same vein, the Yoruba saying, *akii ta ara ile eni lopo* or *eni to ta ara ile re lopo* which literally means, 'a person that sold his family cheaply'. The moral wisdom in the saying is that a person's loyalty, consideration and commitment is expected to first be directed to his/her home for the home to attract great respect from outsiders. To sell your family cheaply implies that you cannot get it back or buy it back scarcely. These comments are direct opposite of the moral maxim, 'charity begins at home' and it is usually made to register disapproval of an action in this context. Partiality therefore recognizes the virtue of community and relationships (as constituents of personal identity) in which relationship of harmony, cooperation, friendship and solidarity are valued and as such pursued while any moral principle that subverts this is seriously frowned at and as such should be avoided like a plague (Tutu 99).

Such moral principle should be avoided like a plague because it amounts to a call for a moral agent to distance herself from who she is and the things that matter to her like friends and family, and occupy a 'moral' point of view. This is insensitivity and irresponsiveness. African moral theory calls a moral agent to be sensitive and responsive to day-to-day issues and challenges so as to develop a particular kind of moral identity steeped in a history characterized by moral victories (Molefe 117). A good person, a moral exemplar should not be bereft of this sensitivity. Unfortunately for impartialism, our impartialist per excellence, Wiredu unknowingly gives support to the moral intuition of 'charity begins at home'. Wiredu writes:

What, then, in its social bearings, is the Akan ideal of personhood? It is the conception of an individual who through mature reflection and steady motivation is able to carve out a reasonably ample livelihood for self, family, and a potentially wide group of kin dependents, besides making substantial contributions to the well-being of society at large. The communalistic orientation of the society in question means that an individual's image will depend rather crucially upon the extent to which his/her actions benefit

others than him or herself, not, of course by accident or coincidence but by design. The implied counsel, though, is not one of unrelieved self-denial, for the Akans are well aware that charity further afield must start at home (Wiredu 200).

Very obvious from the above excerpt is Wiredu's unwitting endorsement of partiality in which he recognizes the difference between one's special relationships (self and family) and the 'wider groups (society at large). Wiredu also endorses the view that morality starts with one improving his/her own life (self-development), that of his/her family and then that of the society at large. If it is true that our moral journey MUST start at home, as Wiredu said, then we can see how this leads us farther away from impartiality.

So far, we have tried to argue that partiality defines African ethics and we have tried to locate it on personal identity which is constituted by relationality and community. However, talking about partiality this forcefully may appear to endorse selfishness or moral egoism. This fear need not be entertained because the moral intuition of 'charity begins at home' allays this fear. It will be shown how it allays this fear in the next section.

Partiality in African Ethics and Its Implications for Good Governance

Good governance as we noted earlier entails, among other things, the harnessing of the resources of a State, by the handlers of the state, for the well-being of the generality of the state and its citizens and not for a particular region, ethnic or tribal group within the state. For instance, Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state defined by certain and different cultural and religious beliefs and ideologies. Fortunately, Nigeria as a state is blessed with abundance of natural resources namely oil, coal, iron ore, lead, limestone, tin, zinc et cetera. These resources are not evenly distributed in all the states or regions that make up the country. Some states or regions are more blessed than the others in natural resources and the natural resources in some regions are more harnessed than those from other regions. For instance, the South-South region is blessed with crude oil in abundance and Nigeria depends largely on this for her revenue and how this revenue is shared amongst all the regions of the country is germane to the even development of the entire country.

Thus, an all-inclusive and equitable sharing and distribution of the benefits and burdens of the country by the entire regions that make up the country impacts on governance. When and if the resources, offices and all other benefits are evenly or equitably distributed, it sets the country on a trajectory of development otherwise,

suspicion, tensions and disunity arise. Acknowledging that the country is not evenly blessed with natural resources and human capacity development, the founding fathers and the framers of the Nigerian constitution in their wisdom inserted into the constitution the federal Character principle to entrench equity and justice in the distribution of the resources, benefits and burdens. Iyabode Ogunniran (18), states that the 1977 Constitution Drafting Committee canvassed options for the adoption of the Federal Character Principle in the 1979 Constitution as strategy for peace, equity and stability. She argues that:

There had in the past been inter-ethnic rivalry to secure the domination of government by one ethnic group or combination of ethnic groups to the exclusion of others. It is therefore essential to have some provisions to ensure that the predominance of persons from a few ethnic or other sectional groups is avoided in the composition of government or the appointment or election of persons to high offices in the state (Ogunniran 4).

Ogunniran further states that the federal character principle was inserted into the constitution to ensure equitable sharing of posts and even distribution of natural and economic resources. It is a legal weapon put in place to regulate appointments, promotions, security of tenure and severance in every government department. Invariably, a definitive power-sharing rule (18).

Be that as it may, since partiality, as we have argued in this work, is the dominant moral thought operational in African ethics, it may not be out of place for the State or its handlers to apply this moral framework provided the objective and the sanctity of governance is not defeated or compromised which is the harnessing of the State's resources for the benefit of all- common good. In governance or the distribution of State resources, appointments and other benefits, should our political leaders and the handlers of the state be mindful of their ethnic or party affiliations and familial-based relationships? Or better put, where should the starting point of the distribution be? Should one start from one's familial and proximate relationships or should one jettison these relationships?

To argue that using party affiliation, ethnicity, or other familial-based relationships in the distribution is beside the point. Our political leaders or administrators are members of our society caught up with partiality as the defining mark of our ethics and it will be unfair and morally and psychologically impossible to expect them to do otherwise (Williams 74). Any moral intuition that asks individuals to sacrifice not only the people and the things that they value

(perhaps people who worked for their emergence and victory at the various levels of their political pursuits) but also who they are in the alter of being ‘moral’ or the equalization of all moral patients is objectionable. The concern should not be about the starting point of the distribution but should be about the availability of the resources and benefits to all and sundry for the common good of all, that is, without making some well-off and others worse-off. Where this is done, then there is nothing morally reprehensible about it, the starting point notwithstanding.

Be that as it may, as much as the reasons given above in support of partiality (as a defining mark of African ethics) hold, and as much as partiality as an ethical framework is not morally reprehensible, however, our political leaders and administrators must guard against slipping into strong partialism as this may be counterproductive to the achievement of distributive justice. Indeed, in real life experience, our political leaders at all levels (in Nigeria and most African Countries) do deviate from the ideals of partiality and drift into strong partialism. This is why there is a growing perception that the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari or the APC led Federal Government has been largely nepotistic in his appointments – the major security offices – Chief of Army Staff, National Security Adviser, State Chief of Protocol, Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Defense. The main economic offices – the Accountant General of the Federation, Deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Group Managing Director of Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC), Controller-General of Customs and Immigration. Other core offices such as Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Inspector General of Police, Chief Justice of the Nation, Attorney General of the Federation et cetera. are all from a particular region and ethnic group in the country. The Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HRIWA) has described the action of this administration as the height of marginalization capable of plunging the country into chaos (Premium Times, 2019).

In the same vein, Abubakar Dangiwa Umar, a political analyst and social critic has called out President Buhari for dividing the nation along ethnic and religious lines, warning that lopsided appointments in government would spell doom for the country’s unity. In an open letter titled “Mr. President, Please Belong to All of Us”, Umar said,

At this time and in the light of all that have happened since you took office, any conversation with you Mr. President cannot gloss over the chaos that has overtaken appointments into government offices in your administration....Nigeria has become dangerously polarized and risks

sliding into crisis on account of your administration's lopsided appointments which continues to give undue preference to some sections of the country over others...your skewed appointments into the offices of the federal government, favoring some and FRUSTRATING others shall bring ruin and destruction to this nation (Guardian, June 20, 2020).

In another development, Eminent Socio-cultural Leaders from Southern and Middle-belt Nigeria have sued the president, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), for N50 billion over marginalization of the people of the region in the appointments to security, quasi-security agencies and "strategic agencies" of government (The Punch, June 22, 2020). This strong partialism is not only seen in appointments but also in the distribution of other benefits and resources of the country.

It must be stated clearly that although partiality, as a care theory, presupposes that one should treat relationship of dependence and inter-dependence as intrinsically significant and prioritize their good and well-being, it does not prescribe that this be done at the expense of others outside the boundaries of proximate relationships. Moral goods or well-being is not limited to one's (self) being or special relationships. Though, it starts from there, it (certainly) does not end there – charity may begin at home, but does not end at home. It is moral myopism and parochialism that will make a political administrator to concentrate ONLY on familial and special relationships at the expense of the generality of the State. It is morally reprehensible to make your familial and special relationships well-off and others worse-off. Partial theory endorses the pursuit of the well-being of our special relationships without leaving others worse-off.

The moral intuition of 'charity begins at home' must guide our partialist political leaders. Charity begins at home recognizes and promotes the Principle of Permeable Boundaries (PPB). PPB validates the fact that there exists a boundary between those within the circle of special relationship and those outside of them. But the principle also states that the boundary(s) in question is permeable which allows the extension of Ubuntu to those who would ordinarily be considered 'outsiders' (Molefe 113; Ramose 330). Molefe further captures this very succinctly when he writes:

A moral agent must be recognized that she is not only her own person and a member of a family; moreover, she is also a member of different communities: her tribe, nations, country, continent and the world. It is for this reason that her moral sensibility and sensitivity must be as wide as the

world. Simply put, though she has immediate duty to herself and family, all things equal, she also has duty to the community at large (Molefe 114).

The above excerpt and extant African maxims reject nepotistic tendencies and practices as unethical. Mogobe Ramose who is arguably one of the most prominent expounders of African moral beliefs, better argues for the above claim when he opines that criticisms on the basis of nepotism are legitimate since no single family or community has the right to subsistence by way of denying the same right to others (200). Therefore, our political leaders and administrators, in distributing public good may start, if they so wish, from their special relationships but must go beyond this boundary to the general community/country if their actions must be adjudged just. They must give all sections of the country a sense of belongingness and solidarity. They must neither concentrate ONLY on their special relationships nor make them well-off and others worse-off. Such acts are capable of fanning the embers of disharmony, disunity and clamor for separation and self-determination on a large scale.

Conclusion

In this work, we defended the view that partiality defines African ethics however, we do not support strong partialism due to its proclivity to moral myopism and parochialism which in turn discourages development and encourages disharmony and disunity. In promoting the principle of permeable boundaries, we claim that the African moral intuition of charity begins at home encourages and promotes the dispensing of moral goods not only to members of one's special relationships, but also to the generality of the community thereby increasing general happiness which impartial theories purportedly aim at and certainly this is what good governance presupposes.

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