

## IGWEBUIKE AND AFRICAN COMMUNALISM

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### Abstract

*The problem of African philosophy lies in the definition as it is also in the issues raised in various themes in African philosophy. There are certain characteristics that are seen as African and by nature African that one calls to question this nature and characteristics of the African person in contemporary times. Is African communalism an ontological aspect of our Africanity as seen in the rational continental state of nature as elaborated by the contractarians? Are Africans truly communal or are they ethnically bonded than bonded globally to other race as Africans? Is Igwebuike as an expression of African communalism translated into an ontological praxis that reflects the past in relation to the present? This paper is an attempt to do a critique of Igwebuike as an African communalism and in so doing, interrogates scholars on African communalism in view of redefining what African communalism is and how it can reshape our ethnicism for a better Nigeria and Africa at large. In view of this, the paper uses the qualitative method to rationally redefine what it means to be African and communalistic.*

**Keywords:** Igwebuike, African, Communalism, Philosophy, Identity, Past, Present

### Introduction

The quest for an African philosophical tradition in other to separate it from Western philosophy will continue to be an issue in Philosophy. There is no doubt as philosophers we anticipate fully when this separation becomes fully endorsed; but until then, as scholars we shall understandably enjoy the various issues and problems philosophy and philosophers try to solve and raise more questions. One of the issues African philosophy and Western thought or tradition will have to contend with is the issue of African Communalism. When African philosophers or philosophers who reside in Africa begin a debate on African

communalism it will appear as if though it is naturally peculiar for Africans to be communalistic; when in ancient philosophy the Aristotelian idea of man as a social being already sets the stage for the community life for human beings to interrelate with one another as the basis for human existence. In the Old Testament scriptures and especially in the Genesis account of creation we understand the God of Israel considered the fact “it is not good for man to live alone but need not just a helper”; it was also an avenue for that interrelatedness between human beings to co-exist together. It therefore becomes difficult to establish and argue in favor of African communalism but ‘Universal Communalism’ which is expressed in Igwebuike and resides in Africa rather than Communalism residing in Africa and the sole property of Africans. This paper posits the fact that communalism does not reside in Africa but it is in the nature of human beings to be communalistic. In x-raying the level of ethnicism and other forms of discriminative attitude in Nigeria, communalism becomes threatened as evidence in the various social contract theories due to human’s inhumanity to his fellow human being and this sets a stage for the issues in Nigeria and Africa at large. Igwebuike becomes not an expression of African communalism but a correction of what was lost due to selfish interest and greed that has distorted the social and political space in leadership and set the nation backward and even the African continent. In so doing, Igwebuike becomes more of a Universal Principle that does not only find its expression in Africa but in the universe at large. Hence, being African is being human not just to our fellow Africans but the whole of humanity.

### **Who is an African?**

It will be very difficult to come out categorically to say who an African is; the very reason been that the more scholars think they have settled for a particular definition it becomes even more complicated when such description is probed and left unanswered (Adibe, 2009). Nonetheless, scholars have made attempt despite these complications to describe or define who an African is. According to Olusegun Oladipo in his work *The Issue Of African Self-Definition in the Contemporary World* he defines who an African is as perceived by the colonizers:

As an inferior race of people whose religions, where they had any, were without any abiding values; they were people who generally lacked the intellectual and moral resources of the Europeans, whose mission in Africa was a “civilizing mission” (60:2006).

This definition as described in the work Oladipo is a representation of a perceived understanding in which Africans themselves continuously think of

what the colonizers thought about Africans; but to hastily generalize this definition on the colonizers considering the fact of the extent we have benefitted from the colonizers will make Africans unappreciative of the said “civilizing mission”. This unappreciative attitude is like throwing away the baby with the bathing water because humans will always be humans despite their good intentions. The colonizers might have good intentions but in between their mission the human nature will always come to play. Their observation is a thinking of their own feeling and perception which is relative to them due to cultural deficiency. Africans probably would do same given the opportunity to colonize a territory. In Nigeria today some ethnic groups feel more superior to other tribes or ethnic groups and some tribes perceive themselves to be more inferior to other tribes; and this is largely because the measurement used in determining the strength of any ethnic group in Africa (Nigeria) is based on its population and their access to political power. Therefore, what we now accuse the colonizers of, despite the level of education received by the political elites and the followers therein interrogates this perceived definition which is claimed to have been reinvented and politicized under British Colonialism (Kukah, 3:2011). Hence, it is not our problems and limitations that make us Africans and the perception what other nations relatively think of us does not define us as Africans.

To designate who an African is within the context of geographical and continental jurisdiction as a black race also suggests the obvious concerns of a weak understanding to what makes Africans truly African. Africans are first and foremost human beings living in the world; and this becomes the substance of what we are and who we are; we are human beings like any other human beings in relation to human beings of other race. Our human nature defines us as the substance not because of the accidents of colour, tribes, the problems that are peculiar to us and other factors. This is the reason Kwame Nkrumah known for his popular maxim said “I am not African because I was born in Africa but because Africa is born in me”. This reveals the humanness and humanity as characterize in the human person as he/she relates to others in the world. According to Enyimba Maduka in *A Critical Exposition of Madukaksim as a Theory of Being Human in Contemporary Africa* argues that an African is a human being described as a Person and his being a member of a community (57:2019). For the purpose of this work, an African is first and foremost a human being as he/she relates to human beings irrespective of the geographical provenance, social extraction, religious affiliation, political party and ethnic or racial ties. It is the ability to be human in the face of a dehumanizing situation, cosmic

interpretation and worldview, and moral Judgement which might be different from his fellow human beings in Europe and America and maybe other continents of the world; which does not make an African less human. To be African has nothing to do with the skin, colour or race and not even in our continental attachment; but in our openness to others and relate as humans. Thus, Olusegun Oladipo asserts:

There is nothing wrong in the affirmation of an African identity in the face of European ethno-centrism. What is questionable is the attempt to consider Africans as a species apart from other human beings, thereby suggesting, contrary to the evidence, that there is a process of human development which is uniquely African and that the culture which is a product of this process has already exhausted the possibilities of human creativity (63:2006).

To be human is an ontological aspect of being; but the openness to others and relate as humans becomes more not just an African problem but a global problem; and attempting to solve this global problem is in the face of been human in Africa.

### **Interrogating African Communalism Vis-à-vis The State of Nature**

To designate African communalism as a way of life purely to the African calls for serious interrogation. According to Polycarp Ikuenobe in *Human Rights, Personhood, Dignity and African Communalism* argue that African Communalism is a moral doctrine that values human dignity, rights and responsibilities (2018:589). This moral doctrine as it relates to human dignity and human right in Africa considering how the human right declaration and its moral issues raised in philosophy of human right, puts Africa in a tighter situation. Do Africans have their own state of nature different as portrayed and given by the contractarians? African Communalism as described in the work of Polycarp Ikuenobe, he presents African society to be a perfect society; and little wonder then some scholars arrived at the certainty of African philosophy as an independent discipline (Etta, Esowe & Asukwo 2016:302) which is still a matter of serious controversy. In arriving at such definite conclusion puts scholars in African philosophy at an intellectual comatose; and the whole of the philosophical enterprise. The quest for a definition of who an Africa is and the quest for a definition of philosophy make the enterprise call African philosophy even more viable and as such the need to interrogate the past on what African communalism entails. African philosophy only becomes independent and viable

not because we are sure of our past in pre-colonial times but rather that we intend to interrogate our past in view of solving immediate problems through research and rational engagement as obtain in Western thought.

In ensuring we understand our past as Africans, it must not make us deny facts were in Africa human beings are killed for sacrifice and those involved in the killing of twins and other barbaric activities in the name of culture, religion and tradition. The interpretation of human right from a Western ideological praxis does not relate with the African thought of human right. Although we are humans living in the world but our thought process were different as succinctly asserted in *Prose and Poetry* the works of Leopold Sedar Senghor thus, "Classical European reason is analytical and makes use of the object; and African reason is intuitive and participates in the object" (33:1976). Our concept of human right in Africa although precedes 1947 as reflected in the Charter of the Universal Declaration of Human Right, but we must categorically bring out areas this has reflected in our past not just a guess interpretation but a thorough rational approach which justifies our human condition of the present. Nonetheless, we cannot at this point come to absolute certainty on the nature of African communalism as peculiar only to Africans because of its unverifiability; but we can reflect on a much "universalized communalism" with its own problems as characterized in social and political philosophy which is centralized in justice and political order. The problem of justice is the same everywhere and hence the saying goes thus: "justice denied to a single person is justice denied to all". African communalism as projected by African philosophers is likened to the state of nature proposed in Hobbes and Locke; and this we know is not real as it actually happened (Fukuyama 2012:29) but a reflection of the present in interrogating the past on how society or the state emerged.

African communalism in pre-colonial era was based on tribe and ethnicity and reflects a people's ontological distinctiveness from the other, which is grounded in the memory of common origins and ancestry (Agbo 2016:66). Every tribe settled independently and not as we have it now as a result of the amalgamation. This is justified in the words of Victor Nweke:

First, Nigeria was founded on the principles of "might is right" and the "end justifies the means". The amalgamation of over 250 diverse ethnic nationalities to create Nigeria in 1914 without the consent or even and form of consultation with the indigenous leaders of the diverse ethnic nationalities buttresses this claim (2016:34).

Hence, this coming together has become problematic as a result of an “indigenous communalistic society” that was amalgamated together with different mindset, thinking, cultures, traditions and even religious practices. Thus, according to Joseph Agbo it is “an ontological distinctiveness known as ethnic primordiality or ethnic essentialism” (2016:66) which is the foundation of African communalism rather than a “universalistic communalistic society” which ought to be peculiar to every human society as “universal essentialism”. The witnessing of the social transformation and reformations with the technological advancement is fast bringing a new dimension to our existence as a people and forming a new era known as the digital natives. Aside from the fact that liberalism which has become a privation of this state of nature not peculiar only to Africans and to other societies has made communalism almost impossible with the emergence of private property in an era of political liberalism.

### **African Communalism and The Problem of Ethnicism in Nigeria**

The problem of justice everywhere in the world is as a result of discrimination and it is this discrimination that has resulted to other issues such as marginalization, ethnicism, tribalism and if indeed African society is communalistic then these human differences should have been overlooked in today’s Africa. Africa and Africans have suffered lots of setbacks due to these ethnic and tribal loyalties and it has also frustrated the continent in terms of development. We have had issues with xenophobic attacks, civil wars in Nigeria and in Rwanda; we have also had such wars in Sudan and has brought about the divide in the country. Even in Nigeria currently, there is so much of religious crisis in the North ranging from Boko Haram and the herdsman clash with farmers. Even in our political life, there is a problem associated with political representation and the so call quota and federal character system. This boils down to the fact that there is a gross violation to communal living and the enthronement of greed and self-aggrandizement. This has even resulted to a broken relationship between African nay Nigerian citizens and her leaders and a threat to the unity of Africa; which also has led to frustrate true federalism in Nigeria (2016:66).

There can be no communalistic living without unity and unity should be the basis of African communalism. This cannot be done without acknowledging the fact that we are truly ethnically inclined as Africans; ethnicity is more or less a universal phenomenon of man in society in which “people-not merely Africa-

tend to pursue power, respect, health, wealth, skills, rectitude, enlightenment unique to each group” (2016:240). It is characterized by shared nationality, tribal affiliation, religious faith, shared language or cultural and traditional origin (2016:240). For Africa to be communalistic then this ethnicity must be able to interact harmoniously with other ethnic groups irrespective of nationality, religion, tribe, etc. if we must overcome our problems and setbacks; then, we must overcome our ethnic sentiments and realistically imbibe the Ubuntu philosophy of “I am because you are”. This is the framework that ought to be created in order to reduce greed in consideration to others. Rather than retrospectively speculating African Communalism as an integral part of Africans I will agree with Martin Asiegbu thus:

Interdependence of generations and nations constitute, as well, another principal aspect of sustainable development. Sustainable development makes much of the view that “no one is an Island. In a social world, no nation stands alone. The cooperation of all – global and the local, the regional and the national, the developed and the developing countries, the rich and the poor – are needed in relation to the economic, the social and the environmental dimensions of development (2016:316).

Martin Asiegbu's assertion is very key to African communalism; African communalism rests on interdependence and not independence to the detriment of one another. This will therefore mean that African communalism is futuristic and optimistic as we endeavour to create an enabling environment for African communalism to thrive as Martin Asiegbu elaborates further that the present state of affairs in Africa typifies the reason for optimism. Although the African is aware that Africa's level of development leaves a lot to be desired, the African is all positive about the future; that the continent would certainly overcome the debilitating obstacles on its way (2016:316) to African communalism. This even becomes easier with the advancement in science and technologies where the world has become a global room and the road to Europe, America or Asia with a click of the button human beings become interconnected. This does not negate the fact we have no values as Africans, we do have values and it is these values and cultural heritage that makes us have a promising future as Africans (Asiegbu 2016:316). It is important to also note that this African communalism is intra and inter; within Nigeria in relations to Nigerians; Nigerians in relations to other Africans; and Africans to the rest of the world. This in turn should be reciprocated in a symbiotic relationship rather than a parasitic relationship.

### **Igwebuike: Exploring the African Identity**

Igwebuike as a new philosophical discourse in contemporary African philosophy has set the stage in devising a modality towards enhancing African communalism. According to Ikechukwu Kanu in *Igwebuike and the Question of Superiority in the Scientific Community of Knowledge* defines Igwebuike as a philosophy of harmonization, and complementation and how the world relates to one another in the most natural, mutual, harmonious and compatible ways possible... it is a relational character of mutual relations (2017:108). This mutual relation is not restricted in relation to Africans alone but it is open to other race as well. Hence, it is common origin, common worldview (Iroegbu 1995) but goes beyond common language, shared culture, shared race, colour and habits. Igwebuike although an African (Nigerian) coinage which provides an ontological horizon that presents being as that which possesses a relational character of mutual relations (2017:108) could project an African identity and also a “global identity or a universalized identity”. The African continent does not exist alone but exist with other continents but could as well be the cure of African identity crisis and considering the fact that it is appropriate to think globally and act locally, Igwebuike becomes a realistic approach in attempting solutions to solve the crisis in Africa. This therefore means that anyone residing in the African soil irrespective of his colour, race, tribe, ethnicity, religion etc. should be given the utmost respect and dignity insofar as we are all human beings. Igwebuike brings out that value which becomes a road mark for the reconciliation within Africa and the rest of the world. Igwebuike draws from the traditional life as reflected in Socrates “man is a social and a political animal... for he/she who is unable to live in the society is either a beast or a god”. Although, scholars have argued that African societies have lived and practiced communal living until recent changes (2016:351); but the question is, what has brought about these changes? Who brought about these changes? There is a difference between socializing and living a communalistic life style. Human beings socialized but not without have issues of greed, unhealthy competition, crisis and other vices that truncates human existence. Communalism does not imply that Africans or humans were so generous to one another without greed and this led to the idea of private property in the contractarians were human beings will love to acquire for their own private needs and this definitely will be done with a great level of selfish interest because we are human beings; yet, been human suggest we defy our own interest for the sake of the common good. Communalism has a deeper sense than socializing; socializing comes with interaction and learning from one another because no one is an island and this does not only pertain to Africa but to everyone living in the world as Mbiti notes:



In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people including those of the past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore, make, create or produce the individual (1968:108).

This interrelatedness as subscribed in Igwebuiké is a correction of the current situation in which Africans have found themselves. Igwebuiké believes there is strength in unity so as to correct this extreme nature of man for greed and excessive power; and also it provides a framework for sustainable development. Igwebuiké provides with an ideal for social justice so we can be united against one common enemy and that is injustice. So far, our egocentric behaviour reflects unbridled individualism as a result of our human nature but our collective goal can be fruitful because in unity there is strength. No matter our diversity as a nation, a people, a tribe, or religion our strength lies in our common humanity. Despite the appealing nature of Igwebuiké, the question one will ask will be, how can this unity be achieved when these ethnic tensions and ethnocentric bias – having distilled in the minds of most Nigerians – has not only manifested in tribal conflicts, it has also permeated the various social and political institutions of the country, so much so that one might even be tempted to consider ethnocentrism as the socio-political zeitgeist of Nigeria (2016:118). African philosophers and scholars of philosophy have proffered solution just as Igwebuiké has made its own attempt not without its own criticisms. Asouzu suggests:

We must imbibe a mindset that affirms that anything that exists serves as a missing link of reality... where anything that exists serves as a missing link, we see the need to live in consequent self-conscious manner concerning the impact and implications, which the fragmented moments of our history have on our lives (45:2004).

This missing link connects us as humans and not as opposing humans through the vehicle of integrative humanism which recognizes the common origin of human beings which also seeks to resolve the problem of ethnocentrism and every form of xenophobic attack in Africa and the world at large. This Ozumba and Chimakonam argue:

Integrative humanism is an intercultural philosophy that calls for more inclusive society. It holds that the diversities we find among nations, cultures, races and individuals make for variety and mark out areas of strength and weaknesses of different nation. All we need to do is to

harness, agglutinate, and synthesize these polar of strength so as to obviate the many weakness of human society (2014:78).

Igwebuike no doubt will agree with the philosophy of integrative humanism that this unity goes beyond the shores of Africa but should be engage with Africans so as to project our humanity to others as human beings so together we can make the world a better place for the common good of human beings and this is what Nigeria needs for its own sake.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has been able to arrive at the fact that African philosophy is not a 'dead end' but that African philosophy is African philosophy because it is open to the clarification of its definition and the possibility of an unending research in the subject as it pertains to Africa. It is in relation to this fact that African communalism is utopian and that the present does not reflect the past of what communalism is and even if it is so, then communalism is not only peculiar to Africans alone but has always been the foundation of western philosophical discourse. Finally, Igwebuike which is an expression of the term African communalism is only a correction to what human beings can achieve in becoming united so as to solve the problem of ethnocentrism which has destroy the foundations of our social and political life.

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