COMMUNALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SOCIETY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Chris.O. Abakare
&
Vincent. C. Okeke

Abstract
This paper critically examines the dogmatic claim that Africans are by nature communalistic –exhibiting a sense of brotherhood among themselves and sharing things equally in common. However, considering the phenomenological evidence of the level of individualism and inter-tribal hatred and hostilities in the continent in this contemporary times, one could conclude, that the above claim cannot be sustained. It is the position of this paper that whether communalism is essentially African, contextual or not is not so much an issue, that there is nothing wrong with an idea that seeks to accord universal equality and humanity, but it must however be backed by genuineness of purpose instead of being a subterfuge for the selfish to perpetrate themselves. The paper concludes that, for Africa/Africans to exhibit more human-centered social relations, it/they therefore, must unite to protect it/themselves from gradual extinction by clamping down on excessive individualism and tribal hatred by promoting an authentic African humanism that emanates from the spirit of communalism instead of paying lip service to the communalist spirit.

Keywords: Africa, Communalism, Contemporary Society, Humanism, Individualism

Introduction
The question of African communalism or communalism in Africa remains a ground for critical reflections both as regards the claim of its coevalness and its exclusivity to Africa. A reading of Oguejiofor’s “How African is Communalism” and Odimegwu’s “How Communalist is Africa?” gives credence to the complexity of the matter. The need to search objectively for facts and more realistic truths arises in one’s mind as one leaves the realm of speculation and indoctrination to step out into the activities of our everyday existence to ask questions that emanates from our history which has been presented by many scholars as essentially communalistic. This work therefore, attempts to understand which connotation of communalism is proper to the African social existence; is it one which is intrinsic? or is it one which is contextual? Or is it one which is essentially individualistic or parasitic as is evidenced in our daily contemporary lives?

What is Communalism?
Simply put, it is giving priority to communal aspirations to individual demands. For the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, communalism is “the fact of living together and sharing possessions and responsibility; a strong sense of belonging to a particular community” (Hornby 290). Obi Oguejiofor puts it thus, “Communalism could be understood as the primacy of the community over the individual” (5). It is a system of social relations in which the claims of the individual is generally put
second, next to the claims of the community, or next to the claims or demands of the collection of individuals. Augustine Shutte sees it as a kind of socialism, but not the European type socialism, it is rather “an updating of the traditional emphasis on community as an ethical and religious ideal” (110). He explains that “communalism implies above all, a quality of life made possible by common attitudes and loyalties” (Shutte 110).

Distinguishing communalism from socialism, Gyekye sees communalism primarily as a socio-ethical doctrine and not an economic setup:

It is a doctrine about social relations as well as moral attitudes about what sorts of relations should hold between individuals in a society and about the need to take into account the interests of the wider society not only in designing sociopolitical institutions and in evolving behavior patterns for individuals in their response to the needs and welfare of other members of society (Gyekye 149).

For the records, it is worthy of note that the term communalism has been used by both Western and African scholars and thinkers in social discourse. When Aristotle talks of man as a *Zoon politikon* (political animal), he meant that man has a social nature. It means that man is communal by nature. In the same light, several African scholars have described that beyond this generic attribute of man to want to live with the Other, the African man is communalist in nature; communalist not just in the generic sense of a social being, but a being whose nature is tied to the other; such that he is one with the other, and that the traces of individuality which is also a dominant nature of man is totally subdued as it is not in the “nature of the African”.

However, the above is against what is observable in our contemporary society, where behaviours towards the other do not indicate any traces of communalism as an inherent part of the African man. With this scenario, certain questions arise; in what sense is Africa communalist? Is Africa communalist because it is part of the social structure or social relations of its people? In practical instances, is the African man communalistic or individualistic? Is Africa communalist in principles and concepts or is communalism coeval with the African? This is against the phenomenology of our everyday practice. In the light of the foregoing, certain African thinkers have attempted these questions; How African is Communalism? and How Communalist is Africa?.

**African Communalism According to African Scholars**

**Placide Tempels**

Father Tempels in the book *Bantu Philosophy*, tries to outline the fundamental philosophy that guides the lives of the Africans. His explanation of the “vital force” is a pointer to communalist-interactive existential pattern of the African universe.
According to Tempels, the Bantu (latter seen as the whole of Africa) have a clear hierarchy of being, with God at the apex, followed by the Archpatriarchs, the founders of clans, the ancestors, living humans, animals, plants inanimate objects, etc. the relations of these realities is through a common essence- the vital force. As a matter of fact this hierarchy itself is only possible because of the different degrees of vital force possession of these realities. Placing man at the centre of all beings, he insists that there are laws governing the interaction of beings- laws of vital causality. One rational being can reduce or increase the vital force of another directly. A rational being can also increase or diminish the vital force of another by making use of other lower beings. Holding that the kind of relationship that exists in the human community is linked directly to this idea of reality, he explains thus:

Bantu psychology cannot conceive of man as an individual, as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationships with other beings and from its connection with animals or inanimate forces around it. The Bantu cannot be alone being. It is not good enough synonym for that to say that he is a social being. No; he feels and knows himself to be a vital force, at this time to be in intimate and personal relationship with others acting above him and below him in the hierarchy of forces. He knows himself to be a vital force, even now influencing some forces and being influenced by others. The human being, apart from the ontological hierarchy and the interaction of forces, has no existence in the conception of the Bantu (Tempels 61-62).

This “metaphysico-communalistic” conception of the being of man and the African universe by Tempels is the origin of the plethora of articulations on the concept of African Communalism or Socialism as some authors choose to call it.

**J.S. Mbíti**

Mbíti’s “We Philosophy”, captured in his book entitled *African Religions and Philosophy*, that says “I am because we are and since we are therefore I am” has come to pose as a direct counter to the Cartesian “I Philosophy”, that says “I think therefore I am”. Like the “I Philosophy” of Descartes’ which has been criticized from many quarters, Mbíti’s communalistic perspective, has also been criticized as not being able to stand as the direct opposite of the Cartesian postulation. We have to take into account that the “I”, or person, is becoming increasingly important in African ontology, too. Also in the West, a philosophy of “We” is not impossible and has immerged as a strong philosophical stream called communitarianism, which stresses the meaning of community (Kimmerle).

**Leopold Senghor**

Senghor accepts the entire idea of vital force as espoused by Tempels. He however differed in his explanation of the African mode of knowing, which for him is in
contradistinction to the European mode. According to him, the African has a natural feeling of oneness with the object of knowledge. He does not see it different as the European does. He explains thus:

The African is as it were shut up inside his black skin. He lives in primordial night. He does not begin by distinguishing himself from the object, the tree or stone, the man or animal or social event. He does not keep it at a distance. He does not analyze it. Once he has come under its influence, he takes it like a blind man, still living, into his hands. He does not fix it or kill it. He turns it over and over in his supple hands, he fingers, he feels… Subjectively at the end of his antennae, like an insect, he discovers the Other. He is moved to his bowels, going out in a centrifugal movement from the subject to the object on the waves sent out from the Other (Senghor 29-30).

The above quotation explains Senghor’s famous statement that reason is Hellenic and emotion is African. For Senghor, however, the African way of knowing is not a failure of consciousness, but rather “the accession to a higher state of consciousness”. The African reason is reason by embrace (Oguejiofor 10). This comes to bare in African social relations. Senghor underlines the unity of the African universe—a unity which impinges very strongly on man’s social relations. This he captures thus:

From God through man, down to the grain of sand, it is a seamless whole. Man, in his role as a person, is the centre of this universe, or rather not man, but family. The family is the microcosm, the first cell. All the concentric circles which form the different levels of society… village, tribe, kingdom, empire… reproduce in extended form the family… The African is thus held in a tight network of vertical and horizontal communities, which bind and at the same time support him. He is the fullest illustration of the truth honoured in our own day by socialism, that man can only live and realize himself in and through the society (Senghor 30).

**Kwame Nkrumah**

Nkrumah’s socialist postulations, is an attempt to revamp traditional communalism on the hinges of Marxism which is anchored on materialist ontology and dialectics. He is one of the few scholars that attempts to distinguish traditional communalism and the modern day African realities, even though he is accused of stumbling into this distinction by chance and not by any conscious attempt. Indeed, Ruch regrets that Nkrumah mixes up the principles of the old and the new Africa in his socialist postulations (Ruch and Anyanwu 325-6). This accusation is even more in his
Consciencism, which is an attempt to invoke the spirit of traditional communalism—“a spirit conceptualized as conscience that has been thrown into crisis by the miserable experiences of slavery and colonialism” (Odimegwu). The resolution of this crisis of consciousness results in consciencism: a philosophical statement that combines traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa into a socialist harmony that is in tune with the original humanist principles of traditional African society (Nkrumak 70). Odimegwu explains that this is yet another beautiful proposition of African communalism by Nkrumah. When he moves to realize this concept in the Marxian scientific socialism based on materialist ontology however, “the questions of authenticity and consistency arise once more. How African is this philosophical statement? How authentically African is this new communalism? And how authentically communalist is this new proposed new Africa?” (4). However, that is not to say that Nkrumah was not objective in his consideration of the claim to the ontology of communalism in Africa. For sure, he denies the existence of any ancient African community that “… was a classless society imbued with the spirit of humanism and to express nostalgia for that spirit” (Nkrumah). For Nkrumah, “an idyllic African classless society (in which there were no rich no poor) enjoying a drugged serenity is certainly a facile simplification; there is no historical or even anthropological evidence for any such society” (Nkrumah).

To buttress his claims against the claims to a classless African traditional society, Nkrumah points out that feudalism, a deep and exploitative social stratification founded on the ownership of land, existed in some parts of Africa before colonization. Nkrumah further noted that slavery existed in Africa before the coming of Europe. Before colonization, Nkrumah insists, “Africans were prepared to sell, often for no more than thirty pieces of silver, fellow tribesmen and even members of the same extended family and clan (Nkrumah).

Julius Nyerere
The traditional African family pattern provided Nyerere with a model through which he thought about human nature, its attributes and goals. Nyerere’s aspiration was to extend the traditional African family pattern which was based according to him on the principles of “equality”, “freedom” and “unity”, to the modern society setting. In other words, the model of the democratic society he hoped to bring about in his native Tanzania was one equivalent to the traditional close-knit African extended family system. In his 1962 paper titled: “Ujamaa- The Basis of African Socialism” he articulated the path he wanted Tanzania to follow and by extension the entirety of Africa. Ujamaa was the name Nyerere called his socialist philosophy.

Through the conceptualization of this social theory, Nyerere fulfilled the philosophic task of bringing unity and cohesion to diverse and conflicting beliefs and values in contemporary Tanzania and thus laid the foundation for an integrated social life (Okoh). His philosophy of Ujamaa is a unique African synthesis of man and society that is aimed not just at arousing the consciousness of man to the ills of inequality and social injustice, but is also postulated as new authentic African socialist society which is an alternative to the European models. For Nyerere socialism is synonymous with
communalism. For Nyerere, socialism is an attitude of the mind marked by people caring for the welfare of one another. He puts it thus:

In the individual, as in the society, it is an attitude of mind which distinguishes the socialist from the non-socialist. It has nothing to do with the possession or non-possession of wealth. Destitute people can be potential capitalists – exploiters of their fellow human beings. A millionaire can equally well be a socialist; he may value his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow men. But the man who uses wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows is a capitalist. So is the man who would if he could (Nyerere 162).

But even with this attitude of caring everyone was a worker, i.e., there was nobody who owned so much as to subjugate the rest of the community. With this, the community was able to ensure security for its members, as well as universal hospitality on which all the members could depend. The most important part of the economic life of this traditional society is the distribution of wealth. According to Nyerere, traditional Africa made sure that there was no parasitism in the distribution of the wealth so created.

The desire to accumulate wealth is anti-social and amounts to a vote of no confidence in the society. Since one was sure of the society’s good-will and care for his wellbeing, he does not need to accumulate wealth for personal keeps, since the individual who is ready to work does not need to worry about what becomes of him tomorrow if he fails to hoard any wealth today. The society, in which he has all his confidence bestowed, will look after him alive and even at the time of death. “This is exactly what traditional African society succeeded in doing. Both the “rich” and the “poor” individual were completely secure in African societies. Natural catastrophe brought famine, but it brought famine to everybody- ‘poor’ or ‘rich’” (Oguejiofor 12). With all these, Nyerere was headed for the root of communalism, and thus attempting to underline the structure that marks the communalist system. The security which the society provided made the individual to find his wellbeing in the wellbeing of others. This is the basis for the individual’s claim that: “I am because we are”. Nyerere captures this thus when he says that, “in our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community and the community took care of us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellow men” (Nyerere 2). He concludes his articulation on socialism by saying that modern African socialism can tap into the raw materials provided by traditional Africa which recognized the society as an extension of the basic family unit. This is well captured in the first line of the TANU creed: “I believe in Human Brotherhood and the Unity of Africa.”
Obi Oguejiofor

Oguejiofor in his 2007 essay “How African is Communalism?”, explains that there are three possible senses from which we could consider the question of how communalism is African. In the first sense, he explains, it may be asked whether communalism however it is understood, characterizes Africa. That is to say, is the system a quality amongst many that can be correctly attributed to the African socio-cultural and economic institutions? He opines that:

In this first sense, the quality of being communalistic can be shared by other communities. If we say for example, that Japanese are industrious, it does not mean that Tahitians are excluded from sharing this quality. Thus, here it is important that the quality exists among the people described, but it does not need to be in any way exclusively so (Oguejiofor 5).

The second sense he says is the opposite of the first. It implies a situation that being communalistic is special to Africa, and therefore not shared by other continents or peoples. In this sense, the system is peculiarly African and even if it exists elsewhere, its origin or root is traceable to Africa. In this understanding, such a quality would be exclusive to Africa as it cannot be European, Asian or American. The third sense he explains, will go further to make it a defining characteristic of the people of Africa—some kind of essence of being African, without which a person, or institution would not be rightly called African. He explains that of the three possible ways to answer the question of communalism and Africa, the first way—communalism is African, but not exclusive to Africa, is the genuine sense in which communalism is African and that it would be wrong to posit that communalism is a defining characteristic of Africans and its institutions.

For Oguejiofor, the crime of most earlier attempt to establish the nexus between communalism and Africa, has been the failure of these authors to explore how far the system is circumstantial and context laden. For him, the major interest of these authors was just to highlight something that was special to Africa, of positive import and praiseworthy that marks Africa in contrast to all other part of the world. He puts this thus:

From here there is a slip towards the direction of making it an essential nature of the African, so that in Okolo’s view, without it one can no longer be African. But it seems obvious that communalism arose in Africa from the fulcrum of the continent’s pristine socio-political and economic conditions. John O’Donohue borrows Emile Durkheim’s analysis of forms of solidarity in society to explain the contextual underpinnings of African communalism. For Durkheim, there is the dominance of the collective in simple
societies. There are two types of solidarities in the human society. The first type characterizes peasant society. It is described as mechanical solidarity. Its origin is what Durkheim describes as *conscience commune* (collective consciousness). Collective consciousness is the “totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society”. For Durkheim *conscience commune* totally dominated the mental life of the members of simple societies. This consciousness imposes itself on the individual, and it sort of assumes a life of its own in the memory of the society. However, as society advances in technology, in “division of labour” it becomes more and more peripheral, even though it is never completely absent in any society (15-16).

Oguejiofor’s attempt here is to show how the community consciousness described by O’Donohue still lingers in the African and thus the continuous holding unto of this belief system. To further buttress his point, Oguejiofor explains the claim in the traditional setup, that in modern times, the thread of communalism in Africa has weakened so much and that in comparison to the west, the individual westerner is more beholden to his society than the African his society, for his education, security and social and economic opportunities. Also, based on the absence of the rule of law in most African societies at present, the individual goes on to flout the provisions of the law without consequences. He opines that what is called western individualism shows its clearest manifestation in the socio-economy of the society where individuals have freedom of opinion and where society recognizes and even backs up his freedom (even though the weight of that freedom is in practical terms often minimal).

He explains that the steady rise of individualism among Africans in modern times is an indication that communalism is a creation of the circumstances prevalent at that time in the history of Africa. The change towards more and more individualism is “a necessary change given continuous and on-going departure from the simple societies that were communalistic. It appears however that there is much that is negative in that change” (19). Corruption is one sure example- an outcome of weak legal systems as well as of myselfism, which are both antithetical to the communalist spirit. The many wars in most parts of Africa were based on personal ambition without any consideration of its effects on the rest of the community (ies). Politics is played not in the spirit of any genuine ambition to improve the lot of the community but rather, the community serves as pawns in political chess board. With these scenarios, Oguejiofor thinks that the aspects of communalism that are still observable in Africa are basically those with negative consequences on modern African societies.
Ike Odimegwu

Odimegwu in his article, “How Communalist is Africa?” explains that this question may be understood in various ways. For him, it raises a number of other questions:

Is there a generally accepted concept or definition of communalism? Are there brands of communalism? Are there levels, types or kinds of communalism? If there are, which is the ideal or perfect communalism? Does communalism consist, for instance in the social structures or social relations of a people? Does it consist in principles or concepts? Does it consist in social precepts or in personal convictions? Could there be a communalist society of individualist persons or an individualist society of communalistic persons? What are the possibilities of a society of persons whose communalism or individualism is determined by their socio-economic states of being at different points in time? In the light of the foregoing circumstances, the question could also be asked: How is Africa communalist: a question that may be understood to mean; what brand of communalism does Africa practice? What is the level of African communalist practice? What are the dimensions, spread and proportions of communalist practice in Africa?; or even, is African communalism theory or praxis or both. Does the theory derive from the practice or vice versa? Is the practice built up, articulated and consciously possessed at the theoretical level? The question at this point dovetails into the personal arena to ask: How communalist is the contemporary Africa? (Odimegwu 4).

After a brief description of the generic understanding of communalism, African communalism in its many manifestations, in its different institutions of Ala-land (land use), marriage, family etc, Odimegwu attempted to answer the above questions by “re-echoering” the questions- Is Africa communalist? In what ways is Africa communalist? And what is the level of African communalist being and existence? He explains that the first question is presupposed by the title of his essay, as it is the being that is that can wonder or constitute the object of wonder about his mode of being. About the second question, he explains that, it takes us to the question of the aspects of, theories of or attitudes to communalism. Regarding the aspects of communalism, he considers two elements: land and family. For him, these two elements constitute the fundamental elements in the communalism of Nze. He puts it thus:
Ala, the land, is the basis, principle and a fundamental element of traditional African communalist unity. In owning the community, the land sustains the people in ontological and existential belongingness. In belonging to the community, it binds the members together in common possession. In their sharing out the land for planting, they share and grow the community spirit. As a deity, Ala binds the community in spiritual and religious unity. It constitutes the people into a community of faith united by the very earth that carries them as sustainer and mother. That was traditional Africa. And so we can say of Africa, in her traditional society that it was verily communalistic, from the perspective of conception and holding of land, that is, without prejudice to limiting influence of this land-community relationship on the scope of traditional African communalism (6).

This however is in contradistinction to what is obtainable now in the contemporary African society where land is now privately or individually owned, purchased, possessed and barricaded. In many African communities now, communal ownership of land does not exist anymore. Odimegwu rightly observes that:

The sense of individualism created by private ownership of land is sustained and furthered by the G.R.A (Government Reserved Area) residential system where the individual fences in his house in high walls with equally intimidating gates and ‘beware of dogs’ signals to complete the shutting off of the community from the world of the individual (Odimegwu).

With this scenario, one begins to wonder how communalist the African is in his everyday life. Regarding the family, Odimegwu explains that the family was the unit model of traditional African communalism. To buttress this point further, he writes:

Nze contended that the uniqueness of African social existence is founded on, and manifests in, in the African family system which, in European conceptual frames, is called extended. This extension was a definitive factor in traditional communalism even as, in contemporary African society, it has become a definitive problem for many an African (Odimegwu).

With the story of how he met a man who wondered how any person from a family of nine could amass as much wealth as he himself an only child of his parents, that the effort to carry everyone along, which symbolizes the family spirit, will surely pull
everyone down or at least hinder ascent to the heights for all, Odimegwu was able to observe that the extended family system could be an impediment to individual growth, singular achievement and distinction, or at least that it is so perceived by some contemporary Africans as a burden and they might be eager to lay off such burdens.

From the above, it is obvious that communalism is mostly seen as an intrinsic African ethos- an attribute that is coeval with the African. With the exception of Oguejiofor, Odimegwu and may be Nkrumah who were critical of this claim; bringing out the inherent individualism, circumstantial, context laden and over exaggerated nature of the said African communalism, the rest of the authors argued that communalism is the definitive feature of being African. The rest of this essay attempts a phenomenological study of this claim in contemporary African society.

**Phenomenology of Communalism in Contemporary Africa**

Is communalism- that attitude of common ownership of things, the innate feature of the African social life? Is the spirit of “brotherhood” and “familyhood” so extended to all corners of the African continent? Are friendship and solidarity the ontological contours demarcating Africa from the rest of the world? To answer these questions in the affirmative will require one more step which is to demonstrate this communalist attitude at work in the contemporary African life, while to answer in the negative only amounts to substantiating the outcome of the phenomenological evidence of this inquiry. To be sure, our study will assume for the sake of argument that the answer is in the affirmative- that communalism is African and Africa is communalistic in all the senses that has been demonstrated and disproved by the scholars that we have studied.

Having done this, all that is left is to demonstrate communalism in Africa in contemporary social life. To do this, we will consider the term Africa both in the particular and generic sense and African society in the present in comparison to the past. With respect to the particularity, experience shows that African families with filial, blood or ancestral relations exhibit communalistic spirit among themselves. Because they are members of a large family or village descending from a common ancestral lineage or extended family, they share experiences and property in common. Decisions regarding “the laws to be obeyed, the place of women in the family, the education of children, religion; the relation of the larger family or village with other villages, marriage customs, modes and patterns of conduct are defined democratically” (Amaku). Each individual finds himself or herself fully integrated into the consanguine family and any form of separation or detachment from this closely-knit family arrangement could herald problems of integration and survival for the individual. As a matter of fact, without full integration within ones family, one is almost non-existent and has no right to properties belonging to the larger “brotherhood”. Mbiti’s —we-philosophy finds its deserved relevance here, when it says: —“I am, because we are”. One cannot for instance, steal, kill, rape or exercise promiscuous acts within the consanguine group, for these are regarded as abominations or crimes against the confraternity. But crimes committed outside the consanguine family did not matter much since the victims are excluded from the
“brotherhood”; they are as a matter of fact mostly celebrated. To be sure we think like Amaku does, that “it is from the life-pattern of particular African consanguine communities that some African scholars have couched their arguments in defence and propagation of African communalism” (Amaku).

But such a claim seems to be too simplistic when considered in generic terms. What this paper is concerned with, is the regular tendency among some African thinkers to generalize from the particular as if Africa were a homogenous entity—pretending that what takes place at particular instances defines and shapes the whole. Indeed, “to generalize from particularities commits the fallacy of over-composition–attributing the qualities of a particular to a whole. That the members of a family or village associate amicably and peacefully among themselves, as it is experienced in all parts of Africa, does not necessarily imply that Africans, as a whole, exercise brotherly attitudes towards themselves” (Amaku). Experience has not really shown that Africans appreciate and love themselves as some African scholars claim. This is what Oguejiofor attempts to buttress when he wrote about the Nigerian scenario, that:

Part of the problem is that psychologically the consciousness of the individual is projected into a sort of communal consciousness. Individual self-worth is, for example, projected into the community, in such a way that those perceived to represent the community, to be its face in relation to other communities bequeath pride and some sense of self-worth to the members of the particular community. It is for instance a special pride to members of an ethnic group that the president of the country is from their ethnic group, even though his misrule brings them misery, they will be ready to defend him in times of trouble without even considering his culpability. It is therefore of great concern who becomes what, and this is not just a struggle for scarce resources. Accession to high office of a member of one’s clan is seen as a booster to the power holders. Where, as in Africa, such sentiments predominate, the first consideration for choice of leaders is everything but competence. Continuation of communal spirit in this form is also propelled by a sense of insecurity. The African projected into modern society with colonialism still feels insecure in the face of an inefficient and corrupt new order. With such feeling of insecurity, there develops the sentiment of banding together in a sort of psychological tribal enclaves. Thus ethnic and sectional origin replaces the politics of idea and vision (19-20).

For there to be authentic African communalism there must be genuine attempt to internalize among all African peoples the virtues of particular communalism. The said
consanguine sympathy must transcend the village or filial confines spreading, authentically, to all parts of the African continent. This is also the view of Nwoko, who reacting to the claim of African socialism held that:

The African today is not locked up as a prisoner of the particularity of his culture or civilization. He is in communion with the universal Other wherever he may encounter it. Therefore, African socialism as the life of the African would not only declare his particularity but also his potentiality to transcend this particularity. The realization of his uniqueness in the universal society is in fact in the transcendence of his social particularity (Nwoko 28).

Ekennia does not also share the view of basing modern African communalism on the backdrop of ancient African traditional family setting. He opines, that granted most traditional African cultures attached much importance to family ties; it is doubtful whether the appeal to familyhood and its litany of virtues went beyond the community which saw itself as ontologically bound together by their beliefs and traditions. Ekennia therefore insists that “… communalism must leave its usual abode in domestic communities or micro social communities and ascend to the level of greater communities or macro social communities” (Ekennia 205).

Further, regarding the emphasis on African traditional communalism, as a distinguishing mark between Africans and the western world, one wonders, if there really is any part of the globe, in which people have not lived and shared life together as a consanguine society. One wonders the difference that African consanguine socialist life makes that makes it to become an ontological point of reference between Africa and the rest of the world. What identity message, which is not also part or existent in other parts of the world, do we really want to communicate by dogmatizing the African ancient socialist set up? “Do the eulogies on African —socialism really differentiate Africans from other races?” (Amaku). Would a scholar vast in African studies really agree with the claim that in African traditional communities, people were equal and shared things equally? Whereas history has proven that some traditional African societies had slaves and outcasts who were regarded and treated as sub-human beings? The Osu caste system in the eastern part of Nigeria is a classical example. Even with the coming of civilization, western education and religion, and all what not, there are still instances of the practice of this degrading human practice in some communities.

Also, it is known that African communities run a “male-centered” society in which women are under the total dictatorial control of men. The evidence of this has remained an issue for social and gender debates for many years now. How do we defend equality of people in traditional Africa with phenomenal number of beggars, homeless people, unattended sickly people that populated that epoch? Kimmerle recalls V. G. Simiyu’s caution on exaggerations about African traditional socialism.
Differing from what he regards as “democratic myth in African traditional societies” draws attention to the fact that “hate and struggle were not unknown in these societies. Moreover, to presuppose one and the same structure everywhere proves to be a too simplistic way of speaking about traditional social life in Africa” (Kimmerle).

We cannot, while defending the so called African’s natural tendency to see the “Other” as “brother”, keep blind eyes over chronic tribal hatred that contoured African traditional communities and have continued to torment the African continent. We habitually associate racism with the westerners, but a deep insight into the lifestyle of traditional African communities would reveal that Africans are one of the most racist groups in the world. Tribalism is the chief operational factor in the African continent right from its history. Since language and some particular forms of culture distinguish tribes in Africa, each African tribe would preferably choose to live, interact and inter-marry within their respective territorial confines without interfering with others and each tribe would do whatever it entails to defend her geographical location and ontological tribal identity and purity against all other tribes notwithstanding the origin of the differences. That is why some African scholars have preferred to “describe African continent as being composed of —republican communities (autonomous communities). It is this strong sense of tribal descent, unity and the compelling instinct of defending tribal historical cultural identity that is at the root of tribal intolerance in Africa” (Amaku).

The experience in modern African social life also persuades us to believe that communalist tendencies are only extended when it is a means for an individual to gain. This is the scenario in most filial or extended family settings where the “one who is still down in the economic ladder”, only extends the brotherhood spirit to his uncle or brother, because of the economic gains he hopes to make from the Other, and lags in the extension of this spirit once the economic gains are lacking and the Other cajoled to continue in this deceit because of social pressure or expectations. This propelled Odimegwu to ask these questions:

Does African communalism today consist in the feeling of belonging wherewith the individual in need feels he belongs together with the benefactor? Does the benefactor feel likewise? Does he feel and accept likewise or does he grudgingly trudge along under the compulsive pressure of social opinions and expectations? (7).

To be sure, if the scenario is that the benefactor does so only as a result of the social pressure and expectations, then the communalist spirit he exhibits is really not intrinsic but only to save his face. Also, like we already alluded to, when the beneficiary only extends a hand of fellowship to his benefactor for the singular hope of economic gains and reneges when the gains are not there or are there and not forthcoming, then he really is guilty of the same crime as the Other, and the scenario therefore, a question mark on the claim to the “coevalness” of communalism to Africa and to the African.
**Conclusion**

We have established that while some African philosophers and theologians have tried to differentiate the African worldview from the Western perspective by appealing to what they regard as African traditional socialism or communalism with its attendant litany of virtues, others, have been critical of these claims, arguing that for this to be sustained as a Pan-African reality, one more step of concretizing these virtues is required.

The scholars who have argued for “communalism as African” and “Africa as communalist” arrived at this idea of African innate brotherhood by referencing to various particular consanguine African communities, where each particular community lived and associated as people having common ancestral descent. This paper based on the phenomenological evidence it finds, has taken the contrary position. It finds that Africans are not by nature generally friendly, hospitable and brotherly to themselves. That Pan-African communalism is still the fiction of the mind. The fact that the members of a particular African community show sympathy to themselves as belonging to the same ancestral family or tribe does not prove that Africans as a “whole” exhibit the spirit of brotherhood among themselves. We are convinced that family friendship is quite different from pan-African unity and confraternity. Inter-tribal wars and often hostilities among some African countries and among ethnic groups of the same country, paralyzes such claims. However, the pockets of socialistic life found in all African societies can become a platform for pan-African socialism. Indeed, pan-African socialism has become a necessity if Africans must survive in the future. Africans require collective efforts to fight against internal inter-tribal hostilities through which Africans are daily dying at the very machinations of their fellow Africans. Lastly, Africa’s unity is non-negotiable in order for Africans to survive unwholesome external politics that is endangering the African black race. Though communalism is not a virtue that is intrinsically African, it can foster a more profound African socio-polity, because there is nothing wrong with a philosophy that seeks to accord a universal humanism, but must not be allowed to become a tool for the selfish to perpetrate themselves.

---

**Chris. O. Abakare, PhD.**  
*Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.*  
*Phone:* +2348035078881  
*Email:* abakarechris@yahoo.com

**Vincent. C. Okeke, PhD.**  
*Department of Philosophy, Federal University Lafia, Lafia, Nigeria.*  
*Phone:* +2348030483359  
*Email:* bigchiizzoo50@gmail.com
References


