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THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON AND COMMUNALISM IN AFRICA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

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ABSTRACT

This article bothers on the Phenomenological expression of life by the individual members of the community in the African setting. The research examines the relationship of the individuals in the community. Communalism in Africa entails that every individual member of the community should try and get involved in the community affairs. Everybody attends meetings and communal work like monthly sanitation. They gather when there is communal ceremonies like burial, traditional marriage, title-taking, and so on. They also pay their dues. They contribute to assist anyone who is to embark on marriage or funeral ceremonies. Everybody strives to contribute to the general welfare of the community. They also share in the communal land for cultivation. They all enjoys the patronage of the community as the base where they are born and nurtured. The community provides a common forum where each person is free to express oneself and be heard. Every person enjoys personal freedom within the community. Sometimes however, a person or group of persons would decide to withdraw from the community with a reason that their freedom is restricted within the community or that they could live independently on their own. Some philosophers also argue that communalism is an essential characteristic of the African. Thus, this research aims at addressing the problem of personal freedom of the individual person within the community and underscores the importance of personal freedom as free members of the community in order to keep the community going and as well achieve personal goals in life. The research addresses the problem of individualism often exhibited by some individual members of the community which goes against the communal spirit. Such individuals claim that they could afford to live independently without the relationship of other individuals in the community. It establishes the fact that communalism is not essential to Africa because it is also found in other continents of the world. This research is carried out through the primary method of data collection which is library collections. Some materials are the original works of authors. However, there are others from commentaries and encyclopedias. The essential method of this research is phenomenology. Phenomenology simply means to see things as they really are. It means to study reality as they appear to the senses. In conclusion, it is found out that no man is an island. No person could live independently of other fellow persons. It is also found out that community does not take away the personal freedom of the individual members. Besides, communalism as it is realized does not belong exclusively to Africa since it is also found in other societies around the world. Every individual member of the community tries to maintain a cordial relationship with the rest of the

members in order to achieve their common and individual goals in life. Besides, it is believed that this work is going to be quite informative in that readers will be more enlightened on the communitarian nature of life in the African society where off individualism and selfish interest have no place. It offers the opportunity to realize that every human person is quite important in the community.

Keywords: Individual Person; Communalism; Africa; Phenomenology; Investigation.

Introduction

The African society is communalistic in nature. It is a society where communal life finds its expression. Everybody is fully involved in the communal affairs of the community. This system of communal living has been there in Africa long before the advent of colonialism. It has stood the test of time because it has passed through thick and thin till the present time. Even the colonial activities of the colonial era, had some over ridding impact on it, but did not destabilize it. The individual person belongs to the community and he finds fulfillment in life by belonging to the community. The issue of the individual - community relationship has generated a lot of debate in African philosophy. This is due to the fact that in some African societies the freedom of the individual person is somehow restricted in order to create a good rapport between him and the community. The individual in question feels trapped in the community with a lot of restrictions. He considers that those restrictions prevent him from developing himself to the fullest in pursuit of self-actualization.

Be that as it may, every member of the community tries to pay his dues and join in all the activities of the men in the village like kindred or village meetings which excludes the women folk, village sanitations like clearing of the roads and gutters, attending the burials/funerals of deceased villagers and so on. All these and more are the duties of every male who are of age in the kindred. In the light of these, they also share in the rights of the group like having a portion of the communal land for farm work or even for building, enjoying the communal support of the members in times of funeral and marriage ceremonies; building of houses, and so on. All these help to keep the members together as one family and make the community to grow.

Every individual in a communitarian African society enjoys personal freedom. Each person guards against anything that would encroach or impede his freedom. In as much as the individual members enjoy his personal freedom, the general wellbeing of the entire community has to be considered too. It is assumed that the community's interest should be considered first before the individual interest. However, many people would rather argue that personal freedom is non-negotiable. This becomes the bane of the crisis within the community and thus, the fulcrum of this research.

2.0 Phenomenology of the Individual Person in the Community

The individual person in the community belongs to that community by birth or by association. The person lives with other people in the community and interacts with them as fellow indigenes of the community. The individual in question may belong to the community by mere association. In that case, the fellow may be a visitor whose stay could be a short one. A visitor has certain rights accorded to him or her. Such rights include; fair reception or hospitality, right to protection without bullying or molestation, etc. The person who belongs to the community by birth enjoys every right as a full member of the community. He participates actively in the activities of the community. He attends periodic meetings of the community. He joins in the activities of the community like the village sanitation, maintenance of the roads to the community, and so on. He pays his monthly contributions as and when due. He does not lag behind in the affairs of his community. He tries as much as possible to fulfill his obligations to the community. This is the true picture of a true citizen who knows his duties to the community and performs them and also shares in the rights there of. Okadigbo explains the notion of person thus:

> Personality is the sum total of individualist action in its distinction from social thought and social action, i.e, social reality. Since existence is the distance between thought and reality, and since existence is, for the African, a vital communal affair, then the African individual and personality is the existential Gestalt between the African individual and the African other. The African personality is the reconciliation of personality per se and Africanity a fortiori. For, as shown above, it is the authenticity of his community that sustains and guarantees the integrity of his personality, just as it is the free participation of his personality that ensures the consanguinity and continuity of his community.[1]

According to Okadigbo, personality is the whole of action performed by the individual person as distinct from the communal action. However, as he said, there is a correlation, on the one hand, between the African personality and the African community in that the authenticity of the African community guarantees and as well sustains the integrity of the individual's personality. On the other hand, the free participation of the individual person in the affairs of the community without any coercion guarantees the perpetuation of the community. According to Adigwe, "the human person is fundamentally a creature of God and not a casual product of blind and arbitrary matter or the construction of social engineers. In essence, the human person proceeds from the idea that God has for him, and develops in the context of time and history."[2] Adigwe maintains that the human person is the

product of God having proceeded from the idea of God himself and not from any other source whatsoever. According to Asouzu, human person identified as *mmadu* is a composite of different parts among which are the immaterial soul and the material body. The term *"mmadu*" in Igbo language which means human person is composed of two words namely: *"mma"* which means *goodness* and *"di"* which means *to be*. These combine to mean *let there be goodness* or *let goodness be*. This becomes the target of the human person, to aspire for everything that is good. According to Asouzu, human person is composite of the material body and the immaterial soul. The material body could die and decay but the immaterial soul or spirit lives on in the land of the spirit. Another important aspect of the human person is the mind which takes charge of all rational operations which include thinking, knowing, understanding and so on.[3]

2.1 Western Philosophers' Conception Of The Individual Person

Prior to the time when philosophers delved into the study of the human person, the Ionian philosophers were puzzled about the nature of things and the origin of the world. They were preoccupied with the problem of the origin of things in the world. According to Stumpf, "Some original thinkers were driven by very specific puzzles, most notably, "what are things like?" and "how can we explain the process of change in things?"[4]

These Ionian thinkers came to realize that things are not always what they appear to be. They came to conclusion that appearance deceives and there is a huge difference between appearance and reality. However, it was Socrates who brought a turning point to the world of philosophy by putting up the injunction "Man, know thyself". From his time onwards, philosophy made a paradigm shift from the study of the world and the stars, to the study of the human person. For the Sophists, they were taken as the scribes of their time. They wrote extensively unlike Socrates who did not write anything. Among the Sophists are Protagoras, Georgias and Thrasymachus. According to Protagoras "Man is the measure of all things, of the things that are, that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not"[5]. Thus, according to Stumpf, Protagoras stresses the point that, "a person is the ultimate standard of all judgments that he or she makes. This means that whatever knowledge I might achieved about anything would be limited to my human capacities"[6]. Similarly, Protagoras maintains that human knowledge is relative. This is because each person perceives things differently depending on their different points of view. He says thus:

> If two people observe the same object, their sensations would be different, because each would occupy a different position in relation to it. Similarly, the same breeze blowing on two people would feel cool to one, while it would be warm to the other. Whether the breeze is or is not cold cannot be answered in a

> simple way. It is in fact cold for one person and warm for the other [7].

In spite of the fact that there is objective truth, Protagoras maintains that knowledge is quite relative depending on the disposition of the perceiver. From the fore going argument, Protagoras maintains that there is no objective knowledge since each person perceives a particular object differently depending on the person's point of view. Thus, for him, knowledge is relative to each person depending on the particular perspective from which each person observes the thing. From the idea of Protagoras the individual in the community will always have conflict of opinions with the entire community because he will always hold onto his personal belief as the only yard stick for judgment even in the issue of strong moral norms and customs of the community that he is bound to keep as a matter of communal interest which supersede the interests of any particular individual. In his theory of knowledge, however, Socrates argues, "that no unexamined idea is worth having any more that the unexamined life is worth living".[8] This means that every idea has to be examined in order to ascertain the truth in it. Every person should also try and make an introspective movement into one's self in order to assess one's mode of life. Socrates believes that,

> To know the good is to do the good, that knowledge is virtue. By identifying knowledge and virtue, Socrates meant also to say that vice, or evil is the absence of knowledge. Just as knowledge is a virtue, so too, vice is ignorance. The outcome of this line of reasoning was Socrates' conviction that no one ever indulge in vice or committed an evil act knowingly. Wrongdoing, he said, is always involuntary, being the product of ignorance.[9]

Socrates' idea that knowing the good is doing the good applies to life of the saints in heaven who would be ready to so whatever should be done and do it perfectly. In our human society, one finds out that there are some individual persons who know the good things to do but will not be able to do them. For instance, a sick person or someone who is bedridden would not be able to perform a good work. A lazy person or someone who is busy at a particular time may not be able to perform some good work due to lack of zeal or chance respectively. However, a crooked person may know the right thing to do but blatantly refuse to do it. Aristotle discussed the relationship between free choice and responsibility. According to him, the individual person exhibits two types of action; one is voluntary while the other is involuntary. The voluntary acts are premeditated and the individual is held accountable for them. The involuntary acts are beyond the control of the person who exhibits them. Thus, the person will not be held accountable for the moral implications involved. He argues:

> The principal distinction... between voluntary and involuntary acts is this. Involuntary acts are those

> for which a person is not responsible because they are: (1) done out of ignorance of particular circumstances. (2) done as a result of external compulsion, or (3) done to avoid a greater evil. Voluntary acts are those for which a person is responsible because none of these three extenuating circumstances take place.[10]

The voluntary acts mentioned by Aristotle refer to those free actions performed willingly by the individual person without external constraint. The involuntary acts refer to those actions which the individual members of the community perform almost out of compulsion for the good of the community. They are performed in order to maintain peace and unity in the community. In his theory on The State of Nature, Hobbes maintains that every person is equal, every person has equal right. No one can claim equality more than others.According to him, the word "right" in the state of nature means a person's freedom to do what he would and against whom he deems fit. He has the right to possess, use and enjoy all that he could lay hands on, irrespective of the owner. The driving force in the person is the will to survive. In the state of nature, everybody pursues whatever acts he thinks will secure his safety. The picture painted of the state of nature is that of people moving against each other like the bodies in motion or the anarchic condition which Hobbes called "the war of all against all".[11]The western philosophers especially the existentialists believe in communalism under discussion because they underscore the fact that our individual choices are in turn the choice of the entire community and that every person has to work hard for his own self-actualization in life.

2.2 African Philosophers' Conception of the Individual Person:

Many African philosophers have delved into the study of the individual person. Oguejiofor rather focusses his discussion on the individualism of the individual person. According to him, individualism generally speaking entails that identity is based primarily on the person with more emphasis on his rights within his community. The rights of the individual in the western society and his autonomy are provided and protected by the law in such a way that the law takes care of what the traditional society does for individual. This means according to him, that the rule of law helps the western societies to re-establish some of the claims of the traditional societies on the individual. Thus, by making and enforcing the rule of law, they protect the community from the unwholesome activities of the individual. The rule of law and the public institutions provide for the individual in the western societies that which the community does for the African.[12] According to Umeogu:

> Being is the nature of the Igbo individual and the Igbo community. But the being of the Igbo individual and the Igbo community has the typology of communalism. That is to say, that the reality of the Igbo being is a function of integrated

> essence of unique individual in a communalistic identity of belongingness.[13]

According to Umeogu both individual and his community enjoy being as their essential property with the typology of communalism. This means according to him, that the reality of Igbo being is the resultant effect of the integrated essence of unique individual with belongingness as their common identity. According to him, "it is a theory of corporate ontology that determines the life and being of individuals in a community".[14] According to Umeogu, in Igbo being, communalism plays the role of defining being as a reality common to both the individual and his community in such a way that neither the individual nor his community can claim more reality than the other.[15] According to Ogbujah, "man as a subsisting entity, is an individual. But he is an individual whose uniqueness and identity are to be exercised within the community."[16]Ogbujah underscores that man is a subsistent reality and *ipso facto*, an individual whose uniqueness and identity should be exercised within the community. According to him, scholars hold divergent views about the relationship between the individual and his community in African culture. While some insist that the individual person should be subordinate the community, others argue on the contrary that the individual should be free to live without any hindrance from the community. Iroegbu argues that in spite of the debate between the individualists and the communitarians, the obvious fact remains that each person has been inserted into the community of others which cannot but remains a self-evident truth. On the other hand too, he argues that there is no denial of the fact that each person enjoys some personal autonomy as an individual.[17]According to Onyibor, "the word individual literally means that which has an independent identity. Philosophically it means that which is not divisible without loss of identity. It is also inseparably linked with the concept of personality…"[18]
According to Okodo, "the individual finds himself inexorably connected to the community. He can only define himself in the context of the community".[19]These philosophers are very articulate in their efforts to explain the conception of individual person. This is quite in order because the individual person is at the center of the universe. The knowledge of the self, by the self helps the individual person to really understand his mission as a being created by God and in the image of God to create a positive impact in the world; maintain a proper equilibrium of the ecosystem.

2.3 Human Person as a Being with Others:
A human being is designated as an entity that lives with other human beings. This is how nature has made it to be. From the biblical point of view, God created the first man, Adam. He was alone. After some time God made Adam to fall into a deep sleep. When he was asleep, God took one of his ribs to form Eve, the woman and a wonderful companion to Adam. They had issues and from there formed the first ever recorded sense of communal living in life (cf Gen. 2:18, 21-23).Martin Heidegger discusses the human person as a Being with others when he says, "by others we do not mean everyone

else but me - those over against whom the "I" stands out. They are rather those from whom, for the most part, one does not distinguish oneself - those among whom one is too".[20] Heidegger demonstrates the fact that Being-with-others requires that everyone stands out distinctly amidst the group one is identified with. This is in line with his argument that every person should authenticate his existence by stepping aside from the crowd in order to actualize his goal in life. This stepping aside does not negate the fact that the person still belongs to the group he/she identifies with. The saying goes that no one is an Island. This means that no one person can stay alone in his world without others and be comfortable. This is the reason why God gave Adam a befitting companion, Eve, to make him a fulfilled human being. Heidegger avers that, "by reason of this *with-like (mithaften)* Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a *with-world (Mitwelt).* Being-in is *Being-with* Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* (Mitdasin)".[21]He argues that it is essentially in the character of Dasein - (Being) to be a Being-with others. According to him, no one can live alone in the world. God created the world and human beings in it even with other lower animals and living organisms. All of them inhabit the world. The world belongs to everybody. No one owns it. And no one can occupy it alone. It belongs to everybody. No one could afford to cut off from the rest of the world. Every person should be in constant communication with other fellow human beings. There should be interaction and intercommunication among the individuals that make up any particular community anywhere around the world. It is the natural gift of God to humanity and the entire God's creature. It has to be perpetuated.

Take for instance, the war between Russia and Ukraine. US and her other NATO allies have been placing economic sanctions upon Russia which includes cutting off ties with Russia in every way in order to cripple her economically and other wise. They chose to wage an economic war on Russia as a lesser option than a head on engagement that could trigger a 3rd World War. The reason behind all these is that they believe that no single country has it all. No single country could exist without the others. The bilateral relationships offer different countries the opportunity of bilateral trade in order to fill the gap in economy. Severing of ties with Russia is meant to stifle the Russian economy and bring them to their knees since it is believed that they cannot stand alone without assistance from other nations. On the other side of the bargain, the issue of communalism comes into play when NATO declared "a war on one is a war on all". That depicts their bonding unity as a region.

Here upon, the discussion focusses on the metaphysical person as a being with other persons also. As a matter of fact, the term person can be viewed from two perspectives: as a human person and as a non-human person. The human person refers to the human being we encounter in our everydayness. The human person is the human being fully alive, physically, with mind, body and soul intact. The Latin adage says, "*mens sana in corpore sano*"- human

being is that with a sound mind in a sound body. The human person is for Rene Descartes, the thinking being. Thus, he says, *"cogito ergo sum"*- I think therefore, I am". The human person is the conscious being which entertains the being of consciousness. The non-human person is a metaphysical person. A metaphysical person is not physical. The metaphysical person operates beyond the physical realm. The person cannot be seen with the visible eyes. The metaphysical person exists in the form of a spirit which remains invisible since it does not possess physical body like other existents. That is why some particular spiritual beings like deities might occupy a place and remain invisible to on lookers. Any person who comes around would say that the place is empty while in actual sense it is heavily occupied by some (invisible) beings. Metaphysical persons operate with astral bodies.

Hegel discussed the philosophy of spirit. According to him in his dialectic, "the thesis is subjective spirit, the antithesis is objective spirit, and the synthesis is Absolute Spirit".[22] According to him, the subjective spirit is the inner workings of the human mind while the objective spirit is the mind in its external embodiment in the social and political institutions. The apex is the Absolute Spirit which manifests in art, religion and philosophy. We gain the consciousness of the Absolute Spirit by a gradual movement from art to religion; and then to philosophy. Art appeals to human senses as it provides us with objects of the senses. Art leads us higher to religion. Religion concerns the human thought whereas art bother on sensual objects. Religion, according to Hegel, is closer to the Absolute because the Absolute is thought and religion concerns the human thought. Both religion and philosophy, according to Hegel, represent the same thing-knowledge which is eternal. This eternal knowledge is God.[23] One thing quite remarkable is that the three are in constant interaction among them. This takes effect as both the subjective and objective spirits reconcile themselves in the Absolute Spirit-God. The interaction is a holistic one.

Masolo citing Tempels toes the same line of thought when he says, "…there is a belief that all beings have or are forces; and that there is a constant interaction between them. This interaction is a passive existential property which unites all beings".[24]These spiritual beings interact among themselves. They also relate with the human beings and vice versa. Similarly, Ogugua argues that,

"in Igbo world view after God comes the spirits, divinities, founding fathers of the clan, the ancestors or the living dead, the kings, chiefs or rulers, the elders, etc. these entities along this chain form a mystical bond and connect the physical world to the spiritual."[25] According to him, "…forces at all levels tend to meet."[26]There is no gainsaying that these spiritual or metaphysical beings interact among themselves the same way the human beings interact also. The mutual interaction which exists among the human beings and the spiritual beings respectively; and between the human beings and the spiritual beings is ordained by God as a means of checks and balances within the eco-system. The interactions help to keep these physical and

spiritual beings in existence. For instance, during prayer human beings commune with the spiritual beings who are believed to be capable of helping us. Christians pray to God and revere the angels and saints. Traditionalists do the same thing through the intermediary beings like deities, spirits and so on. This is the idea behind the sacrifices which traditionalists make to deities and other spirits. Arinze articulates this in a succinct manner when he says, "the Igbo believes that his many desires can be obtained if he has the proper recourse to the ancestors, the spirits, or God…"[27]Many testify that their requests have been answered which shows that there is a clear interaction between these spiritual beings and human beings. The entire eco-system is in a mutual self-interaction. The question that comes our way now is, have you interacted with any person today? This leaves a lot to desire because the mutual interaction not only helps to balance the eco-system it also gives us a psychological relief. There is more gain to dialogue and mutual interaction than keeping to one self. Igbo maxim says that the spoken word is the mind let bare. The resume of the argument is that no one is an island. No person under normal circumstance could afford to isolate oneself from the rest because a person is a being with other beings in a mutual interaction in order to balance the equilibrium and maintain peace and tranquility within the universe. The following sub-heading focusses on the debate as to whether the individual person has freedom to do whatever he like even to the point of dissociating with his family and friends.

3.0 The Individual-Community Relationship: A Debate

Discussion here focuses on the problem of the freedom of the individual in the community. While some philosophers argue that individual freedom is non-negotiable, others insist that the community should take upper hand in everything; and that individuals in the community should bow to the dictates of the community. Okolo argues that:

> The seeming freedom which the individual enjoys is ultimately and in reality a derivative one, dependent on, and largely determined by, the other, that is to say, the community. Little or no room is left for initiative, spontaneity, responsibility, auto-decision, auto-determination, etc., which the individuals cherish as individuals and which are the hallmarks of true liberty and autonomy.[28]

According to Okolo, the personal freedom which the individual enjoys is being determined by the community to which the individual belongs. The community makes decision and initiates action for the members of the community. This does not go down too well with the individual member of the community because the community prevails over the affairs of the community that there is little or no room for spontaneity, personal initiative and individual's sense of responsibility which help the individual member to grow.Momo argues that the honest service and concern for the interest of others ought to be the basis and measure of

all actions and policies.[29] These philosophers are of the view that the individual's rights should not interfere in the communal decisions. Rather the community should dictate what the individual members should be doing. According to Onyebadi:

> What *Ohacracy* stands for, it seems to me aims at a total extinction of the individual identity. It generates individual-community crisis. The over exaggerated emphasis on *Oha* not only diminishes the value of the individual, it fails to take cognizance of the individual's potentialities and contribution to the development of the community *(Oha).*[30]

Onyebadi is of the view that *Ohacracy* aims at total annihilation of the individual identity which suppose not to be the case. Although Martin Heidegger insists that Dasein is a being with others and that "being-with" is the most essential characteristic of Dasein. He argues on the contrary that:

> The Self of everyday Dasein is the "they-self" which we distinguish from the authentic Self- that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way... As "they-self", the particular Dasein has been dispersed into the "they", and must first find itself.[31]

For Heidegger, Dasein lives an authentic life when it singles itself out from the "they-self" -that is, the crowd and stands out alone to actualize himself. Dasein's inauthenticity takes place when it hides in the "they-self" and it is shielded from the world by the crowd. According to him, the height of authentic living is attained at death, when man faces death; he faces the ultimate realization of himself. Similarly, Kierkegaard tows the same line of thought when he says, "a crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility…".[32]

Kierkegaard, in line with Heidegger and other existentialists, argue that the concept crowd is untrue because it renders the individual impenitent and irresponsible and at worst weakens his sense of responsibility. According to him, being in the crowd dilutes ourselves and also undoes our nature. These philosophers believe so much in the individual as a unique entity. They maintain that the individual must work hard in order to actualize himself and this self-actualization is an authentic existence. Anything that would clamp down on personal liberty or freedom of choice in the bid to seek the self-actualization must be removed.

On the other side of the debate are those who uphold that the community should have upper hand in the decision making in the community. Among them is Plato who argues that, "the guardians must be free not only from the temptation to acquire property, but free also from the temptation to prefer the advantages of one's family to those of the

state".[33] Plato's idea suggests his preference of the community over the individual members in matters of decision making in the community. Even Protagoras would argue that, "... the state makes the laws, and everyone should accept these laws because they are as good as any that can be made.[34] The same is applicable within the community where we live. On the other side of the debate are philosophers who insist that the individual freedom is non-negotiable.

3.1 Mediation by Philosophers:

Some philosophers try to mediate in the debate in order to square things up. Based on this, Ogbujah avers, "whatever may be the divergences of opinion, the individual in African communalism realizes that he cannot achieve his selfhood in isolation of the community. His personhood is inextricably bound by the determinations of his community"[35]Ogbujah believes that the individual in the community has the right or the freedom to work hard in order to actualize himself. Yet in trying to achieve that he has to bear in mind that he needs the community as a base in his pursuit of the target goals in life. In other words, he needs the community as much as the community also needs him. He puts it more succinctly when he says, "the personal life is the communal life and the communal life is the personal life".[36] Iroegbu also argues that:

> The individual cannot, because he wants to become something spectacular, destroy the peace, order and harmony that exist in the community. The communal good takes precedence over the individual good. This means that initiative, subjectivity etc., are within the ambience of social order. For if the community is destroyed, the individual is destroyed along with it.[37]

What Iroegbu said is echoed by Nze when he says, "although the individual is swallowed by the society in African communalism, he still enjoys his freedom and autonomy ..."[38]According to Onyibor, "the individual in this context only becomes real in his relationship with others in the community. He is identified with the community. But he is also a distinct person responsible for his actions".[39] These philosophers tried their best to mediate in the argument between the individual and the community. They agreed that the individual person enjoys his personal autonomy and freedom. These will help the person to work hard in order to actualize himself and achieve his set goals in life. In spite of that, they agree that the community should always take the upper hand because it is there before we were born and should be the umbrella that unifies all as one large family.

3.2 Is Communalism African?

The debate about the origin of communalism is spear headed by Oguejiofor when he enunciated the tripartite senses of considering communalism as a lived experience in Africa.

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In the first sense, communalism is African in the sense that it is being practiced in Africa but not in an exclusive manner. That is to say that although communalism is practiced in Africa, other communities around the world also possess the same quality. It is not exclusive to African continent. In the second sense, the system is exclusively African and any other place it is found, its origin is still traced back to Africa. The third sense is where it is taken as the defining characteristic of the Africans and without that; the fellow would not be taken as truly African. Oguejiofor rightly adopted the first sense as the most correct sense of the idea of communalism as it is in practice in Africa. According to him, communalism is African but it does not need to be exclusively so. This is because it is also found in the various communities in other continents.[40]

Apart from the origin of communalism another important issue is its sustainability in Africa especially in this modern age. This issue of sustainability in Africa is being discussed against the backdrop of individualism which seems to have taken hold of the Western society. If care is not taken, African continent may run the risk of experiencing a similar scenario in the near future. Prior to the revolution in science and technology in the 17th century, Europe and America use to have up to ten children in a family of one man and one wife. They stayed together to tell stories at night. They ate together on a round table. They shared a lot of things in common. With the revolution in science and technology things began to change for good. The entire society began to change. The introduction of radio, television, video, cell phone, internet, and so on, helped to widen the gap between brothers and sisters and among kinsmen and relatives, kith and kin and so on. Individualism began to creep in to the extent that when you visit a relative without prior information, he will accuse you of batching in on him. All these did not start in one day. They metamorphosed over time to what seems like absolute individualism. Similarly, if Africans do not take care to perpetuate communalism as adapted to our own culture, what happens in the Western society will eventually take its toll on us. Okodo affirms this when he says that, "a lot of factors are militating against the practice of communalism in Igbo land. These factors favour individualism as a result of which communalism is under fire".[41] It is not enough to assume that Africa is communalistic. All hands should be on deck to make it a lived experience in our everydayness. Otherwise, individualism is already springing up here and there today in our various societies beginning from the urban centers. What Oguejiofor said rings a bell that, "there are indications that this quality is not permanently ingrained in the nature of the African self since it can be nurtured and be lost and since it is described as a tendency which one acquires".[42] According to him, communalism is a way of life which Africans and other continents imbibed and nurtured over time. The aim of this life style is for interdependence whereby neighbours help themselves in solving their personal needs. And as time goes on, when the living condition improves, everybody goes his or her own way.[43] He maintains that, "Other changes are also taking place today,

changes that are gradually reshaping human relationship in African societies.[44]Oguejiofor enumerates some of the areas where the changes are very much felt. In the olden days, there were scarcities of lodging apartments for visitors on business trips. And besides that, the meager cash the person has for him to order for goods would not allow for such luxury. Thus, people resorted to squatting with relatives in spite of the discomfort. The availability of phone service in many African societies today makes it easy for people to communicate with their friends and relatives before paying them a visit. Nowadays, many people fence their houses unlike in the past. Many now live in tenement flats with more privacy and less communication with neighbours unlike in the past when what you had was a single room; mean while you have to share the toilet, bathroom, kitchen, water tap and so on, with co-tenants. The rich now live in ornate houses with fence and barbed wires, gate men and dogs. In such houses, it is difficult to get accommodation without prior information. Improvement in economy has helped to reduce the rate of interdependence among Africans and as well alters the ethos of interpersonal relationship. Thus, it is not correct to assume that communalism is essential to African nature because similar conditions as found in Africa would lead to similar attitude in societies outside Africa.[45]

3.3 The Benefits of Communal Living

There are lots of benefits which one derives by remaining a bonafide member of his community. There is no gain saying the benefits of living in unity as one community. The individual members of the community are always on transit. They come and go while the community as a geographical location and a social entity remains. The community is the base to welcome the incomers. That is why it provides a conducive atmosphere for the incomers to be able to find their footings in the society. The community provides on enabling environment which helps the new generations coming in to be able to work and actualize themselves within the short time they live on earth. When the community is not well organized to provide the new comers with the enabling condition to thrive, the individual members bear the blunt of this failed community. The community encapsulates all the members. It welcomes the new comers with great enthusiasm and a sense of regeneration since the presence of the new generations is a sign of life and hope for the future. In the same vein, the individual members utilize the opportunity of being together to help one another. In a well-organized African community there is a sense of mutual support which the members give to fellow members as a way of survival. The mutual support helps to bridge the gap in order to carry everybody along and move the community forward. Oguejiofor throws more light on this when he argues thus:

> All societies with comparatively low level technological development have also comparatively huge range of interdependence of the members. This should be seen primarily as an

> adaptive mechanism and its end is survival. In such societies that Durkheim describes as simply, mutual help is not only desirable but highly necessary for defense, for economic well-being, for smooth interpersonal relationship, etc. Due to these needs, a type of mutual dependence develops between members of the society, between one person and another.[46]

According to him, poverty and lack of technological development are what made the people to think of establishing a wide range of interdependence among the members as a way of survival. Whenever the economy improves for good, the members tend to go their separate ways. This is quite practical. An Igbo adage explains it well that people become friends first of all as peers but later on, the few ones who have made it financially re-group to form a more exclusive group of friends. By this time, he has cut off completely from those old peer friends and almost everything about the communal sharing and mutual support. Even the old peer friends would find it difficult to access him when they want to do so.

The community also provides the necessary protection to all the members. It helps to parry any external aggressions. It does not allow the individual members to fall prey to external enemies. Where there is a misunderstanding, the community wields into it to broker peace and restore normalcy. This is evident in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The member nations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been very proactive in their support to Ukraine in order to neutralize the assaults from Moscow. They are doing it base on the membership of the organization. In fact, the member nations made a treaty to remain united along the North Atlantic region solely for security purpose. The benefits can never be over emphasized.

4.0 Evaluation:

From the phenomenological perspective, a careful reading through the research would reveal that the article shades light on the individual person vis a vis his relationship with other members of the community. The individual person is the epicenter of the entire discourse. His story is told through out the work. The fact that the members are related predisposes them to form a community where everybody has a sense of belonging. The individual in all his endeavours is quite aware of his belonging to his own very community. He enjoys the freedom within the community as a bonafide member. The stranger does not enjoy such privileges.[47]The individual members of the community strive to achieve self-determination and self-actualization. The individual enjoys his personal freedom and liberty without unnecessary interference. However, there are certain occasions when he is supposed to make some sacrifices by giving up some of his rights freely in order to accommodate other members. When he does that it is for the good of the community, for common good.

4.1 Conclusion:

The African communal society fully recognizes this unique nature of the individual members of the community as well as their responsibilities as bona fide members of the community and their personal freedom. As responsible members, according to Socrates, that "to know the good is to do the good"[48]; they know the duties which they owe to their community and do them to the best of their abilities. By that fact they are responsible in attending to the needs of the community. As free beings also they enjoy their personal freedom without undue interference from any quarters. Yet in spite of their personal freedom, they are aware of the rare occasions when the urgent need of the entire community would demand from every member to sacrifice his personal freedom for the good of all. They do that without grudges since that is for a higher good, for common good. As they exercise their personal freedom also, they are aware of the limit of their own freedom which should not be allowed to encroach into the freedom of other members. What it means is that the inordinate ambition for absolute freedom does not arise at all because the individual members of the community are not only responsible but also they are aware that seeking absolute freedom would breed anarchy within the community.

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