

IDI BU IDI N' UWA: THE NEED FOR REAFFIRMATION OF COMMUNAL LIVING

Uchenna L. Ogbonnaya, Chinedu S. Ifeakor & Chima Eni Uduma*

Abstract

In contemporary Africa, there is a gradual shift from communalism to individualism. In this situation, people think about themselves above others. Individualism has led to social insecurity and instability as well as retarding development in Africa, since individuals do not pull their ideas, resources and strengths together for the common good of the society. They tend to foster their individual interests, even at the detriment of their society. This may not lead to development in Africa since individualism in a way tends to negate the well-being of the community. It is on this note that we call for a return to communalistic living in Africa. We do this, by alluding to the Igbo aphorism *idi, bu idi n' uwa* meaning 'to be, is to be in the world'. Our argument is that, if one sees him/herself as part of the community (*uwa*) of humans, he/she will seek to make the community and the individuals within it better. Using critical analysis and logical argumentation, we posit that communalism is a path to development in Africa.

Introduction

For some scholars, philosophy is a cultural discipline. The argument of these scholars is that every philosophy is a product of a culture (Omoregbe 2004: 1; Edet 2014: 626) and that the philosophy articulated or generated from such a culture influences and shapes the life-world of that culture (Tangwa 2004: 289). This makes philosophy and culture to be in a symbiotic relationship such that they are in a give and take relationship. In this relationship neither of the two is parasitic; rather, they are in a mutual complementary relationship. What can be gleaned from this is that it is the elements of a given culture that feeds or acts as raw data for philosophizing in that culture. And this philosophy is in turn meant to enrich and strengthen these cultural elements. Thus, every philosophy tradition has their origin in its background culture as well as inspires the ideology and life within that culture. Take for instance, Western philosophy tradition has its origin in Western culture and promotes as well enriches this culture through the philosophizing of its philosophers. If this is held to be the case, African philosophy, which is a young discipline is derived from African culture and must influence the prevalent ideologies of African culture, from which its philosophers cultivate and propagate their philosophical thoughts.

However, a critical study of African philosophy and philosophizing reveals that one of the leading ideologies that African philosophers and scholars believe holds sway in African culture is communalism. This ideology is believed to be the rock-bottom of African philosophy and philosophizing. Hence, African philosophy is expected to be a communalistic philosophy that should enhance communal life in

Africa. The problem now is; how true is this argument? Is communalism an African ideal that should also be the touchstone of African philosophy and philosophizing? Also, should African philosophy and philosophers as well as African philosophizers set up their philosophical thought on this ideal and see to it that it remains the prevalent thought for Africa? Or is communalism solely an Africa idea? These are the philosophical questions that have been troubling the minds of lots of African philosophers and scholars.

Some African philosophers and scholars have argued on a positive note that communalism is African and that African philosophy and philosophizing be rooted in it. And they have gone as far as doing this in their respective works (Placide Tempels 1959; John Mbiti 1957; Leopold Senghor 1956, 1964; Julius Nyerere 1962, 1964, 1968; Kwame Nkrumah 1970; Chukwudum Okolo 1993). This notwithstanding, J. Obi Oguejiofor is of the view that communalism is not solely and specially an African ideal. For him, communalism of various forms and shades exists outside Africa. Thus, he noted that it cannot be the defining feature of Africa and by extension African philosophy and life-view as well as worldview. The interesting aspect of Oguejiofor argument is his view that this ideology called communalism is no longer relevant for contemporary Africa. In his words:

even though communalism was of no doubt beneficial to Africans of yesteryears, there is no need to presume that it is still really beneficial to the Africans of today. Indeed, some of the fall-out of the system may be detrimental to the progress and well-being of the present-day Africa. (2007: 6)

Some scholars that follow this line of argument have noted that since communalism no longer has relevance for Africa today, it is high time Africans turn to individualism for Africa's redemption (Táíwò 2011; 2016; Bisong 2018).

This paper is birthed to argue on the contrary. Our thesis is that individualism as practiced in the West and present Africa cannot be the way forward for development in Africa. Thus, our position is that communalism is still very relevant to the development project in Africa. We will foster our argument using the Igbo aphorism *idi, bu idi n'uwa*. Inherent in this concept is the idea that anyone that is communalistic in orientation seeks the greater good of all who belong to the same world with him/her. Hence, such a person will do all within his/her reach to make life better and meaningful for all since it is through all that life is meaningful. We will engage some other Igbo concepts in the course of articulating our position. Therefore, these concepts will be unveiled alongside our key concepts such as communalism and *idi, bu idi n'uwa*. Thereafter, we shall examine communalism in Africa and some of the criticisms leveled against it. After doing this, we shall do a critic of individualism, which is seen as alternative to communalism for development in Africa. And finally we will make a case for communalism as one of the indispensable system for development in contemporary Africa, using our concept *idi bu idi n'uwa* as the foundation of our argument.

Unknotting of Concepts

Concepts on their own are knotted and veiled from those who seek to understand them. This, calls for any scholar or writer who seeks to use any concept to first and foremost unknot or unveil such concept. It is in unveiling this concept that readers come to comprehend better how the author employs the concept. This is done by the scholar as he/she gives meaning to the concept as used in the write up. Hence, in this paper, some of the concepts that we are going to engage will be clarified in this section to aid the readers understand what they are intended to convey and depict. We will start with communalism.

i. Communalism

The concept communalism has to do with community and takes its root in it. It is an ideology and value system that emphasizes the primacy of the community over the individual. This thought system sees the individual as nothing outside of the community. This is because it is in the community that the individual derive being and meaning. Hence, communalism emphasizes interdependence of people found within the human community. With this purview, communalism encourages cooperation and prevents unhealthy competition and rivalry among individuals. A. Wade Boykin gives an insightful understanding of this concept as he posits that communalism

denotes awareness of the interdependence of people. One's orientation is social rather than being directed towards objects. One acts in accordance with the notion that duty to one's social group is more important than individual privileges and rights. Sharing is promoted because it signifies the affirmation of social interconnectedness; self-centredness and individual greed are disdained. (1983: 345)

This conception of communalism is picked up and analyzed further by A. Wade Boykin, Robert J. Jaspers, Constance M. Ellison and Aretha Albury. And they note that the above understanding of communalism includes the following elements, namely:

(1) primacy of social existence, (2) sanctity of social bonds and relations, (3) transcendence of group deities and responsibilities over individual concerns, (4) anchoring of individual identity in the group, and (5) an emphasis on sharing and contributing in support of the group. (1997: 411)

This goes beyond the idea that communalism involves the common or collective ownership of properties and in particular land and other means of production. The concept encapsulates the fostering of harmonious and peaceful life within a community. It involves the people building a relationship with one another such that they live together, work together, feel together and arbitrate for one another (Ikegbu 2003: 31). This brings us to the level of "understanding and appreciating of communal life" (Ikegbu 2003: 31).

It pertinent to note that communalism is not restricted to a socio-political value such as democracy or socialism or communism, devoid of individualism and capitalism. Although communalism abhors extreme individualism and capitalism, it does not follow that they are not part of its being as many scholars tend to claim (Ikegbu 2003: 32). In a communalistic society people still strive as individual but for the common good of the society. Hence, the wealth acquired by individuals in a communal setting is used to foster the well-being of the community. This is due to the fact that humans are by nature social beings. And as social beings they tend to pull together and work together to make the society better and meaningful for their corporate existence.

ii. *Ezi n'ulo*

Ezi n'ulo is another concept that will be used to buttress the idea that we seek to address in this paper. Therefore, it is germane to clarify the manner in which this concept will be used. *Ezi n'ulo* as a concept can be said to be family in terms of nuclear or extended family. But in this paper we employ the term as both a family and a community. In the sense of a community, it involves an analysis of the concept *Ezi n'ulo*. This concept has two Igbo complementary words that give it its community meaning. These words are *Ezi* and *ulo*. *Ulo* meaning 'a homestead' and *Ezi* meaning 'the open space outside the homestead'. It is the open space of the compound and the house. This space is not just empty but is occupied by other *ulo* or homesteads. Hence, a community is a collection of *ulo* in the context of *Ezi n'ulo*. It is also worthy of note that *ulo* consists of individuals such as *nna* [father], *nne* [mother] and *nwa* [child or children] (Ogbonnaya, 2017). It is the collection of members of the *ulo* in the *Ezi n'ulo* that forms the community.

iii. *Idi, bu idi n'uwa*

The concept *Idi, bu idi n'uwa* is derived from two Igbo key words, namely, *idi* and *uwa*. The Igbo word *idi* means *to be* or 'to exist'. It is to be in existence or to possess existence. *Idi* or existence is that which being possesses and exhibits. The other word is *uwa*. *Uwa* is an Igbo word which literally translates as world. It is the place where being or beings take their existence. It is the abode of beings. This gives birth to the concept or expression *idi, bu idi n'uwa* meaning 'to be, is to be in the world' or 'to be, is to belong to the world'.

iv. *Njikota*

Njikota is an Igbo word which is very significant to the task set before us in this paper. The word means to pull together. It is to pull together individuals common resources in order to enhance the well-being of the group; in this way the individual's well-being is in turn, enhanced.

v. *Nmekota*

Nmekota is another Igbo word that will feature prominently in this paper as we discuss on the need for communal living in contemporary Africa. *Nmekota* means to work together. It is to work in unity. It is to work in harmony but not in unison. Here, everyone works according to the person's ability and giftedness to foster the

well-being of the community. This is what is meant by complementarity. Thus, *nmekota* means complementarity.

vi. *Nnokota*

Nnokota means to live together. It is to congregate as one or a unit. It is the coming together of individuals from different *ulo, ezi*, villages, ethnic group to co-exist as an indivisible unity. Put simply, *nnokota* means to co-exist. The idea of *Nnokota* as used here is at the very foundation of communalism. If people do not have peaceful co-existence, communalism will be a mirage – an unrealizable dream or ideology.

Communalism in Africa and Some Criticisms Against it

The ideology called communalism is held to be an integral part of pristine African society/ies such that many African scholars see it as restrictively African. They see it is that which carries African stamp of identity and originality or trademark to the exclusion of other people or places (Ikegbu 2003: 34). But there are some African scholars that hold a contrary opinion to this view. A good example is J. Obi Oguejiofor who have argued that the question of the interconnectedness and interrelatedness of Africa and communalism can be addressed and seen from three distinct ways: first is the inclusive sense wherein the africanity of communalism does not exclude other cultures and people from this ideal; the second is the exclusive sense, which holds that the africanity of communalism excludes other cultures and peoples from communalism [that is to say, it is solely and specially African and even if found elsewhere its origin must be African and nowhere else]; the third is the essential sense, and it holds that communalism is essential to the being of Africa [that is to say it the defining mark of Africa; it is that ideal that distinguishes Africa from other places] (2007: 5). He goes on to note that the Africanity of communalism can only be talked about from the first sense. We do agree with Oguejiofor on this, and therefore refrain from talking about ‘African communalism’ as if there is an African version to every concept. Hence, we, throughout this paper, employ ‘communalism in Africa’ in its place.

Trailing the above conclusion, it is germane to have an overview of communalism in Africa. Communalism is hardly being practiced in contemporary Africa, hence when we talk about communalism in Africa we are talking about communalism in pristine Africa. In the practice of communalism in traditional Africa society there was egalitarianism. In such egalitarian society every individual was given his/her due, such that classism appears not to exist. This does not imply that there was no stratification of any form. There is minimal level of stratification of the human society, but not in such a way that some will have any peculiar advantage or edge to lord it over others. This egalitarian setting abhors inequality by denying individuals the right to private ownership of land, which was the primary means of production. Substantiating the egalitarian nature of communalism in Africa, Andrew Uduigwomen writes:

There was no granting of special privileges to people by virtue of birth, sex, race, wealth, position or class. Every member was accorded an equal opportunity to enjoy his material, social and cultural benefits ultimately aiming at the ideal injunction from each according to his ability, to each according to his need. (2002: 28)

If following the concluding remark of the above quotation, it can be misread that communalism in Africa is the same as communism, wherein the means of production is owned and controlled by the community or state. But this is not the case in communalism. While in communism the state controls the distribution of resources, in communalism individuals have right to own means of production as well as distribute resources to other members of their society according to their needs and according to the person's available resources.

Communalism, from the political angle, is believed to be equal to democracy. It is a traditional form of democracy that bestows power on the community over the individual. In this way, it prevented any form of dictatorship as seen today in most African communities and nations. Decision-making in traditional African societies was by consensus hence it is called 'consensus democracy' (Ruch and Anyanwu 1984: 304-323; Wiredu 1996: 182-190). This also involved consultation of all stakeholders in the community. This is indeed an inclusive democracy. But it has been argued by some African scholars that it does not involve individualism and capitalism, since it condemned them. What is real is that, communalism in traditional African society encapsulated and encouraged moderated individualism and capitalism. In the aspect of individualism, individual rights were not denied. They were moderated and protected for the good of all and the community. This was where each individual has right over whatever he/she produces and who to give it to, contrary to the situation in communism where the community or state takes responsibility for this. If this was the case, traditional African societies could have been filled with many lazy persons [the reason is that they believe that whether they work or not they will be taken care of by the society] (Ikegbu 2003: 44) and very few industrious individuals. But in this society every individual was industrious and contributed effectively for the efficiency of the society. Also, even in traditional African societies any individual who could acquire any means of production exception of land was not denied it. This depicts controlled capitalism of a sort.

Another criticism that has been raised against communalism is that the view that the means of production is owned by the community/society leads to carelessness. In this context, no one cares about what is a community's property. Unlike in a case where individuals own everything they take good care of them. The fact is that in traditional African society, every other means of production or properties were owned by individuals apart from land. Even at that, land which was the common property of all was well taken care of by all. This is apparent with the land fallow and farmland rotation farming systems in traditional African society.

These practices allow farmlands to regain and replenish their lost nutrient of the previous year of cultivation. Thus, the argument that communal ownership of properties leads to lack of care does not hold water. Oguejiofor has argued that communalism promotes communal sentiment which is at the very foundation of many of the contemporary social issues in Africa, such as, ethnic or tribal hegemony of power over other ethnic groups (2007: 20-21). This, according to Oguejiofor, promotes politics of ethnic inclination against the politics of idea and vision. This is what Asouzu calls the super-maxim – “the nearer, the safer the better” (Asouzu 2007). This is a psychological state where people tend to band together in a psychological tribal enclave (Oguejiofor 2007: 20). This depicts ethnocentrism, the elevation of the interest of one’s ethnic group above those of other ethnic groups. He, furthermore, notes the defects of communalism in contemporary Africa thus: “Communist tendencies in modern Africa sometimes furnishes the background for the enthronement of sectionalism, neglect of excellence, cult of mediocrity, nepotism, etc., all factors that together reverse the hand of clock of development in Africa” (Oguejiofor 2007: 20). What this comes to is that communalism in contemporary Africa is the key hindrance to development in Africa. Peter Bisong captures this better as he asserts that

After the critic of the idea of communalism in Africa, most of the scholars of African scholarship argue for an alternative – individualism. They assert that individualism is the way forward for Africa (Taiwo 2011: xxv; 2016: 81; Oguejiofor 2007: 5; Bisong 2018: 1). Their reason is that the days of practice of communalism in Africa is over since there is a paradigm shift in thought and social life in Africa. For instance, they posit that communalism was relevant to traditional Africa because of the dominant lifestyle, which was centred on land as the means of product; but today there is radical shift into other means of income and livelihood. There is also a move away from rural to urban and metropolitan dwelling. These shifts, according to these scholars that advocate for individualism, mark the end of communalism since it is no longer relevant and cannot serve contemporary Africa that is becoming more complex and sophisticated than traditional Africa. The questions that come with this position are: Is it possible for individualism to bring Africa to the state of being termed developed? Is communalism still practiced in Africa today?

It is germane to assert here that when once the second question is answered, the first question becomes clearer. Thus, we will first consider the second question. Scholars such as Oguejiofor and Taiwo have noted categorically that, not only is the days of communalism over in Africa, but that there is the reality of individualism that is gradually taking a firm grip in contemporary Africa (Oguejiofor 2007: 20; Taiwo 2016: 95). This implies that communalism is no longer in practice in Africa today. This is due to the sophisticated nature of this society that it can no longer handle. What this implies is that individualism is what is literally in practice in contemporary Africa. If this is the case, why should Taiwo, Oguejiofor and Bisong argue that the main cause underdevelopment in contemporary Africa is communalism? Their accusation against communalism is

false and unrealistic. What they are trying to do is to give communalism a bad name in order to discredit it as a relevant ideological tool for development in Africa. If it is factual that “individualism is increasing today in Africa” (Oguejiofor 2007: 20), it therefore follows that individualism is the problems of lack of development in Africa today. This is what we shall take to task in the next section.

Against Individualism in Africa

What then is individualism? Individualism is an ideology that holds that the individual and the individual's interest count above that of the community. It is that which places the individual above the community. Trailing this understanding of individualism, we can say that the problem of development in Africa is dependent on individualism. It is germane to note that individualism does not come without community existence, but it places premium on the individual rather than the community. The kind of society that individualism is associated with is what Senghor terms “*assembly of individuals*” (1964: 93) and Taiwo calls “*Assembly Society*” (2016: 89). Describing the relationship in this society, Taiwo writes:

We may understand an “assembly society” as one in which being together, by itself, is not salient: each is independent of and primarily unconnected to/with the other. Each does her thing, as it were, as she sees fit and the main motivation for acting is the advancement of self-interest and whatever solidarity may subsist will be contrived, not immanent... Yes, there often is community among members of an “assembly society” but it is no more than an occasional convergence of interests undergirded by negotiation among its autonomous members. (2007: 89)

Considering the above understanding of individualism, it can be said that the individual is paramount in the society such that the society counts as nothing. In this scenario, there is room for egocentrism. The individual becomes so egoistic such that s/he has no regard for the society and other members of the society. The individual is self-gratifying and pays no attention to others. This conception of individualism leads to extreme, non-moderated capitalism, where money rules as king and superior in the society (Taiwo 2007: 91). Here, other members of the society are considered to be inconsequential to the individual and where the individual own the means of production and money, the individual treats them as third class citizens. It also breeds unhealthy competition among members of the society which leads to strained relationship among them. This kind of relationship of open rivalry cannot lead to development that the proponents of individualism subscribe for Africa.

Moreso, anyone who has an individualistic mindset does not think about the community or others and will do anything even against the good will and well-being of others in order to achieve his/her goal. All the individual does is solely for his/her good and will make use of or exploit others to achieve his/her objective. And where s/he attempts to think beyond his/her good, it lands on his family and then the immediate community or ethnic group. The nation or other human races

might never benefit from his/her industry or achievement since it is primarily for his/her good. Taiwo gives a detailed summary of the disadvantages or negative sides off individualism thus:

under individualism, individuals are ravaged by loneliness, mutual hostility, lack of other-regarding concern, excessive pursuit of individual fulfillment even at the expense of the community and, in the twilight of their lives, such individuals are herded into old people's homes where they are at the mercy of stranger caretaker who abuse them or, at a minimum, fail to extend to them the kind of loving tenderness that would have been theirs in a communalist-oriented social setting. (2011: 42)

If the above quotation is true, we wonder why Taiwo will confidently recommend individualism as an alternative to communalism for the development and modernity of Africa. We believe that Taiwo and other advocates of individualism are misunderstanding communalism and individualism. In this paper, while we may not be saying that individualism is totally out of the picture for Africa development, we are of the view that communalism is the most viable ideology for development and progress in Africa. Our argument is that like communalism that has been criticized to be outdated for Africa today, individualism is not what Africa needs for it to come to be termed developed or modern. In the next section, we aim at justifying our position.

Idi, bu Idi n' Uwa as the Basis for Re-communalizing Africa

To argue out our position, it is pertinent to note the various forms of communalism as asserted by Taiwo. Taiwo notes that there are four forms of communalism, namely, ontological communalism, methodological communalism, axiological communalism and epistemological communalism (2016: 82-83). Ontological communalism is concerned with how humans are in the world as well as how they relate with one another just as beings relate in communalistic ontological frame. Here, humans are thought to exist in community in the same vein as beings. Methodological communalism is the explanatory model of how beings ought to exist and relate in the community. And axiological communalism focuses on the function of humans within the community. It provides the yardstick of each human being's behaviour and worth in the world. The last, epistemological communalism promotes the thesis of communal wisdom vested on old age. This makes the elders of the community the custodian and embodiment of the wisdom of the people – community. This fourth form of communalism will not be employed in this discourse because it is irrelevant to the focus of this paper. But the first three forms will be strongly employed to substantiate our argument. Shortly, we will show that the concept *idi, bu idi n' uwa* is both an ontology and methodology that promotes and supports communalistic thinking and living.

The concept *idi, bu idi n' uwa* as stated earlier means 'to be is to be in the world'. This aphorism carries the connotation that nothing exists except it exists in the

world. And to be in the world is not to be alone; it is to be with others. The rationale is that the world is not an entity where a being exists alone. They always exist as and in community. Here, the community is the *uwa* – the world. What this depicts is that being exists with others in a communalistic relationship. This communalistic relationship points to the fact that beings co-exist. This has been captured by an ontological theory put forward by L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya. This theory is called *ezi n' ulo* ontology. Ogbonnaya makes it glaring that just as individuals within a homestead – *ulo* and an environment – *ezi* co-exist, this is how beings co-exist. He also notes that this ontological theory depicts communalistic living and advocates communalism among beings. This *ezi n' ulo* ontology is the ontological base of our *idi, bu idi n' uwa*, which is employed as a methodology of explaining human relationship in the community.

However, it is grand to assert here that Ogbonnaya is not the only African philosopher who has canvassed for an ontology that is communalistic. This kind of communalistic ontological theory has been articulated by other African philosophers such as Pantaleon Iroegbu and Innocent Asouzu in their *Uwa* ontology (1995) and *Ibuanyidanda* ontology (2007) respectively. Iroegbu, Asouzu and Ogbonnaya, all of the Igbo extraction, deduced their ontology from their Igbo culture but articulated their theories as their individual ontology, and not a community owned ontology or thought. This is where they are distinct from other African philosophers who see ontology as African ontology or ethnic or regional ontology, such as Akan ontology, Bantu ontology, Igbo ontology, etc (Tempels 1959; Okolo 1993; Ijiomah 2000, 2006, 2014, 2016; Ramose 2002; Chimakonam 2012; Ogugua and Ogugua 2015).

The theory of being postulated as African ontology, which is a group ontology, which Ogbonnaya christens 'ethno-ontology' – communal ontology or community owned ontology is nothing but communalistic ontology. This communalistic ontology holds that beings or realities are interconnected, interdependent and interrelated to one another. The connectedness and relatedness of beings is made possible through what Tempels calls 'vital force' (Tempels 1959: 41; Ikenga-Metuh 1987: 75-79). It is this force that binds beings together in the world as a community. This communal and relational conception of being is encapsulated in Ogbonnaya's *ezi n' ulo* ontology. He sees his ontology as relational since all beings are somehow connected to each other either as a family (nuclear or extended family) or as co-existing realities within a common environment (neighbourhood) – the world. This is why we assert: *idi, bu idi n' uwa*. What we assert is that if any being must exist, it must exist in the world – the common abode of all realities. To be with other realities is to be in a community and this is due to the need for co-existence and interdependence of beings.

Ogbonnaya gives a further explanation of his ontology by developing some principles to guide it. These principles include: the principles of *nmekota*, *njikota*, *mbikota* and *nnokota*. The principle of *nmekota* holds that beings are relational inasmuch as they work complementarily with each other; while the principle of

njikota asserts that beings are relational in as much as they pull their resources and strengths together for the common good of the community in which they exist; also the principle of *mbikota* posits that the relatedness of beings has to do with their living together first within their immediate abode; and then the principle of *nnokota* avers that the relatedness of beings is tied to their co-existing with other beings not only within their immediate abode (as conceived in *mbikota*) but with other beings beyond their immediate environment. This relational ontology that is communalistic in nature lies at the base of, as well as promotes, communalism. It is this ontology that informs *idi, bu idi n' uwa* which is communal. This aphorism holds that beings must be communal for them to be meaningful. In the same light humans must be communal in order to be meaningful. It is in their communal living that they become persons. That is to say, personhood is acquired in/through the community (Menkiti 1984: 328, 350; 2004). This is through the individual's meaningful contribution to the society. The advancement, development, growth and progress of any community/society are dependent on its members. Those who realize that their being and person can be actualized through the community or other members of the community seek to do all they can to make the society and its members better. At this point, no individual seeks to voluntarily depend on another for his/her well-being. For this will result to laziness as some scholars have criticized communalism to breed among members of the community (Ikegbu 2003: 44; Bisong 2018: 7). The fact is that everyone works complementarily with each other in order to see to it that none is lacking or is in any kind of need (*nmakota*). In doing this they pull their resources together for the good of all members of the community and the community itself (*njikota*). These two principles of *idi, bu idi n' uwa* lead to individual industry within the community. This does not involve the promotion of the individual's interest as the 'assembly society' depicts; but rather it is after the interests of others.

The thought above shows that communalism entails mutual service to one another with the purpose of making the community better and livable. Thus, the act of *nnekota* and *njikota* are foundational to the idea of *idi, bu idi n' uwa*. And to be in the world (*idi n' uwa*) entails to exist with others as one. This is what is brought out in the principles of *mbikota* and *nnokota*. It should be noted that although *mbikota* and *nnokota* literally translate as 'to live together', Ogbonnaya has employed them as living together at different levels of the community of beings. *Mbikota* involves living together within one's immediate environment – the family [nuclear and extended], clan and tribe (Nyerere 1964; 1968: 292; Nwoko 1985: 71-72), while *nnokota* connotes living together at a larger scale of existence. This includes living with members of other languages, tribes, races, colour, etc. But Ogbonnaya makes it categorical that one cannot attend the level of *nnokota* without practicing *mbikota*. Unless one has been able to live peacefully with members of his immediately community the individual cannot live peacefully with individuals from other distant communities. This is the basic problem that comes with individualism – one with an individual mindset seeks his/her well-being first. In this scenario, members of the individual's immediate environment hardly benefit from him/her, talk less of those far from him/her. If at all the individual

wishes to extend his/her good will to others, it will go first to members of his/her family then, his/her kindred, clan tribe and it will hardly reach outsiders. But one with a communal mindset can easily extend his/her good will to outsiders beyond his/her immediate environment. This communalist individual finds it easier to identify with a larger society even beyond the human society to the non-human society, which includes animals, plants and other natural beings in the world (Tangwa 2004: 389). This kind of communalistic thinking is what can foster a holistic development since it promotes interdependence and peaceful co-existence of all realities in the world.

There are some criticisms that can be raised against this communalistic path to development in Africa. One is that the idea of *idi n' uwa* is also inherent in individualism. So, one cannot talk about an individual as not in the context of *uwa*. Yes! It is true that an individual who is individualistic is also in *uwa* and exhibits his/her individualistic tendencies in it. But the difference lies in the fact the individual in this context is self-centred and is oriented not to the community or any other individual. This is contrary in the context of communalism. In communalism, the individual places the community and others ahead of self. Thus, the service here is a selfless one. Going by this, it is not true that communalism could lead to ethnocentrism in contemporary political leadership. The accusation of anti-communalist is that it makes the individual to amass wealth for his/her immediate family, kindred or community or tribe. We do not believe that this ethnocentric tendency can easily be manifested by one who has the communalistic orientation earlier in life. Our thinking is that one who has always have this community-centred orientation will also seek national, continental and global interest if given the opportunity to lead within the political sphere at any of these levels.

Another criticism is that it retards development in science and technology. But is it true that communalism does not breed ingenuity in science and technology in Africa? For us, communalism is the very foundation for creativity and ingenuity in the area of science and technology. Every scientific and technological discovery and invention is borne out of necessity. One is moved to invent or seek solution for a problem when once such an individual encounters such a challenge among members of his/her society, whether as family, kindred, clan, nation, continent or the globe in entirety. Immediate one encounters any challenge among humans and the community of beings the person is moved by impulse to invent or proffer solution to the challenge, even when him/herself or his/her immediate community is not affected directly or indirectly. This communalist individual acts like this because he/she is after the places premium on making the community (the world – *uwa*) a better place for all. This is the kind of picture that Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere seek to show in their idea that there is a movement in a communalized individual's good from the family to the kindred, clan, tribe, nation, continent and then the globe. What this entails is that communalism leads to 'a world community' (Makumba 2007: 142).

Conclusion

What has been done in this paper is to examine what communalism is within traditional African society. The view of this paper is that communalism is an ideology that was found not only in pristine African society, it is also found in other societies outside Africa. We have also examined communalism and some of the criticisms that have been raised against argued it. We pointed out that although some African scholars have argued against communalism as an ideology for development in Africa and advocate for individualism as an alternative to this failing communalism. Contrary to this position, we also noted that individualism cannot be the way forward for development in Africa. The reason is that individualism has a lot of criticisms that render it useless as a viable ideology for the development of Africa. Using the concept of *idi bu idi n'uwa* anchored on Ogbonnaya's *ezin'ulo* ontology, we argued that "the meaning of life is hidden within the dialectic of the collective or the community. With such a conception, the meaning of an individual's life is found in and through his relationship with the Other or Others" (Nkemnkia 1999: 111) and that the African society could become a better continent through communal living.

***Uchenna L. Ogbonnaya**

The Conversational School of Philosophy
Calabar Circle
Email: revluckyuogb@gmail.com

***Chinedu S. Ifeakor**

Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
[Email: cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng](mailto:cs.ifeakor@unizik.edu.ng)

***Chima Eni Uduma**

Department of Philosophy
University of Calabar
Calabar-Nigeria
Email: eniudumachima@gmail.com

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