

**REASONABILITY AS A STANDARD FOR ASSESSING THE
AUTHENTICITY OF COMMUNALISM AS AFRICAN NATURE**

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DOI: [10.13140/RG.2.2.14922.03528](https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14922.03528)

Abstract

This paper examines the basic presupposition in African philosophy that communitarian life is intrinsic to Africans. Most contemporary African philosophers have held tenaciously for long that communalism is a distinctive African mode of being and is aimed at human welfare and the common good. The frameworks of African communalism they have advanced and propagated find expression in communal values such as love, kindness, sharing, altruism, tolerance, complementarity, harmony, solidarity, integrity, and justice. However, the character (nature) of some African beings in a chain of interlinking forces as well as some circumstances (structures – laws, conventions, standards, protocol, and institutions – and socio-cultural pressures and practices) are not consistent with the essence of African communalism in terms of radii of reasonability (consistency-beneficence) manifested therein. We expose some particularistic religious ethics and ideologies that play out in indigenous African religious and socio-cultural practices, and argue that such ethics and ideologies are devoid of reasonability and thus are not universalizable. We demonstrate that traditional African society has some strains of universalistic and reasonabilistic philosophy and ethics, at least in principle, which should be leveraged on to develop authentic African communalism in practice. Finally, we posit that this can be achieved through signification-concretization processes.

Keywords: Reasonability, African communalism, African agents, African circumstances, religious ethics and ideologies

Introduction

Communalism is widely held as the specific and intrinsic nature of traditional African society. Many socio-political, ethical, epistemic and ontological frameworks and viewpoints have been developed and propagated by African philosophers and other scholars as good showcases for rich and authentic African culture and tradition, and as responses to unfair denigration of African by the West in the past as a granary of ignorance and a 'dark' continent bereft of its own history, culture, and self-defining memories (Achebe, 1988). African communalism connotes a sense of community or brotherhood characterized by communion (or collectivity), harmony, solidarity and complementarity.

Nyerere (1964) claims that the idea of brotherhood (or familyhood) which he enunciates in his brand of African socialism transcends kinship ties (or, in a wider sense, community bound by blood and religion) and extends to the entire African society and humanity is general, and is aimed at promoting human well-being and attaining self-fulfillment. For Senghor (1965), traditional African society is socialist and communitarian in character and individual member of the society is made for the purpose of communal life, as he "dies to himself in order to be reborn in the Other. He does not assimilate, he is assimilated" (1965. p. 32). What an altruistic attitude!

Despite claims that African communalism transcends the ties of kinship and has universal appeal and thus is designed for human welfare and the common good, the practicalities of African communalism reveal that traditional African religious ideologies and ethics, metaphysical/ontological outlook and their associated socio-cultural practices are more particularistic, discriminatory and voluntaristic in nature. Such practices impugn the veracity of universalizability and reasonability of African communalistic and religious ethics in practice and make mockery of the claim that African communalism is aimed at human flourishing and welfare. Against this background, this essay evaluates the authenticity of African communalism based on rationally appealing and universalizable principle of reasonability.

In this essay, Igbo communities, structures and institutions will mostly serve as reference points for our interrogation of the authenticity of African communalism, and will furnish us with some religious philosophies and ethics and their associated religious and socio-cultural practices from which we will make some generalizations with regard to demonstrable common features in African thought systems and religious and socio-cultural practices. This

approach is predicated on three grounds: 1. Igbo has a robust institution or body called *umunna* that captures the traditional African concept of brotherhood and community, just like *ujamaa* and *ubuntu*. *Umunna* is a repository of Igbo philosophy (world-view/ideology) and its associated religious and socio-cultural practices and so it is in the matrix of *umunna* that one can grasp the dynamics of indigenous Africans in their communal life in respect of their relationships with in-group and out-group members. 2. Communal life in Igbo traditional society typifies the sort of communalism many contemporary African scholars propagate as being essentially African. 3. A great deal of Igbo words, aphorisms, ethical precepts and injunctions, socio-cultural and religious ideologies have variously been employed by many contemporary African scholars to frame African philosophy and religion rooted in communalism.

The rest of this essay will first explicate reasonability as a standard for evaluating the authenticity of communalism as African nature. Second, it will discuss some frameworks and principles of African communalism. Third, it will expose some contradictions in indigenous African religious ideologies and communalistic ethics and their associated religious and socio-cultural practices and their implications in contemporary Africa. Finally, it will show that traditional Africans have some strains of universalistic and reasonabilistic ideologies and ethics and posit that such universally and rationally appealing ideologies and ethics should be concretized in social structures, institutions and socio-cultural practices through signification-concretization processes.

Understanding Reasonability

The term 'reasonability' is employed in this study to denote the principle of consistency-beneficence as well as its applications and manifestations. Consistency indicates the absence of a logical contradiction. A set of statements, beliefs or ideas is said to be logically consistent when it involves no logical contradiction. Put differently, it is logically consistent if all members of the set can be true simultaneously. But it is logically inconsistent if they cannot all be true at the same time. For instance, a set of statements "Aristotle was a philosopher" and "Aristotle was not a philosopher" is logically inconsistent since it explicitly asserts something and at the same time negates (or denies) what is asserted. Inconsistency may manifest in the form of an implicit contradiction as in a case where a set of statement logically implies a certain statement and its denial at the same time. For example, "Obama is married to Michelle, but Michelle is not married to Obama." The principle of consistency is undergirded

by a fundamental law of thought known as the law of non-contradiction which states that a statement and its denial (or negation) cannot both be true together, for every such a set of statements is self-contradictory (Copi, Cohen, & McMahon, 2011). The principle of consistency (reason in itself) underlies all (conceivable) reality and is conversely a key constitution of reality (Agbakoba, 2019).

Benevolence embodies other-regarding dispositions, emotions, attitudes and actions such as love, empathy, altruism, benevolence, care, concern, compassion, kindness, tolerance, fairness, solidarity, patience, hospitality, and consideration for others. In the realm of intersubjectivity, benevolence is aimed at enhancing the well-being of others and advancing their legitimate aspirations, interests and needs for the attainment of *eudaimonia* (happiness) and self-fulfillment. To achieve this, the spread of such benevolence must be compatible with the being of reason (principle of consistency), otherwise it becomes counterproductive and self-destructive. The major challenge of spreading benevolence in interpersonal relationships is how to keep it within limit positively for the common good, thus reasonability becomes essential.

Reasonability is a coalescence of consistency and benevolence (consistency-benevolence) in a manner that one does not negate the other. Tolerance (a constituent of benevolence) contradicts reason when, for instance, a person or persons tolerate unruly and deviant behaviour in a community to the extent that it threatens a harmonious and peaceful co-existence of the members of the community; conversely, reason negates benevolence when, for instance, a person oppresses his subordinates in a bid to impress and please his cruel boss for personal aggrandizement. Consistency and benevolence are two sides of the same coin (reasonability as reality) and so one should not negate the other. There is reasonability when the spread of benevolence is grounded in reason and the exercise of reason accommodates benevolence that is consonant with its being.

Therefore, in the integrative system of reasonability, we are concerned not with negative and less rationalistic *conatus* (such as drives, impulses, attitudes and other related affectivities), but rather with ontological benevolence that is, other-regarding dispositions, attitudes and acts that support, or are compatible with, the being of rationality. Rationality that is devoid of ontological benevolence amounts to callousness and insensitivity (inhumanity). The harmonious blend of reason and ontological benevolence makes reason transcendental and environmentally sensitive. Consistency-benevolence (reasonability) governs

reality. It is rationalistic and universalistic since reason is of central importance in its composition and thus it promotes well-being and human flourishing (Agbakoba, 2019). It sharply contrasts with apathy-inconsistency which is irrational, insensible, insensitive, particularistic and voluntaristic due to the absence of reason in its composition and thus engenders chaos, disorder, man-made sufferings and other predicaments, impoverishment and underdevelopment (Agbakoba, 2019). Reasonability helps to achieve a balance between beneficence and reason so that the pursuit of one's goal of self-fulfillment does not hamper (or frustrate) the other's attempt at self-realization.

African Communalism: Frameworks and Principles

African communalism is founded upon communal life believed to be inherent in pristine African society. Its practice can be traced to the moment Africans grouped themselves into communities initially which dates back to the pre-colonial era. It enunciates the values of togetherness, cooperation, solidarity, harmony, reciprocity, caring, sharing, love, empathy, altruism, generosity, goodness, kindness, fairness, honesty, hard work, peace, contentment, genuine concern for one's neighbours, and so forth. It claims that communal relationships are intrinsic nature of indigenous Africans (both the living and the dead) that form the chain of interactions, and that socio-cultural, political, economic and religious life of traditional Africans is marked by collectivity, complementarity and shared personality. African communalism, which finds expression in the life of togetherness and sharing, marks traditional African society off from that of the West characterized by individualism.

Nyerere (1964) develops the idea of African communalism in his socialism founded on a socialist ideology known as *ujamaa* – a Swahili word that literally translates as 'familyhood' (or 'brotherhood'). His concept of 'familyhood' goes beyond the ties of kinship or *umunna* (literally translates as father's children; it connotes brotherhood or a community that is bound by blood and religion) to include the whole of Africa and humanity at large. Socialism, for him, is a distinctive character of traditional African society and is simply an attitude of the mind that consists in altruistic view of wealth, and is designed for the enhancement of human well-being and achievement of human progress (Okolo, 1993; Oguejiofor, 2004). In traditional African society, each member had an access to the means of acquiring wealth, mainly land, and acquisition of wealth was meant for the good of a community and thus every member of the community was mutually helpful, contributing in the production of goods that were

collectively owned (Nyerere, 1964). An individual member or family of the community being poor or rich was dependent on whether the entire community was poor or rich (Nyerere, 1964), goods were distributed evenly and so there was justice and security and freedom: 'Nobody starved, either of food or of human dignity, because he lacked personal wealth; he could depend on the wealth possessed by the community of which he was a member' (Nyerere, 1964, p. 240). Traditional African society, in Nyerere's view, is therefore an egalitarian and classless society that is devoid of class struggle.

Senghor (1965) maintains that traditional African society is essentially socialist in nature and sees negritude (which encompasses the whole of traditional African world-view and values, as well as the value and dignity of African people and their traditions) as the basis of African communalism. This negritude captures a sense of brotherhood (or community), harmony, solidarity, and communion (or participation). Senghor (1965) distinguishes between European and African apprehension of being. The reasoning of a European is analytic by utilization: he distances himself from the object by analyzing it in order to kill and utilize it. In contrast, an African is at one with the rhythm of the other, including objects: the reasoning of the African as regards the other is intuitive and sympathetic by participation. He does not distance himself from an object or analyzes it with a view to utilizing it, but rather he is deeply and passionately engaged with the object; he embraces and feels the object and in so doing he transcends the visible and penetrates into the innermost depths of the object and grasps its essence and interconnectedness. The intuitive reasoning by participation therefore forms the basis of African ontology and world-view in which African communalism is rooted.

African Cosmology and the Hierarchy of Being

In African cosmology, the world is compartmentalized into three parts, namely, *Elu-igwe* (the sky), *Ala mmadu* (the land of humans/the human world) and *Ala mmuo* (the land of spirits/the spirit world) (Ekwealor 1990; Ijiomah, 2005). *Elu-igwe* is the abode of *Chukwu* (Supreme Being) angels and other celestial bodies. *Ala mmadu* constitutes humans, plants, minerals, some spirits, some evil/devil incarnates, and other objects, while *Ala mmuo* comprises ancestors, deities and other spirits. *Elu-igwe* and *Ala mmuo* which can be referred to as the world above (the sky) and the world beneath (the underworld) respectively embody the spiritual (non-physical) world, while *Ala mmadu* represents the material (physical) world. In this sense, the composition of the world is inseparably

reducible to two aspects, namely, the physical and the spiritual worlds (Ijiomah, 2005).

All the beings (both animate and inanimate) that populate African cosmology constantly interact and are hierarchically ordered as follows: God, divinities and ancestors, humans, animals, plants, minerals and other inanimate objects (Tempels, 1959; Njoku, 2002). God is the Supreme Being whose presence on earth is felt through his representatives and intermediaries taken to be deities and ancestors (Idowu, 1962; Metuh, 1981). African communalism enunciates that spiritual beings like deities and ancestors are part of the African universal community and so the being of a human person on earth is ontologically and intimately linked with them. Accordingly, complementarity and harmony are not only shared among the living beings in this world, but are also extended to other beings in the spirit world.

Some Contradictory Religious Philosophies (Ideologies) and Socio-cultural Practices in Indigenous African communities

Igbo religious philosophy and its associated religious and socio-cultural practices evolved out of the Nri myth that explains Igbo religious ideology (or world-view) and provides some justifications, endorsements and reinforcements of its associated religious and socio-cultural beliefs, moral values and actions. Such an ideology to a great extent underpins and shapes some thought systems and practices in Africa of today. Nri is a partriarchal figure and native doctor (*dibi a* in Igbo), specifically traditional medicine man, who was the son of Eri – a migrant from a priest-king family, probably from Bassa tribe of the eastern side of the Niger-Benue confluence surrounded by the Igala, who came to settle in Igbo land (Isichei, 1977; Onwuejeogwu, 1997; Nwaezeigwe, 2007). Nri – among other deployment – is now used as the name of Igbo culture, civilization and philosophy after Nri had identified with, and manipulated, extant Igbo world-view and religious practices (human sacrifices) to establish ascendancy over Igbo communities (Nwaezeigwe, 2007; Agbakoba, 2019), albeit Onwuejeogwu (1997) and Onwu (2002) maintain that the ritual philosophy of Nri is a novel world-view in Igbo religious philosophy. However, even if we grant that Nri's philosophy is a new ideology in Igbo religious philosophy, for the Igbo communities to have imbibed it implies that it is consistent with their nature and thus resonate with them. But then again, if we hold that Nri newly introduced the ritual philosophy in Igbo religious philosophy, it means that he must have possessed such ideology and most probably imported it from his place. If we

maintain that he identified with, and adapted to, the ritual philosophy believed to be already inherent in Igbo religious systems and practices, prior to his migration to Igbo land, it suggests the philosophy is congruent with his ideology and personality. From the above propositions, we can infer that the ritual philosophy is prevalent in some other African communities.

Nri acquired priestly powers and had control over Igbo religious philosophy and its associated cultural practices by allying himself with the priestly *Umụ di ana* clan [children of (*umụ*) and land lord/ lord of the land (*di ana*)] of Agukwu-Akampị sị community and becoming its member through ritual means. In the Nri myth, he killed and buried his first-son (*Okpala*) and first-daughter (*Ada*) in the land so as to get food in the wake of famine at the behest of *Chukwu* (High God as the ultimate being among the Igbo) from whom he requested food, and thus yams and coco-yams grew over the grave of his first-son and that of his first-daughter respectively after twelve days (Afigbo, 1981; Agbakoba, 2019). He equally did the same for his male slave and a female slave and had an oil palm tree sprang from the grave of a male slave and a bread fruit tree from that of the female slave after twelve days. This ensures that he provides his neighbours with these new foods and consequently extracted a number of rights and privileges such as cleansing communities of abomination (*ikpu aru*), crowning of *eze* (king) at Aguleri town, tying of the *ngulu* (anke cords) round the ankle of a new *ozọ* title holder, convoking the yam spirit (*Ifejiọ kụ*), and making of the *Ogụ ji* (yam medicine) for plentiful harvest annually, and *Igu Arọ* - the institution of the Igbo calendar yearly (Afigbo, 1981; Abanuka, 1999; Agbakoba, 2019).

The justification for ritual murders Nri committed is the ensuing wealth (or riches), thus wealth takes precedence over human life, including the life of one's own children (Agbakoba, 2019). Besides, Nri's (ritual) philosophy enunciates that there may be particular circumstances in which one can terminate the life a member of an in-group unsolicitedly as an instrumental means to one's end, thus indicating that religious and communalistic ethics in traditional Igbo society may lack reasonability in respect of its applicability to the in-group. One may argue in favour of Nri's action that he was in dire straits and thus had to make the sacrifices. But, he would have followed the reasonabilistic path by offering to give his life to the Supreme God (*Chukwu*) in return for riches that would sustain his family in keeping with his parental responsibility to protect his children to the extent of sacrificing his life, and see if *Chukwu* would turn down the offer (Agbakoba, 2019). The human sacrifices Nri made enabled him to enhance his powers as a native doctor, became the living *Eze Alusi* (Head of Deity) and *Eze*

Dibi a – leader of the native doctors (Onwuejeogwu, 1997; Agbakoba, 2019). The philosophy of Nri (ritual philosophy) which is rooted in apathy-inconsistency (insensibility) informs the supremacy of will and its concomitant voluntarism and particularism over objective rationality in Igbo thought and practices.

In Africa in general, the ritual philosophy that underpins the foundational sacrifices made by Nri is directly connected to, and provides justification for, ritual killings for self-aggrandizement and acquisition of political power and riches which are rife in contemporary Africa as being widely reported in news and social media on daily basis. An infamous Okija shrine in Umuhu Okija, Anambra State, Nigeria, where unscrupulous elements offer human sacrifices for power, wealth, fame and fortune, springs to mind. On 4 August, 2004, Okija shrine was raided by some fifty officers of the Nigerian police during which 83 corpses that comprised 63 headless corpses and twenty skulls were discovered in the deity's grove (Nwabueze, 2007). In the shrine, the police found three registers that had a list of visitors who had allegedly offered human sacrifices in the shrines for the past five years (Minchakpu, 2004). The shrine is believed to be the meeting-place of a secret society – to which leading politicians are members – for the execution of nefarious religious practices like ritual killings so as to acquire spiritual and political power and wealth (Ellis, 2008). Similarly, The BBC reported in 2004 that, according to the South African police, hundreds of children in South Africa had been murdered for the purpose of money rituals (Minchakpu, 2004). In 2002, London police found the mutilated torso of a young boy floating in the Thames and maintained that the boy might have been sacrificed to one of the 400 ancestral gods of the Yoruba (Minchakapu, 2004). It was alleged that the boy was a victim of West African ritual for riches and power (Minchakpu, 2004). In 2020, police raided a Togolese Voodoo witch doctor's shrine and discovered 2000 dried human bodies with 500 bodies buried alive (Okonkwo, 2022). It was observed, when the police stormed the shrine, over 5000 clients who had made human sacrifices were on the waiting list for their turn to get money ritual potions from the Voodoo witch doctor (Okonkwo, 2022).

It is obvious that the pantheons worshipped in IARs are not deputizing for the same Supreme Being in Christianity as peddled uncritically by African scholars like Idowu and Metuh. The deities (gods/goddesses) that are immoral, adulterous, bloodthirsty, partial and subjective in character cannot be representatives of the Supreme Being (God) who is plenitude Himself, all-powerful, perfect, loving, good, impartial, objective, and life affirming. The Supreme Being in Christianity whose nature is embodied and manifested in His

incarnate Son, Jesus, cannot be the same bloodthirsty *Chukwu* in IARs. If the pantheons act on behalf of the all-powerful and genuine Supreme Being as His lieutenants, then He is ipso facto complicit in those acts that contradict His nature and such complicity amounts to apathy-inconsistency (insensibility/irrationality) and ultimately self-destruction. But Supreme Being whose ontological constitution is necessarily and consistently objectivity or impartiality cannot accept or direct human sacrifices or be involved directly or indirectly in such nefarious acts that are antithetical to His nature. One may contend that chief priests and diviners in charge of various shrines rather than deities are the ones making such insensitive, irrational and whimsical demands for their pecuniary and other egocentric interests. But the Nri myth shows otherwise.

Even if we exonerate deities and their master (*Chukwu*) from such inhuman sacrificial demands, the fact that deities allow those who man the shrines to be making such demands in their names and coasting to victory implies that such demands are consonant with their nature, and, by extension, that of their master. If we claim that *Chukwu* is intrinsically impartial and so it is not the cause of partial and barbaric acts being carried out by deities or those in charge of them, then the supremacy of *Chukwu* is contradicted, for allowing something outside of it to be exerting influence over it (Agbakoba, 2004). Thus, it cannot be the genuine Supreme Being. The non-existence of objectivity and impartiality in the ideas of a Supreme Being in IARs implies that the being, if such really exists, they refer to as supreme is not truly supreme by its very nature; it is supreme nothingness. Bloodthirsty and bloodsucking deities that demand human sacrifices (that may involve members of one's own family) are not of the nature of the genuinely Supreme Being and so must be representing or acting on behalf of something of destructive nature (the devil).

Agbakoba (2019) maintains that *Chukwu* in IARs cannot be thought of in the manner of Supreme Being in Christianity. He explains that the word *Chukwu* as it is currently used in Igbo is a creation of the early Christian missionaries who employed it as a native proxy for the Christian idea of God for evangelization purposes, just as Ekwensu – a war deity in Igbo land in the pre-Christian/colonial era which many communities worshipped for protection, valour and victory in war (Opata, 2005) – is currently designated as the devil in Igbo land probably due to its violent, mischievous, destructive and evil nature as well as the destructive power it wields and manifests in its incarnate, albeit it is not the same as Satan (or the devil) in Christianity. The supposed Supreme God,

Chukwu in IARs is the name of powerful divinities in some African communities. For example, among the Igbo in the 18th and 19th centuries, *Chukwu* was referred to as *Ibini Ukpabi* of Arochukwu, *Agbara* in Awka and among the southern Igbo. Besides, unlike in Christianity where there are days of worship and temples dedicated to God who is the source of Christian and their moral codes, in IARs and traditional African society (with the exception of the Akan of Ghana in some aspects), there are no days of worship and temples dedicated to *Chukwu*, and, instead of *Chukwu*, the Earth Goddess is the law giver and enforcer in many traditional African communities like the Igbo and Igala (Agbakoba, 2009).

Communalism (or communalistic ethics) in Igbo society is marked by particularism in practice, as it is exclusively designed for an in-group (kindred, clan, town, community, tribe, and so forth). This is evident in the meanings and applications of ethical injunctions in the traditional ethical system: significant harsh sanctions are not applicable to a breach of ethical injunctions with respect to out-groups. A member of traditional African community is usually free to apply or not to apply his communalistic ethics trans-communally, trans-tribally or trans-rationally that is more universal (Agbakoba, 2019). He is under no moral obligation not to restrict his application of consistency-beneficence to members of his in-group and concurrently exhibit apathy-inconsistency (insensitivity, self-regarding unconcern attitudes) towards out-groups. For instance, the first commandment in “Ten commandments of the *Nze na Ozo*” (a conglomeration of people that hold a chieftaincy title known as *Nze* or *Ozo*) of the Umuezeoroli clan of Onitsha is that “one must respect his *Okpala* (the father figure and representative of the ancestors); must not seek to supplant him; must pay homage to him and must stand by him at all times.” (Chukwudebe, 1986, p. 40). The last part of the first commandment means that one is obligated to stand by one’s *Okpala* irrespective of whether the *Okpala* is in the right or his acts are morally right. In other words, one is bound by law to protect one’s *Okpala* (or father) at all costs.

Moreover, the commandment on sexual intercourse for the *Nze na Ozo* stipulates that no one must engage in sexual relations with a sister, that is, one’s sister from nuclear or extended families; any daughter of the endogamous *umunna* circle or a lady married into such a circle. This means that the injunction does not apply to a female fold outside the *umunna* circle. Thus, one is free to be licentious when dealing with people one has no blood ties with. Rich titled men could exploit this particularistic ethics and capitalize on their affluence to court wives of the poor

at whim, or employ any other possible man to take away others wives at will. Okwechime's observation captures sexual proclivities and licentiousness one could exhibit:

If a man was stronger than another man who was known to be courting a girl who may even have been betrothed to the suitor, the stronger man could beat him up and disgrace him publicly by defeating him in a wrestling contest to ward him off the girl. He then took over the girl. There was nothing wrong in seducing another man's wife and taking her over if a man was stronger than the husband but adultery was forbidden particularly for women and incest was considered an abomination (Okwechime, 1994, p. 67).

This particularistic and discriminatory ideology equally applies to members of a town or community. The following example illustrates further the ideology. There is a recent development in Awka, a city in Igbo land. In the wake of worsening insecurity in the city, one village recently engaged a security outfit popularly known as 'Bakassi Boys' - a powerful and deadly vigilante group that is known for possessing magic powers to identify and apprehend suspected criminals and bandits and spiritually force them to confess their evil deeds prior to sending them to their untimely graves usually by butchering and setting them ablaze. Having seen considerable success achieved in combating crime, neighbouring villages met the people that hired the vigilante group and forged an alliance with them to fight crime in the city. While the security outfit was operating from the village of their employer as the base, they launched manhunts and apprehension in other villages often at night or at the wee hours with village leaders divulging to them the whereabouts or homes of suspects. Sadly, the village leaders were selective in disclosing the homes or whereabouts of suspects, as homes of the non-indigene suspects were mostly invaded. It was also observed that non-indigene criminal elements were mostly captured, while other notorious crime syndicates who were indigenes were shielded by way of stealthily providing them with useful information that aided and facilitated their escape prior to the commencement of the vigilante group operations in many villages.

The particularist and exclusivist and less reasonabilistic traditional Igbo ethics is underpinned by African religious orientations and ontological outlooks. In Indigenous African Religions (IARs) and traditional African communities (like Igbo), law givers, enforcers and custodian of morality are the ancestors and the

Earth Goddess (*Ani* or *Ala*), for cult of the ancestors and that of the earth are intimately connected (Oguejiofor, 2001; Agbakoba, 2019). Each community has its own *Ani* cult that has authority and jurisdiction over the community only. Other communities are not its sphere of influence and so it lacks inter-communal and trans-communal efficacy. The power of *Ani* of a particular community is therefore limited to the boundaries of the community to which it belongs (Sogolo, 1993). The implication of this is that if, for example, a native of Achalla town commits an offence against a person from Nsukka town, the *Ani* of Nsukka town has no authority over the offender and thus cannot harm him, and vice versa since the power of the *Ani* cult is restricted to its sphere of influence. It also follows that the offender from a kindred, clan, village, town or community to which the cult is related gets off scot-free for an offence committed against an Nsukka person.

Again, in traditional Igbo society generally, the Earth Goddess *Ani* is the most famous, popular and actively worshipped, and highly revered divinity due to the reasoning that the earth generates everything that exists on her, including humans, and harbours the spirit of the dead figuratively referred to as *Ani mu o* or *ala mu o* (land of the dead) in which revered ancestors reside (Agbakoba, 2019). The Igbo and traditional African society in general vehemently believe that there is no radical difference between life in this world and life in the nether world and, accordingly, the inhabitants of both worlds are likened in the chain of interlocking forces, interacting with and influencing one another. Life in the hereafter is seen as an extension of this-worldly life; the spirit world is an extension of materiality. The materialist conception of reality retains spiritual entities and account for them in terms of rarefied materiality – ethereality (Agbakoba, 2019). Spirit is therefore viewed as a rarefied material stuff that underpins grosser visible material stuff, and is linked to, and interacts with it, and tends to govern it. Though at death a person's body decays or perishes, the procreative force or spirit (the *mu o*) of the person lives on in the spirit world, exerting powerful spiritual influences on the living. That is why ancestors/ancestresses are not regarded as ordinary dead people, but living spiritualized beings, the living dead. However, the force of the person lives on in the spirit world as an evil spirit, if he or she is a worthless person (an *akalogoli* – worthless spirit – as a man is called).

Mu o cannot exist without *chi* (a divine being) – the procreative vital force in a general sense that brought a given person into existence. Everything that exists has its *ike* (force) appropriate to its own being and is its quiddity. *Ike* is vital

(living) because everything (both the living and non-living things) has life and manifests this force. Life defined in terms of etherealism has to be protected and promoted at the individual and communal levels as the supreme value and requirement of a good living, and it is in so doing that “the full vitality and potentials of a specific *chi* and *mu o* is realized, enabling one to take one’s proper place in the cosmic scheme of things” (Agbakoba, 2019, p. 158). Given that abundant procreative vital force is an ontological constitution of specific *mu o* and *chi*, the power of an individual lies in her force (*ike*) and the manifestation of that force, that is, its concrete effectiveness, measured in terms of material possessions. Accordingly, a person who possesses an abundance of wealth is regarded as a successful person, and it is believed that his earthly status would continue in the spirit world in the event of his death since life on earth and hereafter is arranged on a continuum. This explains why the Igbo and many other African communities of today bury an affluent deceased with great pomp and pageantry, bury him in the grave with his wealth, and sometimes, with human beings, just to ensure that he is accorded a rightful place in the ancestral land (Agbakoba, 2019).

Moreover, according a deceased a befitting burial, even if he was poor during his earthly existence, is believed to be a precondition and minimum requirement for gaining admittance to the spirit world. Consequently, in many contemporary African societies/communities, there is relatively excessive and unconscionable expenditure, pomp and pageantry, and sumptuous display of material wealth during funerals and burials of deceased persons, even those of lower and middle classes, all in a bid to have their deceased relatives admitted to the nether land. For instance, in the Yoruba ethnic communities of today, it is mandatory for each bereaved family member to provide one cow and one goat, inter alia, for the burial of the deceased, regardless of the ability of each family member to satisfy such requirements. If the deceased is from a poverty-stricken family, her survivors may have to borrow money or sell family property like lands to foot the bill and thus be plunged into heavy debts after the burial. In Ghana, the cost of funerals is unconscionably high. The average cost of a funeral as of 2014 is estimated to range from 15,000 to 20,000 US dollars (Newton, 2014). It is unconscionable to expend this enormous amount of money in holding funerals in a country where not less than 60% of the population live on two US dollars or less per day.

The high premium placed on wealth as a measure of one’s force or (*ike*) also accounts for high cost of acquiring chieftaincy titles in contemporary Africa. For

example, the estimated minimum cost of gaining *Ọzọ* title in Onitsha, a city in Igbo land, is about 15, 000 US dollars between 2005 and 2006 (Agbakoba, 2010). In Igbo society entirely, for example, titles such as *Ọzọ*, *Eze*, *Ọba* and *Ekwe* are available exclusively to the wealthy as a mark of honour and distinction (Oguejiofor, 2004). Given that a person's worth (that is, force he/she possesses as the supreme value) is evaluated in terms of materiality, indigenous Africans commend wealth as a symbol of force or strength. Little wonder the Bantu commends a wealthy and successful person with reference to vital force when they exchange greetings in these ways: "You are strong." "You have life in you." But for a poor and unsuccessful person: "Your vital force is lowered." "Your vital energy has been sapped" (Tempels, 1959, p. 25). In Igbo land presently, anyone who has riches is usually extolled in reference to his/her wealth in this way: "*I bu ike*" or "*I pa ike*" (You carry force). When making reference to his/her wealth in a conversation or discussion: "*O bu ike*" or "*Ọ pa ike*" (He/she carries force).

The implication of this ideology for human and social relations in Africa is that people are identified and classified based on the force they possess. Those who are fame and fortune, regardless of whether their wealth is ill-gotten, are highly commended and respected for having supposedly strong force, while the poor or the less fortunate people only deserve sympathy for having seemingly diminutive force. It is therefore not surprising that in contemporary Africa, many youths are encouraged by their contemporaries, peers, friends, siblings and other relatives to strive to acquire wealth, with little or no emphasis on its acquisition by legitimate means. Since wealth is a symbol of force or strength, there is tendency for individuals to accumulate personal wealth, acquire power, dominate and/or exploit others by whatever means possible to maintain their social status and gain more prestige. The result is that contemporary Africa keeps churning out egocentric and voluntaristic individuals as leaders who have the proclivity to mismanage and misappropriate public funds with impunity, to the detriment of the public.

Concluding Reflections

We have argued that the radius (horizon or depth) of reasonability (consistency-beneficence) manifested in religious and communalistic ideologies and ethics and their socio-cultural practices in Igbo and some other traditional African communities is restricted to the particular – the reasonability is applicable only to in-groups (the *umunna* circle – the family, kindred, clan, community, et cetera) – a tiny section of humanity and, worst of all, in some circumstances such religious

ideologies and ethics are completely lacking in reasonability with respect to the in-group, as Nri's philosophy demonstrates. It is therefore not universalistic in outlook and thus cannot be utilized as a template for positive personality formation and authentic human development for all humanity. Besides, beneficence is stretched to the point where it contradicts reason and thus amounts to insensibility and irrationality when perpetrators of moral evils are not punished simply because they are members of *umunna*, a clan or community, or because such moral evils are committed against members of an out-group. The ultimate end of African communalism – the common good, human welfare and self-realization – is defeated when a person's unwholesome, despicable and heinous acts are concealed or the culprit is shielded from punishment designed to right a wrong only because he is a member of an in-group. It is self-negating and counter-productive for reasonability to be sacrificed on the altar of particularistic, partial, inconsistent and irrational bonds of structural and affective relationality.

For instance, a community that allows in-group members to commit evils with impunity in the name of beneficence is actually sowing the seeds of its own destruction. This is because as it continues to tolerate and condone such reprehensible acts, it will get to the point where the community will no longer be habitable and safe due to the avoidable proliferation of evil, with all its attendant underdevelopment, predicaments and sufferings. Partiality and particularism are the building blocks of apathy-inconsistency (insensibilism) that undermines development in the reasonabilistic trajectory. Any ideal or ideology that is meant for the common good and happiness must be imbued with rationality, justice, equity and fairness. An ideology and its associated socio-cultural and religious practices that are particularistic and partial in nature cannot in any way promote human well-being and development. Njoku (2018) rightly states that humans who cooperate and collaborate with one another in life-journeys must embody consistent rationality that orders human needs to guarantee improvement in human conditions and survival.

However, indigenous Africans like the Igbo people have strains of universalistic and reasonabilistic ideologies and ethics which suggest, at least in principle, that they place a high premium on human life more than any other thing, respect the sanctity of life as well as the dignity of human person. This universalistic outlook is exemplified in Igbo adages and names such as:

Egbe belu ugo belu – Literally means ‘Let the kite perch, let the eagle perch’ It connotes live and let live.

Ezi aha ka ego – Good name is greater than money.

Nwa bu isi – Having a child is supreme.

Nwa ka ego – Having a child is greater than having money.

Madu ka – The human being is supreme.

Mmadu bu u ba – The human being is essence of riches or wealth

Mmadu ka u ba – The human being is greater than riches or wealth.

Madu akonam – May I not lack the human being.

All the above worthwhile and universalizable ideologies and ethics are negated by Nri’s ritual philosophy. The application of double standard in respect of treatment of in-groups and out-groups constrains the universalistic Igbo adage: *Egbe belu ugo belu*. The saying that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander still holds true in this regard. The measurement and determination of one’s worth ultimately on the basis of material possessions undermines the aphorism: *Ezi aha ka ego*. If good name is greater than money, then good and fulfilled life one lived on earth should be the ultimate precondition for gaining unfettered access to the nether world, and not an extravagant display of money with great pomp and ceremony during funerals, neither is it the acquisition of chieftaincy titles at unconscionable costs. Suffice it to say that an individual who did not lead a life of moral rectitude should not be accorded a place in the ancestral home even if his funerals are celebrated on a lavish scale. One would expect that traditional African society that claims to be communalistic in character would allow its members to cut their cloth according to their cloth as regards burying the dead in the spirit of communalism. But this is not the case.

Development oriented communalism lies in an extensive radius of reasonability as the supreme value. We can evaluate the potential of a society to develop in terms of reasonability by looking at the laws, ethical codes, mores, attitudes regulating relations with out-groups (non-members) and the treatment of such out-groups, and other socio-cultural practices. We can grasp the true nature of a

being by looking at qualities it displays – its demands, preferences, dispositions, purposivity, integrity, and so forth. If African agents in the African cosmos and the circumstances (structures – like laws, standards, conventions, protocol and institutions – and socio-cultural pressures) could approve of extravagant funerals – in the name of giving deceased persons befitting burials – that could plunge the bereaved into insolvency; condone ritual killings (which could involve one's relative) in the name of sacrifices; tolerate double standard with respect to treatment of in-groups and out-groups; and adopt riches as a precondition for acquisition of chieftaincy titles, then the claim that communalism is essentially and intrinsically African and that African communalism is aimed at human welfare and the common good becomes untenable.

Given that African ideologies revolve around African agents; they are meant for Africans and not the other way round, African agents hold the key to the abolition and abandonment of particularistic, discriminatory and destructive ideologies. Mere romanticization of African communalism cannot address particularistic African religious and socio-cultural ideological outlooks that shape and underpin choices and actions in socio-political institutions and practices. The particularist, negative and destructive ideologies in African society can be addressed through signification-concretization processes. In this context, signification-concretization processes are processes of reasonabilization, that is, of generating, acquiring, imbibing and internalizing desirable and universally and rationally appealing strains of African communal ideologies and ethics, and applying and concretizing them in social institutions, religious and socio-cultural practices. They include formal and informal means of forming and concretizing positive and valued personality and social skills such as in and through families, schools, social, religious and academic institutions and associations, laws and mores, rites and rituals, and the State (through its system of reward and punishment).

Indeed, societal and individual values and beliefs are encased in categorical frameworks (or ideologies as the dominant values and beliefs). From the categorical frameworks are derived other compatible values and beliefs of which human personalities (thoughts, motivations, moods, attitudes, choices, actions and behavioural patterns) are composed. Different ideologies compete for space in a society and in the minds of individuals in order to gain dominance over the other. The ability to make desirable and reasonabilistic societal ideologies the dominant or supreme foundational beliefs and values of individuals depends to a large extent on the strength (depth) of signification-concretization of such

ideologies (or categorical frames) measured in terms of its effects on personality formation and development in general. Signification-concretization processes are indispensable for bringing desirable societal ideologies to fruition.

In conclusion, a society achieves a considerable success relatively in preserving, protecting and enhancing human conditions by rejigging its circumstances and building agency (the entire capability of a person or group, both natural and acquired capabilities – dispositions and orientations) along the path of reasonability. Every human person is a member of common humanity and therefore to promote human well-being through African communalism, Africans must seek complementarity and harmonious relationships among all humanity which transcends parochialism, primordial sentiments, race, ethnicity, and religion. For a society to be dominantly rationalistic and universalistic in ideological orientation and other spheres, it must be committed to the principle of consistency-beneficence (reasonability) and such commitment must be a general existential reality that cuts across and unifies the being of the individual and the collective. Africa can break out of ontological and ideological particularity of its communalism and achieve meaningful and holistic development by reconceptualizing reality and humanity on the metaphysical, ethical and logical planes along reasonabilistic line through signification-concretization processes.

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