

# AI AND AFRICAN COMMUNALISTIC LIFE AND PRACTICE IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA: A PHILOSOPHICAL INSIGHT

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## ABSTRACT

*The contemporary African society is acquainted with western individualistic way of life more than traditional or communal African way of living, this is owing to urbanization, westernization, acculturation and mostly owing to globalization or the influence of science and technology. However, not minding all these, the contemporary African community is not peaceful owing to so many challenges, for instance in Nigeria today, there is much hunger, inflation, bad governance, corruption, insurgency, kidnapping, killings by Fulani herdsmen and unknown gunmen, boko haram and likes. This is also the case with many other African countries and this situation makes the present African man to recall, suggest and yearn for the values obtainable in communalistic way of life led by the Africans of yester years. These values of African communal living are the remedies and suggestions or recommendations found in so many academic conference papers and journals pertaining to the woes of the present African predicaments. This research, through analytic methodology will analyze the way or model of life obtainable in traditional African society or community before the advent of Europeans or white men. This type of life may be found in some other continents but the greatest manifestation of communalistic way of living was found in the traditional African community. Communalism is a belief and practice of communal living. It means living or interacting in the spirit of one's community. It is a way of life which is community oriented. As this life has respect for life and for elders, value for hard work, truth and honesty, communal spirit and enabling environments, peace and the likes, the contemporary African society is recommended to marry or combine these values with the present hyper technological life, especially in this era of Artificial Intelligence (AI). It is not a human being, rather a friendly robot that is encoded with human intelligence and it's meant to do some works human beings do. Finally, owing to challenges to AI and in this AI era, Africans are challenged to develop AI that is conversant with African communal life and living.*

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, African Communalism, contemporary Africa.

## Introduction

Right from the creation of man, man has been updating himself through the efforts of science and technology and this updating involves some alterations in man's habit and

routines, old practices are destabilized causing controversies, arguments, discussions and among others. So, innovations in science and technology obviously come with blessings and progress, (as in faster performance of works and the likes), but we equally know that challenges in various spheres of life and living follows as well. Introduction of science and technology, especially robotics has been in existence for centuries; but, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, the wave of robotics has enormously risen with the innovation of artificial intelligence (AI) in so many spheres of life, education, business, engineering and other sectors. This AI introduced is really boosting the economy as it heavily maximizes production and cumulatively maximizes profits, though as it has numerous advantages, it's also not left with demerits. And not minding the backwardness of Africans in certain technological advancements and innovations, the wave of AI has really reached the continent and it's permeating its nooks and crannies by the introduction of certain models of AI in the African continent. And these AI robots will be useful and helpful to Africans in their efforts towards sustainable development. However, it is proper at the inception of this era of AI in Africa, to get it right as far as the development and the usage of AI is concerned, in order to be assured of maximum benefits, and never to live on borrowed clothes that can never fit Africans at the end. African way of life, (communalism) culture and traditions must be put into consideration before the production of AI that will serve Africans creditably. As we go on to the crux of this academic paper, we briefly define and discuss as well some relevant terminologies. We begin with communalism in traditional African society.

### **African Communalism**

African communalism is the mode of life of traditional Africans, characterized by humane living. By humane living, we mean a way of life emphatically central upon human interest and values. "It manifests a mode of living evidently, characterized by empathy, consideration for others and compassion for human life. Above all, it stresses oneness and unity of purpose"<sup>1</sup>C.B. Nze, holds that the communalistic culture remains a treasure to the African traditional society. He describes communalism as bedrock and result of the wonderful relationship prevalent in the community, and at the same time serves as purpose of the existence of the community and of the African person.<sup>2</sup>

In the book "*what is Negritude?*" L.S. Senghor holds that African way of life is communalistic and African man has no individualistic mentality since the society in which he lives is structured on communalism and not from individualism or capitalism. His socio-political philosophy (Negritude) is that of re-discovery and cultural awakening/emancipation aimed at bestowing on Africans, pride and dignity through appreciation of their cultural value themselves.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on this Senghorian brand of communalism, Ike Odimegwu Says that much critical attention has been directed to it by African scholars who felt uncomfortable with the poetic clouds and intuitive reason, emotive sensitivity description of the African. However, he later acknowledges existence of factual merit in the conceptualization of human being perceived from African perspective and background as presented by Senghor.<sup>4</sup> In the same line of appreciation and in the same view with Senghorian Negritude, Marowitz writes:

Negritude is the whole of the values of civilization cultural, economic, social, political which characterized the black people, more exactly, the Negroid-African world. It is essentially instinctive reason, which pervades all these values. It is reason of the impressions, reason that is “seized”. It is expressed by the emotions through the abandonment of self and a complete identification with the object, through the myth of the archeprimordial accorded to the cosmos. In other terms the sense of communion, the gift of rhythm – these are the traits of Negritude that we find with an indelible soul on all works and activities of the black man.<sup>5</sup>

Julius Nyerere in his book: *Ujamaa: Essay on socialism*, portrays his philosophy as a communalism of Traditional African society which is based on family hood or family relationship as the root of authentic African socialism. He was optimistic that with egalitarian and communalistic model of socio-political life, African liberation or development could be achieved (however based on family hood or Ujamaa).<sup>6</sup> Nyerere proposes the extension of this spirit of Ujamaa to embrace the whole society of mankind.

J. Obi Oguejiofor, in his famous article: *How African is Communalism?* defined communalism as primacy of the community over individual. He holds that it is a system of governance or social relationship in which the claims of individual generally take the second seat before the demands and claims of the community.<sup>7</sup> He used the term communalism or communitarianism to describe traditional African socio-politico-cultural and economic system.

### **Communalism Original to Traditional Africa**

Traditional Africa is well known for their communitarian way or model of life / living. Citing an example with African Nigerian Igbo setting, one sees that people lives in basic communities ranging from family, extended family, kindred (Umunna), village and town. And one finds communal spirit and brotherhood in action, for co-operation and harmony among individual shares of life force, which is an ontological necessity. Thus, man is not only an “I” but “a being for others”. Here one recalls Gabriel Marcel's inter subjectivity or philosophy of communion, Martin Buber's “I”-“Thou” relationship and Igbo principle of “Egbeberu Ugo beru”.

In traditional Africa, owing to communalism, there is a belief that men cannot fully understand themselves unless in a reciprocal co-operation and relation with others. Thus, the Cartesian Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am) is not a complete truth (as far as African society is concerned), for man is a social being, he lives with others (Heideggerian mit sein), relates with other incarnated spirits. Mbiti expressing this relation to Africans (Igbo community inclusive) says: “I am because we are and since we are, I am”<sup>8</sup>

This relatedness points to an openness to others in order for both to share their love, work and even their thoughts. In traditional African basic communities, there is solidarity of relationship. The members relate to one another in a common fashion of brotherhood, hospitality and care.

### **Advantages and Positive elements in African Communalism**

Traditional African Communalism has some disadvantages but its merits outweigh its demerits significantly. Indeed, no man can succeed as an island unto himself. Hence, the Igbo aphorism; *otuonyenoduruonweya, oduduatagbueya* (if one stays away from fellow men, tse-tse fly will bite him to death). *Ahu ibena-echeibeya* (one's neighbor gives him protection).<sup>9</sup> Indeed, African communalism is deeply ingrained in the Igbo culture. There are very vital and credible stances in Communalism, especially as it affects viable democratic practice in Contemporary Africa. These include: its communal spirit. (Which makes one to carry along the other who is not as successful as one is, and ensures that he/she enjoys fair share of life's goodness.)

An indigenous communal or democratic society can be attained, by the successful integration of various cultures and their values to provide a more dynamic platform for African development. Communal enabling spirit often gives rise to community-oriented developments. Organized communal entities can on their own rights assist the government in the development process by building markets, water projects among others, using communal efforts. This aspect is still very operative in this contemporary Africa society.

### **Communalism and communal Solidarity**

Communalism is a means that ensures even distribution of goods and burdens of life so that everybody could have a fair share.<sup>10</sup> It concerns how the members of a given political community distribute fairly or justly the advantages and burdens of social co-operation. Communalism makes people burdened with grief or unbeatable life situations to be renewed through communal solidarity. Aristotle approves communalism as the way of life of man in the sense that man is a political animal by nature, and thus forms a community that is progressive (that is, from family, town and country spring up).

Communalism ensures communal ownership of land. Land tenure system in Igbo land is a vital force in determining communalism. The reason is that no single individual owns the land. Individual can own land only in the face of extinction of the whole family members (by death from one sickness or other). Normally, land is controlled by heads of extended family (just as a custodian) and allotted to adult males for building houses and for cultivation. Communalism ensures communal ownership of various economic plants or trees (iroko as an example). As a means of coming together, some trees are jointly owned by the community. When such tree is sold or if firewood is made out of it, the proceeds or the firewood is shared by the members of the extended families or villages that own it.

### **Intelligence**

Artificial Intelligence refers to the development of computer system that can perform tasks that typically requires human intelligence, such as learning, problem solving, decision making among others. In the context of this paper, one must not forget that what we are talking about is Intelligence, not minding it is called artificial. The intelligence in question is far from instinctual behaviors of some insects like wasps while storing its food or that of

some birds and other animals. Looking at these creatures and their behaviors, it looks like human intelligence, but it is not, for it is still at the level of instinct. It's only human beings that are accorded or associated with intelligence. Intelligence is the simplest human behavior and it helps man to adapt to new circumstances. Intelligence is characterized by combination of many diverse abilities or traits as learning, reasoning, problem solving, perception, language, methods and goals. We move to artificial intelligence which is intelligence also in a real sense, only it's gotten through computation of data and procession of symbols in robotic digital computers and through artificial neural network connectivity, in imitation of human brain structure.

### **Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

Artificial intelligence is the ability of a digital computer, robot or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings.<sup>11</sup> It is an intelligence exhibited by machines, particularly, computer systems. It is a field of research in computer science that develops and studies methods and software that enable machines to perceive their environment and use learning and intelligence to take actions that maximize their chances of achieving defined goals.<sup>12</sup> AI robots are bound and we have them even in Africa, some examples of AI robots includes, Chatbot Eliza which gives stock responses, ChatGPT which was trained on 45 terabytes of text, we have Alex which one sees in Metal on WhatsApp and this can respond to more than one million messages at a time. All these AI robots are found in Africa. Again, we have a new one, (Chukus Ekwueme's ingenuity and creation) Omeife, which is an African human robot created to give Africa a voice, a space in AI robotics, a space in global ecosystem.

### **Advantages or Merits of Artificial Intelligence AI to the world and to Africa**

The merits of AI stretch through various human endeavors: In medical diagnosis, AI computers are employed nowadays for patient diagnoses, patient care and in other medical researches. This is really an enormous development in health care services. In education sector, AI robots are co-opted for children and adult online lessons, language tutorials, for students' evaluation among other things. In financial institutions like banks, one sees AI high powered computers deployed as chat bots for customer services. It helps in mobile banking and in fraud dictation among others. In agricultural sector, it's not left out as AI computers are used in livestock management, and even in crop cultivation and planting and among other things. In social media, is used in replying messages, example, AI robot called Alex could reply fifty million messages in a matter of seconds. Other virtual assistance of AI robot includes management of schedules by sending reminders. Thus, one sees that the benefits AI are bound.

Looking at the use of robots nowadays in human life, one may ask: Of what use are human beings now? As we see that robot now go to farm, drive taxi, drive buses, work at restaurants, robot do cook, carry child, robot can carry belle nine months and deliver, a robot can do many jobs better and of course this will make things to be cheaper. And with this, human beings will not have much meaning. For instance, one reads that Amazon cuts over 400 jobs following the acquisition of Tesla's Optimum robots, thus, increased

productivity or efficiency is assured, and human elements in work are removed. These advanced robots enhance productivity and faster turnaround times.<sup>13</sup> when human beings are replaced with robots, human elements at work like paying salaries, allowances, pensions and gratuity, granting work leave, among others are automatically gone. AI reduces labour cost.

### **Disadvantages/Demerits of Artificial Intelligence to the world and to Africa**

To develop AI is never an easy task not only in terms of the symbolic data connections and connectivity also; it's really a money consuming task. AI robots are very exorbitant; they are costly as their development is not a cheap work. Again, the maintenance of AI is not an easy task. Some African companies that have them know the amount of dollars they spent for its maintenance annually. The first disadvantage of employment of AI in any country or company is the decimation or displacement of the working class. It reduces the number of employed workers and there by creates unemployment in the country. Unemployment, we know will come up with other vices, like, theft, armed robbery, kidnapping and among others. However, many of these vices are already in existence in many African countries like Nigeria, Sudan, Mali, Niger, Cameroon and others, for AI is not yet the cause of these, as these menaces were the end product of bad economy, caused by bad leadership or government in Africa. The task of the studying the workings and mechanisms of AI is also an enormous challenge.

### **African Communalism, an enormous Challenge to Artificial Intelligence (AI)**

African communalism is marked with certain elements, thus, Ike Odimegwu in his article: *African Communalism*; commented on certain fundamental principles or characteristics of African Communalism that is discoverable from the distilling reading of the writings of the scholars and from the evidence of lived experience as Africans living in the African world. They include: unity of being, community of existence, family hood, openness of mind, spirit and attitude, co-operation, commitment, justice, solidarity and good name.<sup>14</sup> indeed, all of the above principles or characteristics are enough challenges to the effective operation of AI in Africa. We now elucidate or discuss briefly some of those African values which are really an enormous challenge to AI robot in Africa.

### **Lack of Respect for Elders and for other intelligent Beings**

As people were terrified seeing AI robot serving food in a restaurant and as the robot tries to collide with people coming in and out and getting into the seats and some getting up to leave, one old woman there not only observed the collision but she raised her voice and shouted that “this robot has no respect”. In this scenario, one sees practically and immediately the challenge of respect or lack of respect by AI and this can never be played down as far as African communalism is concerned. Thus, it is good to employ AI robots to Africa, and it's also worthy that those robots would be encoded with African cultures and values.

### **AI Robots lack Communal Spirit.**

African communal spirit is what makes one to carry along the other who is not as successful

as one is, and ensures that he/she enjoys fair share of life's goodness. By massive unemployment to be brought about by employment of AI in Africa, the communal spirit of African communalism is of course destroyed, what is left is depression. When men work together, they encourage one another to be steadfast as to reach or attain the goal; this is an enormous challenge to AI robots. Both in primitive and contemporary African societies, this communal spirit is cushioned by songs that helps one with low spirit (the un fit) to gain much strength as to attain the goal. AI robots do not think of such encouragement rather elimination of the un fit (human being) is always among their goals.

### **Work: As an Expression of Man's Social Nature (in African Communalism)**

It's really a consensus that human work has a social dimension. This is evident as Freud sees love and work as the greatest expressions of man's social nature. Marx sees work as an activity done in association of others, in which man reflects himself as specie being. And Pope John Paul II declares: "It is the characteristics of work that it first and foremost unites people. In this, it consists in its social power to build a community"<sup>15</sup> Also he continues that: "By his work, a man ordinarily provides for himself and for his family, associates with others as his brothers and renders them service"<sup>16</sup> Thus, African communalism portrays that work is not personal activity, but links one to human society, creates a relation, a way of being with others, a mode of communication. Work creates a network of relation. AI robot does not create such social dimension of work as it is an automation process.

### **Consensual Decision Taking**

AI robots don't think of access for members in decision taking. Communalism provides avenues like the Aladimma, Town Unions, and women's Organizations, Youth bodies, Age grades to discuss civil, traditional, religious issues among others. It contributes ideas that are consensual and people oriented. AI robots have not risen to such as AI is mainly individualistic.

### **Enabling Environment / Institutions for promoting Social Justice.**

As communal bodies, communal African society interacts efficiently and thus providing environment for man to live in peace with one another through social justice. A good question here is: how will Artificial Intelligence learn and disseminate values of Communalism in the contemporary African society? We know AI operates within a known environment through coded magnetic waves, but, this communal enable environment is the one created by human beings and not through magnetic waves. From this, one still have to know that human beings are human beings while AI computer are computers.

### **Complementarity of the Contemporary African Society's Individualistic and Communalistic living.**

**Contemporary Africa:** By contemporary African society, we simply mean 20<sup>th</sup> and especially this present and 21<sup>st</sup> century African society, whom we know are communalistic while at the same time have carried overboard by the strong wind of individualism owing to urbanization, Americanization, westernization or even globalization. the contemporary African community is not peaceful owing to so many challenges, for instance in Nigeria

today, there is much hunger, inflation, bad governance, corruption, insurgency, kidnapping, killings by Fulani herdsmen and unknown gunmen, boko haram and likes. This is also the case with many other African countries and this situation makes the present African man to recall, suggest and yearn for the values obtainable in communalistic way of life led by the Africans of yester years.

Some authors, for instance Obi Oguejioffor may not agree that communalism is still beneficial to this contemporary African society. Thus, he sets out by posing three questions: 1. Does communalism characterized Africa? 2. Is communalism special to Africa or peculiarly African? 3. Is it a defining characteristic of the people of Africa? In answering the above questions, he writes that communalism is not exclusively African and thus it is erroneous to think of that system as being a defining characteristic of Africans and African socio-cultural institutions.<sup>17</sup> He writes also that even though communalism was of no doubt beneficial to Africans of yester years, there is no need to presume that it is still really beneficial to the Africans of today. He concludes that some of the fall-outs of the system may be detrimental to the progress and well-being of present-day Africa<sup>18</sup>

Individualism points to man's uniqueness, egoism, individuality, independence, distinctiveness, eccentricity and even to selfishness. Egoism is a doctrine which regards self-interest as the only logical human motivation and Altruism holds that the end of social, political and economic organization is the greatest good for greatest number. In a clearer observation, one sees that just as man is both egoistic and altruistic, a real African man is also individualistic as well as communalistic, but African man's individualistic spirit does not contradict its community spirit.

Using Igbo communalism as an example, one noticed that not minding their communal or community spirit, Igbo people are also individualistic. Iroegbu writes that Igbo individualistic spirit is evident in Igbo man's refusal to be governed by a monarch or aristocrat as was the case in some parts of Nigeria, thus the sayings "Igbo enweeze" (The Igbo have no king) "Odighionyenweanyi" (there is no one who owns us). Aham efula (let my name not be lost)<sup>19</sup>

However, the spirit of communalism was very strong and functional in every sphere of the African man's life. It is in property ownership as in marriage or death, it is found in hospitality to visitors/strangers, one sees it in communal functions like festivals and in village/town community labour. In the community, one sees an individual striving to satisfy his personal needs and to develop his abilities and as he do so, the strength of communalism pushes him to a balance and such complements each other. Thus, Igbo communalism is fundamentally not opposed to Igbo individualism for the individualistic spirit does not contradict its community spirit; it complements it by creating a system of natural checks and balances.

E.N Njaka writing on Igbo political culture talks of extra ordinary autonomy within the society and it is his belonging to the community that helps him to develop his potentials, his initiative and drive for achievement, his originality and his ability to ward off inordinate self-ambitions which could remove him from the society's communion. His union within a

communion of persons gives him pride, boldness and individualism.<sup>20</sup>

Conclusively, we have seen that there exist individualistic elements, aspects and practice in the contemporary African man, but not minding such, his communalistic spirit is still at work and many times the two are compartmentalized as Iroegbu and Njaka demonstrated above. But, the AI computers have a big challenge as far as demonstration or practice of communal spirit and communalistic living is concerned.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion.**

Foregoing, we have gone at length discussing AI and African communalistic life and practice and we have seen that both are to a reasonable extent valuable as far as African community is concerned, though not without certain deficiencies. The world is in the era of AI and surely it is moving the world to a greater height owing to its increased productivity in many fields of human endeavor, especially in human work and productivity, speed and accuracy and the likes. AI may even help to reduce corruption in terms of equitable distribution of goods and services, policing and detection of traffic offences and possession of illegal drugs and weapons as many corrupt African agents that have been in these services do promote corruption instead of eradicating it.

Technology has produced invaluable benefits for mankind is hardly in dispute and its potentials for future benefits are still assumed. So, we stand to commend the scientists and technologists or AI technological inventors for their immense contributions to human development, for their profound insight towards various possibilities of nature, and for their creative ingenuity in their efforts in conquering the universe, thereby not only relieving man of certain burdens, also in helping him to realize his possibilities as well.

Nevertheless, one sees the negative effects of this AI in question in Africa by its promotion of individualism rather than communalism, its individual spirit rather than community spirit. This is contrary to the African man's spirit. Thus, it can destroy relationship owing its own recognition or consideration of individual or personal idiosyncrasies and lack of encouragement to the vulnerable part of the African society and lack of upliftment of downtrodden spirit through Igwebuike spirit and Philosophy. Thus, for AI to rhyme with African communalistic life and practice, it needs not only to be produced in African environment captured very well in African environmental space and magnetic waves, it really has to undergo (in the words of Pantaleon Iroegbu) "Enwisdomization".<sup>21</sup> Here, I simply mean that it has to be enwisdomized in the spirit of African communalism, spirit of Igwebuike, spirit of Onye aghananwanneya, in the spirit of Ubuntu, in the spirit of *e g b e b e r u , u g o b e r u . E n w i s d o m i z a t i o n* embraces Ontologization, Ethicization, Epistemologization, Historicization, Axiologization, Humanization, Anthropologization, Holicization, Teleologization and among others.<sup>22</sup> And this we know will be a very big nut for the inventors or producers to crack, however, this onerous task is crucial as it's only when this is done that Africans and indeed the whole human race will enjoy to the fullest the dividends of AI technologies. Till then, one can just say for now that AI technologies are beneficial mostly to the companies and inventors as they make a lot of money through it. But man we know can never be defined only in terms of material wellbeing. Philosophers like Hegel and Karl Marx who

attempted such in their philosophy of history and in historical and dialectical materialism respectively failed woefully as there is transcendence in man.

When one employs ethical principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, respect for autonomy and justice, one sees these principles provide a practical approach to ethically informed usage decision making of AI technologies. We may not get the exact right thing to do as far as these AI robots are concerned, but referencing to them, provides one with guidance towards ethical support action.

On Ethicization of AI, that is, encoding it with morality or moral principles; we recall that Yuval Levin said that the powers of science are morally neutral – as easily used for bad purposes as good ones. In the excitement of discovery, and he went on saying that we must never forget that mankind is defined not by intelligence alone, but by conscience and even the most noble ends do not justify every means.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, AI technology is really a milestone in African technological development, but much effort should be done towards more human genuine development by getting AI towards personal relationship through the awareness of ethical values embedded in African communalism as man is not defined by reason alone, but also by conscience.<sup>24</sup> We also alert the scientists and technological inventors of the great call or need to use the principles of ethics and morality to control their venturesome indiscretions so that some technology will not be a menace to humankind.

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