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**A Critique of Okolo's
Notion of African
Communitarianism**

*¹Ikeagwuchi Ikechukwu
Ukwuoma*

*²George Ohabuenyi Abah,
PhD*

*³Anayochukwu Kingsley
Ugwu*

Philosophy Department
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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¹*Ikeagwuchí Ikechukwu Ukwuoma*

²*George Ohabuenyi Abah, PhD*

³*Anayochukwu Kingsley Ugwu*

Philosophy Department
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

It has been argued that the African life is best described as communitarian and thus different from the western life which tends towards individualism. This African communitarian lifestyle is what Okolo designates with the term, 'being-with'. It is a socio-ontological attitudinal disposition that portrays the interconnectedness of reality in the African worldview. But today, factors have emerged which lead to the emergence of strands of communitarianism; hence this paper sets out to interrogate Okolo's version of communitarianism. However, the problem associated with Okolo's communitarianism ranges from the question and security of the rights and freedom of individuals, imposition of the term 'African' to non-Africans, etc. Nonetheless, the thesis of this paper is that communitarianism best describes the African life. Expectations from this paper are exposition of both the strengths and weaknesses of Okolo's thesis, a new communitarian conception that allows the individual rights and freedom. The methods adopted are critical, content analysis and hermeneutics.

Key Words: Communitarianism, Africa, being-with, African-life, ethical responsibility

Introduction

Chukwudum Barnabas Okolo was a priest and one of the leading Professors of African Philosophy before his death. He argues that his interest in pursuing an academic venture or of coming into the debate of the human project was to prove and grant the status of humanity and 'otherness' (of a human being) to the African (Okolo, 1990). It is Okolo's argument that there is an obligation on the part of the African to know himself and the environment in which he lives in order to attain the truth about all reality (Okolo, 1987). Okolo argues that the ages of the African predicaments are years of inauthentic existence or existential uprootedness, and so, in order to regain the lost dignity, respect and recognition as humans, the African must rise to re-define himself from his existential experiences. From a more humanitarian perspective, among other things, Okolo sees the human being as a social and political being. He knows that the human being lives in communities, and realizes his major objectives in life in political communities. Existential experiences say a lot about that. In reference to this position, Okolo refers to the Aristotelian

statement that “one who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god” (Aristotle, 1998, pp. 4-5). But, unlike Aristotle who works on the presupposition that entities are individuated, Okolo’s argument is that there is no individuation but rather togetherness of all things such that even ‘gods’ or divinities are part and parcel of this holistic system and as such need other entities in the system particularly the human being in order to be what it is. The argument of Okolo that the African is a human being springs from his argument that a human being is rational, one who philosophizes and lives in community; therefore, the African is a human being because he possesses these essential attributes. The African being is a being-in-community; he becomes what he is because of the community. Outside of the web of socio-ontological relationships, the African lacks humanness or existence. The questions such view poses are: what rights do individual human beings possess? Is the attitude of ‘being-with’ specific to the African? Is it a state of mind or fundamental human characteristic? Is it timeless and closed to influences and changes? All these shall be dialogued with, hence, the partitioning of this work into four sections. The introductory section captures the background of Okolo’s discussion on the African ‘being-with’. The second section exposes Okolo’s notion of African ‘being-with’. The third section discusses the ethical implications inherent in Okolo’s notion of African ‘being-with’ and how they can be used to resolve conflicts, nepotism, racism and the crises of ‘otherness’ facing the Nigerian community, the African continent and the world at large. The fourth section raises criticism against the notion of African ‘being-with’ and by extension, includes the last part which is a conclusive summary of the position of the paper.

Okolo’s Notion of African Communitarianism (‘Being-with’)

A basic concept of the human being in the philosophy of Okolo is the recognition that true humanity is a relationship with others, and that this relationship exists not only among the living, but also, among the dead. This is what Okolo terms African ‘being-with’. Thus, a man is a man because of others. This subject matter is the energetic force and spring point to read Okolo’s *What is to be African* declaration. ‘Being-with’ is a socio-ontological essential characteristic of communal sharing inherent in the African traditional community. It is the substance of the African’s identity and personality and as a human being in the world. This area has been vehemently emphasized by philosophers in the African bent in forms of appraisal, critique and recommendations. Nevertheless, there is no gainsaying that the most popular user of the conceptual reference to man as a ‘being-with’ in African philosophy is Okolo. Okolo, like other African scholars, argues that among all traditional peoples, closer interaction and communications exist between the living and their dead ancestors known as the ‘living-dead’. Though no more physically alive, they still exist in the non-physical realm of existence which is not far from the physical world in the African worldview; and their ontological influences in the family reinstate the African belief in the ‘departed-living’. They are part and parcel of the physical living families and are often invited to the family, beckoned upon for interventions, celebrated and upheld with high sense of pride and dignity. From this perspective, it is inferable that the human being is the centre of the created order with forces above and below him. The human being cannot but communicate with them, regularly, at the call of duties or hours of need. Hence, man is the most powerful among created beings; he dominates plants, animals and minerals. In fact, the lower beings exist only for assistance of the higher created being, man (Okolo, 2003).

To appreciate Okolo’s notion of African ‘being-with’, it is essential to understand and know who and what Okolo designates as ‘African’. Even though Okolo’s concept of ‘African’ is not clear,

however, he ordinarily defines the 'African' as the black African, mainly of the South of the Sub-Sahara. For him, what makes the African who or what he is, as a distinct cultural being in a distinct world, arises from culture. He identifies this distinctness with what Professor Jacques Maquet (1972) terms 'Africanity': the totality of cultural features common to the hundreds of the societies of 'Sub-Saharan Africa'. Most common among these features, Okolo argues is communitarian life. Okolo conceptualizes this to mean the cultural orientation, the way of life of the traditional African who thrives in looking out for the other individual, such that, on each person, rested a moral question to ensure the preservation of the fellow's life. This togetherness, in which everyone fears the consequences or repercussions that come from breaching the network of relationships, conveys the point that one could not live alone, but needs the 'other'. In the 'other' one lives and leaves his existential imprint, hence life becomes full of obligation for the welfare of the 'other'. This communal relation has two senses: one, to identify with the 'other', being close, belonging and participating or experiencing life as shared with the 'other', in which case, one is only a part of a group. The second sense is a relation in terms of sympathetic feeling, being committed to the 'other', responding to another's need and acting for his good, an exhibition of solidarity. It is humanism. In Okolo, the notion of 'community' is something one shares ontologically with others such that one shares in the pride and shame of the community. Consequently, the individual's identity is submerged into the group; implicated in the reality of the other and so obligated to take on a specific predisposition towards the other (Matolino, 2018).

Okolo argues that there are several socio-cultural practices that give distinct identity to African personality and family-hood. The family, for Okolo, characterizes the mode of life of the African, and shapes the personality and outlook in life of the African. He also argues that through the African cultural upbringing, rugged individualism as obtainable in the western style of upbringing, is diminished. Thus, the African is essentially man-in-community as it is the community, which makes the individual, not the other way round. Other socio-cultural practices of the African include 'being rooted in kinship', 'going back to the Ancestor (Ancestral reverence)', 'being in harmony with reality' (Okolo, 1989) and so on. However, 'being-with', in Okolo, is peculiar in consideration of the fact that he criticized the earlier African philosophers' conception of 'being-with' like (Mbiti, 1969, 1970; Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 1987, 1993; 1997). His criticism is based on the fact that theirs emphasize the social dimension of the African self over and against the individual's autonomy. Thus, Okolo sees his own conceptualization of communitarianism ('being-with') as a remedy by calling for preservation of individuality in the African communality. Thus, Okolo argues that there are two perspectives/aspects of 'being-with': one, 'being-with' in relation to others; and two, 'being-with' as unique and unduplicable. He uses African names to depict the individuality arguing that African names have distinct meanings, rich cultural contents and each speaks for itself, for instance, each name points to the circumstances and conditions of particular individuals; their family background; social status, etc. Some of these names include Onwubiko (death please), Azubuike (has various meanings, but one used: 'retreat is strength'), Igewbuike (multitude is strength), Ozoemena let/may it not happen again), Obiechina let/may the family entrance- ancestry never end, Onwugbufo (when death remains (a survival)), Taabugbo (Taagbo) (today is still time), Ahamefuna let/may my name- ancestry never be lost), Ezeabia (king has come/arrived), Nwokoabia (male has come/arrived), Obiajuru ((my) heart is (now) at peace), Ibegbunam let/may others not kill me), Ilohamaka (let(may) hatred leave me alone), Chukwuakasiemobi (God has comforted me) and many others. Another way Okolo establishes an African individuality is through physical appearance, particularly, tribal marks. In Okolo's words,

“man’s humanity is expressed through his external appearances as well: broken nose, slanting eyes, deformed hands, crooked legs and so on, easily become various means of identifying individuals, as well as expressing their humanity”(2003, p. 253). Having x-rayed the background of Okolo’s philosophy, it is seen that the question: ‘What is to be African?’ forms the background of Okolo’s definition of ‘African’. It equally forms his introduction, usage and analysis of the phraseology ‘being-with’ as seen in his declaration:

‘Whether the African is one people or many, is insignificant in this essay. We rather assert that the African is easily identifiable ontologically or as a being-in-the-African-world. He is not just a being but a ‘being-with’...the concept and full import of this uncommon phrase is the main theme and focus of this monograph which is an essay in African metaphysics whose deepest inquiry is the African man. It is indeed a search for African identity’ (Okolo, 1987, p. 6)

That a child is born black and becomes African is a straight-forward assertion of Jacques Maquet which Okolo borrows. But, what is ‘to become an African’ is a question that often eludes the African, who is, at once, both the questioner and the questioned. Hence, in expressing his dissatisfaction in the disharmonious answer given by anthropologists as to what constitutes an ‘African,’ culturally speaking, Okolo argues that the African, to a large extent is, philosophically not just a human being, as a subject in existence, but essentially, a ‘being-with’. This constitutes the very claim that he is an ‘African’ and concretizes his definition of African man as a ‘being-with’. This according to Okolo, has its place in major metaphysical discourses on the human person and his horizon of existence, which essentially and practically is relational, that is, oriented towards others in the community. This horizon of being according to Okolo, is ‘self-in-relation-to-other’, in fact, a ‘being-with-others’ and this fundamentally defines his existence. In his own words:

‘As a matter of fact, individuals become real only in relationship with others, in a community or group. It is the community which makes the individuals, to the extent that without the community the individual has no existence. Consequently, the African is not just a being but a being-with, a being-with-others or as I said elsewhere the African self is defined in terms of ‘we existence’ just as much as ‘we’ in ‘I’ existence through social interactions’ (Okolo, 1993, p. 1)

In attempting to give a unique interpretation to ‘being-with’ Okolo argues that the distinguishing characteristic of all that is African is the quality of ‘being-with’, which he understands as the specific quality that distinguishes anybody imbued with the quality of being African. Accordingly, this quality, when it characterizes an individual, has nothing to do with his nationality, place of birth, or education. Therefore, a foreigner, with the quality of ‘being-with’ is more African than a born African, who does not possess, or who has lost, this quality (Okolo, 1993). Okolo, in designating African ‘being-with’, negates his earlier acceptance of ‘Africanity’ and argues that the term ‘African’ is a ‘state of mind’, a ‘dispositional attitude’ that is universal such that any individual, no matter the geographical location, race, culture or history, can become or possess it. An Asian, a European, an American can become an African by mere fact of displaying the characteristic of ‘being-with’, since what is ‘African’ is communitarian. Okolo, in this sense, argues for a world in solidarity, a global family-hood and brotherhood. The guiding principle of this global brotherhood is communitarianism founded on humanism and egalitarianism.

Further, Okolo contends that the African 'being-with' is deeply rooted in the African extended family system. In fact, 'being-with' is the humane and socialist attitude of the African to life. It is the essential horizon of the African and his mode of being-in-the-world, his concern of man-for-man or an involvement of man with-and-for-others (Okolo, 1993). More so, Okolo argues that 'being-with' as a characteristic of the African mode of being-in-the-world, takes the meaning of openness to the world in a form of positive and sacred worship, which solidifies an unlimited relationship between man and nature. Generally, therefore, this dimension of the African 'being-with' implies an essentially true and dynamic relation with the Supreme Being, who is close and accessible, an involvement with spirits, deities and divinities, especially the dead relatives with whom the Africans enjoy an ontological interaction and communication. The conceptualization of 'being-with' does not entail death as the absolute end and final separation of man from communal interaction, or end of man's possibilities. Hence, Okolo emphasizes that the African does not regard the universe as merely thrown into being:

'For the Africans it is to be venerated as the source of his material need, the tomb of his ancestors and shrine of his gods. He obtains his needed material goods not so much by conquering and mastering it as by submitting to it and venerating it as well. Injury or damage to nature is a breach of Cosmic harmony and order which attracts penalty from the gods and when venerated, good fortune and blessings, material and spiritual' (2003, p. 254)

Lastly, Okolo examines the African 'being-with' as a relationship between man and another man, that is, a relationship of 'intersubjectivity', of individuals with one another. This human social and practically structured relationship marks the basic distinctive characteristic of the African 'being-with'. This human relationship has a metaphysical foundation. In the African metaphysical analysis, man is the centre of all things in the universe. Being the centre focus of all things in the universe, he is subjected to its laws, which he must consciously obey or bear the consequences when otherwise. The human being, in this African metaphysical system, is the point of interaction and inter-communication between the visible created order and the invisible order. As the centre of all reality, man is the 'ontological mean' between the beings above and the beings below. Ruch and Anyanwu capture the argument of Okolo by positing that man is at the centre of created order, "the focal point of the universe", the ontological mean between the visible and the invisible worlds, and that is why human individuals enjoy intrinsic dignity, respect, and worth in African philosophy and in real life. They add that this is also the metaphysical basis for anthropological humanism characteristic of the African life and practice particularly in the African inter-personal relationships (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981). African 'being-with', therefore, entails the fundamental human concern or involvement with the other, practical in his interpersonal relationship with man and other realities in the universe. With such a belief-system or wealth of value, dignity and meaning for the human person and realities in the universe, the African 'being-with' implies some basic human values and characteristics. These, as Obinyan (2012) put them, include communal spirit, hospitality, generosity, acceptance, and the practice of egalitarianism, equality of opportunity for all as important existential concretization of 'being-with. Okolo's argument is that 'being-with' is a characteristic of the 'African' that defines his personal identity and personality and the basis of his conception of existential reality. It attempts to show where the African personality derives its onus. In other words, societies have different cultures (personalities) to the extent that they have different assumptions or theories of human nature. Okolo's concept of 'being-with' promotes the saying that family relations and everyone, who is a kinsman, have a duty and responsibility toward

another, and it is by the observance of these duties and responsibilities that African personality dwells (Ndubuisi, 2013).

Okolo formulates the notion of African 'being-with' primarily from his cultural milieu where the African traditional lifestyle is a core replica of what communitarianism could imply; and secondarily, from an indispensable need to respond to the experience of African predicaments, such as colonization, racism, discrimination, slavery, Trans-Atlantic slave trade, subjugation and imperialism, which not only existentially uprooted and alienated the African from this identity, but also threw him into a foreign social environment where the principles of individualism prevail. Thus, Okolo felt the need to assert and defend the African humanity in the global community, of human beings; and for the world to recognize the people of the continent as having a distinct thought-system and culture that could contribute to development and civilization (Okolo, 1974). Okolo contends that African 'being-with' disregards colour, geographical location and even blood ties. The African 'being-with' is more of a concept than a racial identity. For Okolo then, the possibility is that not all Africans possess this attitude of 'being-with' as the African personality. In relation to the Xenophobic attack in South Africa, which has been cited as a critique against the African claim of communitarianism (Okolo 1985), Okolo would argue that the perpetrators of the act are not Africans, or those without (who have lost) the consciousness of the African 'being-with', since the African 'being-with' is a participatory involvement of self with and for others. Thus, 'being-with' as an attitude of mind is ideally universal to all races, hence, any man who imbibes the spirit of communitarianism is an African. Okolo conceives African 'being-with' as the humane and socialist attitude of life in Africa, the African's concern for man or an involvement of man for dealing with and for others. It is his African brand of humanism based on the communal sharing for the welfare of a fellow human. To this end, Okolo does not establish the African identity outside of the culture of the people which he argues is the key to understanding and defining the 'African'.

Okolo's African 'Being-with' and Ethic of Responsibility

Firstly, Okolo's concept of African 'being-with' is embedded in humanism. It is Okolo's argument that in core cultural way of the African, he is a human being, who values life. He treats others of its kind as subjects, not as objects, and for Okolo, this sense of humanism is the guiding principle of the African communitarianism. Okolo's African 'being-with' conditions one to act for others' good and to respond to their need. In this sense of communitarianism, the individual becomes implicated in the reality of the other and so obligated to take on a specific predisposition towards the 'other' (Matolino, 2018). Thus, that which I am, I also assume, that the next person is, a subject-subject relationship. It is through this interpretative schema, that relations take place. The moral sense inherent in this humanistic philosophy is a call to acknowledge that one is dealing with a fellow human being, whose relationship must be guided by humanism and egalitarianism. Further, African 'being-with' entails all realities, both visible and invisible, in all their categories. In this relationship, Okolo, goes beyond social context to socio-ontological, in that, every act has a reprisal consequence and also affects the entire system. Therefore, every act of man must be performed, in consideration of all realities and its effect on the web of relationships. This conception even extends to environmental ethical questions, on how the environment (both natural and artificial), including rivers, lands, seas, groves, animals, etc, should be harnessed and treated.

Secondly, Okolo's African 'being-with' runs into the debate on individual-community primacy, which is rooted on how the individual is separated from a 'specific' social-self. A social-self is a

distinct attribute shared by a particular group or a distinct attribute by which common group of people identify themselves. This social-self has both a racial classification, as well as, geographical classification. As a social-self in the world the black man is synonymous with the African man. It says a lot about the African western-perpetrated humiliation and the necessity for a new African consciousness. The African, as a social-self, goes beyond geographical description because of the African experience in which the African loses its identity, as a social-self, to acquire another social-self. This is pointed out vividly in the French policies of association and assimilation. Thus, African social-self is a social construct to meet the demands for self-preservation. African social-self is a product of leading intellectuals who construct a socio-ontological image of the African. Unfortunately however, even within Africa there exist basically two social-selves: social-self according to nationality and social-self according to ethnicity. An examination into these further social-selves will unearth a denial of social-self to certain individuals (albinos, outcast, *osu*, slaves, and so on) because of their conceptual social position. Hence, within the shared African experience of social-self there still exist differentiations and discriminations. Okolo's African 'being-with' is, therefore, a socio-ontological construct made in order to preserve what he perceives to be good values of the traditional African society. Realizing that the African experience of social-self is further scrutinized into ethnic social-self, Okolo calls for global social-self, which transcends ethnic, national and continental social-selves through recognition of the other individual of another tribe, nationality and race as brother of a global family-hood without eliminating the tension that exists between individuals and their communities.

Consequently, Okolo argues that 'African' is a concept that designates 'being-with'; and by that, this concept can be adopted to combat social challenges, ranging from racism, religious crises, ethnic rivalry and domination. In our contemporary world, one is valued more or less, depending on the race, skin colour, family, community, status or tribe. In fact, an African, in the streets of another continent, is ordinarily seen and treated as the 'African other' irrespective of his/her nationality, ethnicity or even citizenship. This conditions the quality of the individual, his dignity and how he is to be treated (Nkemnkia, 1999). Experiences of this outlook, particularly in Nigeria, is found during force recruitments, Civil Service recruitments and even state recruitments, where it all depends on your tribe, 'who sent you', your family and relationship with the '*oga* on top'. These exist because we do not have that understanding to be dealing with a fellow subject, a family member, or imbibe in that brotherhood that does not end within one's own clan, community. For example, in the Nigerian experience, the 'other' of Igbo extraction, is seen as an outsider to be mistreated, while the 'other' of say the Hausa tribe, is to be welcomed and treated in a better way. Hence, in Nigeria, the different tribes see themselves as 'others' to dominate and rule. This very interpretation is supported by Mudimbe in his application of the myth of Oedipus (Orrells, 2016). What is argued here is that these 'others' within Africa is a consequence of sort of social-selves developed. Social-self refers to a definite group of people, which see themselves as distinct from another group of people, based on the possession of a defined attribute. A reflection on the social self raises socio-political questions, such as, individual freedom, human rights and cognate issues (Okolo, 1993). Okolo's African 'being-with' therefore, raises a particular moral understanding, of how human beings, are to deal with an 'other'— as subjects of the same global family-hood. This will definitely be of help in addressing diverse crises and challenges. In fact, recognition as member of the same extending global brotherhood, will reduce, if not eradicate, the crises of ethnicity, prevalent in the Nigerian society and the world at large, as a global village. Okeja's argument aligns with this hence his position that negative constructions of otherness hinder a

genuine pursuit for justice. In a situation where ‘one’ or ‘more’ parties regard the ‘other’ parties as absolute ‘others’, particularly, as the ‘embodiment of everything aberrant’, one wonders whether justice is realizable in such a society. Therefore, deliberation as a means to justice is ultimately contingent (Okeja, 2019).

A Critique of Okolo’s Notion of African ‘Being-with’

The issue of rights is ultimately a discourse on human relations— a reflection on what should count as the legitimate interpersonal relationship among humans as social and rational agents, living in a specific community. Okolo subsumes the notion of individual human rights to the community, thereby making the individual’s right a derivative one and not inalienable. He does not make a distinction between ‘social rights’ and ‘human rights’. The rights, which Okolo, seems to propose are duties based on participation and entitlement, thereby making rights extrinsic and context-sensitive. This is a general Afro-communitarian view, which Chimakonam and Nweke argue are initiated by Menkiti and Gyekye whom they describe as radical and moderate communalists respectively. In each case the individual human right is subsumed under the community such that the individual lacks personal initiative and freedom outside that which the community grants it. Chimakonam and Newke (2018) argue that such views do not give much needed attention to a basic difference between the prevalent conceptions of rights, traceable to the enlightenment project. The enlightenment project in relation to rights refers to the conception of human rights as inalienable rights of an individual human being. Unlike Chimakonam and Nweke, Okolo, on his part, does not take cognizance of the fact that it is specific individuals that make up and define the community and that without these separate individual entities the community cannot exist. In fact, it takes the coming together of these individual entities to form a corporatist entity in form of community.

Okolo ordinarily defines the ‘African’ as the black African mainly of the Sub-Saharan, but when it comes to his discourse on the African as ‘being-with’, he takes a different stand giving the question: “What is to be African?” For him, what is to be African becomes a ‘state of mind’— an attitude which anybody anywhere can possess and be qualified to be called an ‘African’ (Okolo, 1993). Okolo, is therefore, not consistent since after borrowing from Jacques Maquet that an ‘African person’ is one distinguished by ‘Africanity’ he turns back to say one is not an African by mere fact of ‘Africanity’. It should be said that ‘being-with’ as a distinguishing African characteristic or mode of being is not essentially identical to the black colour in Okolo. In fact, Okolo (1993) gives the African too racial identifying terms/words that raise a lot of questions to the clarity of his thought. For Okolo, since it is arguable that culture is dynamic and the qualities of ‘being-with’ can be lost to innovation and trend of cultures and values, it can also be regained and nurtured or lost forever. Following this, recall that ‘being-with’ as a socio-ontological mode of being of the African is a concrete existential act of ‘becomingness of being’ into what it is not yet, or to what it was, thus, it is not staunch to ‘blackness’ or the African race. Hence, that a man is born black or into any of the African communities is not a prerequisite for being an ‘African’ as he may not possess that African cultural characteristic of ‘being-with’. Here, Okolo is saying that an African who does not possess this attitudinal disposition is not an African and that anyone who possesses it is an African. So an English man, a European and an American or Asian, can become an African, by the mere fact of possessing this attribute of communitarianism. Thus, Okolo would be arguing that the persons involved, in the Covid-19 racketeer, are not Africans. But importantly, would an Asian accept that he is an African, simply because, he possesses the attitudinal

disposition? Okolo by noting that ‘being-with’ can be lost and regained or lost forever has shown that there is nothing inherently black or African about being-with and that it is not specific to the traditional African.

Okolo argues that existence for the African is not individualistic and that the African person is not a lone-ranger, but essentially man-in-community, which goes much beyond nuclear family relationship. In other words, the African man is never isolated as he is essentially a person-in-relation-with-others. However, today, following the effect from the European-African contact, the attitude Okolo enthusiastically holds is the African personality has been impaired. The supposed-communal affairs have been turned sectional, individualistic among people of different interests, and as a consequence, Okolo (1994) notes that the African now has little or no respect for the common good. This alien and new acquired personality has gone so deep in the African consciousness that the African can rightly be described as too selfish towards a supposed communitarian welfarism. This becomes too obvious in the corona virus pandemic where opportunities are taken by few over the common good of the majority like in food prices, palliatives hoarding, financial criminality at the expense of the majority, etc, (Agbedo, et al, 2020, *para.* 3, 5, 6, 8). Among every other instances, the near total lack of conscience and inhumane governance style and principles the African political class allow themselves to be guided by, say a lot about the level of deterioration and erosion of the old value of communitarianism to the new individualistic *cum* exploitative communitarianism that largely tends to define the African situation of today. In the words of Ugwu, et al:

A clear and practical implication of this is that the unified, and Africanly-universal-communitarianism is now segregated-communitarianism. Africans now have a divisional communitarianism of like-faith, a situation whereby you do not ‘communitarianize’(commune) with me if you are not of the same creed/belief-system with me... A communitarianism of disbelief in one another, of domination, of conquer and rule, of avoid him for he is an enemy, evil and kill him, of various negative labellings... A communitarianism of crack, and internal-cracked-communitarians(others) (2022, p. 73)

Further, certain natural human inclinations expressed in incongruity among a people like tribal or communal war bear a contingency to the African ‘being-with’ as held by Okolo. Further, certain culturally-motivated practices like the perception of *Osu* who are segregated against, the reality of *Ohu* who are slaves and considered less-privileged to those considered as *Nwa-Di-Ala* seen as free born, obstruct the equal flow of the ‘being-with’ and thus becomes a critique to Okolo in his conceptualization and projection of this attitude. Thus the paper asks who really and essentially is communitarian and who looks after the well being of his kinsman? It is he who makes a community in which the people “believe together, live together, and surmount various challenges of life together” (Okpalike, 2011, pp. 439-446) for betterment of humanism.

Indeed, events of contemporary times, show overwhelming and staggering evidence of individualism across Africa. What is more is that the modern architectural designs for African residential buildings in the name of ‘quarters’, ‘self-contained’, ‘flats’ and ‘apartments’ depict little or nothing of the extolled virtues of the African ‘being-with’. Even the African governments lack policies that pursue the values propagated by communitarianism whereas, governments in countries assumed to be dominated by individualism, make policies and provide structures that

make bearable, the costs of individual living. Any defence of African 'being-with', in the contemporary world, must factor in the varying context across the continent. For there to be authentic African 'being-with' there must be a genuine attempt to internalize, among all African peoples, the virtues of particular communitarianism, as there are, different brands of communitarianism propagated by African scholars (Nwoko, 1985).

Okolo, among other African scholars advocates for a return to the communitarian values as obtainable in the pristine era in Africa characterized by communal ownership, egalitarianism and solidarity, etc. At the heart of this communitarian *ethos* is care for the 'other' that extends to all members of the community including the stranger. This interdependence therein creates a special type of rights and duties which are claimed within the auspices of the community. These indigenous peoples may have been communalistic but, this possibility of communitarian *ethos* cannot be timeless. To hold that they are, amounts to arguing that these communities are static and unaffected by changes. Evidences abound to show that these communities involve in continuous trans-culturation with communities totally different from theirs both in culture, religion, politics and economy.

Being-with belongs to the sphere, of inter-human relationships, where one human being is confronted by another human being. To, therefore, answer the question: 'What is man?' is to understand man, as a being, who participates in a dialogue, in which another human being is encountered (Sylwia, 2014). 'Being-with' is a fundamental human attribute that conforms to human sociality or tendency to always be involved with other realities through human-to-human interpersonal relationship since no man can provide for himself all that one needs. In the same way that human beings are social beings so also they have the basic tendency to be anti-social. Put differently, as much as human beings are fundamentally social so also they are fundamentally anti-social and the ideology of a society at a given time develops one side of these two aspects of the human being. The village life in the times before encounter with European ways of life vividly demonstrates the communitarian *ethos* which Okolo presents. During this period, the survival of the traditional African peoples, especially in the Igbo land areas where Okolo takes as starting point hugely depends on corroboration among the people. As soon as the circumstances changed the social mode of living also changed. And so, Okolo calls for a return to such traditional living that acknowledges corroboration and welfare of one another. But, as has been shown even in the traditional African society there exists certain anti-social activities. The strengths in Okolo's philosophy have been pointed out but it has also been shown that his stance cannot be taken hook, line and sinker.

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