Rethinking the African spirit of collectivism as a tool for African empowerment

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Abstract

The continent of Africa suffered a lot in the hand; of their colonial masters. This is not unconnected with the way and manner in which the colonial masters handled their affairs while they ruled them and even after they gained independence. Many of the African leaders that fought for the emancipation of Africans from the shackles of the colonial masters were not directly given the responsibility of controlling the affairs of their people. Hence, those that prepared and ready to take the mantle of leadership and governance were denied and were edged out for stooges who would do the bidding of the colonial masters. This, to some extent, has distorted the spirit of collectivism for which the African fought for independence. In place of this, the spirit of individuality sprung up. As such, this paper stress on the implications of the absence of the spirit of collectivism and its effects on Africa to advocate a revisit of Africa communal nature built on collective participation for African empowerment. The paper adopted the analytical method of philosophical inquiry to pursue its argument.

Keywords: Africa, Collectivism, Empowerment

Introduction

Whoever has lost his or her culture has nothing more to lose
- Pa. Abraham Adesanya

… we may be influenced by Europe, our realities are not identical
-Leopold Senghor

Collectivism is not a new concept in most, if not all, African societies. It formed the basis of African love and care for each other's. The gradual collapse of the African traditional culture and values, however, has changed the values and essence of the communal nature of African societies. Africans in the past saw themselves as one and always ready to do things in common. This communal nature of Africa has been discussed by scholars, some of who are, J. S. Mbiti, Kwame Gyekye, whose discussion are from religious point of view. On the other hand, the likes of Leopold Sendar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkruma and Obafemi Awolowo discuss it from political standpoint. The collective nature of African is well expressed in the profound position of Mbiti that "I am, because

we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[1] This maxim gives an exposition of the communal nature of Africans.

One wonders what is responsible for the recent development in African continent where things are lopsided. It is in view of this that this paper tends to rethink the spirit of collectivism in Africa and see how it can be a viable tool for empowerment. The essence of this is not unconnected with the fact that western tradition has become a springboard on which African leaders and followers are swimming. Thus, cultural polarization has raised its ugly head both at the altar of the leaders and the followers, the result of which has culminated to self-centeredness which manifest in favouritism, nepotism, marginalization, ethnic chauvinism, etc. These, among other factors, have degenerated the values of Africa as a continent and individual Africans.

The Spirit of Collectivism

The spirit of collectivism permeates African community such that they live an inclusive as against exclusive lifestyle apparent in the western world. Thus Africans are known for their philosophy of corporate existence as against the individualistic philosophy of the western world often displayed in their atomistic lifestyle. The Africans are not just called African neither is the westerner called westerner; there is a cultural delineation that separates them. For instance marriage in Africa is corporate while it is individualistic in the west. It is not me, my wife and children but rather me, my wife, children and other members of extended families.

One of the enduring attributes of Africa and Africans is collectivism. It is their worldview and it needs to be guided jealously for:

> Lives without worldview to shape them can respect collective goals and the freedom of others. Lives without worldviews to shape them can be empty. Communities of memory and tradition are needed to enable individuals to relate to one another and for one nation to deal with another.[2]

It is in view of this that Africans need to retrace their origins and remodel their worldviews in order to meet up with the challenges that this contemporary period poses. This is because collectivism, as operated in traditional African society, adds to "sense of common origin, unity, oneness and togetherness, and stand for national consciousness."[3] Tunde Adeniran, one time Nigeria's Federal Minister of Education, argues that one of the ways out of the multifaceted African crisis lies in cultural return which collectivism is one. Using Nigeria as test case, he says:

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[1] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* (New York: Anchor Books Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1970), 141

[2] T.Falola, *Transnationalization, Denationalization and Deterrioritation: Contemporary Cultures in the Context of Globalization,* (Kaduna: GK Press Limited, 2010).

[3] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,*

> The time has come for Nigeria to go beyond ethical appeals, drop our anchor into the depths of our cultural heritage and draw from the pool of brotherhood, communion, community and other virtues and values that make man human. By the time these are made to condition intra and inter-party activities and inter-personal interactions across ethno-linguistic and geographical zones, as well as determine the dynamics of our political system and the process of governance, we would have effectively eliminated the raging poverty which presently characterizes the practice of democracy and threatens its survival in Nigeria. The Nigerian people would also have been drawn away from an atrophying culture that unlinks them from their aspirations and mocks their efforts at self-actualization.[4]

Adeniran's position is supported by Oke with reference to the statement of erstwhile military Head of State and onetime civilian President of Nigeria, then General, now Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who while examining the situation of Nigeria sometime in 1980 asked rhetorically out of despair:

> Should we not in our own interest and in the interest of humanity, hack back to our tradition of 'espirit de corps' and communalism and build an economy and a society of our own?[5]

It is germane at this juncture to point out that cultural heritage is a fundamental principle that enhance empowerment of given groups, societies and nations. In this regard, no nation can grow or develop if it operates outside its cultural heritage. Therefore, for any meaningful empowerment in Africa, the cultural heritage of Africa must be in vogue. This, is because, concept of empowerment is all-encompassing phenomenon, for it relates with socio-political, economic, educational, and religious dimension of the people. The evident of the connection between empowerment and development is succinctly captured in Osagie's definition of development.

> The quantitative and qualitative positive transformation of lives of the people which enhance not only their material wellbeing, but also ensures their social well-being and the restoration of human dignity.[6]

Flowing from Osagie's position, the reality of imbibing cultural heritage in order to empower the individual that constitute the society is inevitable. It is on the inevitability of cultural heritage that this paper advocates a revisit of African

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[4] Moses Oke, "Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies,* 15(3), (2006), 236.
[5] Moses Oke, "Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa," 236.
[6] S. O. Osagie, "The Concept of Material Culture and Contemporary Issues in Nigeria," in *Nigerian Life and Culture,* (Ago - Iwoye: Ogun State University Publication, 1985), 12.

spirit of collectivism as a tool for African empowerment. However, several arguments have been put up by scholars against the idea of going back to African past in building virile societies. Such reasons for their argument as articulated by Oke in reference to some arguments of Osundare among others, includes:

(1) Strains of history and the frictions of intercultural contacts have fatally weakened the traditional culture for which nostalgia is being expressed.

(2) Following from the foregoing, it follows that there may be nothing that could be called "the indigenous African traditions, values and ways of life" to which we may return.

(3) The failure of the traditional institutions to withstand the onslaught of slavery and the threat of direct colonialism does not make it appear viable to cope with the extraordinarily complex issues of governance and social co-existence in this age of globalization.

(4) The 'de-monitisation'(trade by barter?) of exchange that is recommended to solve Africa's economic problems is totally out of tune with current realities.

(5) The paradigms on which the demolished traditional institutions stood are no longer compatible with the new world order: they are thus best abandoned.

(6) Continued entertainment of the past as a viable path to the solution of contemporary problems can do nothing but keep us away from realistically confronting our historical duty of salvaging our continent from further deterioration. As was rightly perceived by Osundare (1998: 234), "There is a lot to be done in giving Africa a new lease on life. Nothing can be achieved by papering over her cracks or by pretending (as is customary in sickening diplomatic circles) that the problems do not exist."

(7) It is an escapist approach to the problem. Rather than realize that our problems are caused directly by our own actions and inactions, we are being urged to look away from reality to some obscure sources of redemption. The approach is nothing but an undesirable diversion from the serious task of re-making Africa.

(8) Given the failure of our indigenous cultural arrangements and institutions to repel the attack of other cultures in the past, there is no reason what so ever to think that they will be able to bail the continent out of its present predicament. As the Yoruba people say, "What makes the lazy man's farm to be small is the same thing that makes it to be overgrown with weeds."

(9) The flowery descriptions of the African past cannot be sustained in empirical facts. There appears to be nothing so much to valorize in the African past relative to the contemporary realities. The communalism that is often so much praised in that past also harbored practices and principles that cannot move contemporary Africa further in the path of growth, progress and development.

(10) It is also doubtful if there are any existing 'experts' (or elders) from who lessons about the traditional institutions could be taken. Assuming that there still exist some persons who were once such

experts, the experiences of colonialism and its aftermath must have changed them radically that they can no longer be taken to still be grounded in the 'good' old cultures. Besides, how are they to be introduced into the current non-traditional educational and socio-political arrangements?

(11) The same traditional principles to which we are being urged to return have been used by many African rulers in the past, and even now, to oppress their peoples and to rob their countries. This is especially very prominent in the self-perpetuation syndrome that is prevalent among Africa's ruling elites – traditional and contemporary. In a tone of lamentation, Osundare (1998: 234) asks: "why are patriotic, purposeful, honest and visionary leaders in Africa always so short-lived? What or who is responsible for the murderous longevity of sit-tight despots and dictators with their corrupt, corrupting courtiers and depraved dynasties?[7]

Despite their argument, it is noteworthy to mention that no society can survive outside it culture. This position is inevitable considering the fact that "the past is not only being used to explain the present but also to prescribe for the future of Africa at this point in time by eminent African intellectuals in diverse disciplines. This suggests that there may be something quite important about the past that needs to be given a serious attention."[8]

The inability of Africa to develop home grown policies and ideologies that could be sustained through her cultural heritage further the unimaginable conflict that bedeviled Africa continent. Debt crisis, hunger and poverty, diseases, unemployment, civil disorder and religious conflict among others has peg Africa to the corridor of third world. Upon critical reflection, all these are avoidable if not for the pursuance of the colonialists' grand design to hold Africa perpetually to the apron string of colonialists. This might have informed Oladipo's review of Mugabe's feeling on post-colonial Africa *interalia:*

> Africa is now home to the world's largest number of least developed countries. The continent further boasts of the largest refugee population in the world. Furthermore, it is the theatre of endless conflicts, whereas, standards of living in other continents are now better than they were two decade ago. High unemployment, inflation, civil strives, poverty, refugee crisis, desertification, disease, malnutrition – the list is endless – appear to be only legacy the continent is capable of passing on from one generation to the other.[9]

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[7] Moses Oke, "Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa," 237-238.

[8] Moses Oke, "Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa," 237.

[9] Olusegun Oladipo, "Modernization and the Search for Community in Africa: Crisis and Conditions of Change," in *Remaking of Africa: Challenges of the Twenty-First Century,* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1998), 111-112.

Mugabe's position as represented by Oladipo is a pointer to the fact that, pursuing western ways of life holistically at the detriment of African culture will continue to delay Africa her self-actualization. Beyond this, it is evident from Mugabe's assertion that pursuing the western ways of life in totality is a mere invitation to neo-colonialists regressive tendencies in Africa.

The Africans in their tradition believe strongly whatsoever one is embarking on or passing through, others must be carried along. This is evident in one of the Yoruba proverbs that *"igikan o le e da'gbo se"* literally mean "a tree cannot make a forest." It is in view of this that in African society, for instance, on occasion of joy, (fellow African) relatives, friends rally round to share the joy as against the individualistic tendency in the western world where you come to party with your own cup and bottle. While there is collectivism in joy, and affection is found in corporate philosophy of sorrow sharing. Whenever a typical African is bereaved, he/she is not left alone; people and relatives rally around such person and share the sorrow collectively. The sorrow of one is the sorrow of all. Hence, in the spirit of collectivism Africans come together to celebrate, pray, mourn, etc. together. This is because to Africans the existence of an individual is dependent on that of other human beings. Mbiti captures this in his argument that "in traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole."[10] Nkemnkia's view is similar with that of Mbiti. According to him "whatever the case may be, whether personal or collective, pain and suffering are shared among everyone. Within the African context of the extended family, no one can suffer privately or alone. The participation is almost immediate."[11] Similarly, Ezekwonna puts this in similar perspective. He states, "it is only when the individual relates to the community that his identity will become evident."[12] By implication, for Africans, community is very important and vital to what transpires in one's life. Without community there is no individual and without individual there is no community. In other words, both are necessary for their existence and survival.

African spirit of collectivism gives credence to the normative nature of person in the community. Africans believe that an individual is a communal being. Right from birth they believe that the process of becoming a responsible being lies in the collective effort of the members of society. They quite agree that individual child in the community, though, given birth to by his/her parents the moment such an individual child is born he/she becomes the property of the community. This belief is established in one of the African proverbs that cut across virtually all African society. It is not uncommon to hear African saying that "It takes a village to raise a child." This same proverb which is believed to be of Igbo origin is pronounced in other African cultures, such as the Swahili proverb "One hand does not nurse a child", the Sudanese proverb "A child is a

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[10] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 141.

[11] N. M. Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step forward in African Thinking,* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 112.

[12] F.C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual – Igbo Culture as a Case Study,* (Bern. Berlin: PeterLang, 2004), 17.

child of everyone" and the Tanzanian proverb "One knee does not bring up a child."[13] The same is applicable to the Yoruba proverb "*Ojumerinnibimoigbaojuni wo*."These proverbs and many others revealed the kinship ties that connect the Africans together in unison. The kinship system in Africa is:

> Like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local groups this means that each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else. That means that everybody is related to everybody else, and there are many kinship terms to express the precise kind of relationship pertaining between two individuals.[14]

Beyond this kinship system, Africans express their spirit of collectivism through their feeding system. The feeding system of Africans creates an avenue for unity they believe that it is difficult for someone that eats with you in the same bowl to betray or bedevil you as reflect in one of the Yoruba saying, *eyelekiiba o nile je, kobaonile mu, kowa dojo ikukosa*. Ehinmore captured this *inter-alia:*

> Another area in which co-operation was fostered was the feeding system. This people believed even till date in collective feeding. Food was seen as a free gift of nature, as such, whoever that had invited others as a sign of love, Godliness and co-operation. This feeding tradition in no doubt promoted unity and peaceful co-existence among the fishermen (people). This was so entrenched in the people's social economic philosophy that an aphorism was developed '*erunyibaje, a sure'* (the mouth that eats will bless).[15]

The *eyele*(pigeon) in the Yoruba saying that is linked with Ehinmore's position here is allegorically used to symbolise friend. But as they *eyele* (pigeon) use to run away when their owner dies in anticipation of nobody to cater for them, it is not expected of a friend to run away when his or her friend is in trouble. It is pertinent to elucidate here that, death as portrayed in the Yoruba saying above does not necessarily means death in the real sense of it, but challenges, troubles, agonies, etc.

It has been emphasized that the spirit of collectivism is one of the major attribute of African society which is knit together by a web of kinship relationships and other social structure that gives room for brotherliness in traditional African worldview. This, however, need to be re-modeled in order to meet up with the current happenings in the world so as to meet up with the

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[13] African Proverb of the Month. November, 1998 at
http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/23-1998pr...
[14] John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy,* 136.
[15] O.M. Ehinmore, "Fishing in South-Western Nigeria in the 19th Century: A Study of the Ilaje Fishing Economy," in *AAU:African Studies Review,* No. 1. Vol. 1. (2002), 62.

challenges of this century on the one hand and to experience positive development cum empowerment on the other hand. This is because "kinship relationships are made the basis for interconnecting the well-being of the individual with that of the group."[16] This kinship is built on love and solidarity for "everyone is aware of the Other's value for which the human acts are devoted. Thus all human acts are motivated out of love and solidarity for Others."[17]

The place of kinship tie in Africa is woven around family relationship. As a way of building on this, the Yoruba of West Africa encourage mature minded individual to get married. Fadipe affirms the necessity of marriage and family life that follows as one of the major ingredients that qualify an individual as a good person (*Omoluwabi*) when he asserts that:

> For the man or woman who has reached the age of marriage to remain single is against the mores of the Yoruba. Men get married even when they are sexually impotent in order to save their faces or the faces of their immediate relatives, as well as to get someone to look after the domestic establishment. There are few cases of confirmed bachelors; men, who have reached middle age without getting married even though they are in position to do so. But they are a product of modern times with its individualism, and are almost invariably Christian.[18]

Two things are cogent from Fadipe's position that shows the importance of collectivism in Africa. In the first place, his position revealed the value placed on collective interest as against individual. On the other hand, it established the fact that in Africa (Yoruba) societies, children learns, within the family, internalized values and through practices, how to cooperate to succeed, compete and excel as an individual. This is more visible in their maxim *a n pegbonni a n pe go* literally means there is reasonability in decision collectively taken. Hence, collectivism as operate in the African past is a tool that promote their empowerment, because, they in their past do things together in oneness. This doctrine of doing things together is practical to the African for their stunt belief in the propensity of the saying *igikan o le da'gbo se* meaning a tree can never make a forest.

Re-modeling Collectivism towards African Empowerment

The reality of late Abraham Adesanya's position that 'whoever has lost his or her culture has nothing more to lose' is a pointer to the need for remodeling the spirit of collectivism in Africa. It is not a gainsaying that in modern day Africa the spirit of collectivism is undermined by a culture of individualism, selfishness, lack of care and instant gratification. Values such as respect, friendliness, generosity and modesty that were observed and recorded by

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[16] Kwasi Wiredu, "The Humanities and the Idea of National Identity," in Helen Lauer, Nana Aba Appaiah Amfo& Jemima Asabea Anderson, (eds.),*Identity meets Nationality: Voices from the Humanities,* (Legon-Accra:Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2011), 6.

[17] . N. M. Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step forward in African Thinking,* 113.

[18] N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba,* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1970), 65.

various foreigners gradually made way for disrespect, hostility, greediness and arrogance in contemporary African society. By the way, African cultural values are giving ways for foreign ideologies and by this African heritages are destroyed in the name of modernity. It is in view of this that we see the need to remodel African spirit of collectivism which is one of the attributes of African worldview. This is because:

> ..... The quality of our culture is obviously one which we must not only preserve but positively develop and deepen. It would profit us little to gain all the technology in the world and lose the humanist essence of our culture. If we look carefully at those societies in which technology has been developed to a high degree and in which, consequently, the very form of life has been transformed by industrialization; we find that there is a tendency for the qualities of spontaneity and fellow feeling to be eclipsed.[19]

In view of this, African should learn from their British counterparts who are "reluctant to turn their back on antiquity either entirely or at once. So they maintain ancient institutions and modernize them as they go along, and they are slower to modify traditional habits than many of their peers."[20] Mazrui's position is corroborated by Falola when he posits that, "elements of the practices of the past cannot be discarded and they do have implications for how contemporary societies are managed. Foreign ideas and practices cannot be prevented from making inroads, making it a necessity to accept and edit them."[21] Mazrui's and Falola's positions are instructive here for two reasons. First, they both re-echo the need to respect the past and, second, the need to accept and inculcate the present with a great sense of modification. In a nutshell, it is not the adoption of foreign ideas holistically that can help in empowering African nor assist African development, but the ability of African to locate the relevant of such ideas within their own worldviews.

Collectivism, therefore, is one of the African ways of life. This fact is undeniable. It is within this purview that the need for rethinking its essence toward Africa empowerment is considered necessary. It is believed that "for a group, community, society or country to survive as an entity, it emphasizes to some degree its difference from others. This difference may be real or imagined depending on the exposure or level of knowledge of the groups perceived to be different."[22] The implication of this lies on the fact, that, we don't look elsewhere for empowerment, when one's own potential is yet to be explored to the fullest.

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[19] Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 21.

[20] A.A. Mazrui, *The African Condition,* (London: Heinemann, 1982rep.), 97-98.

[21] Falola, T. (2010). *Transnationalization, Denationalization and Deterrioritation: Contemporary Cultures in the Context of Globalization,* 19.

[22] . Joshua J. Akong'a, "Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development," in P. Ade Dopamu (ed.) *African Culture, Modern Science and Religious Thought,* (Ilorin: African Centre for Religions and the Sciences (ACRS), 2003), 31.

An attempt to look elsewhere, setting such as the model or parameter for one's development will at the end lead and reduce one to second fiddle. This will boil down to one becoming an imitator. The best, however, that imitation can earn one is average. No wonder, Africa still wanton in shackle of underdevelopment. The inability of Africa, therefore to develop and improve on their ways of life within the purview of her cultural heritage has devalued Africa potentials. Until Africa and Africans realize that depending on other cultures as a leeway out of her predicament will continually remain in self-deception and perpetually live an inauthentic life. It is in view of getting out of this self-deceptive life that this discourse forms an alliance with Broom and Selzinck call for "members of a group… to consider their own mode of life, institutions, beliefs and practices as the best and their society, the centre of the world."[23] As a result of this submission, it is important, that Africa should revisit the spirit of collectivism with which their communities and societies were built in the past. This is to enhance corporate success as envisage for the empowerment of individual and the society writ-large.

The necessity of adopting ones way of life to enhance and better one's life is well captured in Akong'a submission. He posits:

> Behind everything civilization in human history including what we today refer to as western civilization, can be identified a few elements of culture about which there is relative internal consensus. Historians, economists and anthropologists, among other professionals, are for example unanimous that western capitalism which has generated so much economic and other forms of wealth had its origin in the liberal ideas that surrounded reformation in the sixteenth century, these ideas found practical expression in industrial revolution which provided an enabling environment for human resource and institutional development. Western civilization is therefore a western cultural phenomenon that found its engine from within.[24]

Given this, it is high time Africans search from within and develops their home grown ideologies toward empowering themselves, instead of depending on the western world for sustainability of their empowerment and development.

Africa as it stands today is retrogressing because sharing and distribution of scarce national resources has been politicized courtesy the adoption of individualistic lifestyle of the westerners. As a result, "ethnic (rather than national) consciousness or ethnocentricism has never been so high in the history of Africa than today."[25] Thus, individualistic lifestyle which is

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[23] Leornard Broom, and Philip Selznick, *Sociology: A Text with Adapted Readings* 3rd Edition, (N.Y: Harper and Row, 1963) cf. Joshua J. Akong'a, "Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development."
[24] Joshua J. Akong'a, "Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development," 34.
[25] Joshua J. Akong'a, "Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development," 35.

antithetical to the collective lifestyle of Africa has a far-reaching negative influence on the leadership style and service delivery of African leaders. The challenges posed by scarce national resources having internalized the western individualistic spirit by African leaders has led to "the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. Leadership does not merely govern and administer, but also co-ordinates a national thought process towards uplifting national vision of where society should proceed."[26] It is the absence of the collective spirit which the early political elites and African nationalists fought for African independent in and among the contemporary political class that is causing Africa her place of pride in the comity of nation. It is an issue that has to be redressed in the cultural court of home grown ideologies and policies, if Africa is to be empowered homely.

The whole essence of re-modeling African spirit of collectivism as one of the tools in enhancing African development and empowerment is not unconnected with the fact that African culture, notwithstanding its richness, is gradually going into extinction. This is because as "people tend to move more from weaker countries to powerful ones, cultures from the powerful countries are the ones that travel more frequently to the weaker ones, which explains the fact that there is more of western culture in Africa than African in the West."[27] This is evident from the rate at which Western values submerge African values under the pretext of modernization. Some of African values that unite African communities in the ancient period are fading out. For instance, the extended family reality of the past that helped in child initiation has become a thing of the past. It is important to mention that extended family promoted the potentiality of collectivism in African society of old such that selfish interest that has exacerbated itself in individuality that has now assumed the order of the day thereby submerging the interest of the whole in the sharing of common good for individual good. The importance of *agboile* is further shown in the Yoruba belief that "the dwelling compound (*agboile*) where the ancestors are buried, and the landed property of the extended family (*idile*) constitute the physical proof of the eternity of the extended family that the land belongs to the ancestors. It is held in trust for yet-to-be-born by the living adult members."[28]

Babatunde, further gives a critical analysis of the importance of the family that enhance the viability of the spirit of collectivism in Africa. The family, especially, extended family as operated in African societies, "as the social unit that can inculcate values of good character (*iwarere*) and work ethics needed for generations of the living to perpetuate the interest and well-being in the society."[29] The absence of this parental roles in moulding and upbringing of adult of this generation devoid of the neglect of the spirit of collectivism in

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[26] Wunyabari O. Maloba, "Decolonization: A Theoretical Perspective," in *Decolonization and Independence in Kenya, 1940-93,* William Ochieng and Atieno Odhiamno (eds.) (Nairobi: EA Educational Publisher, 1995), cf. Joshua J. Akong'a, "Basic Concepts of Culture and their Application to African Social and Spiritual Development," 21.
[27] Falola, T. (2010). *Transnationalization, Denationalization and Deterrioritation: Contemporary Cultures in the Context of Globalization,* 20-21.
[28] Emmanuel Babatunde, "Traditional Marriage and Family," in Nike S. Lawale'tal (eds.) *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture,* (Trenton: African World Press Inc., 2004), 218.
[29] Emmanuel Babatunde, "Traditional Marriage and Family," 218.

African societies is worrisome as bulk of individual are found of not really know what it takes to mingle with others. The delusion of this generation, under the guise of jet age is polarising the modesty of yesteryears because, parenting duties which supposed to be a step to enhancing the lifestyle of individual within the extended family has gone into extinction. This, however, is holding African societies back in the search for self-empowerment as the individualistic approaches to issue is not Africa inclined.

The changes in the family style of African in recent time have been distorted. The distortion to a considerable extent has diminished the collective spirit which Africa operated in the past. This challenge is not unconnected with the influences and contact that Africa had with the western world. Oyedipe articulates this and posits that "these challenges are largely due to western education, industrialization, urbanization, political structure, modern amenities, and world religions (Christianity and Islam)."[30] One implication of this distortion is the precarious peace that is witnessed today virtually in all African states. The good day of oneness seems to have elude Africa today, because, of the inability of the African to build on their spirit of collectivism which is an offshoot of extended family. Today, African states are being ravaged by different kinds of interest ranging from religious fundamentalism and conflict, political instability, ethnic conflict and other avoidable crisis that could have been curbed if the essence of the spirit of collectivism is reactivated, imbibed, and cultivated by the contemporary Africans both at home and in Diaspora.

The conditionality of *agboile* system that gives room for the traditional moonlight stories has been replaced by television and internet. The advent of western technological devices has devalued African orientation. This, perhaps, make Falola posit that "the tradition of moonlight stories cannot survive the onslaught of the television and internet. Home-made meats are giving way to fast food. African youths are attracted by the charms of the Western artists."[31] All these beliefs are attempts to sabotage the expansion of African heritage. It is left to the African both at home and in Diaspora to stand to this challenge of cultural alienation that is daily denying African its cultural identity in the comity of nation.

One must quickly point out here that the anti-collectivist who are arguing that the notion of collectivism promotes laziness and perpetual dependency have misinterpreted its essence. Ezekwonna disproves this logic in his *Communitarian Ethics* from Igbo perspective arguing that:

> The communitarian ethic is man-oriented and it helps man to discover himself and the realities around him. There is a common notion that Igbos are hard working. Despite the communitarian nature of their ethic, individuals still work

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[30] F. P. A. Oyedipe, "Change in the Traditional Family System," in Nike S. Lawale'tal (eds.) *Understanding Yoruba Life and Culture,* 253

[31] Falola, T. (2010). *Transnationalization, Denationalization and Deterrioritation: Contemporary Cultures in the Context of Globalization,* 25.

hard in order not to perpetually depend on anybody. The hard work is geared toward achievements.[32]

The reality of Ezekwonna's argument is profound in Yoruba society where it is believed that "*Isel'oguniise*" (industry is the remedy for poverty) and *"atelewoenikii tan ni je"* (one's hands cannot deceive one) to claim that African spirit of collectivism encourages laziness is wrong-headed. Rather, the communitarian life of the Africans in the past was an embodiment of encouragement to achieving ones set goals. It is their belief that "just as one cannot remove a fish from the water to talk with it, in the same way it is not possible to remove an African from life of the clan, tribe or family group, since he will no longer be an authentic African having lost his deepest identity, his very being."[33]

The adoption of Western ideology at the detriment of African cultural heritage under the guise of modernity has deprived African of its identity and bastardized its educational prowess. For instance, the present formal system of education where a child is taken to boarding school at tender age is not African in nature but rather a negation of what obtained in a typical African society where "education was not formal but acquired through every aspect of a person's upbringing and in which his moral outlook was fortified by an unquestioning faith in the religion of his ancestors."[34] Commenting on the effect and disparage of modernization on African educational prowess Ezekwonna states:

> Another typical example of the effect of modernity on Africans is the rapid disappearance of the African traditional way of educating children.... This traditional way of educating children that is based on the extended family system by which everybody helps in the education, has been and is being tooled by the Western modern way of education. As a result many children do not see their parents as educators any more. Instead they see themselves as superior to their parents. With this attitude in the family it becomes difficult for them to learn anything from their parents.[35]

This single ideology has hampered African empowerment and development as you can only give what you have. African societies have their own peculiarities which are imaginable and attainable through their cultures, the balkanization of the process in the name of modernity has however, disrupted the supposed essence of education in Africa. The fact that development cannot be divulged from education in turn raised the question of the relevancies of developmental process that are attainable in the present day African societies. It is regrettable that Africans in the Diaspora seem to have forgotten their source because of the

[32] F.C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual – Igbo Culture as a Case Study,* 100.
[33] N. M. Nkemnkia, *African Vitalogy: A Step forward in African Thinking,* 112.
[34] . Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture,* 29.
[35] F.C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual – Igbo Culture as a Case Study,* 220.

inherent paradoxes and pleasures they derived from Western world. This is implicative as some of them, who have the opportunity of having a direct contact with undiluted Western culture and are given the opportunities to govern African states, derive pleasure in self-aggrandisement. Their tendency for personal gains which is an offshoot of the individualistic worldview of the Western world has culminated in retrogression. They all seem to be culprit in the altar of corruption and embezzlement of public fund ordinarily meant for development; these immoral vices are not African in nature. It is, therefore, important that we in Humanities begin to learn to see and advocate what some of our ancestors in African traditional society saw in collectivism so that "we might have the clarity and the ability to bend the resources of the modern world to the construction of a befitting African political identity. Such an identity cannot be the reproduction of traditional model. But it can be reminiscent of it."[36] By implication, one can, therefore, posit that corruption, embezzlement, among other anti-developmental acts, are not inborn but acquired through Western educational model. And as it stands, until Africa and Africans retrace their steps and remodel their spirit of collectivism which takes into cognizance the affairs of others, it may be difficult if not impossible to reach its *Eldorado* in the next century.

In remodeling African spirit of collectivism, there is equally a need for African to refocus and reinvigorate their law-making process that gives room for communitarian ways of finding norms by Africans as against "the colonial parliamentary system of government, which gives the law makers the mandate to make laws and the executives to implement or enforce them."[37] This idea of law making process is foreign to Africans and it gives room for miscarriage of justice, thereby denying Africa the needed development that could be attained through impartial judge as exemplified in, for instance, Yoruba traditional judicial system. Against the western model of law making, Africa law making process that gives privileges to people to participate in the law making process, which in turn will be binding on them, should be reinvented to comply with modern positive law. This will allow individual, who the law is intended for, to be part of what will be good for them as espoused by Okafor *inter-alia:*

> Such positive laws are not the product of whims and caprices of a sovereign but the outcome of the collective will of all people of the community or their representatives which are usually elderly men of unquestionable moral character believed to be next to God after the ancestors in wisdom.[38]

Reinventing this kind of law making process will go a long way in helping Africa to attain its developmental goals as individual in the community will be familiar with the do's and don'ts of the society.

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[36] Kwasi Wiredu, "The Humanities and the Idea of National Identity," 16.

[37] F.C. Ezekwonna, *African Communitarian Ethic: The Basis for Moral Conscience and Autonomy of the Individual – Igbo Culture as a Case Study,* 143.

[38] F. U. Okafor, "Legal Positivism and African Legal Experience," in Uzukwu Eugene (ed.), *Religion and African Culture,* (Enugu: np, 1988), 52.

The hallmark of this discourse is well captured in the words of Claude Ake. He posits:

> The notion of freedom, well-being and democratic participation are, for all their appeal, hardly appropriate for people in rural Africa. For in that setting, freedom is embedded in the realities of communal life, people worry less about their rights and how to secure them than finding their station and its duties and they see no freedom in mere individualism.[39]

Conclusion

The atomistic behaviour of contemporary Africans is traceable to the civilization 'inherited' from westerners. It, therefore, means that the individualistic approach of the contemporary Africans is as a result of the influence western civilization has over them. This has contributed more harm than good to Africans; it is on the basis of this that this paper examined the notion of collectivism as an essential tool/approach suitable for the development and empowerment. This is to authenticate the fact that, the appeal here is not a holistic return to the past, but, rather, a need to get back to the past and pick from African cultural heritage those aspects that could enhance Africa empowerment and development. This is, because:

> Given that in the context of our historical past things have not worked out favourably, the rational thing to do is to step back from routine activities and try to fashion out a genuinely African blueprint of social, political and economic life. Such a blueprint will be largely analytical of our experiences. It will also have to be sufficiently comprehensive to take cognizance of the various cultural influences that have now become integral parts of the African life.[40]

The paper reminds it readers that collectivism is neither a new concept nor an approach that should be jettisoned, for it is an enduring an African attribute necessary for the reason for individual contribution. It also explains the corporate existence of the Africans, which is expressed through activities, especially the ceremonies/rites at each stage of rites of passage. The maxim "I am because we are" explains this. Although, at the apparent level, it seems only the community is essential, but a deeper understanding of it establishes the fact that both individuals and community are both necessary and sufficient for their existence and survival.

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[39] Claude Ake, Democratization of Disempowerment in Africa, (Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 1994), 5.
[40] Moses Oke, "Cultural Nostalgia: A Philosophical Critique of Appeals to the Past in Theories of Re-Making Africa," 339.

It must be noted that without people joining hands together for the development of the community, the community cannot progress. In this same vein, if community lacks progress, there cannot be any meaning empowerment programme for the individuals. In other words, the success of every individual brings about the progress of the community if it is strongly believed that individual' contributions are essentials to the success and development of the community.

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