

# Peace and Development in Nigeria: The Imperative of African Communal Values

Linus Oluchukwu Akudolu<sup>1</sup>  
Queen Ijeoma Sokwaibe<sup>2</sup>  
Angela Ogochukwu Odo<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Peace is very necessary for national development. Crises and social vices which are very common in Nigeria undermine developmental stride. This paper tends to investigate the major causes of this social decline and chaos in Nigerian society. It particularly probes into the link between the prevailing social and moral decline and the rise of a so-called modern capitalist society. The major research questions probed here include: what are the major factors that led to the overall social decline in contemporary Nigerian society? How far the modernization is responsible for this decline? What is the possible remedy in this regard? How far a return to the age old Nigerian communalistic values provides an answer to the question of social decline ultimately leading to peace and development in the country? And how those values can be re-inculcated in the society? The paper contends that for peace to reign in any society, citizens must imbibe certain moral values. African communalism provides us with these values requisite for peaceful existence necessary for national development. The purpose of this work is to identify and examine African communal values and their relevance to peace building and national development in Nigeria. The paper is a qualitative research using library materials as data with application of hermeneutic interpretation, analysis, deductive and inductive reasoning.

**Keywords:** African communalism, communal values, African ethics, Nigeria, peace, development

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## INTRODUCTION

The existence of many social vices in Nigeria such as insurgencies, kidnapping, murder, stealing, armed robbery, prostitution, human trafficking, gross violation of human rights, rape, bribery, corruption, nepotism, ethnic and religious conflicts, deficient leadership, electoral malpractice, injustice, oppression of the poor by the rich among others are indications that its citizens lack vital

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Philosophy/Religion, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. email: [oluchukwu1900@gmail.com](mailto:oluchukwu1900@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Philosophy/Religion, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup> Department of History, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

values. These social evils undermine development in the country.<sup>4</sup> Writing on humanism and political development in Nigerian, John and Ogbonnaya explain that these are consequences of selfishness and lack of human values in our society, and our leaders are doing nothing to salvage the situation but continue to give us false hope<sup>5</sup>. In the same vein, Adetoro and Omiyefa lament that rivalry among political class in Nigeria affects the nation, leading to crisis and underdevelopment<sup>6</sup>. There is also erosion of human values. It is this situation that compels Asika (2017) to insist that Nigeria is not far from state of nature where there is disorderliness and lack of development initiative to engender the confidence of masses. For real development to take place, there is need for inculcation of certain desirable values in the lives of the inhabitants. Emphasizing on development, he explains that development is not all about material improvement but has to do with development of man, his character and standard of people<sup>7</sup>. On a related note, Efemini asserts that development is associated with quantitative and qualitative improvement in material, emotional and spiritual conditions of man.<sup>8</sup> This implies that development is inculcation of desirable values in man leading to qualitative and quantitative social consequences.

From the discussions so far, it is obvious that the reversion of the scenario requires the inculcation of certain desirable values. In the first place, we have to understand that a society is made habitable by reason of certain values, which are inculcated into individuals by society from early childhood. These values make man humane, different from animals and beasts. Without such values man is not far from beast. In Nigeria, such values are really lacking. The purpose of this paper is to search out some of these desirable values from the socio-economic system of traditional African society, which is communalist in nature, and also how these communalistic values can be preserved and transmitted for a better society.

### Theoretical Framework

In a society rampant with social corruption, crime and conflict what measures can bring a social change leading to peace and development? According to some sociologists, restoration of the eroded socio-cultural values can be one answer. This is sometimes referred to as “cultural peace-building”<sup>9</sup>. The major resource in this kind of peace-building may include age old cultural values, traditional thinking patterns, and means of communication historically developed in a particular culture or society which can be used to establish rule of law and peace in that society. Here a functionalist approach has been adopted to understand the social changes appearing in African

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<sup>4</sup> L. O. Akudolu, “Understanding philosophical analysis using Nigerian democracy as a case study”, *International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Studies (IJHAS)* 5(2) 2020, accessed 1-9 2020 <https://aircse.com/ijhas/papers/5220ijhas01.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> E.O. John and L.O. Ogbonnaya, “Humanism and political development in Nigeria: A philosophical examination of Protogoras ‘Man is the measure.’” *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies* 3 (1), 2016, pp.46-47

<sup>6</sup> R. Adetoro, and M.O. Omiyefa, “Unity in diversity in Nigeria’s nationhood – Which way forward?”, *International Journal of Scientific Research*, 2012, p.482. accessed 6-8-2023 <https://doi.org/10.15373/22778179/AUG2013/158>

<sup>7</sup> C.J. Asika, “Role of philosophy in human development in Nigeria”, *UJAH* Special Edition, 2017, pp. 48-66. Accessed 22-3-2023, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v18i2.3>

<sup>8</sup> O.A. Efemini and C. Ake, *Philosophy of Development: Implications for Nigeria*, University of Port Harcourt Press, 2010, p. 1

<sup>9</sup> Aigul Kulnazarove, “Cultural Peacebuilding” (Chapter 16) in Henry F. Carey (ed.) *Peacebuilding Paradigms*, Cambridge University Press and Assessment, 2020, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/peacebuilding-paradigms/cultural-peacebuilding/3534D019C493B9C65C9E9155C28681C3> accessed 23-4-2023

society in general and Nigeria in particular. According to this approach, human society is comprised of a “balanced system of institutions” and each institution has a particular function in establishment and continuation of order in the society. Hence, whenever some developments appear “outside or inside the society” the societal equilibrium and peace is disrupted. In such a situation “social institution makes adjustment to restore stability”.<sup>10</sup>

In this context the Nigerian society in the past seems to have a kind of equilibrium wherein the communalistic values had a sound vitality and function in maintenance of law and order, peace and a social interdependence among the members of the society. Over the years, these values have been eroded as a result of material development and modernization of the society. The erosion of communalistic values led to the rise of crime, corruption and selfishness in the society. In order to comprehend this social change it is important to understand the nature of African communalism.

### **Meaning and Nature of African Communalism**

Communalism is a traditional social system in Africa where community member see each other as members of the same family. It is a system characterized by brotherly love, relationship and interrelationship, caring and welfare, participation and a sense of belonging, devoid of selfishness. It is community oriented in such a way that the interest of the community is greater at the hearts of individuals than their selfish ambitions.<sup>11</sup> The individual is connected to the community in a web-like manner. It is a system whereby individuals in a community value and hold the interdependence and interpersonal relationship among them so high that deviance from it is intolerable. Though, growth in science and technology has affected this cherished value so much leading to rise in individualism, the core of it is still manifest to certain level in many African cultures.

Communalism in traditional African society manifests itself in many aspects. For instance, in many African societies like Igbo, a south-eastern part of Nigeria, communalism manifests in economic, social, political, ontological and religious aspects of their culture.<sup>12</sup> Land tenure system is a very vital and fundamental economic aspect of Igbo-African communalism. The land is seen as the abode of ancestors and is sacred. Its sacredness and symbolism made it to be commonly owned by extended families and communities and not by individuals per se; though the individual may hold it as a custodian but has no right to sell it out without the consultation of others.<sup>13</sup> Hence the family has the right to the sacred and secular utilization of the land, but not appropriation in the absolute sense. This is because land is seen as something sacred. In fact, in pure Igbo traditional society, land is communally owned and apportioned to individuals according to needs, but not as owners in the strict sense of it. Farming and hunting, being their major occupation, are done communally. They work on this person’s farm today and tomorrow would be at another’s farm.

In a communal setting, the problem of an individual is a problem of all and the problem of others is the problem of individuals. This can be illustrated with a story of an Olu man with an amputated

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<sup>10</sup> “Top Five Theories of social change explained”, <https://www.yourarticlelibrary.com/sociology/top-5-theories-of-social-change-explained/35124> accessed 24-4-2023

<sup>11</sup> Akudolu, 2020

<sup>12</sup> Akudolu, 2020

<sup>13</sup> C. Okadigbo, “Philosophical foundation of Igbo African personality” A paper presented to the Faculty of Philosophy, Biggard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, 1976,p. 3

hand. As he was returning from his fishing expedition, his fish was snatched from him by people from the neighborhood. He could not offer resistance because of his incapacity. He therefore cried out aloud that an abominable act had been committed in Olu. The cry echoed and the Olu people went to war to retrieve their fish.<sup>14</sup> Therefore what belongs to an individual belongs to others and what affects one affects others. This also applies in marriage. A man does not marry a lady not approved by his people, the same applies to the lady. The kindred members participate in every aspect of the marriage except procreation, when the man is still alive. At death, if the man has not gotten the expected number of children, his closest kin would take over to ensure the continuity of his brother's lineage.

Moreover, communalism also manifests in the social life of African people. The community members see themselves as members of the same family. Late in the evening, they come together at village square for a moonlight picnic. The elders sit at the keg of palm wine watching the young men proving their masculinity by engaging in wrestling. Old men and women tell folktales and stories to the children. Festivals like the new yam festival, masquerade celebrations, funeral and marriage ceremonies are matters that pertain to the community and not to individuals per se. During the new yam festival, the villagers gather at the palace of the village chief or traditional ruler and the chief priest officiates.

It is also not uncommon to see a woman calling on another to taste her food for her. It is also a common sight in the market to come across an Igbo who invites a member of his community to come around to view, assess and finally help her select an item he wants to purchase. Again, it is not puzzling to hear directives coming from one's kith and kin directing one to choose this and not that. Wine tappers also do this to determine the best mixture and taste so as to know the price at which their wine will be sold. In fact, in a traditional communal society, what concerns one concerns others. Communal and not personal interest weighs more in such a traditional society: *I* is in *We* and *We* is in *I*.

Therefore communal society is characterized by love and sense of oneness, "a person can just arrive at the house of the other he regards as his nwanne (brother or sister) without any pre-information but with every confidence that he is free to stay with him as long as he...wants, and he is so accepted"<sup>15</sup> The person who is visited gladly accepts the visitor and integrates him into his family as a member. Sometimes, he may invite his friends, introducing them to his visitor and at times they would spend time in the evening to entertain the visitor. He protects the interest of the visitor. But at this time when things have fallen apart, it is becoming difficult to accept anyhow a person in your house. When these pieces of information are sewn together, we discover that African communal society is fundamentally egalitarian.

### **African communal values and their relevance to peaceful development**

From the above study, we can deduce that African communalism as practiced in traditional African society was characterized by certain desirable values which include love and sense of oneness, caring and hospitality, unity and solidarity, belongingness and participation, equity and

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<sup>14</sup>C.B. Nze, *Aspects of African Communalism*. Veritas Publishers, 1989, p.5

<sup>15</sup> Ike B. Ewelu "Leadership and African values", *West African Journal of Philosophical Studies* 2, 42, p. 46

equality. These values, if restored, preserved and transmitted into the lives of Nigerians are capable of re-humanizing and transforming them into better citizens for a better society.

**Love and sense of brotherhood:** Members of communal society see themselves as members of an extended family, with love and care.<sup>16</sup> (Madu, 2007; Nze, 1989). Since all these families that made up the community can trace their origins to a common ancestral descent and live together in a common living place, there is a share of deep consciousness of their identity, oneness, sense of solidarity and brotherly love. Obviously, love is a cardinal virtue for peace and preservation of human society. Selfishness and lack of love gives rise to various ills we witness in our society: killing, war, kidnapping, armed robbery, molestation and intimidation. All are as a result of lack of love. No wonder God through all religions re-echoes the importance of love among humanity. Is there any religion that relegates the concept of love? I do not think. In Buddhism, love is the cardinal issue in the religion. Three types of love are identified: *kama* which is sensuous love. This is not true love and it is believed to be an obstacle on the path of enlightenment. *Karuna* (compassion) and *metta* (benevolence) are emphasized as true love. The former implies mercy, which reduces others' suffering, while benevolent love implies detachment and unselfish interest in other's welfare. In Tibetan Buddhism, the Bodhisattva ideal involves the complete self-denial and pursuit of the interest of others, which implies a strong unselfish love for others. In Islam, the followers are urged to adopt mutual love, affection and intimacy towards each other at all times especially through almsgiving and charity. Love is also a cardinal principle in Islam. It marvels one why some Muslim and other outfits in Nigeria and elsewhere believe in killing those who do not belong to their religious groups even when these so-called infidels really believe in God and worship Him in their own ways. How can they claim to be humans while they kill people for not believing in their own religion? If their religion teaches love, and they ought to love people, they can preach people, and pray for their repentance if they are truly convinced that their religion is the only gateway to paradise. If their religion is the only gateway to paradise and they kill other people, they send people to hell untimely. It may be that tomorrow, those people may understand and believe but when they kill people, they cut off the chances of their repentance and send them to an untimely grave, to suffer in hell. Do they think Allah would be happy with them?

Where there is love, there must be peace, patience, forgiveness, protection, welfare, self-sacrifice, patriotism, and humanism. No murder, no kidnapping, no assassination, no Boko Haran insurgency, no Fulani Herdsmen attack, no armed robbery, no stealing, no nepotism and tribalism, no inter-tribal and community war, no bribery and corruption, no injustice but fairness and equity. What a perfect and enjoyable state. The social quagmire and moral decadence in Nigeria shows lack of love among the citizens, ethnic groups that made up the nations and various religious sects in the country. But if love can be inculcated into Nigerian citizens, the country would turn to be better.

**Social Welfare:** Next to the principle of love and sense of brotherhood is caring and hospitality. Because people love and see themselves as brothers and sisters, they care for each other; the concern of one is seen as the concern of others. Everybody seeks the welfare of others. Welfare has to do with alleviating the suffering of others. Social welfare includes an organized provision

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<sup>16</sup> E.J. Madu, E.J., "Igbo cosmology: A matrix for Igbo community-consciousness" In I. Odimegwu (ed.), *Perspectives on African Communalism*. Trafford Publishing, 2007; Nze 1989.

of educational, cultural, medical and financial assistance to the needy. Modern social welfare measures may include the care of the widows, the destitute, orphans, the aged, the sick, victims of various disaster, the homeless, the poor, rehabilitation of criminals and the mental deranged, provision of social services like road, free medical facilities, free educational facilities, electricity and various amenities for betterment of humanity. The wellbeing of the citizens is the focus of social welfare.

Our past national heroes like Awolowo and Nnamdi Azikiwe emphasized on social welfare but Azikiwe later adopted a neo-welfarism, which was a development of African communal principles to fit our contemporary era.<sup>17</sup> According to him, neo-welfarism is a synthesis of the positive aspects of capitalism, socialism and welfarism grounded on African traditional ethics. He recommended this as a remedial ideology for Nigeria's socio-economic emancipation. Welfarism should be carried out both by the government and individuals. The rich should make their resources available for the good of others. It is one of the values to be practiced, preached and transmitted for a better Nigeria's society. If this is done, unemployment and poverty which are major causes of social disorder would be reduced.<sup>18</sup>

**Unity and solidarity:** Another value of communalism is the principle of unity and solidarity, oneness and social cohesion. This is possible because "Communalism is the social life of the African which is founded on the African belief that all human beings are members of one family of mankind".<sup>19</sup> They see themselves as one and do things together. This is called *igwebuiké* (solidarity)' in Igbo communal society. Unity and oneness is indeed needed to keep Nigeria as one nation. What is national unity in the context of Nigeria? National unity in the Nigerian context is the acceptance of all the ethnic components of the country into the nationhood of Nigeria. National unity talks about being in one accord. It is being able to accept other ethnic groups as one people, irrespective of religion, status, culture and geographical location. One Nigeria means being as one people and making sure everyone shares the true identity of one nation. It speaks more of unity and letting people embrace others as part and parcel of Nigeria, without seeing them as inferiors or superiors but as people who have the same fundamental rights under the law of Nigeria. The major problems of Nigeria include tribalism, nepotism, ethnicism and religious differences. The Hausas (northerners) see Igbos (easterners) as *nyamili* (infidels) who should be killed at the slightest provocation, the Igbos see the Yorubas (westerners) as *ndi ofe mmanu* (unreliable ones) who can never be trusted, Muslims see Christians as infidels that must be eliminated, and even various Christian denominations hate each other. No peace, no unity, no oneness, and yet we claim to be one Nigeria. The question is: Are we really one Nigeria or different tribes with opposing idiosyncrasies amalgamated into one nation by Lord Lugard (colonial governor) in 1914? Two can never go unless they agree. It is either we agree or reconsider the quest for restructuring being clamored by many.

**Belongingness and participation (patriotism):** It is not enough that one belongs to the society; one should also participate in it. He belongs to society by participating in the activities of the society. He works for the good of the entire community because he understands that the progress

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<sup>17</sup> G. Okaneme, "Critique of Azikiwe's philosophy of neo-welfarism", *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1), 2018, 138-188

<sup>18</sup> Okaneme, 2018

<sup>19</sup> Nze, 1989, p. 14

of the community invariably affects him.<sup>20</sup> This is patriotism. Patriotism can be defined as a strong love towards one's country leading to resolute commitment. Patriotism (love of country) and nationalism (loyalty to one's nation) are often taken to be synonymous. Patriotism is traceable to some 2,000 years prior to the rise of nationalism in the 19th century.<sup>21</sup> Greek and especially Roman antiquity provide the roots for a political patriotism that "conceives of loyalty to the patria as loyalty to a political conception of the republic". It has to do with obedience to law, support to common liberty, the search for the common good, and the duty to behave in just manner towards one's country. This classical Roman meaning of patria re-emerges in the context of the Italian city republics of the 15th century. Here, patria stands for the common liberty of the city, which can only be safeguarded by the citizens' civic spirit.<sup>22</sup> For Niccolò Machiavelli (1998), the love of common liberty enables citizens of a country to see their individual interests as parts of the common good. This helps them to resist selfishness, corruption and tyranny. In military, it motivates the officers to be willing to sacrifice their lives for the safety of their countries. In other words, patriotism is associated with self-sacrifice for the good of one's country.

Undoubtedly, many Nigerians of today are not patriotic. This becomes obvious by people not playing their civic roles like participating in voting, taxation, reporting of crime, obeying the laws of the nation and working for the common good of the nation. Individualism has taken the place of nationalism as a result of indifference towards the affairs of the nation. Both our leaders and the led pursue their own selfish interests and this has led us to where we are today. Patriotism leads to nationalism; and where there is no patriotism, there shall be no nationalism; and where there is no nationalism, social vices and criminalities abound. That is exactly the case with Nigeria today.

**Equity and equality:** Communal society is an egalitarian society where there is equity and equality, justice and fairness. Everybody, whether poor or rich, is respected and treated with dignity. The rich do not oppress the poor. He sees his wealth as the wealth of his community and the community sees the success of a member as the success of all. It is a just and peaceful society. It is a society where justice is the hallmark of relationships. The guiding principle of the relationship is whatever you want people to do to you do the same to others. This can be said in another way in Igbo: *Onye emegbula ibe ya. Egbe belu, ugo belu, nke siri ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya* (Do no evil against another. May the kite and eagle perch, anyone who says that another would not perch, let its wing fail it). Partiality, prejudice, lies, bribery and corruption are abhorred in traditional African communal society. In Nigeria today, there is little or no equity and equality. Some influential citizens are above the law. Winning a case in the law court is becoming a matter of money. Justice and fairness perverted. There is bribery and corruption in every nook and cranny.<sup>23</sup> Nearly nothing is done on merit. Merit has been dethroned and mediocrity enthroned. Consequently, every sector of this nation is seriously collapsing.

## Recommendations and Conclusion

Having known the importance of these studied values to peace and nation building, how can we bring these desirable values to bear in the life of this nation? How can we transmit these into the

<sup>20</sup> M. Molefe, "Personhood and a meaningful life in African philosophy". *South African Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2), 2020, pp. 194-201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2020.1774980> accessed 2-3-2023

<sup>21</sup> N. Machiavelli, *The Discourses*. Edited by B. Crick, trans. L.J. Walter, Penguin Books, 1998

<sup>22</sup> J. Rousseau, *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Trans. William Kendall, Hackett 1985

<sup>23</sup> Ewelu, 1999

lives of the citizens to re-humanize and reform them for a better peaceful society? Every society tries to pass to her citizens and on to coming generations those things it values. Thus knowledge, skills, beliefs, customs, arts and culture considered valuable are transmitted. Unfortunately, African communalistic values have been dragged to the backyard in our society. The problem with Westernization is that presently West is a capitalist society with selfish individualism as its foundation. It places emphasis on technology and not on moral development, while African communalism moves towards character development and egalitarian society. Its foundation is morality. Our mistake is that we have taken in to whatever that is western and termed everything African has as obsolete, archaic and heathenism without properly integrating what we have that will give our society a moral foundation. This resulted in various vices and erosion of our identity. Today we are bedeviled with bribery and corruption, killings, raping, prostitution, kidnapping, terrorism, armed robbery, malpractice, social injustices, and various forms of violence. And the worst part of the game is that we do not have a functional rule of law and security agencies to be able to successfully combat the nasty consequences of blindly following the western capitalist system.

In order to change these anomalies, we have to revive the African communalistic values into our society. We have to reform our education in such a way that it emphasizes these values at every level of our education. Secondly, the media is a veritable agency for social transformation. We have to use the media to transmit these desirable values into the lives of citizens through public enlightenment programmes, music, films and commentaries. In addition, religious organizations have an important role to play here too. It is our belief that if these desirable values are restored, preserved and transmitted, there shall be relative peace for development to thrive.

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