Limited Communitarianism and the Merit of Afro-communitarian Rejectionism

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Abstract

Limited communitarianism is presented as an alternative to classical communitarianism in African philosophy. Bernard Matolino, the proponent of this view, argues that personhood can be attained with the constitutive features of the self leading the process, as against the historical, classical communitarian view that prioritises the sociality of the self. He posits that it is a personhood conceived through such view as limited communitarianism that can guarantee individual rights and prioritises the claims of the individual in African philosophy. Matolino's claim is grounded on the view that Afro-communitarianism, as presented in the classical account such as the radical and moderate communitarianism of Menkiti and Gyekye, respectively, emphasises community essence in African philosophy and hinders the expression of rights. The claim of the classical view informs the nudge to question the relevance and compatibility of Afro-communitarianism with the complex, multicultural modern African societies. As a result, limited communitarianism rejects the mechanism of Afro-communitarianism – essentialism. While limited communitarianism appears a rejection of what is known as Afro-communitarianism, which has earned it non-communitarian labels such as being liberal and individualist, I argue that it is simply a well-argued form of moderate communitarianism that avoids the conundrum of community.

Keywords: Afro-communitarian rejectionism, Matolino, limited communitarianism, individual rights, personhood, moderate communitarianism.

Introduction

The question of individual rights in Afro-communitarianism has significantly challenged its relevance in modern African societies. As a social and political idea, Afro-communitarianism is confronted with tension between its two components – the individual and community. This tension, owed to primacy, generates the conflicts between duty and rights in African political thought. The tension between individual rights and communal duties in Afro-communitarianism has led to different conceptions of persons in African philosophy. Matolino's limited communitarianism is a reaction to this tension. Differing from the classical maximal account of persons that references community primacy, Matolino presents a minimal account of persons that emphasises the metaphysical aspects of the self and takes individual rights seriously by shunning the primacy of community. What is known as a minimal account is demonstrated in doubt and the consequent rejection of what is known of the workings and mechanism of Afro-

communitarianism, before the advent of limited communitarianism from the scheme of personhood and social ordering, a claim which rides on the evidence of the facts of the urbanisation and modernisation of African communities. While the rejectionist thesis has earned limited communitarianism the liberal and individualist labels (OYOWE 2015), I demonstrate that taking limited communitarianism as an intellectual pursuit seeking a shift in the conception of the self; de-essentialising African thought; and achieving individual rights in African political thought, it does not appear mainly as a rejectionist thesis in the light of a non-communitarian critique of Afro-communitarianism, but a well-argued form of moderate communitarianism.

I structure the paper as follows. I begin with Matolino's charge against classical Afro-communitarianism and its idea of persons. In the second section, I followed it up with Matolino's alternative idea of personhood grounded on the metaphysical approach. I illustrate how the metaphysical approach aids a kind of communitarianism where the community retains a secondary status in the conception of persons. While limited communitarianism appears non-communitarian because of its stance on community, in the third section, I show that an evaluation of it gives the understanding that it is a developed version of moderate communitarianism. This identification is important for tracing the nature and pattern of the development of Afro-communitarianism from the classical account to the contemporaries.

Matolino's disagreement with Afro-communitarianism: Essentialising community and the personhood of the classical accounts

In this section, I discuss Matolino's argument against Afro-communitarianism. Matolino carried out conscientious assessments of Afro-communitarianism as a foundation on which social and political ideas in Africa are grounded. His conclusion suggests a rebuff of the idea as the essence of African philosophy. Matolino's rejection of Afro-communitarianism can be located in some of his writings (MATOLINO 2008, 2011a, 2014, 2018), where he expresses doubt about the functions of the idea in the African quest for a viable and inclusive social and political arrangement. In particular, Matolino's works have been directed to the question of community essence in African philosophy and how traditional norms of Africa define individual identity, occlude difference, and hinder the expression of rights. More especially, his works have been concerned with how earlier Afro-communitarians have reacted to the questions of personhood as a critical subject in African philosophy. He believes that the classical Afro-communitarian account of Ifeanyi Menkiti and Kwame Gyekye does not differ in its rights placement and conception of persons. In both accounts, the weight of community is heavy in the relationship between individual and community and, consequently, trivializes the individual interests and rights (see MATOLINO 2009).

Matolino's (2011b) disagreement with communitarianism is about how it continues to be the ontology of African philosophy, despite its obvious incompatibility with modern African societies. In his words, he is committed, philosophically, to exorcising the communitarian ghost from African philosophy. However, he advises not to be misunderstood as discarding the entire project of communitarianism, but he points out that the arguments of classical

communitarians on the community or communal essence of African thought and experience are false.

Matolino admits that community dominance in traditional African societies is unavoidable because of the nature of the life of the period. He argues that "facts of human existence in traditional communities necessitated tightly knitted relations that ultimately gave rise to notions of African communalism and subsequently communitarianism with an emphasis on collectivist understandings of life that prioritize communal reality over individual reality" (MATOLINO 2018, 115). However, he argues that these understandings of the community were valid insofar as they were relevant in the interpretation of life when they were conceived. Therefore, it is implied in Matolino (2018) that this understanding is contested in modern African societies that do not have the same facts of human existence as traditional African societies. These contemporary facts may include economic ones that inform the experiences of migrant labourers, ordinary people trying to make a living as vendors, seasonal workers, and those confined to shantytowns (MATOLINO 2018, 117).

In connection, the essentialists' claim, argues Matolino (2011a), that sees community as the overall good of the individual, is not compatible with the above-mentioned modern realities. Such conception of the good has become obsolete due to the social and economic changes that have taken place in most African communities. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to conceive of the individual whose notion of good is only derived from the shared communal good and having their conception of the self, defined by the community. Outside the claim of social change, Matolino adds that the notion of community that traditional African societies created has been altered by the outcome of colonialism, which includes the breaking down of communal unity.

Furthering the disagreement with essentializing Afro-communitarianism is the social legislation of who qualifies as an ideal African. This criterion is usually set around the notion of community and its appreciation. One is an African insofar as they embrace community life. Matolino (2011a) argues that though some Africans living in urbanized African cities may have a weaker sense of community than those in less sophisticated communities, we cannot claim that they are less African and, consequently, non-persons. Here, we can smell a suspicion as to how being an African is the same as being a person. The question that arises from this would be as follows: Is the criteria for community life that characterizes personhood the same as being African? Are essentialists; that is, classical communitarians, of the view that being African is being persons? I think not, insofar as some such as Menkiti argues that an individual (African) can fail personhood, and we can imply from there that a non-African who subscribes to such normativity may count as a person in the Afro-communitarian scheme. Therefore, I do not think that the issue classical Afro-communitarians have concerned themselves with, which I think Matolino should be interested in, is about who is an authentic African but, if you may call it, an authentic person.

Part of the worries Matolino has with classical communitarians is their presentation and use of communitarianism as a theory to service and influence many ideas and themes in Africa. Nonetheless, this may not pose as great a danger as Matolino thinks. One may argue that such an effect is necessary for ideas that may be regarded as social philosophies. It is not hard to see communitarianism and

communalism as social ideas. Matolino, in fairness to communitarianism, argues that the idea can be limited to a social or ethical theory. Unknown to him, social ideas that inform a way of life can influence other areas of people's lives, vis-à-vis the political, economic, and religious, to mention but a few. Therefore, this effect should not be seen as overstretching the functionality of communitarianism or overuse, as Matolino would argue. Such functionality is not peculiar to the idea of Afro-communitarianism; the focus on the individual dominates political, social and economic theories and discourses in societies where individualism is the guiding mode of social ordering. However, given the influence of communitarianism, one point that may be relevant in that assessment would be the likely hegemonic nature of communitarianism. This, of course, can be curbed through critical interrogation of the idea and not withdrawal from the spheres of ideas in modern African thought and practice.

In furtherance of the disagreement with Afro-communitarianism, Matolino criticised the personhood account of classical Afro-communitarianism. Matolino's assessment of classical Afro-communitarianism on personhood can be summed up in two broad arguments. One is the claim that the community is solely responsible for the personhood and identity of the individual. The second is how the notion of the rights of individuals has been neglected in the Afro-communitarian scheme.

Matolino (2008) queries Menkiti's (1984, 2004) claim on the denial of the personhood of certain individuals by their communities based on moral ineptness. In Matolino's assessment, the significance of such denial by communities is difficult to fathom. He posits that the ideas of moral achievement and rituals of incorporation in determining the personhood of individuals raise serious difficulty in Menkiti's communitarian view. Matolino queries the notion of virtues, which seem to be the key ideal communitarians subscribe to, as the standard for personhood. According to him, ideal moral conduct and virtues are usually heavily contested, and there exists a variance in what counts as virtuous in all societies. Even within the same society, there is the plausibility of contention of what is morally worthy of doing in certain situations.

Gyekye (1997), argues Matolino, does not fare better than Menkiti in his treatment of rights. Like Menkiti, "Gyekye explicitly commits his definition of persons to moral achievement" (MATOLINO, 2008,114). It appears, like Menkiti, Gyekye gives attention to the dominance of the community in the conception of personhood in African political thought. It is, therefore, not controversial to conclude the sameness of Menkiti and Gyekye's account of Afro-communitarian personhood with their weak notions of individual rights.

Matolino reacts to this gap created by the classical Afro-communitarians by developing the idea of limited communitarianism, which he believes best captures the notion of persons and gives the right place for individual rights in modern African political thinking. Afro-communitarianism's inability to contribute to the rights discourse fully renders it irrelevant in rights-driven modern African societies. As a result, the idea of limited communitarianism is to function as a replacement for the existing ideas and concepts of Afro-communitarianism. It is an account that sheds Afro-communitarianism off his responsibility and relevance. In what follows, I discuss this alternative idea.

Matolino and the personhood of limited communitarianism: Promoting the constitutive features of self

In this section, I move to Matolino's alternative conception of personhood in African thought. Matolino (2008, 2014, 2018), drawing on the failure of Gyekye (1997) and Menkiti (1984) to provide a convincing argument for the place of individual rights in Afro-communitarian conceptions of person, attempts a restructuring of the conversation on the communitarian arrangement of African life. He argues for a conception of the persons in African thought in which the community's role is limited. While acknowledging the Afro-communitarian conception of the person, he argues that a weightier conception precedes the generally accepted normative communal conception. This conception of persons he labels the 'metaphysical account'.

The metaphysical conception of persons, Matolino argues, stresses the constitutive human features, without which the normative communitarian conception, which he labels the "social identity of a person", is impossible. The metaphysical conception draws some strengths from Kwasi Wiredu's Akan account of persons and Segun Gbadegesin's Yoruba account of persons.

In Wiredu's account, a person is composed of *nipadua* (body), *okra* (a life-giving entity), and *sunsum* (that which gives a person's personality its force), as well as the *mogya*, which is the blood that is derived from one's mother, and *ntoro*, which is inherited from one's father. Both *mogya* and *notoro* are necessary requirements for clan identity and membership. Referring to the bloodline of individuals in constituting personhood affirms the metaphysics of persons in African thought, which confirms a link between the individual and others, in this case, the clan, without concern for any form of moral demands. The relational nature between the individual and the parenting clans and kins, and what we can take from that understanding in determining individual personhood, is the criterion that every individual cannot fail (MATOLINO 2008, 80-1 cited in WIREDU 1995, 132).

Matolino's metaphysical theory of persons also draws strength from Gbadegesin's (1991) Yoruba account of persons. Persons in the Yoruba thought, according to Gbadegesin, is not only normative but also descriptive. While the descriptive account illustrates the various bodily aspects of the individual, including its physical-material and mental-spiritual categories, the normative is the communal aspect that gives meaning to the existence of the bodily parts. The normative communitarian nature of personhood is emphasized when Gbadegesin adds that the individual's destiny is linked to the destiny of other community members. Though individual destiny holds its own uniqueness, it cannot be fulfilled outside of community relations. The standard for judging the quality of an individual's destiny as either good or bad is by nature communal. These criteria involve communal membership and responsibility (see FLIKSCHUH 2019, 85).

Like the Akan account of Wiredu, a link is established with the 'others' in the details of personhood. Gbadegesin adds that the individual is not fully complete without sociality. Also, the individual is incomplete without a quality reciprocity gesture to the community that produced him. It, therefore, shows that the ontology of the self in African thought in both Wiredu and Gbadegesin does not leave out the communally oriented features and the determinate constitutive

properties of the individual,with the constitutive properties understood beyond their ordinary meanings.

Despite the reference to the normative aspect of persons in Wiredu and Gbadegesin, Matolino finds these scholars' reference to the metaphysical characteristics of persons noteworthy. It confirms that a metaphysics of persons exists in African thought that does not necessarily appeal in totality to the sociality of self, defended by the communitarian view; that is, an approach to personhood exists that is not fully informed by normative criterion. This metaphysical approach must be heard.

Matolino's bid for a non-communitarian definition of self in African thought, despite the acknowledgement of the communal presence, can be defended in what Olufemi Táiwò (2016, 82) refers to as ontological communalism.[1] This sense of communalism holds that "being-in-communion is the natural way of being human". Insofar as we can naturally think of humans as ontologically in communion, we can affirm a sense of communalism. Táiwò notes how scholars like Menkiti have used this communal reference as a ground for some prescriptive theses. However, he adds that there exists no need to attach value preference to this description of humans.

In light of the above, Matolino's metaphysical thesis makes sense as a single defining framework of the self. Though it is different from the communitarian approach, it admits the recognition of community only as a framework within which an individual realizes the relational aspect of their personhood – the relationship between fellow individuals and between individual and collective.

Matolino must have been perturbed by the bodily aspects of the self, not having been given the credits it deserves in the criteria that make a person in African thought. I think extending this relevance in literature is his aim, especially how doing that, philosophically resolves the questions of individual rights in African political philosophy. One may object that the Yoruba and Akan allusion to this part of the human self, captured by Gbadegesin, Wiredu and Gyekye should be sufficient (see OYOWE, 2015).[2] Two reactions may be presented against this objection. One is that Wiredu and Gyekye do not emphasize the role of the blood

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[1] See Táiwò (2016, 82-86) for an analysis of the three sense of communalism he identified. They include ontological communalism, methodological communalism and axiological communalism. He adds a possible fourth sense, known as epistemological thesis, identified in Polycarp Ikuenobe's (2006) idea of 'epistemic authoritarianism'. However, Táiwò is of the view that these senses should not be lumped together in literature to make it clear on how one can embrace the theory of communalism. One can either subscribe to one or a combination of two, without subscribing to all of them. Current literature on the subject is lacking in creating this awareness.

[2] Oyowe (2015, 505) admits that what sets metaphysical and communitarian theories apart is the further requirement that personhood is achieved in a social and cultural space, with its accompanying high moral premium assigned to the community. However, this does not apply in reverse for Matolino's metaphysical account. The metaphysical theory of persons can stand alone as a theory of persons without recognizing any form of normativity. However, the defence of Matolino here is simply a rection to the novelty charge, it is not a defence of the communitarianism of Matolino's theory of persons or an acceptance of the same.

and semen of both mother and father, respectively, in creating the individual, and how that physical component holds a normative principle that is not tied to morality. They stop at the roles of the individual's biological and psychological components, and in the case of Gbadegesin, what spiritual meaning the body parts hold. This may be because of the desire to emphasize what they consider the important parts of the account, which is the normative communal.

Two, their commitment to the primacy of the sociality of the self-conceals any form of relevance the metaphysical aspect may offer. The metaphysical features identified in Akan and Yoruba philosophical traditions are, unlike in Matolino's account, engulfed in the normative claim. As a result, even if every human possesses the constitutive features of personhood, those lacking in the normative communal criteria would not qualify as persons. Non-persons then become disadvantaged in societies where members that have attained personhood are prioritized in the allocation of rights and benefits. This seems to be one of the foundations for Matolino's insistence on the constitutive features of personhood. The metaphysical sense guarantees access to rights. To avoid concealing the significance of the metaphysical features, Matolino steers clear of any form of communal relevance over the metaphysical component. Unlike Gbadegesin, Gyekye and Menkiti that could not defend the place of individual rights, Matolino's account offers such defence.

Limited communitarianism: moderate or non-communitarian
Having identified and discussed the rationale behind Matolino's contention with the classical Afro-communitarian accounts such as moderate communitarianism, and his proposal of limited communitarianism, I show, in this section, that a reading of limited communitarianism gives the understanding that it appears as either a non-communitarian rejectionist intervention owing to its deconstruction of the classical Afro-communitarianism or a version of moderate communitarianism. I argue that the latter describes it appropriately. Despite the differences, limited communitarianism shares certain commitments with moderate communitarianism. Limited communitarianism seeks to keep an aspect of the communitarian and the core benefits of the metaphysical accounts.

While Matolino believes he is making communitarianism more flexible and receptive, it becomes evident that he maintains a position that weakens communitarianism and community. Matolino overstretches the function of limited communitarianism and, consequently, takes it out of the realm of community discourse. Bearing that community is the hallmark of Afro-communitarianism, restricting community from the demand of persons is rejecting what may be known as Afro-communitarianism. At this level, Matolino is assumed to have crossed the communitarian threshold or the communitarian boundary.

In his review of Matolino's commitment to the position of the individual towards the community, Oyowe (2015, 514) asserted that;

> …his [Matolino] view appears to be more at home in the liberal, or shall we say individualist, tradition as what is claimed here, and the metaphysical and normative status Matolino assigns to the community in relation to the individual is very much consistent with many liberal theorists' stance on the matter. To put it differently, if personhood is,

unlike the conceptions Matolino rejects, to be characterised independently of community, and there is a secondary normative status for community in his scheme, perhaps, then, the choice of describing it as a form of communitarianism is misleading. Why cling to the communitarian designation in spite of the obvious liberal commitments about the status of the individual and the secondary normative place of community?

Oyowe's position shows that the 'communitarianess' of a communitarianism idea is missing in the 'limited' version Matolino proposes. Matolino considers this accusation unjustifiable. He corrects that his rendition of communitarianism is communitarian in that it takes the facts of the community seriously. Limited communitarianism, he posits, is simply one of the various models of communitarianism in African philosophy, however different in its placement of the community (MATOLINO 2022, 101). The relocation of community in Afro-communitarianism by Matolino's limited version confirms that he did not reject Afro-communitarianism as an idea but its workings, which of course, is its forte as a theory. While Oyowe would agree to a communitarian conception of personhood that primes community or social recognition (OYOWE 2022), it is not to be assumed that he would insist Matolino's idea give the primary place to the community in defining personhood to be communitarian.

The challenge limited communitarianism faces here arises because the thought of personhood has mainly dominated communitarianism in contemporary African philosophy. It has been preoccupied with setting the standard for the ideal identity of the self, making the discourse of personhood all we know of Afro-communitarianism. This is why it is easier to label a communitarian account as non-communitarian because its notion of personhood does not fully appeal to the claims of communitarianism. Among other things, communitarianism can set the standard for defining selfhood. One can also use it to develop the framework for social relations and arrangements. Both should not be taken as wholly the same.

Nonetheless, the implication of neglecting the community/communal values in the scheme of personhood in communitarian thought would have on limited communitarianism would be the test of its qualification as a theory of persons in African thought. It is corrupt enough that the discussion of persons in the metaphysical approach avoids any sense of morality[3] that individuals ought to engage in applying their rationality to, but to qualify a thing as African without respect to values, at least cultural values, does not sound authentically African, as Matolino think it is.

One may object that the metaphysical conception of persons will be African if we agree with Matolino that we should not essentialise what is termed 'African'. Consequently, accounts of personhood and what would produce

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[3] Earlier, Matolino (2008) queried the classical Afro-communitarian personhood for subscribing to the dictates of morality and virtues. He argues that moral judgement, the standard of rightness and wrongness of actions, is contentious even within the same society. One cannot conceive of community without a sense of morality, even if one conceives of the community as a metaphysical entity, like the classical communitarians, or as a social phenomenon of Matolino.

individual identity may be shaped by factors that are not necessarily communal. One may reply that we can only make sense of the communal essence if we periodise the conversation on Africa. We may have numerous reasons to term traditional African societies as essentially communal, where all phenomena are defined in reference to community. Only in the talk of modern African experience can we begin to evaluate the monolithic understanding of 'African'. Here, the concern would be on what ought to be and not what is in the African philosophical traditions. However, limited communitarianism is not making a claim only on modern African thought. It is preoccupied with the modern, with some notes on questioning what was the case in traditional African thought and practice.

However, even if Matolino account would not count as an African account of persons, it does qualify as an account of persons in the general sense of the term, one that seeks to claim personhood for more people, compared to the classical Afro-communitarian accounts that have polarised ideas of individuals, where some are seen as persons and some non-persons – a class structure that has its roots in moral perfectionism. In connection, Matolino's limited communitarian personhood can be captured as an idea of human or individual rights, one that places human rights on the dignity of human nature and one that places rights on individual possession of the physio-psychological aspects of being human.

I note, however, that while the metaphysical conception of personhood is assumed to be a label that does not prioritise the communitarian aspect, the goal of individual rights was achieved at the cost of the communitarian aura of the theory. This I consider a link towards a non-communitarian account of personhood. I am unsure if Matolino would be bothered about his theory losing the flavour and aura of communitarianism, as Gyekye. Recall that it is implied in Matolino that the persistence of communitarianism and his account of the person in modern African thought is worrisome and should be contested. This is because Matolino believes that the demand of traditional African societies that allows for the flourishing of communitarianism does not exist in modern African realities; realities that exist for modern African societies are different and should inform our review of community.[4]

The call for review and the implicit intention to do so affirms why I think limited communitarianism extends some of the claims of moderate communitarianism. Both moderate and limited communitarianism are driven by the intention to reconstruct Afro-communitarianism to accommodate rights. Both could be best classified as a review of Afro-communitarianism. It is a review of the community primacy and the assumed docility and insignificance an individual may become as a political subject under a political structure resting on such theory promoted by the radical communitarians.

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[4] From what we see in most rural African spaces, the reality of communalism as a mode of social ordering and living is evident that African thought is communal. However, some have argued that the Western world and its individualistic social order is a transformation from a historical communal society (Táíwò 2016). Therefore, the traces of individualism we experience in Urban African space is a testament to what will hit Africa. They might be a tsunami of a social order driven by ideas of individualism. As individualism fully evolved in Africa, shouldn't we regard such a mode of social ordering as African? This seems to capture the position of Matolino on the communal essence of African thought.

Gyekye sought an argument that defends the equal-worth status of individual rights and duty in Afro-communitarianism. Hence, he identified the need for recognising features associated with the individuals and the reappraisal of Afro-communitarian idea of community to be flexible to accommodate that intention while being part of what makes a person. For his part, Matolino sought an account of communitarianism that gives the primary status to individual rights. Like Gyekye, he identified features associated with the individuals for personhood. Since social relations is essential to communitarianism, community, for Matolino, only regulates individual interaction with others, not selfhood. I consider their works as a call to review and restructure what Afro-communitarianism before them is known for – an Afro-communitarianism that unequivocally declares the primacy of community and the secondary status of rights. The challenge with Gyekye, which Matolino also points out, is the inability to push his proposal to a logical conclusion due to some contradiction (MATOLINO 2009; see also FAMAKINWA, 2010). However, analysis and interpretation of some of the claims of moderate communitarianism show that the unclear intention in Gyekye's moderate communitarianism and the process that is designed to drive its claim finds expression in Matolino's limited communitarianism.

Gyekye's recognition of the physio-psychological components of the individual as features not created by the community and essential for selfhood finds similar expression in the attention Matolino gave to the metaphysical features of the individual. The undoubtedness of human rationality, self-assertiveness, and the autonomous nature of the individual worries both Gyekye and Matolino as to why Afro-communitarianism should deny the expression of individual rights and their status. The presence and functions of these features reflect the claims of individuality and show the individual capacity for self-determination, self-expression, and autonomy, consequently affirming the place of individual rights and their primary status.

Moderate communitarianism sought a kind of relations where both the community and individual partially influence the constitution of human personhood. For its part, limited communitarianism emphasises the withdrawal of the rights of dominance from the community in what constitutes persons in African thought. As a theory of persons grounded in the metaphysical features of individuals, it seeks to limit the presence of community, its demand and its influence on individuals' formation and how they perceive themselves (MATOLINO 2018, 111). It is concerned with the need to give greater room to individual inventiveness (MATOLINO 2022, 96).

Like limited communitarianism, the proposal to deflate the community in the conception of persons undergird the intention of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism. Gyekye is aware that the challenge with expressing individual rights is the Afro-communitarian conception of community. This is what moderate communitarian seeks to correct by arguing for a community that will acknowledge the importance of the ontological nature of the individual and allows its features to flourish. Gyekye sought a moderate involvement of the community in the conception of persons and made it flexible to accommodate the significance of other features of the individual. However, Gyekye did not pursue that to a logical

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conclusion. Aside from alluding to a notion of human dignity granted by the community as part of the criteria for individual rights, Gyekye seems to be under the assumption that the identification of the physio-psychological components of the individual suggests an equal status of the same with the role of community in the conception of personhood. Unlike Gyekye, Matolino resolved to a form of community that appreciates the ontological features of the self and would not meddle with the decision and process of attaining selfhood. Limited communitarianism admits the recognition of community only as a framework within which an individual realises the relational aspect of their personhood – the relationship between fellow individuals and between individual and collective. At the end of their analysis, what distinguishes their commitment is what they do with the idea of community. While Gyekye, like Menkiti, submits to a notion of personhood committed to moral achievement, Matolino does not see the need to commit personhood to value preference (Matolino 2008, 114; see also Táíwò 2016, 82-86).

However, both were influenced by a commitment to promote the recognition of the significance of both liberalism and communitarianism in the formation of the modern African person, which is arguably rights-focused. Gyekye's idea came at a time African culture was perceived to be lacking in the idea of individual rights, where it is assumed that Africans only think in the lens of the collective. Following that, moderate communitarianism is a reaction to the primacy of duties over rights in Menkiti's duty-based theory. Gyekye worries that Menkiti's system of thought and those of the thinkers before him would endanger the individual in society. It will deny the advancement of self-actualisation and the expression of rights, especially in modern African societies characterised by a new reality of rights demand. Avoiding this tension informed Gyekye's moderate communitarianism that defends the foundation of individual rights and the primary status it shares with duties. In the same vein, if the claims of limited communitarianism are correct, Matolino notes that the political structure or theory that would emanate from it would recognise the equality of the facts of individuality and community. However, unlike Gyekye, the form of responsibility such political structure may accommodate, I argue, would be one in which the individual willingly decides what their commitment is to the community in relation to self-concerns; that is, a community's needs that affect the existence of such an individual. Matolino's limited communitarianism is an account of the concern of rights in the modern African experience and how evolving African modernity can embrace the liberal values of rights in its socio-political thought and arrangements.

The general scepticism about how traditional ideas will operate in modern societies may inform apathy. If those ideas do not promote human rights, the element for individual flourishing, they may not be worth pursuing. This doubt demonstrates the significance of the claim to reject traditional ideas that are difficult to make sense of modern realities. However, critically interrogating and not withdrawing these ideas from the spheres of ideas in modern African thought and practice may be more productive in thinking about unique modern African (political) theories.

Like other normative ideas in African philosophy, Matolino interrogates Afro-communitarianism to seek clarity of intents and purpose. The logic behind the double appearance of limited communitarianism as moderate and non-communitarian is that the underlying idea behind it is the commitment to interrogating existing commitment to Afro-communitarianism while still being persuaded by its prospect. While the interrogation takes the shape of deconstruction and denial, the outcome produces a kind of communitarianism that places personhood as individual qua individual affair and community as what is only relevant for individual interactions with others, hence retaining the importance of community for social relations.

In his review of ubuntu, in joint work with Kwindingwi, chief among their worries with the idea is that it is deployed to interpret the authentic mode of being in Africa - setting the appropriate form of identity for Africans through its conception of personhood defined by adherence to certain obligations and conformism to certain values. They also contend that reviving communal concepts like ubuntu due to the architectural spaces that have shaped the means of livelihood and social relations in modern African societies is difficult, if not impossible. The actions and motives behind the idea affirm why they argue it is difficult to revive. They claim the ideas it possesses are missing in ethical actions in contemporary African societies. While this claim is seen as mainly a rejection of the ideas of ubuntu, which has attracted reactions by scholars such as Metz (2014); Koenane and Olatunji (2017); Chimakonam (2016); Praeg (2017), I argue that the epistemic strategy is mainly for the purpose for strengthening defence for the acceptance of ubuntu and its functionality in contemporary African societies. The strategy of outright denial and rejection of ideas is an epistemic endeavour that aims to attain conviction and certainty on things we have partial or complete reasons to believe. Therefore, we may interpret Matolino's rejectionism as an exercise in scepticism (ADEATE 2023, 9). Perhaps, some of the contested claims of Afro-communitarianism, community and ubuntu such as being the essence of African philosophy and personhood can be deemphasized, noting that other modes of thought compatible with African philosophy and ways of attaining personhood in African philosophical tradition exists. This approach is similar to Gyekye's attempt to deconstruct the community claims in Afro-communitarianism.

If limited communitarianism is a rejectionist thesis, it will be a rejection of an account of communitarianism and not the entire project, as Matolino also cautioned. Most ideas are developed because of a gap in existing ideas. While this is common in literature, Matolino does not take his rejectionist claim beyond the point of seeking the relevance of the ideas we put forward as discourses in contemporary Africa. While this is important, it is arguably that the similarities of intention and process in both limited communitarianism and moderate communitarianism further strengthen the claims that there is no rejection of communitarianism in the system of limited communitarianism; what exists is a development or a better version of one of Afro-communitarianism classical form - moderate communitarianism, one that escaped the conundrum of community Gyekye could not avoid.

The classification and identification of the family of ideas are essential for discourse and the history of ideas in African philosophy. Identifying the

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similarities in both Gyekye and Matolino is vital for developing Afro-communitarianism for engagement.

Conclusion

In this article, I showed that limited communitarianism could be interpreted as a well-argued form of moderate communitarianism. Its rejectionist appearance emanates from its critical review of the mechanism of Afro-communitarianism as presented in the classical accounts. While Matolino's limited communitarianism emphasises the metaphysical approach as an alternative proposal for personhood, it shares specific commitments and moods with moderate communitarianism in that the latter is also worried about the denial of the role of the physio-psychological components of the individual in personhood and seeks to introduce the ontological. However, the classification of limited communitarianism as moderate communitarianism does not suggest a lack of novelty in limited communitarianism, neither does it reflect the whole picture of moderate communitarianism in so far as both differs in their final commitment to individual's standing in relation to rights and autonomy. However, what could be taken from this classification is that models of personhood in the literature have not gone beyond the Menkiti and Gyekye mappings, with scholars knowingly and unknowingly influenced by either the thought of Menkiti or Gyekye.

Declarations

The author declares no conflict of interest and no ethical issues for this research.

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This issue is dedicated to our Assoc. Editor and a second-generation member of the Calabar (Conversational) School of Philosophy (CSP): **Prince. Prof Mesembe Ita Edet (1965-2023)**