



## Whither Individuality? A Re-reading of Segun Ogungbemi's Scholarship on Individuality-Community Debate in African Philosophy

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### Abstract

Human nature in Africa, especially among the Yoruba, is a subject of contention in contemporary age. It is, however, important to mention that existing literature about that suggests the Yoruba as a communalistic society. Thus, the is perceived as a corporate entity where communal living is placed above individual existence. Against this background, Segun Ogungbemi contends in his article "An Existential Study of Individuality in Yoruba Culture" that this age-long belief about Africans being communalistic in nature seems to have reduced the possibility of individuality in Africa because it is western-directed. Using the analytical method of philosophy, this study attempts a further interrogation of Segun Ogungbemi's perspective on the place of individuality in understanding human nature within the Yoruba cultural context. This is because, the challenge of this possibility has opened a new vista in the narrative of scholars

of African studies. The idea of holistic communal nature of the Africa and Africans has been redirected such that we now have two camps on the belief system, namely radical and moderate communalism. In spite of the dichotomy and the contention of these two camps, each of them still recognises the place of community or sense of collectivity in Africa. While the radical school of thought places the community far above the individuals, the moderate school of thought is of the view that the individual makes up the society/community. Therefore, the claim is *we are because I am, and since I am, therefore we are*. This is against Mbiti's view that "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am." While the latter represents the view of the radical camp, the former is a representation of the moderate camp. It is the contention of this discourse that Ogungbemi's postulation tends towards radicalising the individuality far above the communal nature of the

essence of the individual in Africa society. Hence, a re-reading of his argument within the prism of the moderate communalism in which Ogungbemi's contention is considered western-centric.

**Keywords:** Individuality, Communalism, Segun Ogungbemi, Yoruba, African Philosophy

## Introduction

The question of existence and essence is fundamental in philosophy. World cultures have their different understanding of the inherent reality and interpretation of the existential model of cohabitation. While some cultures conceive human existence as that which is livable individually, others view it from a corporate perspective. This fundamentally gives credence to the essence of collectivism and individualism discourse in philosophy. This article beams a searchlight on the history of human development in Africa, especially among the Yoruba in the current age. It reflects on the profound existing literature that suggests Yoruba as a communalistic society; that is, a society where corporate existence permeates people's activities with little or no place for individual identity. Thus, the aims of this article are first, to examine Ogungbemi's position on this debate, and, second, to interrogate his defense of individuality in the Yoruba culture.

Against this backdrop, this article re-evaluates the age-long belief of Africa and Africans in communalism with the inevitability of the essence and place of the individual that seems to be discouraged in African traditional society. This is done through a re-reading of Segun Ogungbemi's (1992) argument in his article, "An Existential Study of Individuality in Yoruba Culture." The idea of the holistic communal nature of Africa and Africans has been redirected such that we now have two camps on the belief system, namely radical and moderate communalism. Though each of the two camps still recognises the place of the community or the sense of collectivity in Africa, they have their point of departure. While the radical school of thought places the community far above the individuals, the moderate school of thought believes that the individuals make up the society/community. Therefore, rather than the dominant view of J. S. Mbiti that: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore, I am," a more recent perspective is that

"we are, because I am, and since I am, therefore, we are." While the former represents the view of the radical camp, the latter is a representation of the moderate camp.

Ogungbemi's article under review is more of the moderate view. The context herein is not on the two camps as that is sufficient as the subject matter of a discourse on its own. Hence, this current re-reading sets to examine pungently Ogungbemi's contention on the place of the individual in the African worldview. His seminal article on "An Existential Study of Individuality in Yoruba Culture" (1992) shall be critically engaged with a view to showing the relevance of transformation in human cultural development. This discourse therefore explores Ogungbemi's argument within the understanding of communalism, as a cultural belief that needs adjustment to meet up with the current reality that Africa contends with. Though, as an advocate of cultural rebirth, some of Ogungbemi's analysis and/or criticisms of the African communalistic nature is abnegated in this discourse, his position serves as an eye opener to the introduction and internalisation of individuality in African cultural belief. This is suggestive of the fact that communalism, though considered as one of the natural structures of the African worldview, is not devoid of flaws. This reasoning is one of the major features that defines Africa and African worldview.

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Using Ogungbemi's argument as a premise, this article, therefore, projects the inevitability of the advancement and changes in the human society, and cultural beliefs in an ever-evolving universe that is occupied by rational beings. This prepares the ground for a situational interrogation of the possibility of individuality in the African society and culture without total rejection of the Yoruba communalistic belief as one of the major beliefs of Africans. Hence, the argument of this paper hinges on the fact that such a cultural belief evolution, as championed by Ogungbemi's idea of individuality in Yoruba, could reflect the dynamics of Africa and African societies. This is followed by a critical reflection on the possibility of individuality in Yoruba without necessarily disavowing Yoruba communalistic belief as one of the major doctrinal beliefs of the people which is the fulcrum of this discourse.

### **A Conspectus of Segun Ogungbemi's Arguments**

The central argument of Ogungbemi as chronicled in the paper vitalises the existence of individuality in African culture as against the age-long belief that Africa is a communalistic society. Ogungbemi opened up his argument with the recognition of the importance of the corporate nature of humans in Africa and particularly in the Yoruba culture. He, however, refutes the way in which such belief was exaggerated by scholars such as Collin M. Turnbull, John S. Mbiti, and E.A. Ruch (see Ogungbemi, 1992: 98). His argument against the claim of these scholars is that the individual is holistically a representation of the larger society, as popularly echoed in Mbiti's assertion, "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (Ogungbemi, 1992: 98). To Ogungbemi, Mbiti's assumption is merely a way of denying the possibility of the individual in attaining his innate potentials, outside the dictate of the society.

Ogunbemi in his argument articulates four points to argue for the plausibility of individuality in Africa. These points form the fulcrum of his argument against the idea that Africans are purely communalistic in nature. The starting point of his argument is built around his claim that the obsession with which Mbiti (1969) and others emphasised the communal nature of humans in Africa, without a recourse to individuality is exaggerated; hence, his critique of their view. By

individuality, Ogungbemi (1992) contends that the over-bloated idea of communality in Africa suggests a lack of understanding of the significance of the individual as a major player in community development. Thus, one is poised to reiterate here that individuality as used by and interpreted through this piece, is that which recognises the indispensability of the individual right to decision and self-discovery in the African society.

It is from the above view that he argues that they have carried their generalisation too far. This he tries to puncture with inherent evidence from the Yoruba concept of individuality as envisaged in their creation story and some of their sayings and proverbs that reflect the idea of individuation in human society *a la* Yoruba culture. Ogungbemi argues further that communal existence is basically the nature of humans but as humans become more aware of themselves, and with the influence of technological and industrial revolution, the concept of individuality becomes more pronounced. Ogungbemi thinks that the more a society is governed properly, with the basic infrastructures put in place with security, the less dependent on the communal existence he or she is. This is built on his idea of self-consciousness and desires. Corroborating this, Ogungbemi (1992) argues that when a conducive environment is emplaced, there will be room for creative reasoning, thinking and writing which we have witnessed in Europe and America that promote the existential stage of the individual in human and societal development.

Ogungbemi furthers his argument that Africans are poignant with their cultural belief in corporate existence only to savour material and psychological benefits that could result from such a relation and pointed out that, this is not only applicable to the Africans (Ogungbemi, 1992: 98). This position is not but necessarily connected to Plato's theory of human nature that reveals man as ineradicably social. But despite this preponderant reality, one cannot rule out the possibility of individual traits in humanity since "there is the manifest fact that different individuals have different aptitudes and interests; there are farmers, craftsmen, soldier, etc., each fitted by nature, training, and experience to specialise in one kind of task" (Stevenson, 1974: 27). Invariably, one is perturbed to accept this reality as it suggests the fact that no human can live in

isolation because an individual can never provide all that is needed by him-/herself since man's want is insatiable. This seems to imply that corporate existence, that is being aggrandised by African scholars to be the foundation and fundamental attribute of Africans, is not limited to Africans, in Ogungbemi's view. It is also a practice in other climes since it is natural for human beings to live in society, as anything otherwise, makes human less than human in the rational sense of what humanity entails. Thus, it is fathomable from Ogungbemi's view that corporate existence is only possible via the individuals.

In driving his conviction to a logical conclusion, Ogungbemi, in his existential philosophical analysis, argues that the belief in interpersonal relations is prevalent both in Africa and in Western Europe, but that the degree differs. He jagged out some of the effects and reasons that culminated in Africans' zeal in holding corporate existence tenaciously. He suggests that it is not unconnected with lack of industrialisation, which has boosted individual achievement in the Western Europe, as well as lack of existentialist' scholars that could write on individualistic nature of humans as done by Western scholars (Ogungbemi, 1992:99). Ogungbemi therefore showcases the chance of individuality in Africa with a particular reference to the Yoruba society.

The reflection on the possibility of individuality, according to him, could be settled with myths that support individuality. The central argument of Ogungbemi in respect of myths in support of individuality is buttressed with the creation story as understood and believed in the Yoruba mythological account of human creation. He emphasises the fact that *Orisa-Nla* that was saddled with the responsibility of moulding the body did it individually as well as *Olodumare* who breathed the breath of life into the lifeless body did so individually (Ogungbemi, 1992:100-101). This in Ogungbemi's view, presupposes the authenticity of individuality in Africa, especially in the Yoruba culture.

The enigma of individuality in Africa in Ogungbemi's analysis is equally visible in his argument from self-consciousness. To him, human consciousness in Yoruba thought is attributable to all human beings who are capable of breathing or have bodily sensations. This, however, is not sufficient in

Yoruba worldview as the totality of what confirms a human to be man. In the light of this, Ogungbemi raises the possibility of individuality in Yoruba from the fact that when the Yoruba talk about a person, they ordinarily exclude some categories of people, for instance infants, mentally defective human beings, the insane and idiots. However, those with deformity are classified as human beings but not persons because of their inability to be self-conscious. In Ogungbemi's view, the "individual becomes aware of himself that he can actually know that self-awareness individuates. Since individuation is a means to self-actualisation or self-authentication, it differentiates the quality of individuals" (Ogungbemi, 1992:102). This in Ogungbemi's analysis reveals the potency of the fact that when human being first appeared on earth he or she was a solitary individual. Though it would amount to a great disease to be in isolation, that however does not obliterate individuality as reflected in some of the Yoruba sayings such as; '*emi lo ni ara mi*' – I own myself; '*mo mo iru eniyan ti mo je*' – I know the kind of person I am, as identified by Ogungbemi (1992:101-103).

Ogungbemi further argues for the possibility of individuality in Yoruba culture with an argument that the individual is a free being. Ogungbemi pungently articulates his argument of individual freedom in the Yoruba society with reference to the Yoruba belief in their metaphysical concept of *ori*, (destiny). Ogungbemi tries to establish individual freedom from the Yoruba concept of *ori* with reference to Idowu's narratives that:

It is not clearly stated in the oral traditions what the pre-existent state of a person is before he comes into the world. But it occurs in the sayings that it is the *ori* that kneels before Olodumare to choose, receive, or have the destiny affixed to it. The picture, therefore, is a complete "person" knelling before Olodumare to choose or receive (Ogungbemi, 1992:105).

It is from Idowu's submission that Ogungbemi fathomed what he refers to as the existential ontological freedom of an individual in the pre-existent life, namely freedom of choice, freedom of action and responsibility. This he links with the fact that individual made his or her choice in the primordial existence and thus, an individual is the architect of his or her own destiny. Thus, to

Ogungbemi, an individual living a self-conscious life is an offshoot of the individual's disposition and that is why when an elderly person discusses an important matter with young adults or with his or her peer, one often hears a statement like *"Eje ki n lo rori si"* – Let me go and think about it (Ogungbemi, 1992:106). This reflects the inevitability of individuality in decision making as such precipitates responsibility because when an individual is not free to choose and act on the dictate of his or her choice, he or she cannot be held responsible for his or her action. Given this possibility, the idea of reward and punishment would be reduced to absurdity.

Argument from conflicting and/or different desires is another fundamental element of individuality orchestrated by Ogungbemi in his bid to showcase the belief in the existence of individuality in the African (Yoruba) culture. In his defense of individuality in Yoruba culture, he opines that "it must be acknowledged that the desires of individuals are sometimes different" (1992:108). The implication of this is evident in the fact that wishes and aspirations of individuals in a given society differ which could not be dissociated from the dynamics of human nature. The viability of individual desires and aspirations in getting their expectations in the real sense of its manifestation in the African (Yoruba) society seems to encumber the irrevocability of the African communalistic nature. This reality, according to Ogungbemi, is obvious in the light of the fact that:

Nobody can have the desires of others, because everyone is different and our interests are not always the same. And because an individual is characteristically unique in himself (sic), his impulses are experientially subjective (Ogungbemi, 1992:109).

Thus, the dynamics that permeate human activities as exemplified in creation story, self-consciousness, individual freedom, different desires, as pointed out by Ogungbemi, seems to have made individuality inevitable in Yoruba culture. Despite the inevitability of individuality in the Yoruba culture, as obtained in Ogungbemi's argument, it is not projected as a replacement for corporate existence of the Yoruba people.

## **Rethinking Ogungbemi's Concept of Individuality in Yoruba Thought**

The reality of human existence presupposes individuation and corporation. This claim is not unconnected with the fact that the essence of humanity could be meaningfully achieved through the incorporation of individuals to the whole. The logic of this possibility therefore provokes the propensity of union of opposite in a dialectical manner. The coming together of the individuals to work out their desires in sustaining their corporate existence in the Yoruba society and culture cannot be overemphasised. The union, though a product of two different postulates, does not represent a contradiction, but an affirmation of the fact that no individual can live and succeed in isolation. It is within this reality that individuality and collectivity is considered two sides of a coin of which no part could meaningfully attain its essence without the other. It is arguable, therefore, that the relationship between individuality and collectivity in Yoruba culture could be assumed as symbiotic.

Communalism or corporate existence is the practice which pervades traditional Yoruba culture; it is one of the Yoruba ways of life that predisposes members to voluntarily cooperate with the dictates of the community. It is sacrosanct with the Yoruba culture. This reality is not unconnected with the fact that there is no society without its own history despite the fact that social change is inevitable. One cannot gloss over the preponderance of corporatism in the Yoruba culture. This reality is well captured by Olufemi Taiwo (2011:37) when he observes that, "before the irruption of Christianity and colonialism into their land and mindscapes, communalism was the dominant and preferred mode of social living and principle of social ordering in much, if not all, of Africa."

Corporatism avidly reveals the communal nature of the Yoruba worldview. It is a principle of social ordering under which, in the relationship between the individual and the community, the community is held superior to the individual, and where their interests come into conflicts, those of the community should prevail. And it should not be forbidden to bend the will of the individual or sometimes abridge his or her interests, if doing so would serve the ends of the community (Taiwo, 2011:37). This propensity, however, does not rule out

the reality of individuality holistically as there are some attributes of individuals that are retained in so far as the individual is willing to be subsumed in the group. Such attributes include names, mine and thine, heroism, and so on (Taiwo, 2011:39). It is in the light of this that the Yoruba often distinguish the individual in their saying: *tori a ba da ran n la n fi l'oruko* – individual is given a name for ease of identification. Thus, the individual at some stage will be the ultimate judge of his or her action in the sense that in some cases, the individual could only be advised by the society, but it solely rests with such an individual to determine and/or decide “what to do with societal advice; whether or not to accept such an advice” (Taiwo, 2011:48).

Ogungbemi pensively argues for the viability of individuation in the Yoruba culture with reference to self-consciousness. His argument on self-consciousness as articulated in the previous section of this article is onerous. Yet, if taken within the Yoruba cultural heritage, it may not necessarily disentangle the individual from the community where his or her existence gains its essence. That is, the essence of the individual can only be sustained within the community and not in isolation. Recourse to self-consciousness, as raised therefore by Ogungbemi to justify his position for a holistic individuality in Yoruba culture, is suggestive of a western-centric claim that “foster rugged individualism in the order of Rene Descartes’ *Cogito ergo Sum* – ‘I think therefore I exist’ – which is diametrically opposed to African ‘*Cognatus Sum, ergo Sumus*” (Ezekwonna, 2005:60). While Ogungbemi’s conjecture is holistically western-centric in my view, it is apposite to argue that evidence abound from a Yoruba saying that self-consciousness, though an attribute of individuals, does not serve as a yardstick in seeing it as the crux of Yoruba lifestyle. Hence, a popular saying that “*ogbon ologbon ko je ki a pe agba ni were*” literally means shared wisdom makes a person wise. The implication of this is the fact that no matter how self-conscious an individual is, it cannot be quantified with the gains of coming together and sharing one’s life with others.

Ogungbemi, while trying to justify his argument on the existential analysis of freedom as that which is individuated in the Yoruba culture with reference to the Yoruba metaphysical concept of *ori* makes recourse to Karim Barber contention that:

Yoruba cosmology presents a picture of man, a solitary individual, picking his way (aided by *ori*, destiny chosen by himself before coming to earth) between a variety of forces, some benign, some hostile, many ambivalent, seeking to placate them and only himself with them in an attempt to thwart his rivals and enemies in human society (see Ogungbemi, 1992:105).

Ogungbemi’s reference to the individual *ori* that triggers individual license to his or her way of life still reflects Euro-Western understanding of Yoruba belief. It is fundamental to mention that the individual *ori*, so chosen in the pre-existence life, is an enigma that could only be explained within the society where such a belief is held. It follows therefore that despite the necessity of individual freedom of choice that could galvanise moral responsibility, the Yoruba still believe that individual freedom could only be exercised within the communal freedom. This is aptly captured by Bujo (1998:73) who argues that:

No member of any African society can develop outside the community. According to the African understanding of interaction, the individual is an incomplete being who basically depends on the community. On the other hand, the community dissolves without individuals. Where the initiation rite is practiced, e.g., it has as its effect that the individual ceases to exist as a being for himself, so as to become a “being” existing for the community. The individual is no longer an “I-for-myself,” but has to become an “I-in-the-community-for-others.”

Bujo (1998:75) further explains:

Such an understanding of freedom necessarily challenges the traditional Western doctrine of conscience. Whereas from a Western perspective the individual has only to follow his/her conscience as the last instance, the situation in Africa is different. Individual conscience is not the last instance without a common listening to each other; the “conscience” of the community might eventually be the last instance for individual action, because one does not feel cheated by the community. Instead, the individual knows that the community is positively oriented towards him or her. On the other hand, one considers conformity with the community as being decisive for the whole

... If the individual conscience is thus coupled with the conscience of the community, then one understands the marked inclination of the African for common responsibility.

Given the above reality, it will not be out of logical reasoning to suggest that Ogungbemi's validating his profound possibility of individuality in the Yoruba culture is not Yoruba-inclined, but a clash of cultural belief that is informed by his western existential potentials. The preponderance of this argument is well represented in the Yoruba belief and saying that *Ai kowo rin ejo n lo seku pa won* – A lone ranger snake makes an easy prey. This implies that coming together is more reasonable than being alone as that will go a long way to salvage one from untoward danger that could overcome one, if alone. Thus, the claim that the individual could exercise his or her freedom without necessarily depending on the community seems to be wrongheaded. This is evident in the Yoruba society where the individual is considered to have attained the essence of humanity through the process of incorporation. The implication of this ambivalence is that individual freedom though individuated, could only be meaningful within the confines of the community. Menkiti (1984:172) seems to have made relevant submission in this regard when he claims:

In African thoughts, person become person only after a process of incorporation. Without incorporation into this or that community, individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description 'person' does not fully apply, for personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed... Whereas Western conceptions of man go for what might be described as a minimal definition of the person – whoever has soul, or rationality, or will or memory, is seen as entitled to the description 'person'... Hence, the African emphasised the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e, become a person with all the inbuilt excellences implied by the term.

The logic of Menkiti's argument crisply analyses the nature of individuality in the Yoruba culture

as a being for others and not a being for itself as assumed by the western existentialist philosophical thought, exemplified in Ogungbemi theorisation. Though, the reality of the individual's freedom is undeniable in the real sense of it; however, "the individual is required to achieve but expected to turn around and give back to the community" (Taiwo,2011:27). This possibility in Yoruba community does not necessarily imply that the community is instrumental to the achievement of the individual but rather, it is a way of reinvigorating the individuals such that the Yoruba would say *bi ori kan ba suwon a ran igba ori* - If an individual is successful and the success is sustained, it will aid the prosperity of others. This is profound as the individual's success is more appreciated when shared and when it is used in the challenges of other. From this saying, they are aware of individuality, but to them the essence of such an individual could only be meaningful to the extent that such individuals relate and affect the community at large. Hence, as he would be identified as individual, he would also be seen as communal being whose meaning is emboldened within the kernel of the community. This further reflects another understanding of freedom from the Yoruba culture where it is believed that "the community must not destroy individual freedom but has the task of making freedom possible. The community has to prevent the individual from arbitrary action, so that one's life and that of the clan experience more opportunities for development" (Bujo, 1998:74). Though, Bujo speaks from a Southern African perspective, his claim resonates with the Yoruba proverb *A ki ba ni tan ki a fa ni nitan ya* – it is untoward to make one/other miserable because of common origin. Hence, when an individual success is enjoyed by the community, the community should not turn out to abuse the opportunity.

It is, however, pertinent to mention that despite the belief in the uniqueness of corporate existence in the Yoruba culture, the concept of individual freedom is fundamental in determining human life in society for it underlies human thought and behaviour. This reality is fathomable as individual co-exists with social cohesion. This cannot be glossed over as one of the major components of human life in the society. The consequence of this is that the votary of individuality notwithstanding in the Yoruba culture, social cohesion is still dominant

over individuality. Nevertheless, one needs to state that individuality could be positive, and it could be negative. It is negative when individuality tends towards promotion or the pursuit of ego or selfish interest, and it could be seen as positive if it has a utilitarian posture towards the society as a whole. This responsibility of the individual makes collective/social cohesion meaningful.

Given the foregoing, it is necessary to explain that in the Yoruba society and cultural belief, a person as an individual may have all it takes to exercise his freedom and demonstrate his individuality existentially. As such, he is not necessarily compelled to be a conformist to the social ethic. However, such a person would be expected to have a moral obligation to behave and exercise his freedom in a manner that would galvanise social ethics. This is because the social ethic within the Yoruba cultural parlance is the application of individual ethics cum morality. This brings to light Kantian's categorical imperative that states "act according to that maxim by which you can at the same will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1959: xiii). This implies that while the individual is morally bound to promote the common good, society also has the moral obligation to ensure the integrity of the individual. This in a way justifies the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the individual and the community as suggested earlier.

This is suggestive of one of the fundamental roles of the society as observed by Wiredu's (1980:21). According to him, social cohesion is that which "enables society to be held together; great value was placed upon communal fellowship in the traditional society, which fellowship infused African social life with a pervasive humanity and fullness of life." Wiredu, however, quickly reiterates the viability of authoritarianism in African collectivity and/or corporatism. To him, authoritarianism refers to any human arrangement which entails any person being made to do or suffer something against his will, or which leads to any person being hindered in the development of his own will. He qualifies this conception by saying that what is authoritarian is the unjustified overriding of an individual's will (Wiredu, 1980:21).

It needed to be pointed out that one way of showing and demonstrating authoritarian nature of collective principle in the Yoruba culture is the

claim of the elders to knowing all, that is, elders claim to know what is good or right for the society. So, their ideas often are imposed on the non-elderly, forgetting the Yoruba beliefs and sayings that *omode ni se, agba ni se la fi da lle-lfe* – It was division of labour between the elders and the youths that brought about the existence/creation of *lle-lfe* and *owo omode o to pepe, tagbalagba o wo keregbe* – As children's hands cannot reach the rafters/shelves, the elders' fists cannot take items from inside the gourd, we need to help one another among others. The point here is that the young are not ontologically less human than the elders in social organisation.

It is therefore logically deducible that given Ogungbemi's arguments, one may tend to agree to the seeming fact that community cannot be totally opposed to individuality. According to Gyekye (1992) "the well-being and success of the group would depend on the unique qualities of its individual members – that is, on the intellectual abilities, talents of various kinds, characters, dispositions, share-able experience, etc., of each individual person." The profundity of Gyekye's submission is not too far from the Yoruba worldview where it is believed that nothing is as good and rewarding as collectivism, as enshrined in their corporate existence. This reality they often displayed through countless proverbs such as; *agbajowo n la n fi n soya, ajeji owo kan o gbe eru dori* – cooperation gives credence to existence or it is when our fingers are rolled into a fist that we can boldly beat our chests, a single hand cannot lift a heavy load onto one's head, *ka fowo we owo n lowo n fi mo* - It is only when the two hands wash each other that they become clean, and *ka rin ka po yiye ni ye ni* - when we walk in groups, we achieve more, just to mention a few.

## Conclusion

This article interrogated Ogungbemi's argument for individuality in the Yoruba culture. It demonstrated that Ogungbemi's argument for preponderance of individuality in the Yoruba society as delineated in his analysis is considered western-centric. Suffice is to say that this re-reading of Ogungbemi's contribution to the debate on 'Individuality-Community Debate in African Philosophy' through his four major arguments, as discussed earlier, is an eye opener to the potency of the individual in



the African society. Thus, it is arguable to contend that individuals make up the society, but that does not debunk the age-long doctrinal belief of the Yoruba being communalistic in their worldview. This submission is not unconnected with the fact that in the Yoruba cultural belief, a person as an individual may have all it takes to work-out his freedom and determine his individuality existentially. Nevertheless, such an individual is not necessarily compelled to be a conformist to the social ethic. However, it is expected that such an individual would have a moral obligation to behave and exercise his freedom in a manner that would galvanise social ethics.

### Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of my Grandmother Mama Atoke – Ala Atitebi, a traditional worshipper, the Atokun of Abilere and Arosoju Masquerades before old age sets in and the immediate past Iya Agan Olorisa Parapo, Bonni, Igboho, Oyo State. She was the Matriarch of Atitebi Compound, Okeloko, Igboho, Oorelope Local Government, Oyo State who joined her ancestors on May 9, 2023 at the estimated ripe age of 150.

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