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INTRODUCTION.

According to Menkiti (1984), in his article, "Person and Community in Traditional African thought", the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life history in Africa. His statement was based on the African notion of community and individuals.

In African world view, the community defines the individuals. Individuals do not exist as islands or lone individuals, rather they derive their existences from the existence of the community. That is to say that individuals would not exist without the community. This implies that the community is held as supreme in African world view and individuals strive to be connected to the community.

Menkiti's statement could be said to be founded on the philosophy of Mbiti which says, "I am because we are, and because we are, therefore I am".

This further buttresses the notion that communalism rather than individualism is the practice in Africa. In communalism, individuals exist together in the community, sharing things together, caring for

one another unlike the Western practice of individualism whereby individuals are not after communal goals but their individual goals.

In the next section, we would present the difference between the Western view of person and the African view of person.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE WESTERN VIEW OF PERSON AND THE AFRICAN VIEW OF PERSON.

The Western world and the African world entertain different view about person. In the Western world, person is described by certain isolated characteristics. The Western view of person is abstract. They tend to abstract certain physical and physiological characteristics of a person and make them the basic and essential defining features of person.

This is not the same with the Africans. Africans do not define persons by their isolated characteristics. They define person by making reference to the community. Thus the African sees the community as the defining factor of person. That is to say that personhood in African worldview flows from

the community.

Secondly, the western world view of person as minimal. This implies that any one who possesses soul, rationality, will or memory fits into the description of person. This is however not so with Africans. Africans view person as maximal. What this implies is that personhood is processual. Being processual entails that one is gradually incorporated into the society before one can be fully described as a person.

These differences derive from the differences between the western conception of reality and the African conception of reality. Thus, whereas in the western worldview, reality is conceived as isolated from each other, the Africans conceive reality as a unity and so do not diversify them like the western in a bid to explain them.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE AFRICAN VIEW AND THE WESTERN VIEW OF COMMUNITY.

Menkiti also distinguished between how community is viewed in the Western world and in the African world. According to him, in the western world, it

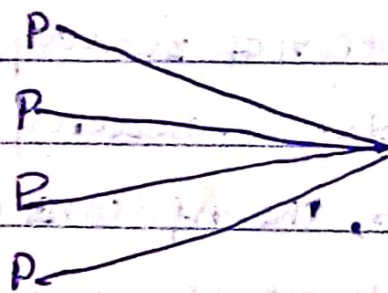
different individuals persons that cause the 'community to exist. In other words, the community exists because the persons that make it up exist. This implies that without the persons, the community would not exist.

On the other hand, in African worldview persons exist because the community exists. This implies that without the community, persons would not exist.

Personhood in this regard flows from the community.

Menkiti's diagrammatic representation of this is shown below

COMMUNITY IN THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW

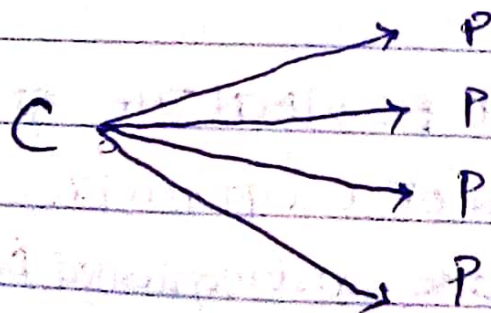


where:

P means persons

C means community.

COMMUNITY IN THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW



where:

P means persons

C means community.

The above diagrams illustrate that in the Western view, it is the persons that cause the community to exist, while in the African worldview, it is the community that cause persons to exist.

PERSONHOOD IN AFRICAN WORLDVIEW.

In African world view, personhood is not conferred on individuals once they are born into the world. It is gradually attained as one continues to exist in the community. This implies that the longer one exists in the community the more person he/she becomes. This is because it is believed that the more such a person is in the community, the more excellencies he/she acquires and these excellencies are definitive of full personhood.

This is why statements such as "Oghooka Mmadu" (he has become a person) is used to depict the level of experience or the stage of growth one has attained in the community. Also, Africans believe in the saying that "What an elder sees while sitting down, a younger person will not see it even if he climbs an Uko tree". This statement also points to

experience attained by being a part of the community. Furthermore, given the role of experiences in the definition of person in African worldview, elders are more respected and regarded unlike infants. This is because, infants are not yet fully considered as fully persons since they are yet to ^{be} fully incorporated into the community. Hence, neuter pronouns such as "it" is used to refer to infants. Such neuter pronouns cannot be used for adults. This is because having passed through different stages of incorporation into the society, they are now considered as fully persons. This also accounts for the reason why there is elaborate funeral rites and strident grief at the death of an adult unlike the death of an infant or a young person.

PERSONHOOD AND EXISTENTIALISM IN AFRICA.

As earlier mentioned, personhood is not conferred to one at birth. One passes through different stages of existence during which various incorporation rites confer personhood on him.

At birth, the infant is said to have a

depersonalised status and referred to as "it" due to the fact that there is lack of incorporation. After birth one passes through several stages of incorporation into the community. This includes the rites of initiation ~~into~~ at puberty which ushers one into adulthood during which procreation occurs. The individual also grows old and dies. At death, the person is said to have joined the community of ancestors. At this stage, personhood is still retained even though the individual is dead. He/she is said to have joined the community of the living dead because their memories still live on in the minds of the living. The living also at various occasions make reference to them.

However, after a long while, with the passage of many generations, their memories fade away and they completely lose their personhood. At this stage also, since personhood is lost, they also go back to the stage where there is lack of incorporation and neuter pronouns such as "it" is used to refer to them.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Menkiti's statement could be said to be justified as the real situation of things in Africa Community actually takes priority over the individual and individuals do everything possible not to sever their relationship with the community. This is why ostracization is usually decided by individuals in Africa because by being ostracized from the community, one loses his personhood.