

## THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MODERATE AND LIMITED COMMUNITARIANISM

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### Abstract

This article uses philosophical analysis to defend the status of limited communitarianism as a standalone theory in African political philosophy. Early African scholars like Ifeanyi Menkiti argued that the community takes priority over the individual in all important respects. However, these thinkers were soon labelled radical or extreme in their treatment of the individual and were requested to moderate or restrict their articulation of the community's role. This gave birth to the radical and moderate theories. But not before long, the moderates were also accused of supporting the tyranny of the community. They were also accused of not being fundamentally different from the radicals, giving rise to the limited version of Afro-communitarianism. Yet, the status of this latest instalment as a standalone theory has been doubted, with critics claiming that the limited version is not different to, or is merely another well-argued variant of, moderate communitarianism. This article argues that upon critical philosophical analysis, there is good reason to conclude that Bernard Matolino's limited communitarianism is different from (and not just a well-argued version of) Kwame Gyekye's moderate communitarianism. The paper argues that while there are similarities between the theories, the differences which exist in the definitions of persons and community and how the relationship between the two is understood in terms of rights, duties, and primacy make moderate and limited communitarianism distinct standalone theories.

**Keywords:** Limited communitarianism, African personhood, Bernard Matolino, Afro-communitarianism, Moderate communitarianism, Kwame Gyekye.

## Introduction

While there have been several Afro-communitarian theories articulated in the postcolonial literature of African philosophy, their statuses as viable standalone theories have come to be questioned by other scholars in different ways. Radical communitarianism (see MENKITI 1984) argues that persons are defined by the community, and as a result, the latter precedes (or takes priority over) the individual, rendering individual rights secondary to communal duties. Kwame Gyekye (1997) criticizes the radical theory for being too extreme in its understanding of the community. He then coins moderate communitarianism as a theory that seeks to be different from its radical counterpart regarding the primacy of the community and the level of recognition accorded to the individual. In several publications, however, Matolino (2009, 2014, 2018) argues that Gyekye's theory is not fundamentally different from the radicals since the moderates also prioritize the community.

Matolino (2014) then puts forward his limited version as different from moderate communitarianism when it comes to rights and the primacy thesis, as well as his definition of community. However, despite Matolino's claims, some scholars like Mesembe Edet (2015), Jonathan Chimakonam and Victor Nweke (2018), as well as Tosin Adeate (2023a), argue that limited communitarianism is no different to its predecessor, moderate communitarianism or that the former is merely a version of the latter. The overarching reason driving these positions is that both moderate and limited communitarianism seek to accommodate the individual's rights; therefore, the latter is a version of the former.

The focus of this article is to use philosophical analysis to defend the difference between limited and moderate communitarianism. In the first section, I show significant differences between the two theories as articulated by the authors. In the subsequent sections, I argue that Edet's (2015) argument cannot be sustained because it contradicts other arguments in which he admits a fundamental difference between limited and moderate communitarianism but fails to take this admission to its logical

conclusion. On the other hand, Chimakonam's and Nweke's (2018) claim also cannot be maintained as they do not provide sufficient support for it but rather provide premises that support the idea that there is a significant difference between Matolino's and Gyekye's theories. However, these scholars also do not take this difference to its logical conclusion. I then argue that Adeate's (2023a) conclusion is unjustified as it does not take seriously the differences between the theories.

### **Moderate and Limited Communitarianism: In Favour of a Difference**

In this section, I defend Matolino's claim that his theory, limited communitarianism, is different from its predecessor, Gyekye's moderate communitarianism. I maintain that the difference lies in the fundamental concepts the authors use to articulate their theories – concepts of persons, community, rights, and duties – which then account for the serious differences between the theories themselves. Moderate communitarianism can be viewed as a theory that seeks to articulate the appropriately balanced relations that are to be maintained within the community in order to secure the overall well-being of community members (GYEKYE 1997). This explains why Gyekye is of the view that while persons can be conceived of both metaphysically and morally, it is the moral aspects that are more significant for a communitarian theory of persons. This is because, for Gyekye, personhood is about the moral behaviour of individuals within a community, and what confers personhood status on individuals, as distinct from their status as human beings, is their moral behaviour towards promoting the well-being of others.

However, while agreeing that persons can be understood through their metaphysical and social identities, Matolino differs from Gyekye in that when it comes to matters of strictly identifying what a person is, nothing precedes the metaphysical identity (2014, 160). In fact, Matolino argues that to take the metaphysical identity seriously means that it is this identity that has primacy (MATOLINO 2014). As a result, while persons are characterized by both their metaphysical and social identities, for Matolino, and unlike Gyekye, the metaphysical identity takes precedence over the social identity.

This is understandable since limited communitarianism is a theory that seeks to articulate the appropriate relations to be

maintained within the community in order to guarantee the claims of individuals, in terms of things like dignity and rights, who live in ever-changing communities that differ in their capacities to secure the well-being of their members (MATOLINO 2014, 2019). It takes seriously the claims of individuality, which are independent of any community and are to be protected in all communities. This is why Matolino (2014, 160) argues that his theory differs from moderate communitarianism in terms of the primacy of rights and how it defines the community.

Remember that for Gyekye, the cultural community in which the individual finds herself is prior to that individual. This is simply because the natural sociality of the individual is a fundamental feature of persons, making them unable to operate without communities and thus rendering the community prior. This community, for Gyekye, is not just an association of individuals whose interests coincide contingently. It is also a reality in itself distinguished from a mere association by the fact that individuals “share an overall way of life” (GYEKYE 1997, 42). As a result, to take the community seriously, for Gyekye, means that there are communal values that can never be sacrificed for any individual rights or preferences.

With that said, Gyekye argues that while moderate communitarianism takes communal values, such as reciprocities, generosity, or mutual sympathy, to be more important than individual rights, this does not mean that rights do not exist or are not essential for his brand of Afro-communitarianism. In fact, Gyekye argues that rights are an individual’s way of expressing their capacities and autonomy, aspects of the individual which are acknowledged in the moderate communitarian scheme.

Nevertheless, in Gyekye’s moderate communitarian theory, the recognition of rights coincides with the recognition of communal values, and the latter can be regarded as overriding the former under certain circumstances. This, then, means that rights can be infringed if they are insensitive to social responsibilities.

Therefore, just like how the community is prior to the individual when it comes to rights, the community can abridge individual rights if there is a need to maintain the integrity of the community. It becomes clear, then, that Gyekye’s moderate communitarian scheme recognizes individuality and rights but does

not prioritize them. Instead, Gyekye prioritizes the community and its communal values.

However, in direct contradiction to Gyekye, Matolino (2014) prioritizes individual rights over communal values. Matolino argues that while all communities possess some degree of cooperation, a fundamental feature of communities is that they cannot exist without individual members voluntarily assenting to the ways of the community. In other words, without such voluntary association from individuals, no community can exist. Therefore, what is integral for communities to exist is individual assent, which contradicts Gyekye's view that what is integral for communities is not mere individual association but the sharing of an overall way of life.

Moreover, because individuals have parts of themselves which are independent of the community and because communities depend on the realities of individuals to exist, Matolino argues that individual rights are more important than communal rights (or duties). This is because individual rights pertain to the individual person whose status is protected by a regime of inviolable rights). Communal rights, on the other hand, are less important since they are always up for negotiation because they depend on factors like the prevalent political regime, the social conditions, and the prevailing culture.

Therefore, it is clear that while Gyekye recognizes rights, such rights can be violated if they clash with communal values. However, Matolino's theory contradicts this and argues that not only are individual rights more important than communal rights, but individual rights can never be violated for the sake of communal rights. These are fundamental differences between the two theories.

### **Against the Difference**

In this section, I argue that those who claim that there are no differences between moderate and limited communitarianism or that the latter is a variant of the former are unjustified in their arguments simply because they downplay the differences articulated by the authors of the theories themselves, as I have tried to show above.

I would like to be explicit from the beginning that when I refer to moderate communitarianism in this article, I am merely speaking about Gyekye's theory, and I interpret the interlocutors in this paper to also be referring to Gyekye's theory when they write about moderate communitarianism. While it is not the ambit of this paper to

debate whether or not it is conceivable that there may exist a standalone concept of moderate communitarianism of which Gyekye's own theory is merely a variant, it is sufficient for my argument to point out that none of the authors I speak of in this debate have explicitly referred to this standalone concept. Instead, all of them refer to moderate communitarianism in the context of the theory articulated in the debate between Menkiti (1984) and Gyekye (1997).

As a result, I find it justified that my discussions throughout this paper are limited to interpreting all the interlocutors to be referring to Gyekye's theory when referring to moderate communitarianism and Matolino's theory when referring to limited communitarianism.

### *Mesembe Edet's Argument*

Edet argues that Matolino's theory is no different from Gyekye's moderate communitarianism because the latter also acknowledges individuality and rights. As a result, Matolino has not presented a new theory of Afro-communitarianism. Edet states; "[I]n my view Matolino's Limited Communitarianism is not different from Gyekye's moderate communitarianism" (EDET 2015, 103).

However, not long after this claim, Edet concedes that Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is autocratic in favour of the community; "[T]he moderate communitarians can...be linked to...community autocracy insofar as they concede that the community may trample on individual rights that conflict with the interest of the community" (EDET 2015, 104). In my view, Edet's admission that Gyekye's moderate communitarian theory is committed to the autocracy of the community contradicts Edet's earlier admission that Gyekye's theory accommodates individuality and rights the way Matolino's view does.

Moreover, in limited communitarianism, the community cannot be autocratic because of the limits placed on it; and these limits involve individual rights that are never to be abrogated for the sake of communal rights. Thus, even if one can accept Edet's claim of the similarity between limited and moderate communitarianism since both recognize and accommodate individuality and individual rights, such similarity is trivial because, as Edet also admits, moderate communitarianism allows the community to infringe on these rights, making the community autocratic, while limited communitarianism does not allow communal autocracy in any circumstance. I am of the

view that this is a fundamental difference, and for Edet to argue that limited communitarianism is not different from its moderate predecessor is not to take this fundamental difference between the two theories seriously.

At times, Edet seems to accept the seriousness of this difference and bases his *tu quoque* criticism on this difference between Matolino's theory and Gyekye's theory. After accusing moderate communitarianism of allowing community autocracy, Edet says:

Limited communitarianism claims to be different from the moderate version on the ground that it rejects the autocracy of the community. But this [rejection of communal autocracy] involves a *tu quoque* because Matolino's Limited Communitarianism merely reverses the trend; instead of the community preceding the individual, he suggests that it is the individual that precedes the community. (EDET 2015, 104)

It is unclear where and how exactly Matolino commits a *tu quoque* fallacy, particularly because all rights or norms do not come from anywhere but are authored. And this fact of rights or norms being authored cannot, by itself, render the authoring dictatorial<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, I engage Edet's accusation because these comments show Edet's admission of a difference between the theories.

In my view, if Matolino reverses the trend of there being an authoritarian community – a trend that Edet links to moderate communitarianism – then surely now, Edet has accepted that there is a fundamental difference between Matolino and Gyekye. In fact, this difference is so serious that Edet has used this very difference to accuse Matolino of a philosophical fallacy: a *tu quoque*.

In my view, to charge Matolino with the *tu quoque* fallacy would mean that Edet accepts this difference, which is that the moderates (like the radicals) make the community authoritarian, while Matolino makes the individual the authoritarian. The *tu quoque* would unfold when Matolino accuses the moderates of allowing the community to dictate matters, while at the same time, his limited communitarianism allows for the individual to be similarly dictatorial.

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

Thus, what Edet means by the *tu quoque* is that Matolino is accusing previous communitarians of the same crime that he is committing: dictating.

Perhaps Edet's point is that these theories are the same by virtue of the fact that in both theories, there always exists an authoritarian between the community and the individual, and this similarity is what Afro-communitarianism is about. However, even if this similarity is true, it is not such a similarity that could lead to the conclusion that one theory is not different from the other, not just from this similarity. What this similarity merely shows is that even diametrically opposed theories can share something; a commitment or a weakness. For example, individualism and communitarianism are theories fundamentally about human beings, but this similarity does not mean that they are not different.

As a result, even with this similarity – the existence of a tyrant – Edet requires more justifications to support his stance that limited communitarianism is not different from moderate communitarianism. Such a claim is not sustained by any of Edet's arguments. However, it is possible that Edet meant that limited communitarianism is merely another variant of moderate communitarianism rather than that the former is 'not different' from the latter. This is the kind of thought produced by Chimakonam and Nweke, which will be investigated in the next section.

### *Chimakonam's and Nweke's Argument*

Chimakonam and Nweke (2018) claim that Matolino's limited communitarianism is a variant of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism, as both seek to make a place for rights. For Chimakonam and Nweke, Gyekye challenges Menkiti's understanding of Afro-communitarianism and calls the latter's version radical because it prioritizes the community. Therefore, according to these scholars, Gyekye advocated a different version of Afro-communitarianism that is not like Menkiti's, and one that "allows for the rights and dignity of individuals" (CHIMAKONAM & NWEKE 2018, 82-83).

As a result of Gyekye's criticism of Menkiti, and the former's articulation of moderate communitarianism, Chimakonam and Nweke argue that there are only two versions of Afro-communitarianism, and



Matolino's limited communitarianism is just another variant of the moderate kind:

From the foregoing, one can infer that radical and moderate communitarianisms are the two versions of Afro-communitarianism that undergird the debate on rights in African philosophy. Other versions of Afro-communitarianism, such as Bernard Matolino's *limited communitarianism*...can be grouped as a variant of [the] moderate version. (CHIMAKONAM & NWEKE 2018, 83)

This is a curious characterization of Matolino's theory when, right after these claims, these scholars admit that Gyekye's own position prioritizes the community; "moderate communitarianism which he [Gyekye] advocates suggests special recognition of the individual autonomy...even though he [Gyekye] admits...that the community remains prior to the individual" (CHIMAKONAM & NWEKE 2018, 82-83). As mentioned above, I interpret Chimakonam and Nweke as referring to Gyekye's theory when they speak of moderate communitarianism.

Additionally, what makes it even more curious for Chimakonam and Nweke to argue that Matolino's theory is a variant of Gyekye's theory, is that they outrightly admit that Gyekye really does not take rights seriously:

In other words, Menkiti was mistaken in his supposition that the individual has no form of autonomy and Gyekye was mistaken in his supposition that the marginal autonomy which the individual enjoys in his system effectively translates to the existence of human rights in Afro-communitarianism. (CHIMAKONAM & NWEKE 2018, 84)

Yet, as argued above, Matolino is explicit that in his theory, there are individual rights that can never be infringed upon in favour of communal rights.

So, if Chimakonam and Nweke accept the idea that Gyekye prioritizes the community over the individual and is mistaken to think that moderate communitarianism takes rights seriously while also accepting that Matolino prioritizes individual rights over communal

rights, in that case, it seems to me that these theories prioritize different things, making them, *prima facie*, different theories. If this is true, and if there is evidence that these theories are different, then there exists evidence that justifies that Matolino's limited communitarianism is different from moderate communitarianism. As a result, the evidence presented by Chimakonam and Nweke does not justify that the former is a variant of the other.

To be fair, the authors do cite Edet (2015) and Oyowe (2015) and perhaps believe that the argument that limited communitarianism is a variant of moderate communitarianism has already been made by these scholars, and there is no need to rehash it. Therefore, the arguments made in these previous works could be what justifies Chimakonam's and Nweke's own postulations. Yet, upon further philosophical investigation, the works of both Oyowe and Edet do not justify Chimakonam and Nweke's position.

As argued above, Edet does not provide sufficient evidence to justify Chimakonam's and Nweke's argument. Furthermore, Oyowe is not explicit in making such a claim that limited communitarianism is a variant of moderate communitarianism but is very explicit in characterizing Matolino in communitarianism's opposite camp, the liberal individualist camp. While Oyowe does admit some form of communitarianism to Matolino, I am of the view that the most reasonable way to understand Oyowe's argument is that while Matolino does not escape the clutches of communitarianism, even at the metaphysical level, these clutches are merely trivial because of the precedence Matolino gives to facts of individuality.

As a result of Matolino's priority thesis, Oyowe argues that Matolino is the best fit for the liberal individualist camp. Thus, a charitable understanding of Oyowe (2015) could be that, while never fully escaping communitarianism, the greatest reason Matolino's theory could not be a version of moderate communitarianism or any other type of Afro-communitarianism is that he prioritizes the individual, unlike Gyekye and most traditional communitarians who prioritize the community. Whether or not Oyowe's suspicions are true is not the focus of this paper. However, what is clear from Oyowe's postulations above is that Matolino's theory is not the same as the moderate communitarian theory articulated by Gyekye. And it is clear, once we accept all of Oyowe's concerns, that Oyowe is not explicitly

committed to the thought that limited communitarianism is a variant of moderate communitarianism.

Therefore, from reading Edet and Oyowe, one does not find any support for the statement that limited communitarianism is another version of moderate communitarianism. Instead, Edet claims that Matolino prioritizes the individual to the point of autocracy, while Oyowe is explicit that such prioritization is more at home in the liberal/individualist tradition. One can easily go the opposite direction from reading these scholars and conclude that they interpret Matolino to be more of a liberal or an individualist than a communitarian. It is my view, then, that Chimakonam's and Nweke's arguments are unsubstantiated by them or the authors they cite. Even by their evidence, there exist differences between the theories, and these need to be taken seriously.

However, others like Adeate (2023a) argue that the similarities between moderate and limited communitarianism are significant enough to render the latter a well-argued form of the former. In the next section, I attempt to show that these claims are unjustified as they minimize the differences between the theories.

### *Tosin Adeate's Argument*

Adeate (2023a) provides a more sustained defence of the argument that limited communitarianism is a version of moderate communitarianism. For Adeate, limited communitarianism can be understood as either a moderate version or not communitarian at all. As a result, rather than being non-communitarian, Adeate argues that limited communitarianism is a well-argued version of the moderate form. The reason for interpreting the relationship in this way, for Adeate, is that both theories share the intention to rework Afro-communitarianism by accommodating rights, and thus, Matolino's theory becomes an expression of Gyekye's moderate theory in a way that the former is the logical conclusion of some of the commitments of moderate communitarianism. Again, as mentioned above, I read Adeate to be referring to Gyekye's theory when speaking of moderate communitarianism.

Of course, Adeate does point to where Matolino differs from Gyekye in how far the role of the community extends with regard to the identity of persons; that, unlike the latter, the former does not include morality as definitive in identifying persons. Nevertheless, for

Adeate, these differences are not significant. This is primarily because of the similarities in how both try to accommodate the rights of individuals; in other words, Matolino only did what Gyekye had intended.

Thus, we can say that from Adeate's point of view, Gyekye's intentions were to review Afro-communitarianism to accommodate rights and decrease the role of the community that classic (radical) communitarianism attributes to it. But, according to Adeate, Gyekye fails at his intentions. Yet, Matolino, whose intention is also to review the classic theory by accommodating rights, succeeds at his intention. In the end, Adeate claims that:

[I]t 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. (ADEATE 2023a, 60)

As a result, since Matolino's theory succeeds at the intention both he and Gyekye shared, limited communitarianism is a well-argued version of moderate communitarianism. In other words, since Matolino takes to their logical conclusion the intentions he shared with Gyekye, limited communitarianism is then a version (perhaps a better version) of the moderate theory.

Adeate's argument is well articulated, but I argue that its conclusion is not supported by the premises provided. My reasons are that the mere sharing of intention by two theories does not logically entail that these theories are versions of each other; it is logically possible for similar intentions to yield fundamentally different theories. As a result, one needs to argue beyond the mere presence of a sharing of intentions to show that one theory is a version of the other. Adeate attempts to make such an argument when he claims that limited communitarianism is the logical expression or conclusion of some of the intentions and arguments of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism.

However, this argument is unconvincing because it over-emphasizes the parts accepted by Matolino at the cost of those parts

rejected by him. In other words, the root of the problem with Adeate's argument is that he downplays the differences between the theories and directs considerable effort at articulating the supposed similarities in intention. The upshot of this strategy is that the similarities become unable to prove Adeate's conclusion once thoroughly compared with the differences. And it is this marginalizing of the differences that ultimately renders Adeate's argument that Matolino's limited theory is a version of moderate communitarianism unjustifiable.

For example, take Adeate's idea that one theory takes its intentions to its logical conclusion, and the other does not. As he argues; "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 conclusion" (ADEATE 2023, 58-59). If Matolino's theory is successful at taking its intentions to its logical conclusion and Gyekye's theory is not successful, then it is unclear how the limited communitarian theory is a version of Gyekye's moderate communitarian theory. Say for argument's sake, one agrees that both these theories share intentions; it seems to me that these theories differ in how they actualize these intentions. They differ so much that one theory fails, and the other succeeds. If one theory has succeeded, and if the other theory has failed, it is unclear how one theory becomes a version of the other.

As far as I am concerned, ordinarily speaking, success is not failure, and failure is not success. They are contradictory concepts, making it difficult to conceive of success as a variant of failure. One might respond that it is because of the similarities that success shares with failure, like the presence of challenges, that the former is a version of the latter. However, my reply would be that one cannot draw the conclusion that success is a version of failure just because they share a similarity. To draw this conclusion would be to not take seriously the differences ordinarily understood to exist between success and failure. This would simply be against our everyday understanding of the language of failure and success as logical opposites such that failure is not success and success is not failure.

One might eventually admit a difference between the theories but claim that this difference is not crucial because the authors share something more important, and that is the intention to accommodate rights in their theories in the first place. While one author may have

taken this intention to its logical conclusion, and the other author does not, and while the other author succeeds and the other fails, the fact that the authors share such a deep intention is enough that one is a version of the other.

My response would be that just because intentions are the same does not mean that their logical conclusions will necessarily be the same. This is because the logical conclusion of something depends on a number of factors, including the surrounding conditions, that inform the logic of the conclusion. Here is a simple example: the logical conclusion of someone who steps outside naked while it is raining, without an umbrella, *ceteris paribus*, will be that they will be wet. However, getting wet is not the logical conclusion for someone who steps outside in the same spot when it is not raining, *ceteris paribus*. Thus, if one's intention or aim is to go outside, then the logical conclusion of this intention is not universal or absolute but depends on certain historical and contextual conditions.

Even at the level of theorizing, the sharing of intentions does not logically entail the sharing of theoretical conclusions. For example, Thomas Hobbes, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels intended to reform society against the state of nature and the capitalist bourgeoisie, respectively, and they also sought to secure the survival of the masses. However, it would hardly seem correct to then proceed from just the sharing of these intentions, however deep, to claim that the withering of the state is some form of the Leviathan. From my perspective, we would need to go deeper in analyzing the theories – beyond sharing intentions – to find out if one is a version of the other. One needs to show that apart from sharing intentions, the theoretical conditions under which such intentions unfold are also likely to yield the same results.

To take what I am saying to the level of a principle, I can say that, beyond the sharing of intentions, what makes a theory a variant of another is the sharing of the conceptual and theoretical conditions and frameworks utilized to achieve these intentions. If these theories do not share such frameworks, or if their conclusions diametrically oppose each other, then we cannot plausibly claim that one is a variant of the other, even if these theories share intentions.

In light of the above, I argue that the conditions surrounding Matolino's and Gyekye's intentions are not the same, even if Adeate believes they are the same. The theoretical conditions I am talking

about here are the conceptual frameworks that each scholar uses, which then inform how they theorize their intentions. What the logical conclusion in a particular set of conceptual and theoretical frameworks is not guaranteed to be the same conclusion in a different set of frameworks. For Hobbes, the intention to secure the lives of people logically leads to the conclusion of a Leviathan, whereas Marx's and Engels' intention logically leads to the complete opposite of the Leviathan: the disintegration of classes. Such diverging conclusions are plausible due to the different conceptual lenses that each scholar uses to realize their intentions. Similarly, Matolino and Gyekye differ in their fundamental concepts of persons and communities, along with the subsequent relationship between them as articulated through rights and duties. All of these differences in conceptual framework inform the fundamental difference in their eventual theories, however similar their intentions were.

As a result, it is not justifiable to conclude that just because theories share intentions, then they share conclusions. Adeate needs to argue beyond the mere sharing of intentions and delineate what exactly it is that makes Matolino's theory a version of Gyekye's.

Adeate might point out a shared conceptual commitment of the theories, which could ground the claim that one is a variant of the other beyond intentions. He may say that the way Matolino accommodates rights is similar to how Gyekye accommodates rights once we interpret Gyekye as giving equal status to rights and duties (see ADEATE 2023b). One might quickly challenge Adeate by pointing out that Matolino does not give equal status to rights and duties. Instead, Matolino prioritizes rights over duties; therefore, their intentions are not identical. Unphased, Adeate<sup>2</sup> would agree that such accommodation of rights may not be identical but insist that for both theories, rights are accommodated through the non-primacy of the community, which makes Matolino and Gyekye sufficiently similar rather than identical. It is because of this sufficient similarity in accommodating rights through the non-primacy of the community that

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<sup>2</sup> I lack the space to adequately respond to Adeate's (2023b) interpretation of Gyekye. Suffice it to say that I disagree with it for many reasons, one of which is the lack of charity I read in such an interpretation. See Hasskei M. Majeed (2018) for a more charitable interpretation of Gyekye.

limited communitarianism is a version of moderate communitarianism.

Again, for argument's sake, we accept the sufficient similarity of the theories. I am not convinced that this similarity of accommodating rights is enough to warrant the claim that limited communitarianism is a version of moderate communitarianism. This is simply because there are many other serious differences that render this similarity incapable of justifying Adeate's (2023a) claim.

In reality, Matolino rejects almost the whole theory of moderate communitarianism as presented by Gyekye. According to Adeate (2023a, 58), Matolino follows "some of the claims" of Gyekye's theory to their logical conclusion. It is important to note that even Adeate admits that Matolino does not accept all aspects of Gyekye's arguments. Upon proper analysis, it is not even clear that Matolino accepts the majority of Gyekye's commitments. The only aspect that limited communitarianism takes is the argument that the individual is independent of the community and should be adequately accommodated.

Matolino vehemently rejects every other aspect of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism for several reasons. Matolino rejects Gyekye's claim that persons are naturally inescapably embedded in the community; Matolino rejects Gyekye's claim that due to persons being naturally social, the community has primacy; Matolino rejects Gyekye's claim that rights are best understood within the context of community; Matolino rejects Gyekye's claim that the most fundamental idea behind a community is the sharing of ends; Matolino rejects Gyekye's rejection of voluntary association; Matolino rejects Gyekye's claim that individual rights will be abridged when they clash with communal duties; Matolino basically rejects almost everything Gyekye takes seriously such that it becomes very difficult to imagine in what way one is a version of the other. One can easily conclude that Matolino is the logical opposite of Gyekye; that it is Matolino who is Gyekye's most formidable opponent, rather than Menkiti. Such an emphatic rejection of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism shows fundamental differences between these theories, and the similarity of intention is not enough to justify that one is a version of the other. In fact, one may go further and say that it is because these theories are fundamentally different that one succeeds and the other fails at taking its intentions to their logical conclusion.



As a result, taking some parts of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism to their logical conclusion does not make Matolino's theory the same as Gyekye's theory. And this is simply because Matolino denies other premises that Gyekye deems very important, and that the latter also seeks to accommodate. Thus, the most we can say is that both share an aspect; but we cannot, from this position, conclude that Matolino's limited communitarianism is a version of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism. Such a conclusion is not supported by the premises provided by Adeate (or any of the theorists mentioned above).

The mere sharing of intentions – to accommodate the individual – is simply just that and nothing more. Both scholars share this intention, but a deeper analysis of all the commitments of their respective theories shows that how these scholars understand these intentions differs because of how these scholars differ in their conceptual framework or in their ideas concerning persons, community, rights and duties. These concepts – which inform their theories – are understood differently, and if philosophers use their concepts to express their intentions, then a difference in these concepts opens up a genuine possibility of a fundamental difference in the eventual theory. It is thus a fact that similar intentions can logically yield different theories.

Moreover, in the context of Matolino refuting almost all of Gyekye's claims, such divergence is to be taken seriously. Their sharing of an aspect does not necessarily make one theory a version of the other. If a theorist wants to claim that one is a variant of the other, then a theorist is required, at the very least, to take seriously all aspects of both theories, including the differences, and then proceed from there. I argue that if any theorist takes seriously all of Gyekye's commitments, along with all of Matolino's commitments, the similarities, along with all the differences, then there will be nothing that justifies that Matolino's limited communitarianism is a variant of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have argued that the claim that Matolino's limited communitarianism is not different from or is just another variant of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is unjustified. I have shown that the theories fundamentally differ in terms of how persons,

communities, and rights are understood. The moderates argue that the communal aspect of individuals has priority over their metaphysical features, whereas the limited theory argues that in issues of strict identity, nothing can precede the metaphysical identity. The moderates also argue that communities are not defined by individual voluntary association but are defined by the sharing of ends, whereas for limited communitarianism, the community is defined in terms of voluntary association. Finally, while rights can be trumped by communal values for Gyekye's theory, Matolino is adamant that there are rights which can never be abrogated for the sake of communal values. These are serious differences.

These stark differences highlight what I believe are good enough reasons to argue against the thought that limited communitarianism is no different from or is just another variation of moderate communitarianism. I argue that the onus is on those who claim that the former theory is a version of the latter to show that these differences are not significant enough for these to be fundamentally distinct theories. Of course, there are similarities between the theories, such as the fact that persons possess both individual and communal aspects, that the community involves varying degrees of cooperation, and that rights deserve recognition. However, I think these similarities are so trivial that any theorist belonging to any camp can accept them and take them into serious consideration. However, what differentiates these theorists is what all of these factors mean or how much weight is given to each factor. I am of the view that these factors mean different things for both Gyekye and Matolino, a difference that affects their political theories significantly. Therefore, I am not convinced that limited communitarianism is no different from or is just another variant of moderate communitarianism. Such a claim is unjustified. Limited communitarianism is different from moderate communitarianism and should be treated in its own right as a standalone theory in African political philosophy.

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