FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

CONCEPTIONS OF PERSONHOOD AND GENDER IDENTITY IN AFRICAN THOUGHT: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis postulates that gender identity is an integral part or category of human personhood and identity. Based on this, the purpose of this thesis is to provide an examination of the dominant theories of both personhood and gender identity through a literature-based methodology or analysis. In doing so, the thesis explores issues associated with these theories, relate the ideas on gender identity to views on personhood, and attempts to establish the interplay between the two. What is demonstrated is that African traditional conceptions of personhood are incompatible with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender). While the incompatibility renders such practices and orientations 'un-African', it also reveals conceptual defects in these African views of personhood. That is, an analysis and application of the African conceptions of person to gender identities such as homosexuality, raises fundamental problems and philosophical issues that weakens the very African concept of person in general. These philosophical problems and issues centre around a number of competing constructs such as whether African personhood should be viewed as subjective or objective, that is, intrinsic or extrinsic (or both) to the person considering its inherent and relational nature. The conclusion is that African conceptions of personhood such as the communitarian view, do not only lack inclusivity owing to their tendency to marginalize certain categories of gender in their account of personhood, but have conceptual and philosophical weakness that renders the theories less attractive and favourable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank my family, friends, colleagues, and lecturers for all of their encouragement and support throughout my persuit of this dream. A very special thank you is due to Professor I.B Ikpe, whose help overseeing my dissertation was invaluable. I appreciate all the time and energy he spent reading through drafts and meeting with me. He created time to help me work through and develop my inchoate ideas, and still had the time for his own work and responsibilities. Without his help my mistakes would be much more numerous and the ideas would have been even less clearly expressed; his suggestions and criticism have undoubtedly improved this dissertation. Special thanks are also due to the members of my dissertation committee. In particular, I would like to single out Dr T. Chimuka, who, in addition to serving on my committee, has always been willing to give feedback, suggest reading material, and gently persuade me to work hard. My deepest thanks go to my wife, Zibby, and my son, Michah. They have sacrificed so much over the years to make this possible. They deserve special appreciation for all of their support, especially my amazing wife. Without her help I never could have finished this work. Thank you for all of the emotional support you have given me over the past years and for having kept me company on my long journey!

DEDICATION

To the loving memory of my departed son, Manuel. You shall forever hold a special place in our hearts.

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CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Thesis

African traditional conceptions of personhood are incompatible with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), thereby rendering such relations and identities inimical to personhood status in African thought**.**

1.1 Problem

There seem to be polarized, and even contradictory realities inherent in some of the dominant African traditional conception of personhood. Based on its collectivist values, African societies are commonly said to be egalitarian, inclusive in nature and characterised by among other ethos, respect for the dignity of every individual. On the other hand however, the same African view seems to be committed towards the exclusion of certain genders and gender identities such as homosexuality, thereby bringing into question its egalitarian claims. This seeming contradiction is amply demonstrated by multiple observations including the fact that while some proponents of the communitarian view of personhood presents it as egalitarian and inclusive, several political and social elites on the continent continue to denounce same-sex behaviour and maintain that it is 'un-African'. They insist that homosexuality falls under the category of practices that African cultures and societies clearly abhor and do not share with the Western world. Therefore, the question that is addressed through this work is how traditional African conceptions of personhood relate to gender identity particularly homosexuality. The work consists of an attempt to determine through careful analysis of existing literature, whether homosexuality in particular, or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) in general, are (in)compatible with the African traditional conceptions of human personhood. Most importantly, the thesis will attempt to provide the reasons for such

mismatch, if there is any, and for the seeming contradiction alluded to above. The need to investigate how African personhood relates to issues of gender identity is further necessitated by two factors in the mismatch;

a) The mounting pressure on African nations by human rights groups and Western donors to liberalize legislation on homosexuality, and end discrimination and violence against homosexuals by the dominant heterosexist social order.
b) The ever increasing and unwavering resistance by most African countries, nations and communities towards such calls, with some countries on the continent even further strengthening their already strict laws on homosexuality.

The fact that some African countries are completely undeterred by the threat and real possibility of not getting the all-important foreign aid from western donors due to their stance against homosexuality might be indicative of strongly held views about personhood and gender. It is such views that are often said to be deeper than any external influence or threat, hence the need to investigate. The findings of this investigation would further address other related questions, such as whether by succumbing to local and external pressure groups to decriminalize homosexuality would compromise African views on identity and personhood.

1.2 Background

Defining personhood has always been a controversial, sometimes even an elusive task, and yet it remains a very necessary and unavoidable endeavour particularly in philosophy. This is primarily because personhood is closely tied to all spheres of human existence, including moral, legal, political and social concepts of identity, responsibilities, privileges, rights, citizenship, equality, liberty and so on. Personhood continues to be a topic of much debate where critical questions regarding issues of abortion and foetal rights or reproductive rights, as well as animal rights have been asked. Further, notions of personhood have also generated

debates about corporate personhood and the beginning of human personhood among ethical questions.

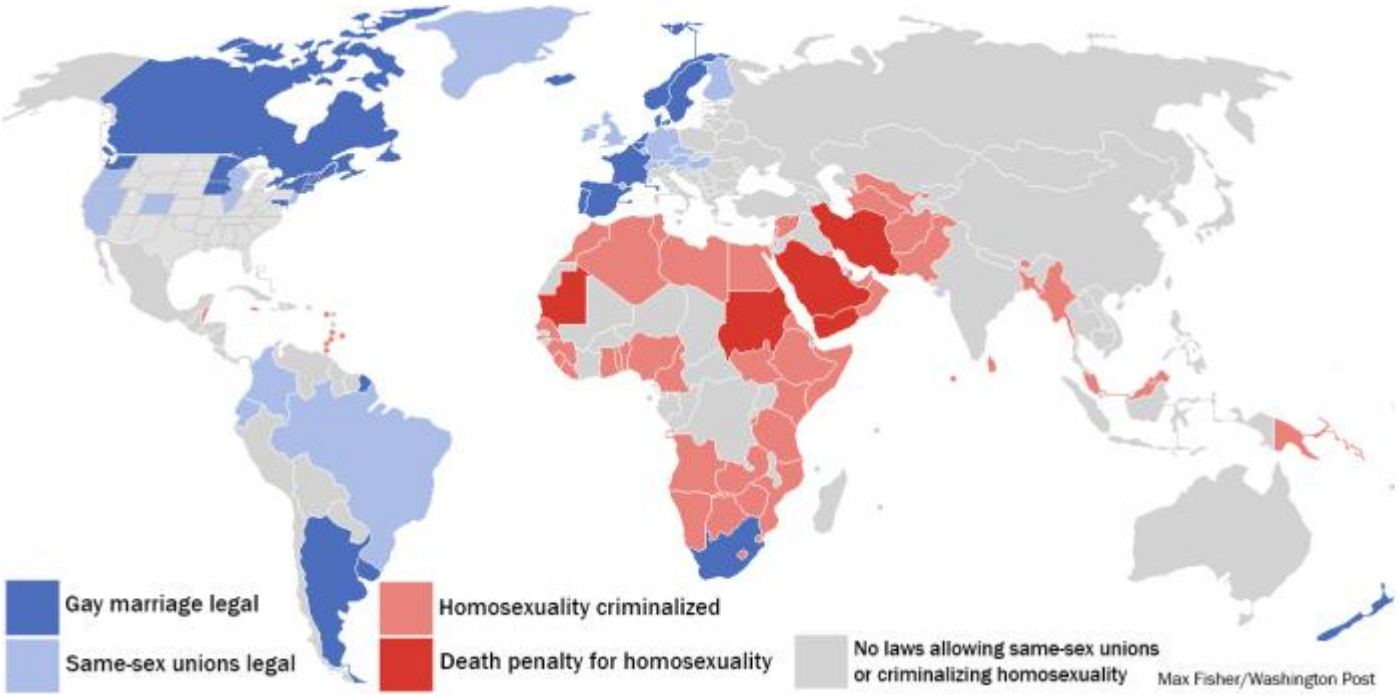
It has been argued that the process through which personhood is recognized varies across cultures, and this on its own implies that notions of personhood are not universally applicable. For instance, Shweder and Bourne (1984) discuss the variances between Melanesian personhood and Western personhood in terms of sociocentric and egocentric persons respectively (pp, 127–8; Mageo, 1995, p. 283). Smith (2012, p. 50) observes that in other contexts, the Japanese have been characterized as 'groupist' in contradistinction to Westerners who are characterized as 'individualistic'. Similarly, some Africans have been characterized as subscribing to communitarian/social personhood by which "personhood is a standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of a relationship and social being" (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8). What this shows is that it is a people's concept of personhood that determines the way they acknowledge, understand and relate to each other. Thus, individuals may not always consider other human beings as persons because determining what or who is a person involves such boundaries and criteria that may not be satisfied by others. These boundaries and criteria are not universally applicable; they vary cross-culturally where factors such as gender, morality, ethnicity, age, social and economic status come into play. Where someone falls in relation to those boundaries and criteria will determine whether she/he is considered and treated as a person.

Gender identity is one of the essential factors considered in determining degrees of human personhood. This is despite the fact that many conceptions of personhood claim to be genderless and/or gender-neutral. Gender in general is an integral part of every human being and arguably one of the central identity categories in people's lives (West & Zimmerman, 1987). It may appear, even when casually considered, that it is not possible to hold a concept of human personhood that excludes gender. Normally, at least according to the heterosexist

social order, a human person is either male or female, and cannot be neither nor both. Whatever the case maybe, it is unusual or difficult to imagine or talk of a genderless person. This may suggest that gender identity is an inherent part of the nature of human persons and that any denial, rejection, discrimination or stigmatisation of any gender identity inevitably extends to the personhood of individuals identified with that gender. Some gender identities are denied, rejected and oppressed, such that persons identified with such gender identities are often stigmatised and even violated in different parts of the world. Homosexuality in particular, remains one of the most contentious gender identities in today's society. The world is divided on the issue, and debate on it is very passionate. Such passionate debates notwithstanding, Africa continues to hold the most conservative view on the subject with perceptions on homosexuality virtually unchanged over the decades. According to the findings on global attitudes on homosexuality by the Pew Research centre, an American research and policy institute that provides information on social issues, public opinion, and demographic trends shaping the world, (*"About Pew Research Center". Pew Research Center, 2010)* publics in Africa and in predominantly Muslim countries remain among the least accepting of homosexuality, (*Pew Research Center, 2013*).

According to the findings, the 10 countries that are most resistant to homosexuality in the world are as follows: Nigeria (98%), Jordan (97%), Senegal (96%), Ghana (96%), Uganda (96%), Egypt (95), Tunisia (94), Indonesia (93), Palestinian Territories (93%) and Kenya (90%). The above figures show the extent to which publics in the above countries reject homosexuality and that there is more resistance towards homosexuality in Africa than in any other part of the world. Even in South Africa where, unlike in many other African countries, homosexual acts are legal and discrimination based on sexual orientation is unconstitutional, 61% of the public say that homosexuality should not be accepted by society, while just 32% say it should be accepted (*PewResearch Global Attitudes Project, 2013).* Further, out of the

10 countries of the world that are most resistant to homosexuality, 7 are in Africa, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for five. These are Nigeria (98%), Senegal (96%), Ghana (96%), Uganda (96%), and Kenya (90%), Egypt (95) and Tunisia (94). The remaining 3 of these 10 countries are Jordan (97%), Indonesia (93), and Palestinian Territories (93%).



GAY RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD:
Source: *Max Fisher/Washington Post-Pew Research Global Attitudes* ***Project, 2007 and 2013.***

The high levels of resistance towards homosexuality characteristic of most African countries can be easily contrasted with responses from most European countries, which are more liberal and tolerant towards homosexuality. According to the findings by the Pew Research centre on Global Attitudes and Trends, the view that homosexuality should be accepted by society is prevalent in most of the European Union countries as evidenced by the response of the following countries: Spain (88%), Germany (87%), the Czech Republic (80%), France (77%), Britain (76%), and Italy (74%) .

Since, according to Amnesty International, Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights are considered to be human rights, and human rights should be the entitlement of all

humans, it is often argued by most human rights groups that homosexuals as human beings deserve full recognition as such and need to be protected from discrimination that is based on gender and sexual identity. Thus, while most African countries regard homosexuality as a taboo, non-human, and "un-African" and therefore a crime, Western countries and pro-homosexuality groups regard the criminalization of homosexuality inhuman and discriminatory.

In view of the above, and also taking into cognizance the connection between gender and personhood, a question can be posed as to whether this difference in attitude in Africa and the West towards homosexuality is due to the difference in their notions of personhood. In other words, is it the case that issues of gender equality and identity has a direct bearing on the notion of personhood? In the light of the forgoing, it is hoped that a careful analysis of existing literature on African conceptions of personhood and its relation to notions of gender and identity, especially homosexuality, will help to explain African attitudes towards homosexuality and other non-heterosexual identities. It will also help explore and hopefully address a number of pertinent questions and issues pertaining to the interplay of personhood, gender and gender identity. Some of questions and issues that will be explored include the following: Where does the African rejection of homosexuality leave the personhood status of a homosexual?; If a homosexual continues to be recognized as a person based on the secrecy surrounding his/her sexuality, is he/she really a person? If personhood is dependent on societal perception of and assumption concerning one's sexuality or gender identity (which assumptions may be wrong), how intimate is personhood? This last question is concerned about whether personhood is an essential part of one's nature, or if it just an acquired status attributed to one by society and therefore does not define who that individual really is. On one hand, the notion of personhood as an attribute makes it superficial and not an integral

part of human nature. On the other hand, if we posit that personhood is inherent, we then have a problem of defining what that inherence should be like.

A consideration of gender in its broader sense beyond just homosexuality raises further questions in relation to different conceptions of personhood. It could be asked whether man, woman, children, and people with disability are given personhood status (or equal personhood status) in traditional African culture. Given that the capacity based approach to personhood defines or is based on display of cognitive abilities such as rationality, memory or will, all human beings that are capable of displaying these attributes, may be regarded as persons. It follows this approach that homosexuals who fit the said criteria are equally persons. It appears that if the homosexual's personhood status is questioned, according to the capacity-based approach, it will not be on the basis of his or her gender identity, but on whether he or she is capable of demonstrating cognitive abilities such as reason and free will. On the contrary, the African communitarian personhood which is connected to the communitarian ethics of Ubuntu founded in the traditional African worldview (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, p. 86), may be discriminatory of certain gender identities such as homosexuality. This is especially so if such identities are found to contravene accepted or common ethical standards and norms. On the other hand however, the concept of Ubuntu or humanness is presented, at least in principle, as equally embracing of all members of the community, in a network of joint moral obligations. It is connected to the Ubuntu values of respect, commonality, support, trustworthiness, compassion, collective responsibility and consensual democracy. African communitarian personhood therefore professes to embrace differences in people and be gender-neutral (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, p. 86). Notwithstanding this claim, the reality on the ground seems to suggest oppression towards certain gender identities such as women and homosexuals. This immediately raises the question as to whether such (gender-based) oppression is in contravention of the African

notions of personhood. If the African notion of personhood is egalitarian in the sense that it connotes equality among persons, why is it that there is so much resistance towards homosexuality in Africa? And why is it that African women are seldom considered equal to men? For instance, why are women in some African cultures not allowed to speak in, or in some instances, attend public gathering meant for decision making? Again, why are women not accorded ancestorship status upon their death?

In summary, it can be demonstrated that there are conflicting views about what it means to be a human person across cultures. It is possible that there is a connection between notions of personhood (that is, what it means to be a person), and gender identity, and that this connection is responsible for the different positions and attitudes on gender identity particularly homosexuality. However, since intersexed, transgendered, and transsexual (such as homosexuals) people do not consider themselves to be wholly female or male, one could question the validity of the male/female dichotomy, which has been part of human history for a long time (Barron, 2000). On this point Anzaldua (1987, p. 4) argues that

> There is something compelling about being both male and female, about having an entry into both worlds. Contrary to some psychiatric tenets, half and halfs are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other.

Not only does this view question the tendency to divide human persons exclusively into male and female, it also questions the role of gender identity in defining or determining human personhood. Emphasising the supremacy of certain gender identities in defining personhood might adversely affect the moral value of certain (human) beings and lead to their being regarded as "marginal or less persons" and even "non-persons". If individuals have the capacity to thrive, even when they are not identified as either male or female, one could argue

that the categories of male or female are of less metaphysical and moral importance in defining human personhood than commonly thought.

In light of the above, this thesis is an attempt to understand the African conception of personhood in relation to gender identity. Although there are a few writings on African personhood and gender such as the one by Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) referred to above, they focused only on the inequality between men and women and the subsequent issues of gender violence and discrimination that women suffer in a male dominated social order. The current effort focuses on homosexuality, which as a gender identity has been subjected to even worse discrimination, prejudice, and violence. Further, while Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) focused only on the communitarian conception of personhood in their discussion, this work will explore and compare several conceptions of personhood in Africa South of the Sahara, and how these conceptions relate to gender identity. It will involve an examination of what different scholars have identified as the categories of personhood and will attempt to show how these categories complement the African conception of personhood. It will attempt to establish a relationship between some of the dominant African conceptions of personhood and gender identity especially in the contemporary world where there are a variety of gender ascriptions. It will also attempt to understand the status of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) as a gendered identity and evaluate where such gender identities fit within the dominant African conceptions of personhood. The thesis will also consider both the female and homosexual identities as categories of gendered identity and attempt to position them within the dominant African conceptions of personhood. In doing so it will pose such questions as; does the African conception of personhood include women and LGBT and if so, what sort of persons are they? The thesis hopes to highlight the metaphysical issues raised by the intersection of gender and personhood in African thought as well as the ethical problems involved in constructing a gendered personhood. The researcher is primarily using the

qualitative research method because it will enable him to evaluate, compare and apply complex, broad and subjective views within the discourse on personhood to issues of gender and gender identity. Specifically, the researcher will be doing 'content analyses' in the belief that this will expose him to the rich variety of data that is available on the subject. The assumption that this work aims to prove or disprove is that individuals who are homosexuals, including, by extension, LGBT, (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), may not reach any or full personhood status within the African conception of personhood. In (dis)proving this assumption the researcher hopes to discuss the ethical and metaphysical issues raised by the assumption and link such issues to contemporary global discourse concerning the status and rights of human persons. This, it is hoped, will offer an opportunity for Africans to reflect on their cultural beliefs upon which their conceptions of personhood are based.

1.3 Research objectives

The key research question necessitates the following related research objectives:

a) Review traditional and modern theories on gender and gender identity.
b) Discuss leading, philosophical conceptions of personhood and how they relate to gender identity.
c) Explore African traditional conceptions of personhood, focusing on Africa South of the Sahara.
d) Compare some of the leading conceptions of personhood in Africa South of the Sahara.
e) Relate African traditional conceptions of personhood to gender identity issues, focusing on homosexuality.
f) Make critical analysis of African traditional conceptions of personhood in the light of gender identity issues, focusing on homosexuality.

g) Discuss the philosophical issues that arise from the application of some of the African conceptions of personhood to gender identity particularly homosexuality.

h) Explore incompatibility of African traditional conceptions of personhood with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality.

1.4 Key Research question

The key question that engages this research is therefore:

Are African traditional conceptions of personhood incompatible with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender), thereby rendering such relations and identities inimical to personhood status in African thought?

1.5 Methodology-Literature-based Qualitative Approach

A qualitative, literature-based approach used involved, for the most part, an extensive and methodical review of existing literature reflecting some of the virtues inherent in qualitative research such as dialectic, deductive reasoning, and the use of words as the basic element of analysis and interpretation. The method enabled the researcher to evaluate, compare, apply complex, broad and subjective views with an aim to relate views on personhood to issues of gender identity especially homosexuality. Thus the overall orientation of the research and the type of claims that it makes suggests a qualitative research design.

1.5.1 Justification for the use of literature-based methodology

One of the reasons for using logical analysis of existing literature for this research is its capacity to yield enormous and appropriate data which otherwise could have taken years to gather from the field. That is, in this case, someone else or some organisations has already collected and published the relevant data on issues of gender, homosexuality and personhood.

As a result, this researcher does not have to devote the already inordinate time to travel not only within Botswana but to other parts of Africa and abroad to gather information on, say, homosexuality, for this research. Since the data is already collected and kept in hard copy or digital format, the researcher spent most of his time analysing and applying the data rather than harvesting already existing data and getting it ready for analysis.

The other advantage of using literature-based method/analysis for this research is that it exposed the researcher to a wide aray of readily available data on personhood, gender identity and related issues. There is currently numerous literature on large scale studies on the subject matter with international bearing and on a cross-cultural scale. An individual researcher would have a difficult time conducting such research more so that some of these data sets are also longitudinal, meaning that the same data has been collected from the same populations over several different time periods (Boslaugh, 2007). Thus, using literature-based approach allowed this researcher to look at trends and changes of phenomena or ideas held on both homosexuality and personhood over time.

Lastly, the other reason for using literature-based method/analysis for this research is that the data collection process used in the quantitative methodologies is often restrictive and does not allow for the full explorarion of the subject matter irrespective of the expertise and professionalism or skill of the researcher. But even where the data required is of a quantitative nature, such data is better collected by organisations and individuals (such as statisticians) who possess specialized training and many years of experience in the gathering, classification and codification of such data especially where they have many years of experience in gathering data in such areas using particular survey methods.

1.6 Hypothesis

The basic hypothesis that underlies this research is that individuals who are homosexuals, including, by extension, LGBT, that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; those who undergo gender re-identification; and those who do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex, as well as those who undergo surgery to change their biological sex, may not reach any or full personhood status in African traditional thought. This is to say that traditional African conceptions of personhood are incompatible with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

1.7 Impact

It is hoped that the study will help in gaining understanding and appreciation of the beliefs, values systems and world view of the African people as it relates to personhood. That is, whatever the outcome of this research might be in terms of the stated hypothesis, its wider or general impact may include expounding further and making known African philosophical thoughts particularly in relation to personhood. It could further provide insight of the extent to which African conceptions of personhood could have influenced positions held by individual African leaders and societies on some of the world topical and controversial debates on personhood and gender identity, particularly, homosexuality. In this way, the study might contribute towards the on-going global debates on gender issues and homosexuality. The assertion that homosexuality is generally unaccepted in most African societies is a known fact, hence it goes without saying that it does not, (and will not) need to be proved or argued for in this work. However, what is not readily known, and which this dissertation may bring forth through argument and analysis of existing literature, is the philosophical basis or reasons why homosexuality has been resisted or shunned by most

African communities. Thus the outcome of this research will either question further the commitment of the African people to contemporary global values of equality, minority rights and human rights in general, or justify the positions, practices, legislations and general attitudes towards the 'disadvantaged and minority groups' in society such as women, the disabled and homosexuals. The study may give African societies and individuals an opportunity to reflect on their cultural beliefs and conceptions of personhood, gender, human rights and related issues and bring about change if they find it necessary

1.8 Layout of chapters

Chapter 1: **A review of theories on Gender and Gender identity**

The chapter provides an overview of the complex phenomenon of sex, gender and gender identity and also serves as an introduction to gender identity terminology. The chapter also explores what research shows about the origins of homosexuality or same-sex sexual relations.

Chapter 2: **Views on Personhood: A critical evaluation**

This chapter surveys and scrutinizes some general and dominant theories/views on personhood. The conceptions of personhood that are discussed in this chapter include; the Capacity based theories, the inherent/transcendental theories and the social/relational theories of personhood. The chapter concludes by briefly relating these conceptions of personhood to gender identity, particularly homosexuality.

Chapter 3: **Exploring African views on personhood: The Metaphysical Dimension**

This chapter explores views on the concept of personhood associated with African traditional thought in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the metaphysical dimension of person. Some of these views include Force thesis, the communitarian view and the shadow thesis. The chapter

and the next one serves to lay the foundation for chapters six and seven, which relate gender identity to the different African conceptions of personhood.

Chapter 4: **Exploring African views on personhood: The Normative Dimension**

Continuing from the previous chapter, this chapter explores views on the normative dimension of personhood associated with African traditional thought in Sub-Saharan Africa, focusing on the communitarian view. The chapter lays the foundation for chapters six and seven which aims to relate gender identity to the different African conceptions of personhood, with the purpose of determining the personhood status of homosexuals.

Chapter 5: **A comparative analysis of some African ideas on personhood**

This chapter highlights the similarities and differences that exist between the different African conceptions of personhood discussed in earlier chapters. Based on the strength of shared or solitary features, the chapter makes a determination on the extent to which the various African ideas on the nature of the person are (dis)similar, complementary (or opposed), and even reducible to each other regarding what constitutes the essential nature of the human person.

Chapter 6: **African personhood and the status of the Homosexual: A Philosophical exposition**

Focusing on the metaphysical dimension, this chapter explores how some of the major African conceptions of personhood can be further understood in the light of different gender identities, especially dissident sexualities such as homosexuality. To this end, the chapter seeks to establish the personhood status of the homosexual, that is, whether or not being a homosexual meets conditions considered necessary and/or sufficient for recognition or acceptance into the community of persons according to the African traditional conceptions of personhood.

Chapter 7: **African personhood and the status of the Homosexual: Issues and problems**

This chapter explores the philosophical issues and complexities arising from the application of the African communitarian conceptions of normative personhood such as *botho (ubuntu)* to issues of gender and gender identity. In so doing, the chapter establishes the personhood status of the homosexual by determine whether or not being a homosexual compromises in any way the conditions considered necessary and/or sufficient by the communitarian view for inclusion into the community of persons.

Chapter 8: **Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter will provide an answer to the problem put forward in the statement of the problem of the research proposal, as well as proving or disproving the truth of the hypothesis. The position of the researcher will also be put forward in this chapter as well as the Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THEORIES ON GENDER AND GENDER IDENTITY

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview to the complex phenomenon of sex, gender and gender identity. It also attempts to introduce and analyse the concept, 'gender identity. This is important because it is necessary to distinguish between the different concepts and terminologies commonly used in the area of gender and sexuality. The reason for this is that many of the terms used in discussing gender and sexuality are part of everyday conversations where there may be wild equivocations that render their meanings imprecise. Distinguishing between these concepts and terminologies will also ensure that subsequent chapters that seek to relate gender identities to views on personhood are free of any kind of linguistic confusion, and that positions and issues raised are free from connotative meanings that may link them to other positions and issues that are not related to the current study. This will also create a platform for a successful discussion of the issues involved in other chapters since vagueness, ambiguity and contradictory language will not stand in the way of having a common understanding of issues. Most importantly for this work, the chapter explores what research shows about the origins of homosexuality or same-sex sexual relations. It discusses the two main theories that attempt to explain the causes of homosexual attractions. That is, it discusses the theory that a homosexual orientation is in actual fact determined by genetic and or biological factors thereby implying that homosexuals are simply "born gay". It also discusses the theory that homosexual attractions emanate primarily from psychological, environmental and early childhood influences. The chapter begins by examining the concept of gender and goes further to define and differentiate between sex, gender, gender identity,

sexual identity, sexual behaviour and sex orientation. This will be followed by a brief overview of the different theories on the causes of, and the proposed solutions or remedies to homosexuality.

2.1 Conceptualization of Gender

Many people commonly have the impression that sex and gender are inseparable and interdependent, and that the word woman generally refers to the human female, and man the human male. For many modern scholars in the area of gender and sexuality however, gender is an achieved status and the distinction between the human female and the human male is not so simple. According to this understanding, gender is that which is produced through psychological, cultural, and social means (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125) and should not be confused with sex which is ascribed by biology: anatomy, hormones, and physiology. Therefore, according to the proponents of this view, while 'sex' classifies human beings as females and males depending on *biological* features such as chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features, 'gender' classifies them based on *social* factors (social role, position, behaviour and identity). Hence gender refers to socially defined behaviour considered to be suitable for the members of each sex.

The above distinction between sex and gender made it possible for the proponents of this view to further argue that many differences between men and women were socially generated and are therefore changeable (Mikkola, 2012). West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 125) observed that "Sex makes us male or female; gender makes us masculine or feminine. Sex is an ascribed status because a person is born with it, but gender is an achieved status because it must be learned." Therefore, despite the fact that one's sex as male or female is a biological reality that is similar in every culture, what that sex signifies in terms of one's gender and gender role as a 'man' or a 'woman' in specific social orders can differ from one culture to

another. Thus gender and, by extension, its expression or 'gender role' refers to the characteristics and behaviours that different cultures attribute to the sexes. According to the proponents of this view, what it means to be a 'real man' in any culture requires male sex as well as what that particular culture defines as masculine characteristics and behaviours. Similarly a female needs both female sex and feminine characteristics to be regarded as woman. This means that one is not given the status of, or identified as a woman or man on the basis of physical or biological characteristics alone, but also on the basis his/her ability to fulfill certain requirements consistent with that sex.

The above understanding of gender as differentiated from sex is often distinguished from traditional or earlier biological deterministic understanding among some scholars. This earlier understanding tended to make an almost indivisible link between biology and gender. Scot (1986, p. 1054) writes regarding the use of the word gender in opposition to the traditional differentiation of the sexes:

> In its most recent usage, "gender" seems to have first appeared among American feminists who wanted to insist on the fundamentally social quality of distinctions based on sex. The word denoted a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the use of such terms as "sex" or "sexual difference." "Gender" also stressed the relational aspect of normative definitions of femininity.

Thus biological determinism is the view that biology is destiny; which is the assumption that human behaviour is genetically determined. According to one of the earliest versions of the biological determinism, human social, psychological and behavioural qualities were caused by metabolic state (Geddes & Thompson, 1889). They alleged that women store up or preserve energy, making them 'anabolic' and therefore passive, indifferent to politics, conservative, submissive, and stable. Women's anabolic state is contrasted with their men

counterparts who are said to use up their surplus energy, making them 'katabolic'. This state makes men to be enthusiastic, energetic, zealous, variable and, interested in political matters. Mikkola (2012) observes that this view of gender was often used to argue for withholding political rights accorded to men from women because according to its proponents, "what was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament" (Moi, 1999, p. 18). Later proponents of the view in question such as Rogers (1999) based their argument on the biological differences between men and women, pointing out that certain jobs such as airline pilots should not be done by women because they are hormonally unbalanced at least once a month. Such imbalance makes them unfit to carry out such duties as compared to their male counterparts. Of late, the differences in male and female brains (corpus callosums) have also been used to explain behavioural and psychological differences between men and women (Gorman, 1992). This view is based on the notion that if men and women think differently, their brains must also differ in some way. This view which Bishop and Wahlsten (1997) hold to be true regardless of whether such difference can be accounted for largely in terms of experience (i.e. environment), since experience also changes the brain. However, Bishop and Wahlsten (1997) refute the claim that a significant cognitive gender difference exists, pointing out that based on several abilities of men and women, claims of such difference has disappeared in more recently published findings. Bishop and Wahlsten (1997) further observe that while data collected before 1910 from cadavers show that on average, males have larger brains than females and that the average size of their corpus callosum is larger, meta-analysis of several similar studies after 1980 give a different picture. The post 1980 studies as well as reanalysis of some previously published raw observations done in earlier period reveal no significant sex difference in the size or shape of the splenium of the corpus callosum between males and females.

There are various other theories that view gender as socially constructed rather than biologically determined. For instance, the gender socialization theory holds the view that masculinity and femininity are products of nurture or how each person is treated as they grow up, and are therefore "*causally constructed"* (Haslanger, 1995, p. 98). On this point, Millett (1971, pp. 28-29) believes that the distinction between genders is essentially cultural, rather than biological, and that it comes about as a result of being treated differently. She goes further to argue that gender is a result of "the sum total of the parents', the peers', and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (Millett, 1971, p. 31).

Thus as mentioned, the view that gender is a person's 'self-identification with being a man or a woman', has been refuted by a number of scholars including Stoller (1968); Rubin, 1975; Nicholson (1998), who argue that such view falsely supposes that people get to choose their gender. Instead, they argue that, for the most part people are socially conditioned from a very early age to understand sex and gender and how they relate to each other. As already alluded to, the view that gender is a result of social conditioning contradicts some traditional interpretations of gender. Rogers (1999), for instance agues that, sex and gender were thought to complement one another such that, as Nicholson (1994, p. 81) puts it, 'gender was thought to be the social interpretation of sex'. Since sex refers to the biology one is born with, not that which one may choose, and gender refers to the socially defined roles and characteristics of men and women associated with that sex, it follows that neither sex nor gender are a result of choice. That is, according to this interpretation, all humans are either male or female; their sex is fixed. And cultures interpret sexed bodies (though differently) and project different norms on those bodies thereby creating feminine and masculine persons. Nevertheless, there is a general agreement among the proponents of this approach that the ascribed status of sex is less likely to be altered than the achieved status of gender.

2.1.2 Gender Identity

Gender identity has been defined as a person's private feeling, personal experience and knowledge of their own gender. It is one's innermost concept of self as male or female or both or neither-that is, how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves (APA, 2013). By and large gender identity is understood as one's private sense of being a man or a woman, consisting primarily of the recognition of membership into a class of human persons, being male or female (Carlson & Heth, 2009). This understanding of gender identity may at once seem to be at variance with the understanding of gender as a socially or culturally acquired status as discussed above. It also appears to be at odds with the biological determinist view of gender, also discussed above. That is, both the social/cultural view as well as biological determinism consider gender and, by implication, gender identity, as a state beyond individual choice or preference, while the current and most familiar definition of gender identity attributes such status to an individual's private feelings and experiences. Although the above appears to show an obvious contradiction between the views of gender and identity, such contradiction could be said to disappear when we distinguish between one's perception of one's gender identity and the attribution of gender identity by others. It could be argued, for instance, that whereas the feeling of being male or female is privately felt and expressed, which is what gender identity is, the individual experiencing those feelings may still not be responsible for having them. That is, the individual's private gender identity could still be the result of socialization or biology, whatever the case may be depending on the ideological framework used. Scholars emphasize the view that in the case of gender identity, the individual simply integrates their sex and gender into their self-understanding (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; West, & Zimmerman, 1987). Thus, "gender identity formation refers to the complex processes through which young children come to incorporate their sex and gender into their behavior, attitudes, and self-understanding",

(eNotes, 2016; see also van Schalkwyk, Klingensmith & Volkmar, 2015). This incorporation includes the development of an innermost sense of one's femininity or masculinity (Spence, 1985); the attainment of information about cultural beliefs and dictates for women and men (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989; Harding, 1987); and the development of attitudes, interests, and behavior that represent these sociocultural expectations, (Bem, 1985; Aron, et al., 1991; Diamond, 2004).

While in most societies, there is a fundamental separation between gender attributes allocated to males and females, there are always some individuals who do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex. For such individuals, their gender identity is different from or do not match their biological or assigned sex. Some of these individuals even opt to socially, hormonally and/or surgically modify their sex to more fully match their gender identity. According to a number of scholars including Kalbfleisch & Cody (1995); and Gallagher & Kaufman (2005), gender identity is influenced by such factors as other people, social interactions, and personal interests. It is generally shaped as early as age three and is tremendously hard to alter after that. One of the most researched aspects of gender identity in childhood which, according to Egan & Perry (2001), is the one regarding children's awareness of where they belong in gender category. Egan & Perry's observation above is consistent with Slaby & Frey (1975), who add that the aspect of gender identity where one feels psychologically compatible with his or her gender, progresses successively in stages. By the age of 2 or 3 years, most children are able to identify themselves as either boys or girls even though they only achieve what is called gender constancy, that is, the understanding that their sex remains invariant across time, in about 3 or 4 years later. It is now at that stage that they also understand physical appearances associated with particular sex such hair length.

Furthermore, a number of scholars including Haslanger (2000) and Stoljar (1995) observe that sex and gender can be further separated on the basis that a person can be sexed male and yet be gendered a woman, or vice versa. Some individuals even develop strong feelings of disassociation with their ascribed gender and/ or sex, a condition that is also known as gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is the diagnostic name that replaced "gender identity disorder" in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V). The latter is a non-static document that continues to evolve through text revisions and advanced scientific knowledge (Arlene, 2006; Bower; 2001; Zucker, 2005), and has been taken as the sole authority for psychiatric nosology within the western world (Arlene, 2006).

Gender dysphoria can arise during childhood, adolescence or adulthood and manifests as a strong and persistent cross-gender identification, leading to persistent discomfort with one's biological sex or a sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex.

2.1.3 Sexual Identity, behaviour and Orientation

Gender identity as described above can be distinguished from sexual identity in that the latter refers to how one thinks of oneself in terms of people one is romantically or sexually attracted to (Holmes, 2003; Persad, 2012). Further, although sexual identity is closely related to both sexual behaviour and sexual orientation, they are actually different. Whereas sexual identity refers to individuals' conception of themselves, sexual behaviour refers to actual sexual acts performed by the individual, and sexual orientation refers to romantic or sexual attractions toward the opposite sex, the same sex, both sexes, or having no attractions at all **(**Reiter, 1989).

This means that sexual identity may or may not relate to a person's actual sexual orientation. For example, gay, lesbian, and bisexual people may not openly identify as such in a homophobic/heterosexist setting or in areas whose record on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and

transgender (LGBT) rights is considered to be poor (Holmes, 2003; Persad, 2012). With regard to sexual identity, West & Zimmerman (1987) observe that sex is a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. They point out that while the criteria for sex classification can be genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, the two do not necessarily agree with one another (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). That is, an individual can be classified as male in terms of his genitalia, for instance, but in terms of his chromosomal typing, he/she may prove to be female. On this point West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 127) argue that:

> Placement in a sex category is achieved through application of the sex criteria, but in everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one's membership in one or the other category. In this sense, one's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking.

Johnson, Greaves and Repta (2009) agree with the above view, adding that sexual identity can change throughout an individual's life, and may or may not align with biological sex. Moreover, Laumann (1994, p. 299) points out that development of self-identification as homosexual or gay is a psychological and socially intricate situation that is accomplished gradually, in most cases with significant personal struggle,self-doubt, and social discomfort.

2.2 Homosexuality

Ordinarily, homosexuality is sexual interest in and attraction to members of one's own sex. This view of homosexuality could be broadened to include romantic attraction, sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between members of the same sex or gender. As an orientation,

homosexuality refers to a persistent pattern of, affectionate, or romantic attractions mainly or wholly to people of the same sex (APA, 2011). It also refers to an individual's perception of individual and group identity grounded on those (same sex) attractions, behaviours conveying them, and association in a community of others who share them, (APA, 2011).

It is generally believed that at different times throughout the course of human history, and in different cultures, homosexual behaviour has been variously approved of, permitted, penalized, and prohibited (Homosexuality', Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013,). African, Judeo-Christian as well as Muslim cultures have generally viewed homosexual behaviour as sinful or taboo. This is said to be responsible for the high levels of hostility towards it in Africa and Asia whereas this is not the case in Western countries where attitudes towards it, are to some extent, more liberal. Nevertheless, by and large, attitudes toward homosexuality are always changing with positions softening or hardening with time. Whereas consistent and amplified political activism by gay rights movements and efforts by homosexuals themselves to be seen not as abnormal personalities helps soften positions, religious fundamentalism and nationalism hardens positions.

2.2.1 Theoretical Disputes regarding homosexuality as a gender identity

The conflicting views and debates about homosexuality—as a variant but normal human sexual behaviour on one hand, and as psychologically deviant behaviour on the other—have been present among scholars since the 19th century to date ('Homosexuality', Encyclopedia Britannica, 2013). In order to better explain the particular content of this debate, a brief review of common arguments on homosexuality from essentialism on the one hand and social constructionism on the other hand are presented in what follows.

2.2.2 The Essentialist views on homosexuality

In its broader sense, classical essentialism such as Plato's (428-348 B.C.), holds the view that there are fundamental true forms or essences and that there is discontinuity between these different forms. Rather than continuous variation, it argues that these true forms are constant over time (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). When this is related to homosexuality and other forms of gender identity, it means that the state of being homosexual exists as a distinct, independent essence. It also means that the nature and existence of homosexuality are separate from the other gender identities such as heterosexuality which also have their own existence and essences. This is because according to this version of essentialism, every phenomena that is experienced in the empirical world such as homosexuality is simply a reflection of fixed and unchanging reality or essence beyond the physical world. Since an essence does not change and is categorically different from another essence (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008), one could argue that homosexuality always has the form that is discontinuously different from other forms of gender identity. This means that efforts to change the sexual orientation of homosexuals through clinical counselling and therapy cannot work since, according to this version of essentialism, such therapy will not affect the fixed and unchanging reality beyond the physical world. This is to say that therapeutic change is fundamentally at odds with the notion of constancy in essentialism (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). Moreover, modern essentialism comprises of the belief that certain phenomena are natural, unavoidable, and biologically determined (Houston, 2007; Hyde & DeLamater, 2008).

Thus, apart from classical essentialism, there is also modern essentialism which refers to research and theories assigning a biological basis or determination of sexual behaviour (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). Consistent with this view, during the 19th and 20th centuries, many psychologists including Sigmund Freud and Richard von Krafft-Ebing categorized

homosexuality as a form of mental illness. However, these psychologists advanced differing and sometimes conflicting theories on the origin of homosexuality. For instance, Krafft-Ebing (1886) saw homosexuality as hereditory, while Freud (1920) regarded it as resulting from conflicts of psychosexual development, including identification with the parent of the opposite sex. Based on an essentialist view of gender which holds that an attraction to women is a masculine trait, Freud (1920) theorized about lesbians as having a masculine psychology (Drescher, 2010, p. 430). Again, Ulrichs (1864-1879) developed the third-sex theory of homosexuality; the concept that a homosexual was a female soul trapped in the male body (Drescher, 2010). He defined a woman whom we would today refer to as a lesbian as *urningin;* a man's spirit trapped in the body of a woman. He also proposed a homosexual law and advocated for social rights for homosexuals. Ulrichs coined the word *Urning*—in English *Uranian*—to denote homosexuals and in an attempt to cancel the negative conotations associated with *sodomite* (Drescher, (2010); procon.org, (2011).

Another essentialist, and 19th century German physician, Magnus Hirschfeld (1896), linked bisexuality to embryonic development and argued that people are bisexual in the embryonic state. He further argued that it is in the course of their natural development that most people lose their desire for members of the same sex (AGLP, 2007). Thus the remaining few who do not lose their desire for members of the same sex become homosexual. To some extent, this view is later supported by Havelock Ellis (a British physician) and John Addington Symonds (1897), who argued that homosexuality may be an inborn abnormality. According to them, the above is the only plausible explanation of how "a well-bred individual" who leads a normal life and feels the ordinary degree of respect for the social values and norms, can engage in an act that amounts to sexual inversion such as homosexuality. Such behaviour, they argue, shows that the invert is driven by a fundamental and probably inborn, perversion of the sexual instinct that renders the individual organically abnormal. Ellis popularized the

idea of homosexuality as an inversion, an inborn non-pathological gender anomaly. According to the Association of Gay and Lesbian Psychiatrists (AGLP, 2012), the concept of sexual inversion as a way of making sense of homosexuality dominated medical thinking for the longest part of the twentieth century as biomedical researchers engaged the modern procedures to expose biological basis of this sexual practice. In 1945, Hebbert Greenspan and John D. Campbell of the US Navy published a study about homosexuality where they concluded that homosexuality was a "biological anomaly". In their argument, they pointed out that it is incorrect to suggest that homosexuality can be environmental or learned: "True homosexuality cannot be induced merely through environmental exposure...We, therefore, conclude that homosexualism is not an acquired vice but a biological anomaly" (1945, p. 688). They also came to the conclusion that even though the homosexual may be said to suffer from a regrettable sexual anomaly, they are otherwise normal, productive individuals, who are neither a burden nor a detriment to society. In 1978, Edward Wilson had advocated for the possibility of homosexuality being a beneficial evolutionary trait. He argued that homosexuality is normal in a biological sense, that it is a distinctive beneficial behaviour that evolved as an important element in human social organization. According to Wilson, homosexuals may be the genetic carriers of some of mankind's rare self-sacrificing or self-less impulses (Wilson, 1978).

2.2.3 The Social Constructionist views

Social constructionism has been said to have a broad use in the social sciences and when used casually often refers to any social influence on the individual's experience (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). However, a more accurate use of this concept has to do with a theoretical model where the fundamental assumption is that "reality is socially constructed" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). This claim about reality is centred on two main assumptions, firstly, that each person's experience of the world is never chaotic but orderly

with discrete events and distinct actions taking place in an orderly manner. Secondly, that even though each person experiences the world in a personal way, it is experienced as an objective reality thus raising the need to make sense of it and share such experiences with others. Language becomes the only tool through which people make sense of the world and communicate their experiences. Without language, reality becomes inaccessible and unintelligible, leading to the conclusion that it (reality) is simply created through our linguistic description of it in the social space. Since language enables people to share experiences, or to make their experience accessible to others; reality becomes a creation of social interaction (Gergen, 1985; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Hyde & DeLamater, 2008). Hyde and DeLamater (2008) claim that according to essentialists, the situation described above leads to shared typifications of reality which ultimately become institutionalized and habitualised. They further explained that

> Once a typification or practice becomes habitual, others come to expect it, and mechanisms of social control are developed to perpetuate it. Of particular significance are institutionalized roles, reciprocal typifications of conduct by types of actors in specific contexts… knowledge may be institutionalized at the level of society, or within subgroups. A subuniverse of meaning is a socially segregated store of knowledge "carried" by a specific group. There may be conflict between such groups. (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008, p. 14)

The above described reality and people's use of language to make sense and share such reality with others is not limited to the external world, i.e., to the world outside the individual. It includes the internal world of the individual comprising of emotions and thoughts. It is through language that people interpret or explain internal phenomena such as emotions, and share such phenomena with others. Again the result is typifications and institutionalization of

internal phenomena, leading to some strong versions of this theory concluding that there is no emotion that can be a natural state (Armon-Jones, 1986; Hyde & DeLamater, 2008).

Some proponents of social constructionism are of the view that when sexual orientation and forms of gender identity such as homosexuality are analyzed using social constructionism, it becomes evident that sexuality is founded in biological drives such as genes, hormones and chromosomes. These biological drives only provide a kind of generalized stimulus but do "not dictate where, when, and with what object a person engages in sexual behaviour" (Hyde & DeLamater, 2008, p. 14). Instead, "sexuality… is channeled in specific directions socially rather than biologically; a channeling that not only imposes limits on these activities, but directly affects organismic functions" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 181).

It is in line with this thinking that, from 1900 to 1923, German entomologist and ethnologist Ferdinand Karsch-Haack wrote that homosexuality is socially constructed. Damm (2001) points out that most important feature of Karsch-Haack's writing was his strong cultural approach to homosexuality. In keeping with his social constructionist approach to homosexuality, Karsch-Haack (1923) offers other possible explanations for homosexuality other than an innate drive for same-sex behaviour advocated for by earlier authors. He argues that lack of opportunity, greed for profit, indigence, misery, the attraction of beauty, temptation, goodwill, curiosity, the drive for adventure, the imitative instinct, moral laxity or indifference are all possible reasons for same sex behaviour (Damm, 2000, pp. 238-9). Also, since Karsch-Haack held the view that the development of sexual norms and behaviour are socially constructed, he thought that both the independent observer and the person engaging in homosexual acts could not perceive the difference between 'real' or 'pseudo' homosexuality (Damm, 2000, pp. 238-9).

Another social constructivist view of homosexuality is offered by Rado (1940) who sees it as a phobic escaping of the other sex caused by parental prohibitions against childhood

sexuality. His position was a denial to the question "*Is Sexual Orientation Determined at Birth?*" arguing that

> The chief causal factor [of homosexuality] is the affect of anxiety, which inhibits standard stimulation and compels the 'ego action system in the individual' to bring forth an altered scheme of stimulation as a 'reparative adjustment'. Both the inhibitory and the reparative processes begin far back in early childhood, leading up to the picture which we encounter in the adult. (Rado, 1940, p. 8)

It is believed that almost all of the mid-twentieth century psychoanalytic theorists who pathologized homosexuality followed Rado's theory in one form or another (AGLP 2007). As a result of 'the psychoanalytic shift from Freud's theory of immaturity (homosexuality as a normal developmental step toward adult heterosexuality) to Rado's theory of pathology (homosexuality as a sign of development gone wrong),' some analysts optimistically claim that they could 'cure' homosexuality (ProCon.org. 2013).

Houston (2007) gives a summary of the debates on homosexuality, pointing out that there are basically two conflicting views on homosexuality, namely; social constructionism and essentialism. Those who hold an essentialist view, as evidenced by some of the theories mentioned above, maintain that homosexuality is natural, and that it is essential to the human wholeness of the homosexual. For the most part, proponents of this view argue that, one is born a homosexual. Those who advocate for the opposing view, the social constructionists, argue that homosexuality only has the meaning which is given to it by the society and culture it is part of (Houston 2007). Houston's (2007) summary is consistent with Sullivan's (2008, p. 3) view about arguments on homosexuality captured below:

> Various theories of homosexuality are derived from either an essentialist approach or a social constructionist approach. Essentialism claims that homosexuality is a

> construct that is both ahistorical and acultural, a part of human civilization for all time; whereas constructionism suggests homosexuality is defined more by temporal periods and cultural context.

Thus the debate between the essentialists and social constructionists involves questions whether or not same gender or bisexual orientation is a choice. Houston (2007) observes that this debate is probably the sole interest of many individuals and groups, and one of the most fiercely debated issues among scholars, scientists, and the lay public.

2.3 Gender Identity Disorder (GID)/ Gender Dysphoria

According to Giordano (2012, p. 31), Gender Identity Disorder (GID) has been viewed as a mental disorder characterised by a 'mismatch' between the assigned gender and biological sex, and one's perceived gender. Bartlett, Vasey, & Bukowsk (2000, p. 754) agrees with Giordano's view above and argues that as it pertains particularly to children, GID is a mental disorder:

> Children with GID have (a) a strong and persistent identification with the other sex or with the culture-specific gender role associated with the other sex or with both and (b) discomfort with their own biological sex or the culture-specific gender role of that sex or with both.

Giordano (2012) asserts that as a demonstration that GID has been classified as a mental disorder, it has been included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-IV (APA, 2000) and in the DSM-V (APA, 2013) as well as in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD-10), (WHO, 1992). However, a look at the DSM-V reveal that gender nonconformity is not in itself categorised as a mental disorder. It is rather the presence of clinically significant distress associated with gender identity disorder that renders it a mental disorder (see APA, 2013). The DSM-V argues that Gender Identity Disorder is not a mental disorder since it does not "manifest the

behavioural, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual" as mental disorder does. It further holds that neither deviant behaviour (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) nor conflicts between the individual and society are mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict is a symptom of a dysfunction in the individual" (APA, 2000, p. xxxi). In order to avoid stigma and guarantee clinical care for individuals who see and feel themselves to be a different gender than their assigned gender, DSM-V substituted the diagnostic name "gender identity disorder" with "gender dysphoria," among other changes, and made other clarifications considered relevant to this disorder. However, it is clear that the distress associated with GID is due to the fact that the condition is characterised by severe and persistent discomfort with the assigned gender. This is due to the fact that the victims frequently find it extremely difficult to adjust socially and psychologically to such persistent conditions that it often leads to high incidences of suicide (Giordano 2012, p. 31).

A number of scholars including Giordano (2012), and Arlene (2006), as well as some organisations or groups such as the Council of Europe (CoE, 2010), disagree with the decision to add GID to mental illnesses as DSM-IV did. Some of them argue that instead of regarding it as a mental disorder, GID and transsexuality in general should be properly perceived as a form of normal human or individual diversity (see CoE, 2010). Similarly, when highlighting some of the issues that LGBT activists raised in relation to GID and the DSM during the process of revising DSM IV, Drescher (2010, p. 428) wrote:

> As in the case of homosexuality in the 1970s, it is wrong for psychiatrists and other mental health professionals to label expressions of gender variance as symptoms of a mental disorder and perpetuating DSM-IV-TR's GID diagnoses in the DSM-V would further stigmatize and cause harm to transgender individuals, already a highly vulnerable and stigmatized population.

Apparently, the subsequent removal of GID as a mental disorder in the DSM-V did not end the controversy surrounding GID, as evidenced by some of the issues that LGBT activists still raised in relation to GID and the DSM. Drescher (2010, p. 428) points out that even before DSM-V was finalised some members and advocates of the transgender community voiced concern regarding this move. They argued that removing GID from the DSM-V as a mental illness would lead third party players to deny access to care for those transgender adults already struggling with insufficient private and public sources of healthcare funding for medical and surgical care. Still others expressed fear that "retention of the GID diagnoses would eventually lead to putting the diagnosis of ''homosexuality'' (removed from the DSM-II in 1973) back into the psychiatric manual" (Drescher 2010, p. 428).

Clearly, the debate on whether GID should be understood as a mental illness or not has also influenced the kind of solutions proposed to address it. Dreger (2009, p. 26) observes that there are two basic models about how Gender Identity Disorder should be tackled. These models, which seem to be opposed to one another, may be appropriately termed as "the therapeutic model" and "the accommodation model" respectively. In order to explain the two models in question and also clearly distinguish them from each other, Dreger (2009) invents an imaginary figure; a boy called William Lee who has been diagnosed with GID.

He describes the imaginary William as a five years old boy whose physical body formation can be said to be consistent with that of an average male. Notwithstanding this physical appearance, William, as far as everybody who knows him could remember, has always displayed behaviour that is mostly associated with girls, including playing with girls' toys. Apparently Williams also plays with girls almost all the time and hardly with boys. He often puts on not just women clothing, but often assumes an appearance of a beautiful, conservative woman by wearing dresses and pumps complete with matching jewellery and make-up. William defends his behaviour by arguing that he is actually a girl, and that one day he will

grow up to be a woman. Dreger (2009) explains that his fictional boy's behaviour is what psychologists call gender dysphoria or Gender Identity Disorder (GID), a condition that puts most parents under enormous distress and confusion based on the fact that such a child effectively challenges and even goes against social norms on gender and gender identity. Dreger (2009) goes further to illustrate how each of the two models referred to above will understand William's situation and the kinds of solutions that each model will propose.

2.3.1 The Therapeutic model

According to Dreger (2009), the therapeutic model does not regard any one issue as the sole cause of Gender Identity Disorder. It however, regards familial dysfunction such as family conflict, misbehaviour by family members, child neglect or abuse and other similar incidents that occur continually and regularly in the family as factors that make this disorder worse in all GID cases. As a result, the model aims to mitigate the socioemotional difficulties often experienced by children as well as address some problems that occur inside the family which also contribute to the child's gender confusion (Singh, 2012, p. 16). Some versions of this model, such as the one proposed by Reker & Lovaas (1974), interpret gender identity disorder or cross-gender behaviours in general as being an outcome of inappropriate learning. As a consequence of this understanding, they proposed measures that will gradually end these (inappropriate) behaviours while at the same time promoting or reinforcing the appropriate behaviours using the principles of behaviour therapy. For instance, if a male child, such as William in Dreger's scenario stated above, had been psychologically assessed and found to be exhibiting "childhood cross-gender identity", the child's therapist must reinforce masculine behaviours and extinguish feminine behaviours. This can be done by "strengthening more than one masculine behaviour and weakening several feminine behaviours" (Reker & Lovaas, 1974, p. 173). In light of the foregoing, the model holds that in the above scenario,

> William is showing all the signs of gender identity disorder (GID) and that he should be treated by a mental health professional. Or rather, his family should be treated by mental health professionals because, according to the typical contemporary therapeutic perspective, William needs—and lacks—a family that is functioning well psychologically and emotionally. If his mother is depressed or clingy, if his father is physically or emotionally absent, if his parents' marriage is a stressful mess, William is going to keep suffering from gender role confusion, and secondarily from the anger, shame, disappointment, anxiety, and guilt that his parents may exhibit in response. (Dreger 2009, p. 26)

Dreger (2009) further observes that under the therapeutic model, mental health workers will first provide some form of counselling to immediate members of William's family as well as to William himself. Since the model believes that familial dysfunction makes this disorder worse in all GID cases, health professionals will find it necessary to relocate William to "a less stressful, more sustainable" gender identity and family atmosphere. The therapeutic model then advocates that William be exposed to gender-neutral toys only, and be allowed to interact exclusively with "calmer, gentler" boys; as he will definitely find it hard to relate with tougher and rougher boys. The main objective of the therapeutic model, is to help William by teaching him that it is possible to be a boy without having to be aggressive and competitive. On this point Dreger (2009, p. 26) explains that

> As part of the new family discipline, William's mother and father will learn to act like a loving mother and father should, and William will not be allowed to go to school as a girl or to otherwise pretend he is a girl. Thus, the therapeutic approach assumes that William's desire to grow up as a woman represents a kind of problematic fantasy and that, with the right interventions; it can be made to dissipate.

Consistent with Dreger's application of the model as in the above, Singh (2012, p. 17) points out that regardless of the numerous versions of the therapeutic model, there is a common thread that runs across them as well as the views of clinicians associated with them. This is the assumption that it is possible to modify a child's gender identity.

Singh (2012, p. 17) observes that some clinicians propose a biopsychosocial model of treatment where socioemotional problems inside the child and as well as family dynamics, for instance, are used to address the causal factors that influence the child's cross-gender identification. Other clinicians argue for a strictly psychodynamic formulation in which GID is viewed as a defence against distress and anxiety. Still, others place the weight of treatment on related emotional/behavioural difficulties in the child as well as on underlying forces working in the family rather than on direct efforts to change gender identity.

2.3.2 The accommodation model

The accommodation model, according to Dreger (2009), holds that there is basically nothing wrong with either William or his family. The model argues that it is only a misconception and lack of proper understanding of William's situation that results in needless psychological and social suffering by the family. Regarding children's gender identity, this model advocates that both the family and the therapist or health care professionals must adopt an attitude of "not knowing" while waiting for the child to disclose a genuine gender identity and expression. When such an identity is disclosed, it may or may not be consistent with their biological sex (Singh, 2012, p. 19) and in such cases social gender transition must be carried out as early as possible. Dreger explains that when the accommodation model for tackling GID is applied to the above scenario, William is actually Julie who was "born with a female brain in a male body". Thus, the accommodation model, which is also known as the "wait and see" approach to the treatment of GID, states that "the problem is not the child, nor the

family, but the culture, and so the culture must learn to accommodate Julie as she grows to become a woman" (Dreger 2009, p. 27). In light of the foregoing, health care professionals should concentrate first on giving Julie the much needed psychological support to assist her deal with the unfriendly and unreceptive world she finds herself in. One way of doing this is by encouraging William's parents to support William's cross-gender behaviours in order to reduce feelings of stigmatization and to promote his overall adjustment (Singh, 2012, p. 19). Secondly, health care professionals must give William's body the right hormones and later, surgeries that will ensure a smooth transition from her current boyish body to the one of a girl, which is what she should have had in the first place.

2.4 Conclusion

The discussion carried out in this chapter left a number of questions often asked regarding gender and gender identity unanswered. There was no conclusive scientific evidence about what causes or determines homosexuality, and gender identity in general. There were only theories that claimed homosexuality could be explained or linked directly to genes and hormones. There were also theories and studies about the connection between the brain and the different forms of gender identity. Similarly, there were theories and studies about how upbringing, early childhood experiences, and the social environment contribute to the development of homosexuality. Thus, it is clear that scientists do not know precisely what causes or influences an individual's sexual orientation They are, however, of the view that it is determined by an intricate interplay of genetic, hormonal, and environmental stimuli (Frankowski, (2004); Lamanna, Riedmann & Stewart (2014); Stuart, (2014), and that the individual had no choice in the matter (Frankowski, (2004); Lamanna, Riedmann, & Stewart, (2014); Kersey-Matusiak, (2012). Moreover, discussions made in this chapter raised questions regarding the fundamental nature of human existence and being, all which will be explored in the subsequent chapters. It raised questions about what normal human sexuality

(or normal gender) was and what role sexuality (or gender) plays in human existence and personhood. It also raised questions concering whether the instinctive requirements of species' survival suggested a specific answer to the question of whether or not homosexuality (or gender variance) was a disorder. How societal values on gender and sexuality influenced and helped to define the concept of personhood were also explored. It is hoped that a correlation of gender identity, particularly homosexuality, to some conceptions of personhood in the proceeding chapters will provide answers to some of the questions posed above. In particular, and consistent with the thesis of this work, it is hoped that this will assist in explaining some of the dominant African traditional conceptions of personhood. It is the need for this explanation that the next chapter is focused on doing a survey of some of the dominant conceptions of personhood, namely, the capacity based approach, the transcendental approach and the social/relational approach and briefly relate these approaches to gender identity particularly homosexuality.

CHAPTER THREE

VIEWS ON PERSONHOOD: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

3.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that notions of personhood are not universal, and that the views and processes through which personhood is recognized vary among scholars and also across-cultures. This justifies the need to explore and evaluate the nature of personhood according to the African perspective in comparison to other views of personhood found elsewhere, which is the main aim of this work. The chapter is also necessary for this research as it demonstrates that personhood has always been, and continues to be a topic of international debate where important questions about the nature and beginning of human personhood in issues such as abortion, slavery, animal rights has been raised and debated. The chapter begins by exploring various views on the concept of personhood including the capacity-based approach, the inherent/transcendental approach, and the relational/ social approach. In addition to stating the main arguments advanced for these approaches to personhood, the challenges and pitfalls for each approach will be discussed. The differences and similarities between these views of personhood will be explicated as they become evident in the process of discussion. The chapter will be concluded by briefly relating these conceptions of personhood to gender identity, particularly homosexuality.

3.1 Conceptualisation of person.

Since personhood is simply the state of being a person, the initial questions should then be; what is a person? And what does it mean to be a person? While in everyday usage and experience a person means the same thing as a human being, in philosophical usage however, the reference of the term may extend to non-human agents such as God and ghosts. Yet still,

of recent there have been on-going debates based on suggestions to widen 'the community of persons' further to include certain 'smart' animals such as dolphins and guide dogs. It has also been suggested that some inanimate objects such as computers and robots may be classified as persons due to their intelligent functionalities. Many people are puzzled at the fact that determining what a person is and distinguishing persons from non-persons has been part of philosophical discourse and has engaged the minds of many scholars for several centuries. This is because in everyday experience many people do not have difficulty in identifying persons as human beings and distinguishing them from non-persons such as plants, animals, machines and spirits. The fact that nonhuman animals and inanimate objects lack relevant cognitive properties such as intelligence and self-consciousness that is often ascribed to persons, marks them out as non-persons. Further, the issue of personhood arose because of the dispute as to whether all human beings could be persons or whether we could limit personhood to those with defined cognitive capacities and moral standing. This is due to the fact that the lack of one or more of the cognitive capacities and moral uprightness makes such individuals to be very different from others. Likewise personhood may be extended beyond human to such agents as demons and angels (whether real or imagined). Nevertheless, there seem to be a general consensus among a number of scholars that 'person' entails such charactersistics as being "(a) embodied; (b) animate; (c) emotive; (d) initiators of actions rather than merely reflexive, instinctual, or mechanical respondents to their environment; and (e) capable of forming ideas about the world rather than being merely things in the world" (Sapontzis 1981, p. 608). Discussions involving personhood frequently employ both moral and metaphysical concepts.

3.1.1 Metaphysical Personhood

From a metaphysical point of view a person is a being, such as a human, that has certain capacities or attributes. Dennett (1976, p. 176) equates the metaphysical notion with the notion of an intelligent, conscious, feeling agent. Further, Sapontzis (1981, p. 608) explains that 'person' in the metaphysical sense denotes a kind of thing that endures through space and time and has its own identity, integrity, independence, or self-sufficiency. He argues that metaphysical personhood functions to describe a certain kind of thing, denotes all and only human beings and separates persons from inanimate objects, machines, plants, animals, and spirits. Similarly, Beauchamp (1999, p. 1) explains metaphysical personhood as consisting entirely of a set of person-distinguishing psychological properties such as intentionality, self-consciousness, free will, and language acquisition. A number of scholars hold a more or less similar understanding of metaphysical personhood. For instance, when discussing the metaphysical and moral aspects of a person, Gaie (2007, p. 29) observes that the Setswana word *'botho'* comes from the root *–tho,* which means a human being at a metaphysical level and a person at a moral level. In this sense the concept of *motho* denotes an ontological status and makes reference to the existence of a specific being, or to the 'whatness' of a thing, as Gaie (2007) indicates. This is consistent with the concept of metaphysical personhood as discussed by the other scholars above. Further, Gaie's analysis of the human person above is comparable with the views of Wiredu (1991, pp. 32-33), who explains the (human) person as follows:

> Being a person implies having the capacity for reflective perception, abstraction, and inference. In their basic nature these mental capacities are the same for all humans irrespective of whether they inhabit Europe, Asia or Africa, just as in their basic nature the instinctive reactions of, say, the frogs of Europe are the same as those of the frogs of Africa. … there is a common human identity.

However, there are a number of philosophers including Taylor (1985) and Beckwith (2000) who are opposed to the view of personhood expressed above. Such philosophers argue that the problem with such cognitive/naturalist theories of personhood is that they solely stipulate a "performance criterion" for determining whether something is a person or not. This leads to some difficulties especially when we consider that some non-human entities such as machines and animals exhibit "similarly complex adaptive behaviour" and could therefore qualify as persons. This notwithstanding, there seem to be a general consensus regarding the necessary conditions for metaphysical personhood which, according to Goodman (1992, p. 75), are captured in the works of some of the leading authorities on the subject. These conditions include; (1) consciousness, (2) rationality, (3) ability to have and reciprocate a personal attitude toward another being, (4) the ability for complex communication, (5) self-consciousness, (6) the ability for self-motivated activity, and (7) freedom of the will. The goal of philosophers in theorizing metaphysical personhood has been to identify a set of psychological properties possessed by all and only persons, and to determine if any or some of these properties are more basic to identifying and distinguishing persons from non-persons. This has led to numerous debates and formulation of theories aimed at addressing the said goal, as well as establishing the nature of the connection (if any) between the metaphysical and moral aspects of personhood.

3.1.2 Moral personhood

The moral conception of personhood is founded on the notion of an agent who is accountable and has both rights and responsibilities, (Goodman, 1992, p. 75). Moral personhood views a person as something more than plain biological life or organism. ‘Person’ in this case denotes a being that is a member of a “moral community”. And this according to Sullivan (2003, p. 11), implies having rights and duties of a moral nature. The view that moral personhood

indicates individuals who possess properties or capacities such as moral agency and moral motivation is captured in the works of a number of scholars across the world including Beauchamp (1999, p. 309), Wiredu (1996) and Menkiti (1984). On this notion of personhood Menkiti (1984) is well-known for having argued that, "personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed….without incorporation …individuals are considered to be mere danglers to whom the description ' person ' does not fully apply**".** When commenting on Menkiti's view of personhood, Matolino (2011, p. 24) writes, "he (Menkiti) argues that personhood is not a static thing that is granted at birth but something that is attained as one gets along in society. In particular, one becomes more of a person through moral growth, which he (Menkiti) sees as synonymous with ontological progression". Moreover, Sapontzis (1981, p. 608), who holds that the moral and metaphysical approaches to personhood serve to evaluate and describe persons respectively, argues not only that moral personhood separates persons from nature and property but also that it denotes creatures with rights and assigns a certain moral status.

As mentioned above, the source of disagreement among philosophers has been the nature of the relationship between the metaphysical and the moral aspect of a person. Whereas philosophers, such as Dennett (1976), contend that metaphysical personhood is both a necessary and sufficient condition for moral personhood, others such as Goodman (1992) and Sapontzis (1981) deny this. This latter group argues that it is possible for an individual to be in possession of all the characteristics required for inclusion in the community of metaphysical persons, but fail to meet the requirements for moral personhood. Yet others, such as Goodman (1992) argue that while metaphysical personhood is a necessary condition for moral personhood, it is not a sufficient condition.

3.3 Capacity-Based approach to Personhood

The capacity-based approach to personhood has been labelled differently by different scholars, who use different names to refer to the same thing. For instance, the same approach has been referred to as 'cognitive theory' due to its appeal to mental states. Chappell (2011) and Kadlac (2009) refer to the same approach as 'criterialism' and 'personism' respectively. When explaining his preference for the term in describing the approach, Chappell (2011) points out that "criterialism" is the view that actual possession of the criterial properties is necessary and sufficient for membership of the primary moral constituency, (PMC). It is clear that by 'criterial properties' Chappell has in mind the same cognitive capacities that the proponents of this approach have always advocated for; and these include rationality, self-consciousness and autonomous volition. In making particular reference to the moral capacity aspect, Chappell (2011, p. 2) contends, "criterialism, as I call it, is pretty much the same view as what McMahan (2005), following Rachels (1990), calls "moral individualism." This is the view that "how an individual may be treated is determined, not by considering his group memberships, but by considering his own particular characteristics" (Rachels 1990, p. 173). A number of scholars including Kadlac (2009, p. 422) are of the view that the capacity-based approach (or criterialism, according to Kadlac) has attracted a wide following and as a result has tended to dominate debates concerning, what constitutes personhood and when personhood begins. It has gained special prominence in relation to the morality of abortion and animal rights especially where accepted differences in biological species are not thought sufficient to determine the moral status of non-human animals. The other words and phrases that have been used to express the same cognitive ideology of personhood are "performance theory/criterion" and "functionalist theory/ approach". However, for the purpose of this discussion, the author chose the phrase "capacity based approach to personhood" to refer to the line of thinking in question.

3.3.1 The Capacity-based approach-The Main argument

According to the capacity-based theories, an entity is a person if and only if it possesses certain cognitive rather than singularly human properties. Beauchamp (1999) observes that cognitive conditions of metaphysical personhood similar to the ones listed below have been promoted by several classical and contemporary writers including Warren (1973), Engelhardt (1996), Lomasky (1987), and Tooley (1972, 1984). These cognitive conditions are (1) self-consciousness (of oneself as existing over time); (2) capacity to act on reasons; (3) capacity to communicate with others by command of a language; (4) capacity to act freely; and (5) rationality. For instance, Warren (1997) made an argument to this effect, claiming that, "the six key markers of personhood are] (1) sentience . . . (2) emotionality . . . (3) reason . . . (4) the capacity to communicate . . . (5) self-awareness . . . (6) moral agency, (Warren 1997, 83-84). Proponents of this understanding of personhood often move from these metaphysical descriptions to moral attributions, making a connection between the two, or employing metaphysics in the service of ethics. On this point Tooley (1972, p. 82) asserts that "an organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself such an entity". Harris (1985, pp. 16-17), holds a similar view, pointing out that, "persons are beings capable of valuing their own lives". These characteristics, according to the proponents of this view, distinguish human beings who are persons from mere human beings (homo sapiens). Singer (1993, p. 87), confirms this when he writes, "I propose to use "person," in the sense of a rational and self-conscious being, to capture those elements of the popular sense of "human being" that are not covered by "member of the species *Homo sapiens*." Further, Kadlac (2009, p. 422) observes that while personists may disagree concerning exactly which properties are constitutive of personhood, or which properties are more central to personhood, they are united in thinking that purely biological considerations should not be counted among

them. The same cognitive characteristics apparently differentiate persons from nonpersons regardless of species, origin, or type. That is, since the properties or characteristics of personhood can, in principle, be found in a wide range of entities, it is left to some extent open as to which entities exactly will qualify for personhood. Any being that satisfies the relevant criteria will in that way be entitled to such status, regardless of the biological species to which they belong. For this reason, it is often asked whether God, a robot, an ape or even a computer would be successful in attaining personhood in a metaphysical sense.

Beauchamp (1999) asserts that sometimes the proponents of cognitive criteria with such conditions as those listed above assert that any one of these criteria, such as self-consciousness, rationality, or linguistic capacity is sufficient for metaphysical personhood. For instance, Warren (1973), who has been one of the leading scholars on this approach, insists that we need not expect an entity to have all of the cognitive attributes to be properly considered a person. She asserts that "Sentience and emotionality alone may well be sufficient for personhood, and quite probably sentience and reason are sufficient" (p. 55). Warren further argues that we do not need to insist that each of these criteria is necessary for personhood, but asserts that sentience and emotionality look like fairly good candidates for necessary conditions, as does reason if 'activity' is construed to include the activity of reasoning. Other writers suggest that each condition must be satisfied; the five conditions are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for personhood. The typical view, according to Beauchamp (1999), seems to be that some subset of these five conditions is both necessary and sufficient. Thus while proponents of this approach generally argue that human beings are "persons" only if they actively instantiate the capacities mentioned above, some scholars within this camp have tended to emphasize or pick one or two of the said capacities at the exclusion of the rest as being more central to defining personhood. For instance, Henry

Frankfurt's undertaking to define personhood focus on the notion of desires. More specifically, according to Fox Pons (2011) helpful analysis, Frankfurt is not just concerned with desires, he is concerned with desires about desires, or second order desires. When providing a justification for this approach, Frankfurt (1971, p. 6) writes, "Human beings are not alone in having desires and motives, or in making choices..... It seems to be peculiarly characteristic of humans, however, that they are able to form what I shall call 'second-order desires". Frankfurt is of the view that a thinking being or person must be able to figure out that one of his conflicting desires should be paramount over the other, thus it is not the mere *possession* of second-order desires that constitutes personhood. Rather it is when such second-order desire moves agents into action that we can rightly attribute personhood to the individual involved. On this point Fox Pons (2011, p. 10) observes that Frankfurt's position entails that, "a person is an agent who has the capacity to reflect on his desires, interests, etc." Frankfurt is often credited for his strict definition of personhood which tends to debar animals and robots from being adjudged as persons. He did this by arguing that a being that lacks second order desires has no awareness of what happens to it apart from fulfilling basic desires. Such a being, according to Frankfurt, has no interest in itself as it cannot make out itself as a self. This is due to its lack of reflection, which further leads to its inability to know what it is like to be itself. Fox Pons (2011, p. 59) concludes Frankfurt's argument above by highlighting its moral dimension, pointing out that

> As the wanton has no actual interest in itself as a self, there should be no moral considerations for the wanton. If the wanton is indifferent to what happens to itself or, more accurately, cannot view itself as a self, then other agents ought not treat such wantons as agents who can have interests in themselves. Hence, it would be impossible for other agents, such as persons, to be morally obligated to further the interests of wantons if wantons cannot have interest in themselves.

Frankfurt's view is that it is only humans that deserve moral considerations. This is because they are capable of second-order desires based on their reflective mental states.

Frankfurt's claim that only humans are capable of self-awareness, or are the sole possessors of reflective mental states especially when contrasted with animals has been challenged by numerous scientific discoveries. For instance, Gallup (1970) carried out a scientific experiment where chimpanzees and monkeys were exposed to mirrors to determine their psychological levels of self-awareness, introspection and mental state attribution. It was decidedly concluded that while the ability to recognize oneself in a mirror is a remarkably rare capacity in the animal realm, the great apes (particularly chimpanzees) had shown compelling evidence of mirror self-recognition, a capability previously found only in humans. After at least three decades since Gallup's (1970) discovery above, Reiss and Marino (2001) likewise exposed two dolphins to reflective surfaces, and both demonstrated responses consistent with the use of the mirror to investigate marked parts of the body (2001, p. 5937). Commenting on their finding after the experiment Reiss and Marino (2001, p. 5942) concludes that

> Collectively, these findings provide definitive evidence that the two dolphins in this study used the mirror (and other reflective surfaces) to investigate parts of their bodies that were marked. These findings, therefore, offer the first convincing evidence that a nonprimate species, the bottlenose dolphin, is capable of mirror self-recognition (MSR).....Bottlenose dolphins share several behavioral and social eco- logical features with great apes and humans, including sophisticated memory and classification of relationships among events (27), the ability to learn rudimentary symbol-based artificial codes (27, 32), and complex social behavior (28). Bottlenose dolphins, great apes, and humans all possess high degrees of encephalization and neocortical expansion.

Commenting on Reiss and Marino's (2001) findings above, Fox Pons (2011, p. 54) observes that Dolphins have been recognized as among the most intelligent of animals although many

researchers tended to place them below chimpanzees, which some studies have found can reach the intelligence levels of three-year-old children. Fox Pons (2011) however, goes on to say that recently, a series of behavioural studies have suggested that dolphins, especially species such as the bottlenose, could be brighter than chimpanzees. These studies have shown that dolphins have distinct personalities, a strong sense of self and can think about the future (Fox Pons 2011, p. 54).

3.3.2 Relating Moral worth to Metaphysical qualities

Most traditional advocates for the capacity-based approach to personhood are of the view that there is a connection between metaphysical personhood and moral personhood (see for instance Dennett, 1976, p. 176; Tooley, 1983, pp. 95-122; Singer, 1993, pp. 95-99, 181-184; Korsgaard, 2004, pp. 103-104). One of them, Dennett (1976) delimits the metaphysical and the moral senses of a person by associating the metaphysical notion to the idea of an intelligent, conscious and feeling agent. He also relates the moral notion to the idea of an agent who is accountable, has both rights and responsibilities and holds strongly to the view that metaphysical personhood is a necessary condition for moral personhood. This is the view that the particular cognitive properties or capabilities that constitute personhood have got moral significance.

The above line of thinking implies that in order for a being to be regarded as a person in a moral sense where certain rights and obligations can be conferred, such being must necessarily be a person in a metaphysical sense. For such a being, rationality, self-identity/consciousness and other such features should be evident. The tendency to connect cognitive qualities with moral capacity is apparent in many forms of rationalism. For instance, Kant (1959, p. 46 trans. Lewis White Beck) argued that, “Rationality is a necessary

condition for morality. Moral respect is due that without which there could not be any moral respect. Therefore, rational beings must be respected". Gunnarsson (2008) makes the same assertion when he observed that according to rationalism, a living being obtains its moral status by its possession of rational capacities. When rationalism is approached from a Kantian point of view, argues Gunnarsson (2008), one assumes that moral subjects are the basic objects of moral concern. He goes on to point out that given that rationality is often believed to be part of being a moral subject as mentioned above, it can be concluded that the moral status of a being is dependent upon its rational capacities. Further to this, Gunnarsson (2008) opines that one may think that the fundamental objects of moral concern are beings that have interests, regardless of whether they are moral subjects. If one then thinks that high moral status is dependent upon having certain kinds of interests and that having these interests is dependent upon rational capacities, then high moral status becomes indirectly dependent upon rationality (Gunnarsson, 2008, p. 306). It is from this perspective that Chappell (2011, p. 2) explains further his chosen term 'criterialism', as referring to the same view as what McMahan (2005), Rachels (1990), calls "moral individualism." Moral individualism is the view that how an individual may be treated is determined, not by considering his group memberships, but by considering his own particular characteristics. That is, as Chappel explains, the advocates of this view contend that the actual possession of the criteria (cognitive) properties is necessary and sufficient for membership of the *primary moral constituency* (PMC): where primary moral constituency (PMC) refers to some class of creatures who all alike and equally share in the highest level of moral rights and privileges. This means that what makes us human beings who have rights and privileges, according to this view, is not the mere fact that we belong to the community of human beings, but whether we individually possess qualities that are consistent with being human. Based on this line of thinking, Tooley (1972, p. 82) links morality to rationality and self-consciousness. He argues

that, “An organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself such an entity.” Thus there is a connection or some sort of identity, according to this line of thought, between moral personhood and metaphysical person.

However, there are some scholars including Sapontzis (1981), Goodman (1992), and Chappell (2011) who deny any kind of identity between morality and metaphysical qualities. For instance, Sapontzis, who is perhaps one of the most convincing contenders against the tendency to link moral worth to metaphysical qualities, insist that there is no relation in meaning between being human (or ‘person’ in a metaphysical sense) and meriting rights (or being a person in a moral sense). He asserts that the propensity to relate moral personhood to metaphysical personhood is as a result of confusing or misunderstanding the two senses of personhood. To illustrate his point, Sapontzis defines a "moral" concept as an evaluative concept concerned with transmission of rights, duties, obligations, and respect, and a "metaphysical" concept as a part of the essential structure of our experience of a thing. Thus the moral and metaphysical concepts of personhood should be differentiated by their functions, where one is serving to evaluate, the other to describe (Sapontzis, 1981, p. 607).

That is, that one is a human being is a matter of fact; that one's life must be respected is an evaluation (Sapontzis, 1981, p. 612). Therefore, since metaphysical personhood describes a certain kind of thing and moral personhood simply assigns certain moral status, clearly the two have different functions and it is not all clear what sort of identity is involved between them. On this point Sapontzis argues that there is no logical or linguistic rule relating moral to metaphysical personhood, such that one could derive an evaluation from a description. According to Sapontzis, the fact that some tribes regard only their members as persons; slave

owners considered only members of their own race to be persons; and Hinduism and other vegetarian traditions consider animals other than human beings to be persons, is prove that moral personhood is not based on or derived from metaphysical qualities. This is because people who refute that certain human beings are persons appear to be quite aware that these human beings are rational, have self-awareness, have a language, and are capable of formulating and carrying out plans. In the same way, vegetarians do not give the impression that they believe that cows and other nonhuman beings are human beings in a metaphysical sense. Further, Sapontzis contends contra most rationalists and capacity-based theorists, that morality is not based on rationality since "members of many species of animals exhibit moral virtues even though they clearly lack human intelligence" (Sapontzis, 1981, p. 614). Examples of such virtues include love, compassion, devotion, patience, courage, self-sacrifice, responsibility, moderation, and parental concern**.** Sapontzis' argument here is compelling provided that the capacity based theorists use the term 'rationality' to refer to human intelligence as a precondition for morality. However, if rationality, self-awareness and other metaphysical qualities are not restricted to human cognitive capabilities alone, then clearly many animals, which act virtuously, qualify as rational beings hence they deserve moral rights recognition.

Unlike Sapontzis, Goodman (1992) adopts a less extreme position in his critique of the capacity-based approach to personhood. He contends that a being may have all the features necessary for inclusion in the class of metaphysical persons, but not meet the requirements for moral personhood. For Goodman, metaphysical personhood is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for moral personhood (1992, p. 75). He further holds that moral personhood is a sufficient condition, although not a necessary condition, for metaphysical personhood. Goodman made an attempt to show that none of the conditions for metaphysical

personhood (i.e, rationality, complex communication, self-consciousness, freedom of the will and so on), taken either singularly or collectively, embody qualities that imply moral personhood. For instance, even if a dog is acutely aware of what she intends, reasons out and actually carries out the plan, we still have no sense that there is any mindfulness, on the dog's part, that the action is good or bad, right or wrong, valuable or not valuable (Goodman, 1992, p. 75). Hence Goodman reaches the conclusion that rationality itself is not implicative of morality. While Sapontzis (1981) would most likely be in agreement with Goodman that rationality is not implicative of morality, he would definitely not accept Goodman's view that a dog (or any other non human being) that clearly shows self-awareness, thought and planning still lacks mindfulness and therefore its action lacks moral worth. The actions of non-human beings (just like those of human beings) should be judged as right or wrong based not on rationality or other metaphysical qualities (for they have no bearing on morality, according to Sapontzis) but on moral virtues. Notwithstanding this, Goodman's argument on the apparent lack of a clear relation between metaphysical qualities and moral personhood is to some extent consistent with Sapontzis views discussed above. Goodman, for instance, while making reference to self-consciousness, argues that there must be, but there is not, some linking idea from self-consciousness to that of rights if self-consciousness is to be a sufficient condition for moral personhood. Explaining this point further, he writes:

> There ought to be some clear path from 'X is self-conscious' to 'X is a person in the moral sense', or to 'X has rights'. But there isn't. Self-consciousness entails consciousness, rationality, and, I think, the ability to adopt a personal attitude, at least with respect to oneself. But, where each of these has no necessary connection with moral personhood, the moral person, strictly a being with rights and responsibilities does not somehow pop into existence when self-consciousness is added to the list. (Goodman, 1992, p. 78)

However, Goodman thinks that it must be admitted that self-consciousness is a necessary condition for moral personhood, that is, a necessary condition for the possession of rights and responsibilities, even though it may not be a sufficient condition. Thus while Goodman is unable to establish the connection between self-consciousness and moral personhood, he still thinks the latter has some kind of moral significance, a view that Diamond (1991) below seems to dispute. Diamond (1991 argues that despite the fact that what makes us human is that we have certain properties, these properties, making us members of a certain biological species, have no moral relevance.

3.3.3 Objections and Challenges for cognitive theories

Contrary to a number of scholars such as Lock (1979), Watson (1975), Raz (2006), who posit rationality as a condition for personhood, Sapontzis (1981) argues that the term "person" does not refer essentially to rational animals, of which human beings are only one kind. Metaphysically, "person" denotes all and only human beings. By "human being" Sapontzis refers to the same thing as a "person" in a metaphysical sense, arguing that in everyday experience "person" is just another name for human beings. He further emphasize that such behavioural traits as rationality and consciousness which are commonly used in identifying persons are not as important as the bodily-shape of a creature. If behavioural traits were central in identifying persons, an intelligent, orderly and self-aware dog would be recognised as being more of a person than a human adult suffering from mental disorder. However, a dog remains a dog not a person because, "No matter how superior its behaviour, a dog can never be a person because it does not have a human body, and no matter how inferior the behaviour of a human infant or a handicapped human, he is still a person because he has a human body", Sapontzis (1981, p. 608).

Chappell (2011, pp. 4 -5) makes an interesting argument in which he challenges the capacity based approach and its association of personhood with certain rational capacities. For him, the tendency for advocates of the capacity-based approach, (or criterialists, as he prefers to calls them), to take "markers of personhood" as indicators of necessary conditions for personhood has made personhood sound rather restricted and hard to qualify for. According to Chappell, the properties that the proponents of the approach in question have picked on are not criteria of personhood at all, but simply markers of personhood. That is, the so called criteria for personhood are dimensions of interpretation of beings that are already taken to be persons (2011, p. 6). This is because in reality people do not wait for a human being to start displaying, say, rationality, reflection, feeling, self-awareness, and other such qualities before they start treating him as a person. Chappell's argument for this claim is best captured in his own words where he writes:

> Contrary to what criterialism seems to suggest, we do not look for sentience or rationality or self-awareness in a creature as a test to decide whether or not that creature counts as a person. It is the other way round. Having once decided, on other grounds, that a creature *is* a person, we know that this makes it the kind of creature that is likely to display sentience, rationality, self-awareness, and the rest of the personal properties. Hence, we look for displays of these properties from the creature. That is to say, we treat it as person *in advance of* any such displays. (Chappell, 2011, p. 7)

Chappell's argument above poses a challenge to the proponents of the capacity-based approach in that their claim is not exactly consistent with what is observable in reality. Chappell argues that, if metaphysical qualities were so central to being a person and being treated as such, parents would probably treat their babies as non-persons right from the beginning, but this does not seem to be the case. This may suggest that there is something else that is more fundamental in marking creatures as persons than cognitive qualities.

Perhaps Sapontzis' idea of body shape (discussed above) as the real determinant or marker of personhood might be more compatible with what obtains in everyday life.

Consistent with most proponents of the capacity based approach to personhood, Tooley (1984) claims that an organism needs a future-oriented self-concept to qualify as a person. This is to say that it is only self-conscious, continuing subjects of experience that qualify as persons. Commenting on Tooley's view Bishop (1998, p. 56) observes that the approach excludes infants until they are much older children; an observation that is also made by many other capacity based theorists. Engelhardt (1989), for instance points out that, "If being a person is to be a responsible agent, a bearer of rights and duties, children are not persons in a strict sense" (1989, p. 120). Bishop (1998) goes on to contend that the capacity based approach to personhood further excludes those who are dying of fatal and incurable diseases such as cancer. This is because they do not create in their minds any future except the end of pain and of the life that brings only pain. The capacity based approach also excludes the exceedingly senile elderly from the sphere of persons. This is because such individuals do not have a future-oriented self-concept since their minds can neither connect with the future nor the past. To some extent, the approach might even justify treating such individuals as those mentioned above without any compassion. The above observation by Bishop (1998) and similar ones by many other authors including Kittay (2005, p. 101) could be said to be consistent with the views of McMahan (1996). In his work titled "Cognitive Disability, Misfortune, and Justice" McMahn makes the assertion that those with congenital severe cognitive impairments fall below that threshold (i.e. the moral threshold of personhood) and are not subject to the claims of justice. Also in *The Ethics of Killing: Problems at the Margins* he argues further that neither the death nor the killing of those falling below the

threshold of personhood carries the same moral significance as the death or killing of "us," who are above the threshold.

Another argument for the capacity-based approach which proposes conditions for personhood that are different from those already discussed above is by Warren (1991). For him, there are three "sufficient" conditions for personhood and these are:

(1) Consciousness of objects and events, especially pain perception

(2) Reasoning to resolve problems and

(3) Some autonomy, or self-motivated activity, relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control

Responding to Warren's list of conditions for personhood above, Bishop (1998, p. 56) argues that if these three (supposed sufficient conditions above) were jointly sufficient for personhood, then at many points in their clinical encounters and hospitalizations most patients would not have enough characteristics to be persons. This is despite their having what Warren considers to be the necessary conditions for personhood. Further, Bishop contends that the set of sufficient conditions proposed by Warren and other proponents of this approach *may* include too many "persons," including robots, androids, and dogs; a move that is objectionable on empirical grounds as most people would not accept such beings or things as persons. Perhaps an objection to the capacity-based approach based on pragmatic evidence is best captured in Chappell's rather humorous words:

> If self-consciousness is a necessary condition, then many mentally handicapped humans will fail to count as persons. If the capacity to communicate is a necessary condition, then Jean-Dominique Bauby, of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1998), would fail to count as a person after his catastrophic stroke—had he not

> worked out how to signal with his eyelids. If persons necessarily have "the concept of a self as a continuing subject" and believe that they are such selves, then David Hume, Derek Parfit, and most Buddhists are not persons. If you cannot be a person unless you are capable of valuing your own life, then you cannot be both a person and a committed nihilist about value (i.e., someone who finds himself compelled to believe that no such thing as value exists). If persons have to possess "emotionality," then Mr. Spock in *Star Trek* is not a person, and neither, perhaps, are some extreme autistics, for autism involves various sorts of emotional dysfunction. (Chappell, 2011, pp. 4-5)

The emotional dysfunction referred to in the above includes such maladies as *over*-emotionality, "inappropriate" emotional responses as well as a lack of emotional response. Chappell believes that this shows the absurdity of using "emotionality" as a necessary condition for personhood, for this would mean that autistics who are over-emotional would count as persons, but autistics who are "cold" and "withdrawn" would not (Chappell, 2011, p. 5). Using the views that individuals hold regarding self/personhood, Chappell attempts to demonstrate why it would not make sense to equate persons to certain cognitive qualities such as rationality or memory. Hume, for instance, would probably not count as a person since he is well known for his view that "...when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other,....I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception,....When my perceptions are removed for any time, as by sound sleep, so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist" (1739, section 1.6.3). It is perhaps on the basis of views such as the one above by Hume that critics of the capacity based approach continue to ask mind puzzling questions. Such questions as whether or not one is still a person while asleep or under general anaesthetic. Responding to this

question O'Mathuna, D (1996), who is one of the critics of the view in question points out that the functionalist perspective (or capacity-based approach) actually leads to a confusing notion of personhood. This is especially so for those who are asleep or under anaesthesia or unconscious, new-borns, and some people suffering severe forms of brain injury or dementia. Such individuals who are clearly persons could be classified as non-persons in their current and perhaps temporary state.

3.4 The Inherent/Transcendental approach to personhood

The transcendental or inherent approach to personhood regards being human as the same as being a person in the sense that being-in-itself is the only measure. This approach to personhood is based on the contention that a human being is a substance; a distinct unity of essence that exists ontologically prior to any of its parts (Sullivan, 2003, p. 19). This view of personhood can be traced back to some of the earliest Christian philosophers. Thomas Aquinas, for instance held that existence as such makes something an individual, and this alone allows us to predicate essential qualities or properties to it (Meyer, 2006, p. 209). Applying Aquinas's epistemology to human beings, Meyer (2006) points out that we could say that ''person'' is not something added to being, but rather it is 'simply what being is when allowed to be at its fullest, freed from the constrictions of subintelligent matter' (2006, p. 209). Agreeing with this view, Clark (1992, p. 20) argues, "Consider how the connection between person and being is the basis for an affinity with all persons and all things. If a unique act of spiritual existence makes one a person in his or her own right, so it is with other persons". Meyer (2006, p. 211) further claims that ever since Aristotle counteracted Parmenides' rejection of the concept of change as a mere figment of imagination, philosophers have generally agreed that whenever a thing undergoes some kind of change. A fixed substance (substantial form or soul according to Aquinas) must sustain its new

accidental determination(s). This unchanging substance acts as the enduring centre and source of an entity's built-in potentiality. This, according to Meyer, makes it possible to account for several basic human experiences, such as memory, moral responsibility, promises, or the urge to carry projects forward to a chosen goal (2006, p. 211).

Proponents of the inherent or transcendental approach generally agree that personhood must be a fundamental presupposition, and not a reasoned conclusion. This intrinsic view of personhood, according to Hammer (2012), is both morally sensible and clinically relevant (that is, where bioethical issues arise) than other views of personhood. Moreover, the transcendental view of personhood is found in the beliefs of many religions, where it is held that people have a kind of distinctive inner essence or fundamental nature that is often thought to continue to exist beyond the human earthly life either through reincarnation or life-after-death. This view of personhood has a good following even in the philosophical and Bioethical front, where it has often been utilized in arguments against such socio-moral issues as abortion and in favour of the continued care for people with dementia and other ailments. For instance, Kitwood (1997) claims that personhood is sacred and unique and that every person has an ethical status and should be treated with deep respect (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8). He understands personhood to be transcendent, sacred and unique, and accords an ethical status to every person because, according to him, "they have an absolute value and so there is an obligation to treat each other with deep respect'' (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8). On this point, Davis (2004, p. 375), observes that "Kitwood's totalising premise is that a person with dementia remains *as* a person throughout their disabling experiences"; a view that is consistent with Post (2006, p. 231) who asserts that there is a "non-material soul that still exists intact underneath all the neurological losses of dementia". Post (2006) believes this truth should provide comfort to care-givers of patients with dementia and help to ensure that interaction

with the patient is maintained. It will therefore be helpful to make an overview of the both the philosophical and religious arguments that support the transcendental approach to personhood.

3.4.1 Transcendental personhood- the philosophical perspective

When stating the philosophical basis for transcendental personhood, Sullivan (2003) makes a contrast between what he calls *Ontological personalism* and *Empirical functionalism.* From his discussion, it is clear that by Empirical functionalism Sullivan (2003) is referring to the capacity-based theory of personhood discussed above, where 'human personhood may be defined by a set of functions or abilities that are present in actual, not potential form' (2003, p. 17). This, according to Sullivan, is a sharp disagreement with Ontological personalism, which states that all human beings are human persons and that the intrinsic quality of personhood begins at conception and is present throughout life. Emphasizing this point Sullivan writes, "...individuals are not potential persons or "becoming" persons; they are persons by their very nature. There is no such thing as a potential person or a human non-person," (2003, p. 19).

Sullivan's characterization of transcendental personhood is in line with O'Mathuna (1996), who claims that the intrinsic view of personhood was traditionally held by Christians, who maintained that all human beings are also human persons. Thus at the moment of conception, a new and unique individual comes into being and that the embryo only needs protection and nourishment to become an adult person. On this point Lee & George (2007, p. 7) also write: 'since we are not consciousness inhabiting bodies but are physical organisms possessing from the beginning a human soul (i.e., rational nature) . . . it follows that we came to be when these physical organisms came to be. This is determined by the science of embryology to occure at

the point of conception. Pasnau (2003, p. 524) goes on to assert that the soul is 'that which is responsible for all the capacities that distinguish us as human beings, including our nutritive, sensory, and rational powers'. A mind must be present for an embryo or fetus to be truly human, since 'the soul requires a body that actually has the relevant organs' (2003, p. 525). According to O'Mathuna (1996), these developmental changes continue into adulthood hence human embryos, foetuses, children or adults are not human beings becoming persons; they are persons developing in their ability to express their inherent capacities. Similarly, Palazzani (1996, pp. 7-14), agrees with both Sullivan (2003) and O'Mathuna (1996), arguing that "the absence of certain characteristics or facets of behaviour (as is inevitably the case with the initial prenatal life) is not equivalent to the absence of the person: one 'is' a person, one does not just 'behave' as a person."

The above view is often easily contrasted with reductionist views (such as the cognitive/capacity-based theories) that claims that the human organism is no more than the summation of its functions or chemical parts. Thus the transcendental approach to personhood concludes that all humans should be treated as persons and therefore, regardless of the possible benefits, some things should never be done to humans (Sullivan, 2003). For instance, proponents of this view argue that abortion should not be allowed at any stage, for it takes the life of an innocent human person. Further, research must not intentionally hurt any humans, including embryos. All people are to be taken care of and treat with dignity notwithstanding they level of development or growth, (2003, p. 19). Agreeing with is view, Clark (1992, p. 20) points out, "If persons are made persons by human existence they never lose their value" whereas such value will cease to exist if personhood becomes the kind of thing that is gained or lost.

The specific views of certain proponents of the capacity based approach has been brought under scrutiny by transcendentalist in an attempt to show them to be untenable. For instance, Tooley's claim that what makes an individual a person 'is the property of being an enduring subject of non-momentary interests' (1983, p. 303), and Walters' assertion that the embryo is not a person because it only has the potential to be self-conscious (1997, p. 66) have been criticized by Banner who argues that:

> If we do have an obligation to future generations in spite of their lacking present capacities including sentience, it is difficult to understand how the early foetus' lack of sentience should disqualify it from moral regard. It has a potential for sentience and for rationality in a much more straightforward sense than do non-existent future generations: if allowed to go to term a viable foetus will possess all those capacities we associate with fully developed human beings. (Banner, 1999, p. 110)

Thus most proponents of this view of personhood do not agree with the position that any one of the capacities or functionalities of the human person constitute personhood. This can be further illustrated by making reference to Meyer's (2006) argument that while it is possible to make a distinction between the person and her nature, "there is no one definable property, quality, or attribute that is exclusively applicable to personhood as such". He points out that personhood is irreducible to human nature and the natural qualities pertaining to it, a view that is also supported by Sullivan (2003), claiming that even if a person lacks memories that relates her to her childhood and cannot give date to her birth because of disease or injury, she still has a continuing self that is identical to her earlier self. Lossky (1985, p. 120), is also in agreement with Sullivan and Meyer's view above, arguing that personhood "cannot be a question of ''something'' distinct from ''another nature'' but of someone who is distinct from his own nature, of someone who goes beyond his nature while still containing it".

Furthermore, Meyer (2006) argues that it is reasonable to conclude that wherever you have a human body, a rational soul that actively forms the body and potentially enables the person to think is present. He based his argument on the alleged functions of the rational soul which, according to some proponents of this view such as Haldane and Lee (2003) and Pasnau (2003), is twofold. The first is to be an integral part of the human organism that organizes the body, and the second is to bear the act-of-being which is capable of rational activity. This means that, consistent with this argument, an embryo is already a person even at its pre-implantation stage, because the rational soul is already present at that stage. Advancing further the argument that personhood begins at pre-implantation or conception stage and that there is continuity of personhood at every stage of human existence, Sullivan (2003, pp. 20-21) writes:

> Using common sense, there is no *prima facie* (at first impression, or self-evident) reason to assume that a baby changes its essential nature by virtue of geography (namely, in the womb or out of it). And there is no *prima facie* reason not to extend such humanity further back in time. In fact, the continuity argument argues for the personhood of the foetus all the way back to the moment that it became a *substance*, i.e., the moment of conception.

Thus the arguments by proponents of the capacity-based approach to personhood that a human person is defined by a list of functional traits that exclude a newborn baby by definition hence effectively justifying abortion and infanticide are effectively countered. Proponents of transcendental personhood argue that human beings have certain inherent capacities, which may currently not be fully realized by arguing that "It does not make sense to say that a person comes into existence when human function arises, but it does make sense to say that a fully human person is an entity who has the natural inherent capacity to give rise

to human functions" (Beckwith, 1993, p. 109). Sullivan (2003) underscores this point by claiming that if we remove an arm or a leg from John Doe, he does not only remain a person, but the *same* person. That is, no matter how much of his parts we amputate or remove including many of his internal organs, as long as he is still alive, John Doe remains the same persons, because his substance will never change. Sullivan goes further to say even if one decides to add new parts to say, person B by transplanting organs from person A, nevertheless person B will never become person A. This is because a person's substance is not defined by his component parts. As long as an individual has continuity from one time to the next, he will always remain the same person or substance. Thus person B is the same person as he was one week ago, one year ago, or ten years ago regardless of whatever changes he might have gone through, (Sullivan, 2003, p. 20). Perhaps the essence of the transcendental approach to personhood can be best concluded in the words of Meyer (2006, p. 219):

> A creature derived from two members of the human race is a member of the human species, and one could argue that they should have all the rights and privileges guaranteed to any member of the human race, even though the embryo is incapable of demanding others respect such entitlements. All human beings are capable of becoming moral subjects, even though the embryo is not able to think, reflect, or communicate at the present time. As one author writes, human embryos 'do not develop into humans, but as humans'.

Thus according to this approach to personhood, human beings are persons by their very nature, and whatever is born of human beings is intrinsically human, no matter how un-human it may appear to be. It should be taken for granted, or so they seem to argue, that the newborn will realize its inherent capacity in the future, and so will the reversibly comatose and temporarily unconscious (Sullivan, 2003, p 22). Even if they fail to realise these

capacities, they remain persons because, as Sullivan (2003) and many others points out, human beings are greater than the sum of their parts.

3.4.2 Transcendental personhood-the Religious perspective

O'Mathuna, (1996) is of the view that the concept of the image of God provides not only an understanding of what it means to be a person, but also a possible solution to many of the moral dilemmas faced by medical practice. Sullivan (2003), shares the same view, explaining that the Christian worldview including its view of human beings made in God's own image, which, according to him, is the highest achievement of God's creative impulse gives us worth, dignity, and hope. He goes on to point out that the idea of the image of God simply describes man's resemblance of God hence his (man's) high and intrinsic value or nature. This claim is mostly derived from Genesis. 1:26 which states that "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" as well as Genesis. 5:1: "In the day when God created man, He made him in the likeness of God." According to this view, what makes humans unique and distinct from other beings especially plants and animals is the fact that being created in the image of God brings with it a number of privileges including rational, relational, moral and spiritual capacities at which they function. However, Sullivan is quick to point out that humans are not images of God *because* they have these capacities. "All humans *are* images of God and because of this, these types of activities are part of what it means to be human" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 13). This point by Sullivan was necessary, for without it the transcendental view of personhood would face the same objections that the capacity-based approach faces in that human capacities would be central to being a human person.

Further, O'Mathuna (1996) adds that being an image of God also brings with it certain responsibilities where we are supposed to represent God through our actions and relations

with others, for this according to him, is what it means to be created in the image of God in contra-distinction from being created according to his likeness. However, the focus is not on *who is* an image of God, cautions O'Mathuna, but on how we can live as *true* images of God. This is because it is clear from the bible, according to the proponents of this view, that all human beings are made in the image of God regardless of whether they are able to faithfully represent this image or not. All human beings are made in the image of God even before or after displaying any of the responsibilities and human attributes associated with being made in the image of God. Sullivan (2003, p. 16) supports this view by asserting that the biblical figure Jeremiah describes God's creation and personal connection with him as an unborn child (1:5): "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations." Sullivan further observes that while some scholars have criticized this understanding by saying that the quoted text above only refers to God's foreknowledge of Jeremiah's pre-birth fate as a prophet, "the word "formed" used in the text, from the Hebrew *yatsar*, has the primary meaning of "fashioning," as with a potter and his clay, which implies an intimate level of involvement" (2003: 16). It therefore follows, according to the proponents of this view, that the Bible affirms the great value that God places on the human person whom he even made in his own image.The Bible further ascribes personhood to every human being including the unborn child, whom God forms in the womb in an intimate and personal way.

Moreover, it is also argued by some proponents of this view such as O'Mathuna that to the extent that we carry out good deeds that show compassion, love, peace and so on, we image God faithfully to the world. Heschel (1955, p. 290) also supports and underscores this view when he wrote, "No image of the Supreme may be fashioned, save one: our own life as an image of His will. Man, formed in His likeness, was made to imitate His ways of mercy. He

has delegated to man the power to act in His stead. We represent Him in relieving affliction, in granting joy. Striving for integrity, helping our fellow men". It can be argued that Heschel (1955) and O'Mathuna's (1996) interpretation of what being created in the image of God means is not very consistent with the views of some of the early Church Fathers who rendered their interpretations on the same concept. Thus besides John Calvin who held the view that God's image is actually the human soul (Calvin, 1581), Irenaeus, according to Ware (2002), made a distinction between "image," which he believed had to do with man's reason and freedom of choice, and "likeness," which he thought referred to man's holiness and relationship with his creator. Further, Augustine was of the opinion that God's image refers to qualities such as memory, intellect, and will, and other capacities that are considered to be part of the nature of the personal of God (Augustine, 396). Furthermore, Thomas Aquinas thought that the image of God has to do with man's intellectual capacities given him by God (Aquinas, 1274). Once again it is probably on the basis of these interpretations of God's image by the church fathers that Sullivan (2003) observed that "if the image of God determines personhood, then there is a great danger in attempts to arrive at conclusions about this important concept from a list of characteristics. This may open up a real temptation to declare some human beings as "non-persons" when they cannot fulfil all the elements of such a list" (2003, p. 14).

Thus contrary to some Christian theologians such as Rakestraw (1992) who after equating God's image to rationality went on to claim that an individual in a persistent vegetative state has lost the ability to be an "imager of God," and should be declared dead, Sullivan (2003, p. 14) maintains that "the image of God in man must surely be an intrinsic feature, not separable from his humanness. Though the image may be tarnished by sin, it is never lost, and it may be renewed through Christ." This view by Sullivan is in agreement with O'Mathuna's

argument that we should keep in mind how God looks upon us when we think about the unborn and the severely brain injured, for God does not measure our worth based on our functional abilities.

3.4.3 Objections and challenges for the Transcendental approach to personhood

Proponents of the transcendental view of personhood argued that cognitive functionalities such as rationality, spirituality, morality, and relationality are activities or components of the human soul, which is the image of God, and that the said functionalities do not in themselves define personhood. It however remains unclear how one could identify the presence of the human soul apart from its said functionalities. It seems the only tools at our disposal by which we can judge the presence or absence of the soul are its functionalities. Thus as long as personhood and human cognitive functionalities are both associated with the human soul as per the argument of the transcendental approach, it is implied that personhood is identical or reducible to the noticeable functions of the soul. Therefore, it will still make sense to posit that the (inherent) person is no longer alive in the case of dementia or comatose where cognitive abilities are non-existent. Associating cognitive capabilities to the human soul exposes transcendental approach to personhood to the same objections to the capacity based approach. Offering what may be said to be a rebuttal of the above argument, O'Mathuna (2003) first concurs that "attempts to determine the characteristics necessary to be an image of God have more in common with secular, capacity or functionalist thinking". However, he denies that such functionalist analysis of personhood are consistent with the biblical view of humanity. According to O'Mathuna (2003), there is nowhere in the Bible where we are given a concise definition of what it means to say that humans are made in the image and likeness of God. This is because, as O'Mathuna (2003) points out, the image of God passages were not written to demonstration which humans are images and which are not. Nor were they

written to illustrate to us how to work out who succeeds as an image of God. They merely point out that humans *are* images of God because God created us as such (O'Mathuna 2003). Hence we have no basis, according to the proponents of this view, for declaring some human beings as persons and others as non-persons.

However, such responses by the proponents of the approach may be viewed as insufficient in addressing the critics' objections such as the one above. This is particularly the case if we consider another typical argument by the proponents of this view, best captured in the words of O'Mathuna (1996, p. 16):

> Christians are to be God's ambassadors to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20). Our focus should be on the type of character we exemplify when we act. Only Christ is the true image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15). Everyone else is a "shattered image." But by establishing a relationship with Christ, and living by the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the example of Christ, we can have the character of God formed in us (Colossians 3:9-10). Part of this renewal is the denial that there are distinctions between different types of humans (v. 11). Thus we can become truer images of God.

This effectively means that being images of God is something human beings can succeed at, improve upon or outright fail to achieve. It is evident from some Biblical teachings that ultimately, those who fail to display the characters of goodness and righteousness will face God's wrath in eternal damnation or punishment. This shows that in the creator's judgement, such human beings would have failed to live up to their essential nature as bearers of the image of God. They do not deserve to be treated as persons hence their rejection and

destruction. Further, if all human beings are made in the image of God, it follows that they would all effortlessly image God, that is, they would all represent God faithfully in all their actions since that is their intrinsic and essential nature.

Furthermore, from a pragmatic point of view, a belief in the inherent personhood of people does not automatically give guarantee that they are treated humanely and with respect. That is, some people who believe in inherent personhood may still practice abortion, euthanasia and fail to care for people with dementia. This might be because, metaphysical beliefs do not always dictate how people react morally when faced with a real life situation. Moreover, an empirical research carried out by Dunham & Cannon (2008) shows that some people believe that a person's essence or soul may be lost or may no longer be reachable, as reflected in the Dunham & Cannon (2008) study:

"But you have to remember, that body is not who the person is. The person is gone"

"There's no sense in asking her…. She's not there…" (Dunham and Cannon, 2008, p. 49)

This shows that while some of the care-givers believe in the existence of the human soul and probably in transcendental or inherent personhood, they do not think that as long as the physical/biological body is alive, the soul inhabits that body. This might even contribute towards helping carers to cope with dementia in that they find a reassurance that their loved one is "no longer there". Thus, contra proponents of the transcendental personhood, accepting that the person is "no longer there" in this way does not show lack of compassion and disregard for human life.

3.5 The Relational/ Social approach to Personhood

The current social or relational conception of personhood is formulated in opposition to the line of thought that it is the internal capacities of the mind such as rationality, free will or autonomy that provide the rational for a concept of truth and personhood. The social approach is also opposed to capacity based approach that the capacities above are necessary and sufficient criteria for personhood. The social conception of personhood has been formulated in different ways by different thinkers, and while these formulations or versions have a lot in common, they are not always in harmony with each other in all respects. As Gunnarsson (2008, p. 309) observes, some relational theories are ultimately versions of rationalism, anthropocentrism, or animalism. He goes further to point out that according to all these views of social personhood; the moral status of an individual depends on a relation between that individual and all humans who are moral agents. This means that the interpersonal or interconnection aspect of social personhood is one of the common features of the various versions of social personhood.

Like the other approaches to personhood already discussed, this approach has been referred to differently by different scholars often with the aim of signifying or emphasizing aspect(s) of the approach that the particular scholar believes to be more central to. As a result, while some scholars refer to it as the social approach to personhood, others conceive of it as the relational approach; and yet others prefer to name this approach communal or communitarian. The name used to describe this approach by different scholars notwithstanding, the characteristic features of this approach remains the same, viz. the tendency to emphasize interpersonal relations, social ties and the communal good or communal existence as the means through which personhood can be attained and understood. While the phrase "social approach to personhood" will be adopted for this discussion to denote this approach, the other phrases

may be used interchangeably with it from time to time to highlight certain aspects of this approach.

The social approach to personhood is clearly not a new thinking about human persons. There is evidence of such an approach in the works of early Greek philosophers such as Plato. Plato, like many other Western philosophers after him, thought that political reality is inseparable from morality, and by extension, from the natural connection that exists between the individual and the larger community or state. He argued that the state could demonstrate the greatest virtue of them all, namely justice, only to the degree that the individual could demonstrate the same virtue. Emphasizing this argument, Stumpf (1994) points out that there is a structural and natural as well as logical relation between individuals and the state. Some scholars may hastily reject this evidence on the grounds that Plato's discussion is concerned with a political structure or connection between the individual and the state, rather than a connection between the individual and the community. But that Plato's understanding of the state is not limited to the ruling elite, neither is it equivalent to modern day government. Rather, Plato's state extends to the whole society, social structure or what we may refer to as the community in modern usage. Stumpf (1994) further explains this point, by indicating that according to Plato, 'a state will reflect the kind of people the community has become'. Thus if we want to understand the nature of the individual person, we need to analyse the nature of the state. Plato makes this point when he argues that, 'We should begin by inquiring what justice means in a state. Then we can go on to look for its counterpart on a smaller scale in the individual' (Stumpf, 1994, p. 70). This may be Plato's answer to the question that is often asked as to which comes first between the individual and the society, and which of the two should be taken to be the result of the other. It appears that even though it is individuals who form the state and society, it is the state (community) that is the 'yardstick' for the

individuals' moral uprightness. The state, according to Plato, is man writ large. Moreover Stumpf points out that Plato believed that the state (or the community) is a natural institution because it grows naturally from, and reflects human nature.

In early modern Europe during the industrial period, some prominent philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and David Hume advocated for a social conception of personhood. This was against the backdrop of a society where ideas of individual freedoms and rights had taken centre stage and the norms of society were believed to be diminishing. The 17th-century philosopher John Locke, even though he is credited with founding liberalism as a distinct philosophical tradition, argued for the natural right to life, liberty and property for all men. He also argued for a communal, cordial living in the form of a social contract that is remarkably different from the social contract of Thomas Hobbes. Thomas Hobbes' theory of social contract alleges that the primitive man in response to a desire for security and self-preservation in an environment where life was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short,' decided to band together in society (Harrison-Barbet, 1990, p. 200). Locke rejected Hobbes' idea of the primitive man being brutal and concerned only about himself, arguing instead that people are not only closely connected to God's natural laws of reason that govern the whole of reality but also that as a result of this rational instinct, they are naturally social. Locke's social contract theory can also be likened, in some respect, to personhood theories by colonial and post-colonial African scholars such as Tempels (1959) and Mbiti's (1969). Such scholars advocate a social existence and adherence to the common good as the means for achieving authentic humanity. Their theories also advocate a humanity that is interdependent with nature, adding thereby a supernatural or spiritual outlook to their concept of personhood and reality. For instance, Mbiti (1969) discusses the individual in relation to the household, family, kinship and community at large. According to him, the individual simply does not

exist alone in African thinking. He exists corporately, that is through other people. These 'other people' refer to both past generations and present community. Tempels widens the scope of this corporate existence to include animals, plants and rocks. This therefore makes the individual not only to be part of the whole, but to naturally want to care for others and for the rest of creation. Locke expresses a more or less similar view when he wrote regarding all of mankind; '….sent into the world by his (God's) order, and about his business, they are all his property…and being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature…(Harrison-Barbet, 1990, p. 201). Moreover, unlike in Hobbes social theory where the social contract is made between individuals and rights are surrendered to a sovereign, the Locken account holds that individuals surrender their rights, which he identifies as life, liberty and property, to the community. Harrison-Barbet (1990) makes an important point regarding Locke's theory of social contract when he asserts that the theory was democratic in the sense that authority lies with the majority of the commonwealth or community. Only those natural rights which are necessary for the well-being of the community are surrendered, and, 'the welfare of the community is the supreme law' (Harrison-Barbet, 1990, p. 201).

Kitwood (1997), who is one of the proponents of the social approach to personhood, claims that on capacity-based account of personhood, autonomy and rationality become esteemed qualities, to the exclusion of feelings and emotions (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8). His position is opposed to the views of such rationalists as Kant, Locke and the recent cognitive theorists discussed above, who argue that it is reason and the internal capacities of the mind that enable rationalisation towards a concept of truth and authentic personhood. Kitwood bases his discussion on relationships, arguing for the primacy of interpersonal interaction. Here, Kitwood retains an idea of the uniqueness of persons grounded in a social constructivist notion of the discursive production of self (Davis, 2004, p. 376). Kitwood also understands

that the self requires nourishment through recognition and response from others. Unlike many other proponents of the social approach who tend to be discriminatory or selective in their recognition of personhood, Kitwood contends that personhood is a status that must be accorded to every human being, including those disabled by dementia and other ailments. In Davis's (2004, p. 376) view, Kitwood advances this perpetuity of self because he understands people as existing affectively in relational contexts. Since Kitwood's main aim was to provide an effective way of caring for people with dementia, emphasis on the relational aspects of personhood is important. This is because it is such social relations that prevent the intellectual impairments that sometimes result from the disease from becoming a disability (Davis, 2004). Kitwood urges all people, especially caregivers of people with dementia, to create an environment that provides for the expression and creation of self which otherwise would be imprisoned and excluded by dehumanising social forces. Thus Kitwood recognises that personhood can be weakened and even destroyed by some powerful sociological forces. On this point Davis (2004, p. 376) points out that according to Kitwood, it is the social dynamics that establish disability which corresponds to cultural conditions that perpetuate a wider disregard for personhood and a pervasive marginalisation of older age. Personhood is therefore "a standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of relationship and social being. It implies recognition, respect and trust" (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8).

One of the 20th century philosophers whose work advocated for the relational understanding of personhood is Martin Buber. Buber, who according to Scott (2010) articulates a complex and worthy philosophical anthropology, worked on a theory of existence where beings come across each other. He explained his viewpoint using the word pairs of *Ich-Du* and *Ich-Es* to break down the modes of essence or being, relations, and awareness through which a human being engages with other human beings, inanimate objects, and all reality in general. Buber

aimed to show that there is a radical difference between a person's attitude to other people and his attitude to things (non-persons). This led to his main proposition that existence by its very nature is twofold; firstly, the attitude of the "I" towards an "It" - towards an object that is separate in itself, which is either used or experienced. Secondly, the attitude of the "I" towards "Thou" - a relationship in which the other is not separated by discrete bounds (Buber 1970). According to Buber, the other person, the Thou, is shown to be a reality, which means that it is given to one another, but it is not bounded or restricted by either of the two: "Thou has no bounds" (Buber 1970, p. vi). Thus *Ich-Du* ("I-Thou" or "I-You") is an association that underscores the communal, holistic existence of two beings. It is a tangible or solid encounter, because these beings meet one another in their authentic existence, without any prior requirements or objectification of one another (Scott 2010). This means that, "in the reality of this meeting no reduction of the 'I' or of the 'Thou', to experiencing subject and experienced object, is possible. So long as I remain in relation with my Thou, I cannot experience it, but can only know it in the relation itself," Buber (1970, p. vii).

This form of relationship is so pure and genuine that even background or historical information, imagination and ideas about the two parties do not play a role in it. In an I–Thou encounter, infinity and universality are made actual (rather than being merely concepts), (Kramer & Gawlick 2003, p. 39). Hence, one of the major themes in Buber's work is that human life finds its meaningfulness in relationships (Scott, 2010). Buber further maintains that all of our interactions ultimately take us into a relationship with God who is the Eternal Thou. Thus, while the "It" of *I-It* refers to the world of experience and sensation, the word pair *I-Thou* describes the world of relations.

According to Buber, we enter into an "I-Thou" relationship with any other person merely by beginning to think positively about people in general. What is interesting about this

relationship and distinguishes it from most relational conceptions of personhood is Buber's position that the word pair "I-Thou" can refer to a relationship with what is ordinarily regarded as non-persons such as a tree, the sky, or the park bench as much as it can refer to the relationship between two individuals. That is, if we focus on the "I-Thou" relationship as a meeting of singularities, we can see that if we truly enter into relation with a tree or cat, for instance, we apprehend it not as a thing with certain attributes, presenting itself as a concept to be dissected, but as a singular being, one whole confronting another (Scott, 2010). This means that whether a being is a person or not does not depend on the nature of that being, but on the nature of the relationship one has with it. The essential character of "I-Thou" is the abandonment of the world of sensation, the melting of the between, so that the relationship with another "I" is foremost.

Thus according to social approach to personhood, a person is essentially a social being who has fundamental and vital relationships with others without which he cannot be perceived as a person. It denies the capacity-based view that a person should be regarded as an independent and autonomous being. It also denies the view that despite living in a community and having relationships with other people, a person cannot be defined or understood in terms of those relationships or the community he/she lives in. Instead, some versions of the social and relational approach such as the African communitarianism argue that the individual does not come before the community, for it is the community that gives the individual his being and personhood (Okolo, 2002, p. 213).

3.6 The Conceptions of personhood and Gender identity

As discussed in the previous chapter, most societies confer gender identities based on certain generally recognizable sexual attributes. This is despite the fact that some members of such communities do not identify with the gender they have been assigned, despite possessing the

generally recognizable sexual attributes of the gender. This raises the question as to whether the individual caught up in this confused assignation of gender has some kind of identity crisis. In the western world in particular, the alleged mismatch between one's sex and gender, as well as cases of gender dysphoria (a significant discontent with assigned gender or sex at birth), has led to sex reassignments through surgery. Other reactions to gender dysphoria include, third gender, gender variant, and transgender all of which raises important issues for the different conceptions for personhood.

3.6.1 The Capacity based approach and Gender Identity

According to the capacity based approach, a person is defined or recognised as such based on his or her possession of cognitive abilities such as rationality, memory or will. Whether or not one is adjudged to possess such cognitive abilities is usually determined by the community which thereby determines who in the community may be regarded as persons. Also, since in many traditional societies and scholarship, men were considered to be more rational than women who were thought of as rather emotional, (see Mikkola, 2012), it meant (or still means) men were attributed higher personhood status than women. Furthermore, given that human beings display these cognitive capacities in different degrees and even at different times, the capacity based approach allows for different degrees of personhood. That is, some men and women, as well as transgendered individuals, may be considered to be more or less of persons than others at different times and circumstances depending on their perceived cognitive abilities. The tendency to emphasize the cognitive aspect of the human being as a basis for defining personhood by the approach in question led to a private, individualistic conception of personhood in opposition to a social and collective understanding. For instance Tooley (1972, p. 82), who is one of the leading proponents of this view had argued; "an organism possesses a serious right to life only if it possesses the concept of a self as a

continuing subject of experiences and other mental states, and believes that it is itself such an entity". This view of personhood, according to McMahan (2005), has given rise to the concept of "moral individualism," which is the view that "how an individual may be treated is determined, not by considering his group memberships, but by considering his own particular characteristics", (Rachels, 1990, p. 173). Thus for instance, in America, as is in many Western societies, where the capacity based conception of human persons is most popular, proponents of fetal research had argued that the courts should allow such researches to be carried out based on consideration of its collective social benefits. Their opponents however, insist that the value of individual life must outweigh any promise of social gain (Nelkin, 1983). On this point Nelkin (1983, p. 105), writes, "Our very concern about personhood reflects the deeply rooted belief that a person is an individual psyche that exists in contrast to, indeed in struggle against, the demands of public life". Naturally, the capacity based theories allow for an individualistic understanding of gender where gender identity is a personal and private affair explained in terms of how one thinks of one's own gender: that is, whether one thinks of oneself as a man (masculine) or as a woman (feminine). Thus in a sense, it is individuals who "do" gender, despite that it is done in the presence of other people (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Furthermore, advocacy for the individuality of personhood through personal cognitive capacities such as free will and rationality affords people the freedom to move freely from one gender to another. This is to say that they could abandon their socially ascribed gender and identify with the one they feel more comfortable belonging to. This may explain why many Western societies as well as Western scholars of gender are more liberal towards homosexuality whereas such is not the case in African (and Asian) part of the world. This may also explain why many Western societies and scholars are more likely to advocate the recognition of a third gender in addition to the traditional male and female genders. From the above, one can surmise that the capacity based approach is more

accommodating of gender dysphoria and is therefore more likely to accord personhood status to people of all genders.

3.6.2 The Intrinsic/ transcendental approach and Gender Identity

The transcendental or inherent approach to personhood regards being human as the same as being a person, thus making being-in-itself the only measure of personhood. This is because all human beings, regardless of gender, have a kind of distinctive inner essence or fundamental nature that continues to exist even beyond the human earthly life either through reincarnation or life-after-death. This approach, especially its more religious adherents, claims that personhood is sacred and unique and that every person had an ethical status and should therefore be treated with deep respect.

Some of the issues that may arise from this view of personhood, are whether a homosexual identity is intimately related to the homosexual's true identity as a human being. In other words, when using the term homosexual, is one accurately defining a person's self, his/her inner core, and the nature of his/her being? It would seem that proponents of the transcendental approach would answer this and other similar questions in the affirmative. This is because human personhood is gendered and since gender is arguably one of the central identity categories of people's lives (West & Zimmerman, 1987), it is very difficult to imagine or talk of a genderless person. Thus, consistent with the transcendental approach, gender identity (whether heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual) is an inherent part of the nature of human beings. Whereas the above argument should legitimize all genders and make them acceptable to the proponents of the transcendental view of personhood, it is not always the case. Indeed, proponents of religious versions of the transcendental view of personhood, including the adherents of Christianity, African traditional religions and Islam, are some of the most resistant groups to homosexuality in the world. The religious constituency of the

transcendental approach, contrary to an argument that all genders are part of human nature argue that some sexual orientations such as homosexuality are unnatural because they are not consistent with God's order of creation. The order of creation referred to here consists in the idea that God created the male and female of every creature and charged them to procreate and multiply.

There are several challenges to this version of transcendental personhood especially as it relates to gender identity. First, proponents of this view would have to decide whether there is a difference between gender and sexual identity. Accepting such a difference will mean that gender is an inherent aspect of human nature and will entail that their disparaging of non-heterosexual identity is against the order of nature. Denying such a difference will require that they explain why other genders persist despite centuries of being frowned upon by society and various cruel attempts to rid society of those who claim to be so gendered. Secondly, that even if non-heterosexual identities are not inherent aspects of human nature, those who present such identies are, according to the Christian version, made in the image of God and should therefore qualify as persons. Given the arguments by those who advocate for the essentialist view of personhood, as well as scientific findings which suggest that no sexual orientation is a conscious choice (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991), it would be difficult to make a case for excluding non-heterosexual identities from personhood. But even if one were to make the argument that non-heterosexual identities are against the course of nature, the fact that some individuals who are born with both male and female sexual organs shows that there can be mistakes in nature and such mistakes should not be blamed on individuals. Accepting the essentialists view as articulated earlier will lead to one of the several possibilities:

a. God did not create all human beings to be heterosexuals, he created homosexuals and bisexuals as well. This makes these sexual identities natural and not learned or chosen.
b. God did not create non-heterosexuals since his creations are perfect and good. This view still has to say how non-heterosexual genders came about and how their situation affects ther personhood status.
c. A mistake occurred in God's creation of human beings of which the result was the coming into being of the unintended forms of gender identities. This view raises further questions including whether the victims of this error are accorded full and equal personhood status as those who are heterosexuals.
d. Homosexuality and bisexuality, at least from the Christian perspective, came about as the result of the fall of man through which sin entered the world. Apart from its obvious unfairness, this view still raises the question whether people of non-heterosexsual orientations deserve personhood status.

Due to their transcendental view of personhood, it may seem that the proponents of this view will respond to the last two options by affirming that indeed non-heterorosexuals are still full persons because they are created in the image of God despite what happened later due to sin. However, such a response is not consistent with the rejection and discrimination that non-heterosexuals regularly suffer as a result of the attitude of adherents of the Christian, Islamic and other religions. Thus while transcendental view of personhood seems to advocate equal personhood status for all individuals, irrespective of their gender identity, such advocacy remains hollow in the face of discriminatory rhetorics of the religious traditions that champion transcendental personhood.

3.6.3 The Social/ relational approach and Gender Identity

This approach to personhood stresses that "who one is and who one can be are defined in the context of authentic relationships" (Malloy and Hadjistavropoulos, 2004, p. 152), and that personhood is a standing or status that is bestowed upon one human being, by others, in the context of relationship and social being (Kitwood, 1997, p. 8). Thus, according to this view personhood implies recognition, respect and trust" (Kitwood, 1997), which are rooted in relationships with others and therefore requires the presence of another human being" (Penrod et al., 2007, p. 64). Jenkins and Price (1996, p. 88) hold a similar position, asserting that personhood is "a dynamic concept, refined and articulated through constructs and subsequent social intercourse", a view that also finds support in Moody's (2003) claim that personhood is a status accorded to one human being by another.

With regard to gender identity, it may be argued that there is a connection between the social approach to personhood and social constructionism, a theory that views sexual oreintation "as only having a meaning which is given to it by the society and culture it is a part of" (Houston, 2007). This is contrary to the essentialists' position which assumes that no sexual orientation, whether same-gender, bisexual, or heterosexual, is a conscious choice (Gonsiorek & Weinrich, 1991; Herdt, 1990). The essentalists see sexual orientation as a "fixed, independent biological mechanism that steers individual desire or behavior either toward men or toward women irrespective of circumstances and experience" (De Cecco & Elia, 1993, p. 11). The social constructionists on the other hand claim that one's sexual orientation is chosen or constructed. Given that the human person, who is a product of the society, is always gendered, the interpretation is that just like personhood; sexual orientation should not only be understood in social/cultural contexts but also as its product. Thus in theorizing sexual orientation and personhood, social constructionism seems to create an inseparable link between the person, his/her gender identity, and the society. The fact that social personhood is conferred on individuals by the community suggests that not all human beings are persons

in that personhood. Indeed some theories of social personhood actually hold that personhood is a status accorded to a human being by others based on their social achievements, especially social achievements that contribute to the common good. Thus, if non-heterosexual identities are seen by the community as a form of socially deviant behavior, such a community cannot be favourably disposed o according non-heterosexua individuals with personhood status. This raises the question as to whether the failure of non-heterosexuals to live up to the expectations and common values of the society is entirely their fault or whether society itself should share part of the blame. In other words, is it entirely up to the individual to conform to social expectations and thereby qualify for personhood, or can the community also be blame for the failings of such individuals?

3.7 Conclusion

The above juxtaposition of the different conceptions of personhood with gender and gender identity issues discussed in the previous chapter suggested a correlation between the two. The juxtaposition revealed that gender identity issues could be reducible to issues of personhood. This was because to exist as a person, at least for most people, was to exist as a male or female (Barron, 2013). It would be remembered that while gender was often understood to refer to socially defined behaviour considered to be suitable for the members of each sex, that is, male and female (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 125), gender identity has been defined as a person's private sense, and subjective experience, of their own gender (Popenoe, Cunningham, & Boult, 1998). In other words, gender identity was viewed as the self-image that one had about one's own gender as masculine, feminine, or otherwise. Thus gender identity was usually seen as one's private sense of being a man or a woman, based on how he or she viewed himself as accepted by members of the community into a predefined sexual category, viz. male or female. This placed gender identity at the centre of one's personhood,

self-identity, and self-image. However, as already observed in chapter one, there appeared to be inconsistency between the definitions of these two closely related concepts, namely; gender and gender identity. That is, one would expect that if gender was a socially defined behaviour allocated to each sex, then gender identity should also be socially acquired, as opposed to being a private and subjective experience of an individual. The fact that it was not, was indicative of one of the most fiercely debated issue of all time among scholars, scientists, and the lay public regarding the causes of homosexuality. In that debate, the view on the one hand was that homosexuality as a form of gender identity was a construct that was both ahistorical and acultural, in that one was born a homosexual (Houston, 2007). There was on the other hand the view that people take an active part in constructing their sexuality (Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor, 1994). According to the latter view; the fact that people make a conscious and intentional choice of sexual partners (Baumrind, 1995), makes their sexuality to be either chosen, or socially constructed, or both.

However, to the extent that personhood was always gendered, in that it was impossible to think of a genderless person, it might be argued that debates on gender identity could actually lead to debates on personhood. It should be acknowledged however, that while it might be the case that to be a person was to be gendered, the opposite did not follow. That is, it did not follow that to be gendered was to be a person. Nevertheless, just as scholars on issues of gender and gender identity were concerned about whether homosexuality was chosen, socially constructed or inborn (i.e. one was born a homosexual), scholars in the area of personhood were equally divided on a similar issue, namely; whether personhood was an inherent nature of human beings, or was caused; a product of social factors, among other views. This meant, as Barron (2013) suggested, another way to approach the concept of personhood was by considering how the somewhat similar questions of sex, gender and gender identity were treated. In many cultures, one was not identified as male or female on

the basis of physical or biological characteristics alone. Similarly, one might not be recognized as a person (at least according to some versions of the social/relational and capacity-based conceptions of personhood), on the basis of physical existence or human form alone. The conclusion from here was that physical characteristics plays a limited role in both gender and personhood ascriptions. Therefore, if it was the case that gender identity was central to the identity and nature of human persons; it made gender identity issues personhood issues. In view of this, it would appear that some identity questions that attempted to establish if there were connections between an individual's gender identity and his/her personhood remained relevant. These questions included whether a homosexual identity (or any other gender identity) was pertinent to a person's true identity as a human being. Again, when using the term homosexual (or heterosexual), was one precisely defining a person's being, his inner core, and the nature of his person or self? If answers to these and similar questions were affirmative, it would imply that homosexuality (like other gender identities) was natural, and essential to the humanity of an individual. However, this conclusion may be viewed as misleading in that it assumes that all sexual orientations are genuine forms of gender identity; an issue that remains debatable. That is, while some opponents of homosexuality may regard heterosexuality as natural and essential to a person's inner being, or his inner self, they may not think the same of homosexuality. The next chapter discusses some of the metaphysical conceptions of personhood in African traditional thought especially those that originate from Sub-Saharan Africa such as the Force thesis often associated with Placid Tempels; the shadow thesis associated with Alexis Kagame, as well as some West African views on this concept.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPLORING AFRICAN VIEWS ON PERSONHOOD: THE METAPHYSICAL DIMENSION

4.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter (and the next one) is to lay the foundation for chapters seven and eight, which aim to relate gender identity to the different African conceptions of personhood. In doing so, the main purpose is to make a determination on the personhood status of the non-heterosexuals. One way of doing this is through a comparative analysis of both the theories of gender and gender identity discussed in chapter one, and the different African conceptions of personhood discussed in this chapter and the next one. This chapter explores metaphysical personhood in African traditional thought especially those that originate from Sub-Saharan Africa. The chapter begins with what is commonly known as the force thesis often associated with Placid Tempels and goes on to discuss the shadow thesis associated Alexis Kagame, as well as some West African views on personhood as presented by scholars such Gyekye, (1987, 2002); Wiredu, (1987); Gbadegesin (2002); Kaphagawani (2004) and Imafidon (2012), among others. In addition to stating the main arguments, the challenges and pitfalls of each of the views will be evaluated.

4.1 Personhood in African Thought

In his critique of Menkiti's account of personhood Matolino (2011) observes that Menkiti's view is that the African conception of personhood is decidedly communitarian. Menkiti's view is in direct contrast with the view of Malawian philosopher, Kaphagawani (2004), who "identified what he claims to be three distinct theses which seek to articulate the African view of persons" (Matolino 2011, p. 23). The view that the communitarian view is not the only

African conception of personhood in existence but that Africans subscribe to other non-communitarian views has been supported by other scholars. For instance, in making reference to what they describe as 'the relational, ascriptive, communalistic, inert self, attributed to pre-modern societies,' Comaroff & Comaroff (2001, p. 267) claim that, ".... African notions of personhood are infinitely more complicated than this tired theoretical antinomy allows". In fact Comaroff, & Comaroff (2001) do not think it is appropriate to talk of African personhood at all, adding that "... we do not seek to arrive at a generic account of '*the* African conception of personhood'. There is no such thing" (p. 268). Matolino is of the opinion that the three views of personhood by identified by Kaphagawani have irreconcilable differences. Each o these views have not only been defended to the exclusion of the others but "claims to represent the authentic African view of a person". Kaphagawani (2004) identifies them as:

The 'Force' thesis - mostly associated with Placide Tempels

The 'communitarian' thesis - mostly associated with John Mbiti and

The 'Shadow' - thesis propounded by the Rwandese thinker Alexis Kagame.

The main arguments put forward in support of these views are explored below, and later related to the different ideas/issues of gender and gender identity.

Over the years, many scholars in the area of African philosophy have produced works on the concept of a person. These scholars, whose work clearly has some similarities and differences, include but is not limited to Rattray (1916); Danquah (1944); Parrinder (1951); Busia (1954), Tempels (1959); Abraham (1962); Mbiti (1969); Wiredu (1987); Kagame (1989), Gyekye (1995); and Gbadegesin (1998). The question that this chapter will attempt to answer is; given the diversity of African cultures, is it possible to formulate what may be reasonably accepted as an African conception of personhood? It should be noted that the aforementioned authors have limited their discourse on the concept of person to sub-Saharan

Africa and as such an answer to the above question will also be limited to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Following Kaphagawani's (2004) survey of African conceptions of personhood, this chapter discusses the different approaches to personhood according to the geographical regions of Sub-Saharan Africa. Thus the regions of focus are Southern Africa, East Africa and West Africa. The similarities and differences in views on personhood within particular regions are discussed, and further compared with those from other regions. It is hoped that at the end of the discussion (after most of the problems, criticism and counter arguments against different claims are explored) a unified view of personhood in Africa which brings together compatible features of these different conceptions will emerge.

4.2 Southern African Conceptions of Person

4.2.1 Placide Tempels' Bantu Ontology and concept of personhood (The Force Thesis)

The ''Force Thesis'' is a phrase first used by Kaphagawani (2004) to refer to a particular conception of reality and personhood propounded by Placide Tempels (1959). According to Kaphagawani (2004, p. 335) Tempels "strongly believed in a radical conceptual difference between Africans and non-Africans on the essential nature of beings and entities in general, and human beings in particular". Placide Tempels had lived 12 years among the Luba Katanga people of Belgian Congo, sharing their language and cultural background when he eventually decided to publish his experience (Tempels, 1959, p. 41; Apter, 1992, p. 91). He made an attempt to outline what he considered to be the African view of reality and human beings in relation to the whole of reality (cosmos), as well as what a person is in the African thought. According to Deacon (2002), Tempels' Bantu philosophy should be seen as an organized depiction of his understanding of the indigenous Congolese people which he achieved through his close relationship with them. However, it is clear that Tempels did not

intend for his work to be a disclosure of the thought system fundamental only to the traditional indigenous people of Congo, but an accurate representation of world-view of all the African people (See for example Tempels 1959, p. 21). That is, even though Tempels carried out his researches only among the Baluba and Bemba of Lake Mweru, out of this he established a thought-system which he confidently branded "Bantu". P'bitek (1975, p. 66) observes that although Tempels did not test his thesis against the beliefs of the Zulus, Ganda, Nyoro and the numerous other Bantu peoples, not to mention the other African peoples, he enjoins us to accept this system, not only as Bantu, but African. In agreement with Okot P'bitek critique of Tempels' generalisations, Ajode (1964, p. 5) wrote; "I, however, support him (P'bitek) wholeheartedly where he demands to know the scientific method whereby Fr. Tempels arrived at the conclusion that the beliefs of the Bamba and Baluba tribesmen, whom he studied, are characteristic of Bantu thought-systems generally or do constitute "Bantu philosophy"." Ajode (1964, p. 5) is of the view that what Tempels must have been trying to demonstrate instead is a link between two spatio-temporal phenomena; i .e. the beliefs of the Bamba and Baluba tribesmen on the one hand and the Bantu group on the other. Notwithstanding the above objections to Tempels' thesis, Ogot (1961), not only accepts Tempels' Bantu Ontology, but also agrees with another Tempels' supporter, Janheinz Jahn (1961), that this Bantu conception of reality and personhood applies to all African peoples. Ogot also urges very strongly that African Philosophy must be taken seriously, if we are to avoid cultural vacuums in Africa.

Tempels claimed that the Bantu people perceive beings, including human persons, as nothing more than vital forces. He points out that according to African thinking, the universe is ultimately controlled by God who possesses force in himself and therefore gives force to everything he has created. Making reference to the expressions the Luba people use to refer to hunger, when greeting, and when showing sympathy, Tempels argues that all Bantu

languages comprise of words and phrases denoting a force. This, according to him, shows that God used force to create everything that exists, and he (God) went further to give force to everything. Kaphagawani (2004, p. 335) explains how Tempels used the Luba and Chichewa languages to demonstrate his contention that words in Bantu languages denote force and that this African view of reality can be easily contrasted with the Western view of reality:

> Tempels goes on to claim that those words or phrases, kufwa and kufwididila in Luba, and kufa and kufadi in Chichewa, for instance, indicating different degrees of loss of vital force ‘‘the superlative of which signifies total paralysis of the power to live,’’ should not be translated in English as ‘‘to die’’ and ‘‘to die entirely’’ precisely because, for Tempels, Westerners ‘‘hold a static conception of ‘being’, [and Africans] a dynamic [one]’’. For Tempels, specifically what is wrong with such translations is that they fail to capture what he regards as the processual connotation of the Luba words which refer to points in a processual continuum. Indeed, according to Tempels, for a Bantu, ‘‘Force’ in his thought is a necessary element in ‘being’, and the concept ‘force’ is inseparable from the definition of ‘being’...without the element of ‘force’, ‘being’ cannot be conceived’’.

Kaphagawani (2004) goes on to observe that by claiming that force is an essential property of being, Tempels was not implying that ‘‘force’’ is only a necessary attribute of ‘‘being,’’ and not its sufficient condition. Indeed ‘‘being’’ does not have any properties or characteristics other than that of force. Instead, according to Kaphagawani, Tempels contends that in Bantu thought, force is a necessary characteristic of being as well as the very essence of being. ‘‘Force is not for (the Bantu) an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force,” (Tempels 1959, p. 51). This means that within the Tempelsian framework, humans, animals, plants, rocks, etc are created with and contain vital force. It also entails that at first stage of God’s creation, human beings are not given a distinguished position in relation to other created things. There are all created by God using force and they are all endowed with force.

This shows that Tempels' account of the concept of a person in Bantu thought is different from the Western concept, where humans are held to be superior to other entities. However, it could be argued, as Kaphagawani (2004) did, that Tempels avoidance of the Western concept mentioned above was short lived. This is because his later discussions on the subject adopted the very same distinctions employed in Western philosophy by claiming that attributes such as reason and free will separate humans from other beings in Bantu thought. Kaphagawani (2004, p. 336) explains this distinction by Temples thus; "…on the Tempelsian thesis of being as force, it should apparently be possible to distinguish between rational and non-rational forces, and voluntary and non-voluntary forces. For, according to the Force Thesis of beings as forces, there must be a radical difference between vital forces that have intelligence and those that do not." Tempels distinction between humans and other beings immediately brings to mind similar approaches associated with such traditional Western thought as the Aristotelian framework. Aristotle had appealed to reason as the fundamental difference between humans and animals, and that it is reason which also account for the power of speech in humans. Thus, for Aristotle, the power of reason, which is as much a moral as an intellectual faculty, is what distinguishes humans from animals (Trigg, 1988). Stumpf (1994, p. 95) also attest to this by pointing out that Aristotle placed humans in a more distinguished position than inanimate things and animals in the hierarchy of beings Indeed Aristotle believed that plants and animals have souls which are concerned about nutrition and appetites/desires respectively. He also perceived the human soul to "include the nature of the plant and animals souls but in addition possesses the rational faculty" (Trigg, 1988, p. 29). Following this, Tempels believes that in Bantu ontology, there is a hierarchical ordering of the forces. These forces are situated according to the strength of their vitality such that beneath the human vital forces exist the forces of animals, then followed by vegetables and by minerals forces. As Tempels (1959, p. 97) puts it:

> The Bantu sees in man the living force; the force or the being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals and minerals. These lower beings exist by divine decree, only for the assistance of the higher created being, man. (Temples 1959, p. 97)

Mbaegbu (2015, p. 223) observes that the position and role of man as represented by Tempels above is in harmony with the position that the biblical God designated to man in relation to all other created beings, which were given a rather inferior position. That is, it is recorded in Genesis (1: 26-28) that:

> God said, let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth. God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and conquer it.

Mbaegbu (2015, p. 223) further asserts that it is on the basis of the above Biblical scriptures that Tempels (1959, p. 98), allocates to man privileged status in the hierarchy of forces in the Bantu ontology. Tempels view that "man is a dominant force among all created visible forces" as well as the view that his force, his life, his fullness of being consists in his participation to a greater extent in the force of God"appears alien to the Bantu. Rather it mirrors his Christian faith and appears to superimpose Christian beliefs on Bantu ontology.

However, those who support the Tempelsian framework may argue that it is the purpose of creation or the designated purpose of the different vital forces, not their essence, which creates the distinction factor between human beings and other created things. This purpose is what Tempels refers to when he says that God made the non-human forces for the purpose of serving or of being used by human beings to strengthen their human vital forces. This means

that the human person and the whole of creation have the same essence and even interdependent, an ontological reality that is not consistent with the Biblical ontology referred to above.

Again consistent with some of the Western theories of personhood such as the cognitive theory or personism, the Tempelsian framework makes distinctions in the theory of being between the 'human being' and the 'person'. Tempels (1959, p. 57) argues against translating *munthu* as ''human,'' suggesting, rather, that it be translated as ''person", a view that some scholars such as Kaphagawani (2004) support to some extent. The argument here is that the term 'human being' as a species of being has universal applicability, whereas the term *munthu* translated as ''person,'' varies from one culture to another and from one time to another. This is because the tern "munthu" reflects a sociocentric view of personhood which results from the dynamic nature of culture and society. However, unlike Tempels, Kaphagawani (2004) asserts that using the word *munthu* to refer to a human being or to refer to a person depends on the context of its use. The same word *(munthu)* can be used to refer to a human being and to a person at different times, places and circumstances. The difficulty with Kaphagawani's view however, is that since there is only one word for both human and person in these particular Bantu languages, which is *munthu,* the intended meaning of any statement where the word *munthu* is used can be truly known by the one who makes such statement, leading to arbitrariness. While Kaphagawani asserts below that a careful analysis of such statements can help render a proper understanding and translation of the statements into the English language, it is not clear what this analysis entails.

> In Chichewa, it is said: *Azungu siwanthu*. On a literal translation this statement means ''Whites are not human,'' which would seem to indicate that the Chewa deny humanness to whites. Yet with a little analysis, this statement is seen not to be uttered to assert the non-humanity of whites; rather, it denies that whites are Chewa persons insofar as their looks and behaviour are at variance with that of the Chewa.

> Thus, this statement should not be translated as ‘‘Whites are not human,’’ but rather as ‘‘Whites are not Chewa persons.’’ And to this extent, Tempels (ibid. 57) is quite right in advising against translating *munthu* as ‘‘human,’’ but, rather, as ‘‘person.’’ But some situations warrant translating *munthu* as ‘‘human.’’ For example, to say that Achewa ndi *wanthu* is more to assert the humanness of the Chewa than their personhood. Similarly *Azungu ndi wanthu* means that whites are just as human as the Chewa except for pigmentational differences… (Kaphagawani 2004, p. 336)

The tendency to contrast the state of ‘being a person’ with that of ‘being human’ as do Tempels (1959) and Kaphagawani (2004) above is consistent with most personists’ position that not all human beings are persons. It is also consistent with the idea that one has to satisfy certain criteria in order to be accepted into the community of persons. As a result, the Tempelsian conception of personhood may share some of the objections against personism. While for most personists the criteria for personhood is based on cognitive capabilities, it can only be assumed, based on the claim made in the quotation above, that for Tempels (1959) and Kaphagawani (2004) such criteria is based on ethnicity or ethnic identity. By extension, the criteria is also based on observation of the cultural beliefs and practices as well as adherence to the world view of a particular ethnic group. But an individual can adhere to or adopt the world view, cultural beliefs and practices of a particular ethnic group without belonging to it. This will create problems as to whether such individual could be regarded as a person under the Tempelsian framework? Furthermore, where membership of an ethnic group could be acquired by being born to parents that belong to the ethnic group, it is possible to be a member of an ethnic group without adhering to the cultural beliefs, practices and world view of the group in question. Here again the problem arises as to whether such an individual could be regarded as a person? If one cannot be awarded personhood by identifying with an ethnic group’s culture and view of reality alone, or by being born to parents who are members of an ethnic group, then none of the mentioned conditions are

sufficient for personhood. However, it would seem that according to the Tempelsian framework, belonging to an ethnic group, as in being born to it, is a necessary condition for personhood, but it is not clear from his writings that it is sufficient as well.

Another challenge for the Tempelsian framework is that his Bantu ontology appears to make sense only within the framework of Western philosophy and religion, thereby raising questions about its authenticity and real objective. For instance, Bell (1989, p. 364) observes that Tempels' Bantu philosophy might have been:

> an extension of the nineteenth-century Hegelian philosophical notion that there was a 'unity of being' that gave order and coherence to the natural and human order that could be expressed in some universal way in a single underlying principle.

This objection against Tempels' thesis is not helped by his (Tempels') own sentiments below:

> We do not claim, of course, that the Bantu are capable of formulating a philosophical treatise, complete with an adequate vocabulary. It is our job to proceed to such systematic development. It is we who will be able to tell them, in precise terms, what their inmost concept of being is. They will recognise themselves in our words and will acquiesce, saying, 'You understanding us: you know us completely: you "know" in the way that we "know"'. (Tempels 1959, p. 36)

It is on the basis of such remarks by Tempels that scholars such as Mudimbe (1983) and Hountondji (1983) claim that the Afrocentric and protonationalist implications of Tempels' work were merely superficial. They argue that, for the most part, Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* recommends more effective ways of 'civilizing' and evangelizing Bantu peoples (Mudimbe, 1983, p. 138). Tempels particularly explains that Africans refer to God as force the same way Christians refer to their God as Love, such that Force and God are almost inseparable, and a thought of God is a thought of Force. Somewhere else Tempels goes on to explain this point further:

> When we think in terms of the concept of 'being', they use the concept 'force'. Where we see concrete beings, they see concrete forces. When we say that 'beings' are differentiated by their essence or nature, Bantu say that 'forces' differ in their essence or nature. They hold that there is the divine force, celestial or terrestrial forces, human forces, animal forces, or mineral forces. (Tempels 1959, p. 52)

Thus the Force thesis has been dismissed by some as ‘unAfrican’ and a mere replica of the Christian and Western views of reality. Critics claim that Tempels’ work merely serves as an extended argument that ‘Christianity is the only possible consummation of the Bantu ideal’ (Mudimbe, 1983, p. 54), and a philosophical blueprint to fulfill Tempels supposedly civilizing mission. Mudimbe’s critique is echoed by Hountondji (1983), who, according Apter, (1992), develops a more militant crusade against both Tempels and Griaule (one of Tempels’ supporters). Hountondji observed that, “at first sight ... Tempels' object appeared to be to rehabilitate the black man and his culture and to redeem them from the contempt from which they had suffered until then," but soon it becomes apparent that Tempels’ work:

> is not addressed to Africans but to Europeans, and particularly to two categories of Europeans: colonials and missionaries. In this respect the seventh and last chapter bears an eloquent title: 'Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilize'. In effect, we are back to square one: Africans are, as usual, excluded from the discussion, and Bantu philosophy is a mere pretext for learned disquisitions among Europeans. The black man continues to be the very opposite of an interlocuter; he remains a topic, a voiceless face under private investigation, an object to be defined and not the subject of a possible discourse. (Hountondji, 1983, p. 34)

Hountondji believes Tempels’ philosophy was written for the missionaries and colonizers to enable them to effectively bring what they thought was civilization to the ‘uncivilised’ African. He argues that through Tempels’ brainwashing, it was possible to continue the eternal enslavement of the African to the advantage of the colonial master.

However, a number of scholars have came to the defence of Tempels. Such scholars argue that those who read Tempels' *Bantu philosophy* should clearly distinguish between the analysis of the Bantu philosophy and the Western expression used as a vehicle to render it accessible to European readers (Deacon, 2002, p. 89). Deacon further argues that Hountondji's harsh critique of Tempels and *Bantu philosophy* is unjustified. He refutes Hountondji's view that Tempels' aim was to assist the colonizer in subduing the African, pointing out that Tempels had in fact recognised the injustice in the actions of the colonial administration, (Deacon, 2002, p. 109). On this point, Deacon thinks that De Craemer's (1977) description of Tempels' attitude and approach to the culture and traditions of the BaLuba people is instructive, and that such attitude was not consistent with the popular colonialist attitudes of the time. De Craemer had pointed out that Tempels:

> was willing and able to go so far in his relations with the Congolese as to reverse completely one of the primodial assumptions on which any form of colonialism or evangelism is based. This is the idea one comes as a teacher and benefactor to a people who have not as yet either heard or absorbed the superior message one brings. (De Craemer, 1977, p. 24)

Deacons goes on to argues that contrary to the view that in *Bantu philosophy* the African is merely the object of definition rather than a valued subject in a discourse, the philosophy was arrived at through Tempels' active participation and discourse with the *BaLuba* people with whom he lived. Okafor (1982, p. 89), who shares the above view objects to some of the critiques raised against Tempels' force Thesis, (even though he had his own objections to it). For instance, concerning Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy* Mbiti had argued that:

> The book is primarily Tempels' personal interpretations of the Baluba, and it is ambitious to call it 'Bantu Philosophy' since it only deals with one people among whom he had worked for many years as a missionary. It is open to a great deal of criticism, and the theory of 'vital force' cannot be applied to other African peoples

> with whose life and ideas I am familiar. The main contribution of Tempels is more in terms of sympathy and change of attitude than perhaps in the actual contents and theory of his book.

Okafor's (1982) reaction to the above is that such criticism is not sufficiently discriminating owing to its summary nature. He further argues that Mbiti's remark above fails to note that the footnotes in Tempels' book are mainly concerned with letters of approval from scholars, missionaries and colonials working in other parts of Africa. "As a result the work cannot easily be confined to the Baluba people among whom Father Tempels lived and worked" Okafor (1982, p. 89).

Notwithstanding the numerous objections against the force thesis, it is worth emphasising that, according to Tempels, understanding the Bantu conception of reality is central to understanding their conception of personhood. Tempels (1959, pp. 50-51) argues that "There is no idea among Bantu of being divorced from the idea of force. Without the element force, being cannot be conceived". Thus the underlying thinking in the Tempelsian framework is that all beings, all essences, in whatever form they are conceived, can be subsumed under the concept force. What then is man in the context of Bantu theory of forces? Tempels explains that a person *(muntu)* is a vital force that has got intelligence and a will. Such a force is closely connected with other forces (both in the animal and inanimate worlds), such that the activity of any one force affects all the others. The human being, however, is the most powerful among created being and is therefore the supreme force. Tempels maintains that all the other vital forces are created for the sole use of human beings. He explains that *'muntu'* signifies '…vital force, endowed with intelligence and will…', while *'bintu',* meaning objects and things, are '…forces not endowed with reason, not living' (Tempels 1959, p. 55). Individual persons are seen within the hierarchy of forces, which is arranged according to their strength and function. In fact, Tempels points out that for the Bantu, 'nothing moves in

this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement' (Tempels, 1959, p. 60).

Placide Tempels is not the only scholar who advocates the African view of reality and personhood. Théodore Theuws (1951), whose work was published just a few years after Tempels', presented a view of reality and personhood that was almost identical to Tempels'. His main claim is that in Bantu thinking *muntu* is the living force, dominating the visible created forces (Theuws 1951, p. 63). Theuws goes on to explain this Bantu philosophy:

> What is the central point around which their (the Bantu) meditations move? This is what is found in a few expressions they continuously use: Bumi, life, Bukomo, force. All their wishes, regrets, prayers and benedictions gravitate around that fundamental idea: vital force, of life, vital energy. The filial aim of all activities is always reinforce one's being, that means increase one's life. (1951, p. 62)

Theuws argues that these Bantu conceptions of reality and personhood explain and justify not only the religious beliefs and practices of the Bantus, but also constitute the foundation of social order, morals and law. Similarly, Smith (1950, p. 16), has the following to say regarding the Bantu strong belief in vital force; "….to the average African: he acts as if he believed in elemental powers resident in, working through, persons, things, words, even thoughts and desires". Again, just like Theuws and Tempels, Smith claims that the Bantu ethic is based on their philosophy of vital force;

> The negative aspect of this belief in vital force is what we call *tabu*. Certain things may not be done, certain words may not be spoken, certain thoughts may not be harboured, because they release hidden forces and their reaction is automatic: it is like touching a live wire. (Smith, 1950, p. 16)

In addition, Goldsmith (1978) observes that a similar notion of vital force is reported by Monteil (1971) among the Bambara of the Mali Republic. According him, two other scholars, namely, Griaule and Dieterlen (1966) report yet a similar concept among the Dogons.

Goldsmith (1972) concludes some scholars such as Driberg (1936) believe, rightly or wrongly, that this concept of a world-wide force or inner energy is at the basis of the religious beliefs and philosophy of Africans in general.

The above survey, shows that Tempels' force thesis has largely being met with more hostility than support. This does not, however entail that it should be accepted or rejected, based on hostility or support it receives from these. Instead, attempts should be made to establish the extent to which the major features of the thesis are consistent with other theses claiming to represent an African ontology and personhood. For instance, Tempels' decision to generalize his observations about the Luba to cover all Africans should not be viewed as irregular, since the same claim has been made by other African scholars. Ramose, for instance argues that "there is a family resemblance among Africans" which explains the similarity in world views and personhood concepts among African groups despite the apparent cultural diversity among them. It is therefore argued that notwithstanding the cultural diversity among the different Africa groups particularly in the Sub-Saharan Africa, there may be features or aspects of world views and personhood that are common to or dominant among these different groups. A common world view and concept of personhood may be formulated based on these commonly shared or dominant features, and such a view may be viewed as representative enough of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It would therefore be expedient to be on the lookout for some of the main features of the Tempelsian framework in subsequent surveys of the other conceptions of personhood found in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Bantu ontology is dynamic in the sense that there is a constant vital interaction and interdependence among forces or beings. This is often contrasted with the Western ontology or views which are perceived to be static and beings are isolated or individuated. Tempels (1959, p. 58) attest to this when he argues that, "this concept of separate beings, of substance which find themselves side by side, entirely independent one from another, is foreign to

Bantu thought. Bantu hold that created beings preserve a bond one with another, an intimate ontological relationship, comparable with the causal tie which binds creature and creator". Tempels (1959, p. 60) further argues that "all creatures are found in relationship according to the laws of a hierarchy that I shall describe later. Nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider's web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network".

Secondly, man is not only at the centre of the universe, but is also a social being because, according to Temples, the Bantu cannot be a solitary being; and is even more than just a social being. Rather, an indivual in the Bantu thought understands himself as a vital force; he sees himself to be in close and personal connection with other forces acting above him and below him in the hierarchy of forces everytime, Tempels (1959, p. 103).

4.2.2 The Shadow Thesis

A number of scholars including Masolo (1994); Kaphagawani (2004); and Hountondji (2002) seem to be in agreement that the view that came to be known as the shadow doctrine, originated with the Rwandais priest Alexis Kagame. In addition to claiming that the Bantu understands a human being metaphorically as a shadow, Kagame held that the Bantu also perceive the human being as both a complete animal and a being endowed with intelligence (Kaphagawani, 2004). Masolo (1983) observes that just like Tempels, Kagame attempted to demonstrate in detail two major issues regarding African culture and philosophy. Firstly, building on Placide Tempels earlier position on Bantu philosophy, Kagame argues that what Western scholars erroneously described as mysticism, idolatry and mere witchcraft when referring to many of the different cultural practices of the Bantu people was actually an expression of a body of thought that was both logically coherent and consistent with itself. Secondly, that the very language of the Bantu was a well-thought-out model of a clear

metaphysical conception, an ontology of being and hierarchy of how beings exist and relate with each other. It is from the position of Kagame's work that his understanding of the African conception of a person was articulated and came to be known. Masolo (1994) explains that Kagame's works was built on, and even attempted to improve on Tempels' Bantu philosophy by giving it a fresh approach by trying to reveal the concept of being among the Bantu through the careful evaluation of their language (Masolo, 1994). Hountondji (2002) also acknowledges the connection and continuity of thought from Temples to Kagame. He points out that an analysis of content of the Bantu 'philosophy' reveals that there are undeniable conjunctions between Kagame and Tempels, particularly in their views regarding the Bantu conception of personhood (Hountondji, 2002). Mudimbe (1983, p. 135) has a similar view of Kagame's work as he points out that, "Kagame drew out all the consequences of Tempels' method….to demonstrate simultaneously that Bantu philosophy is a reflection of a perennial and universal philosophy and, at the same time, the vital expression of the soul of a community". Thus, there are many similarities between the force view of Tempels, and the Shadow view of Kagame. These similarities will be explored in more details towards the end of this section, with the aim of bringing out a more adequate conception of personhood.

4.2.2.1 The Shadow thesis-the main arguments

The shadow thesis has been described as Kagame's attempt to use his native Rwandan language to formulate a philosophy that is fundamental to his people's world view (Irele, 2002). This approach that has been rejected by scholars such as Hountondji (2002), who argued that it renders Kagame's work as not philosophical but a mere ethnological work that is spiced with philosophical jargons. Others have, however, argued that Kagame's work consists of an attempt at understanding and explicating the philosophy of *being* of his Banyarwanda people through a linguistic analysis (Ukwamedua, 2011**)**. Ukwamedua (2011)

observes that according to scholars such as Masolo, Kagame clearly thought that his linguistic analysis was not limited to the *Kinyarwanda* language, but relates to other Bantu languages of Central Africa and Eastern Africa with similar linguistic structure. He argues that his analysis of Kinyarwanda reveals the exceptional way which all the Bantu-speaking people conceive of being and by extension, the human personhood. In Kagame's view of Bantu ontology, the whole of reality is premised on and emanates from the root stem *ntu*, which signifies *being.* Through an approach and analysis comparable to both Aristotle's categories and Thomastic linguistical analysis, Kagame argued that this root stem (*ntu*), becomes the basis for four general categories to which everything that exists, can be classified. 'All being, all essences in whatever form it is conceived, can be subsumed under one of these categories. One cannot think of anything outside them,' (Ukwamedua, 2011, p. 253**).** The categories of being in African ontology according to Kagame are:

Muntu - 'Human being' (Plural: Bantu)-someBODY

Kintu -'Thing' (Plural: Bintu)-someTHING

Hantu – 'Place and Time' -someWHERE

Kuntu– 'Modality' -someHOW

Masolo (1983) observes that in Kagame's interpretation of the Bantu ontology as stated above, what is on top of all the possible levels of life and existence is the human person. This is similar to the elevated position which Aristotle and the earlier pre-Socratics placed the human person. Also, and importantly for this work, this elevation of the human person is consistent with both the Mbiti and Tempels accounts discussed earlier. Kagame further elevates the human person above all other beings by the fact that she/he possesses reason or

intellect, which is the principle of original activity (Masolo, 1983). To this, Masolo adds the moral dimension which the human person is said to possess exclusively, asserting that

> *Ubwenge* is the principle that distinguishes man from the animal, endows him with the dignity of knowledge and the capacity of distinguishing between good and evil. Man is a rational moral agent. *Ubwenge* therefore is the principle in man of his moral and intellectual life. (Masolo, 1983, p. 453)

As a result of the privileged status of being sole possessors of intelligence, humanity in Bantu thought has always been placed at a central position in relation to the rest of reality. It is the focus of the visible and invisible worlds. Masolo explains that according to the Bantu conception of personhood and reality as presented by Kagame, all beings are conceived based on their participation in the whole of reality. This participation, it is understood, is dependent on intelligence, a quality attributable only to humans. As a result, humans alone are capable of causing certain events, especially in the metaphysical spheres of magic and witchcraft. Thus the human person 'is the agent of all the activities of lower beings which become only the media of man's own activity' (Masolo, 1983, pp. 453, 4).

Hountondji (2002) agrees with Masolo's on the idea that humanity is at the centre of the Bantu thought and preoccupations. This leads to a situation where other beings are perceived 'as negations or inverted images of their own natures as thinking beings' and therefore in conflict with the human person. Thus things (*ibintu* in Kinyarwanda) are by definition beings lacking in intelligence, contrasting them with humans (*umuntu*, pl. *abantu*), which are defined as intelligent beings (Hountondji, 2002). This 'opposition' between *ibintu* and *umuntu* that Hountondji refers to above is not in terms of the essential nature of the beings, but in terms of how they can be distinguished in relation to each other. While the difference between the human person and all other beings is clear and decisive in Kagame' account, the connection and interdependent nature of all beings is strongly argued for and is evident in Temples

account as well. Like Temples, Kagame appeals to the notion of *force* as the unifying factor among all beings, living and non-living:

> According to Kagame, all that there is must necessarily belong to one of the four categories *and must be conceived not as a physical substance but as force*. *Man is a force; all things are forces including place and time, modalities*. They are all also related to one another because they are forces and this relationship is vivid in their very names because if the determinative is removed, the stem *Ntu* remains and is constant in all of them. (Ukwamedua 2011, p. 253-254)

4.2.2.2 The notion of 'Shadow'

While for the most part Kagame seems to affirm Temple's notion of force as the basic substance of all things, he also introduced the two notions of '*ntu*' and '*nthunzi*' (shadow), which are ontologically parallel to the notion of force. His description of the three concepts, namely 'force', 'ntu' and 'shadow' imply that they all play the same role in the Bantu metaphysical scheme. He however points out a slight variation with respect to the concept of 'shadow' to which human character seems to be attached. For instance, according to Kagame**,** human beings share the same principle of birth and death with animals, and that is the principle of shadow (Ukwamedua 2011, p. 255). Of this Kaphagawani (2004, pp. 338/9) explains:

> that for the Bantu a human being is both a complete animal and a being endowed with intelligence; complete, because he or she possesses ''the vital principle of animality known as shadow,'' and intelligent insofar as he or she ''is animated by a second vital principle which is immortal and in which are anchored the intelligent operations proper to man''.

Kaphagawani goes on to argue that Kagame fails to explain clearly and satisfactorily what he means by the completeness and the shadow of human beings. He also questions Kagame's contention that, the union between the shadow and the intelligence of the human person

comes to an end at the point of death of a person. This is because, the shadow disappears completely after the death of the human person. Kagame, does not, however, say what happens to the human 'intelligence' aspect after it is separated from the shadow at death. The above, does not however entail a complete rejection of Kagame's views by Kaphagawani concerning the shadow. He agrees with Kagame that the shadow is a vital principle of animality in a human person. He also agrees with Kagame's claims regarding the disappearance of a person's shadow at death in Bantu thought and cites the Chewa belief that 'a dead person is devoid of a shadow even when exposed to the light of the sun'to support this. Kaphagawani does not however think that the shadow referred to in the Chewa proverb is a physical shadow arguing that it should be understood metaphorically and not literally. This is because it would be absurd to expect a dead person to have a physical shadow. For him, the shadow as expressed in this Bantu thought refers to a person's personality and character, both of which cease to exist upon the death of a human person:

> This symbolic shadow presumably refers to the departure or absence, at death, of an individual's personality and individuality. Since personhood is not static, but a dynamic, gradual, and persistent process in which personality is continually reinvented, death marks the end of this creative process, thus signaling the end of the quality of personality which is as elusive as a shadow. (Kaphagawani, 2004, p. 339)

The identification of the shadow thesis with personality and character entails that it regards personhood as the gradual development of an individual's character and personality. This character development is, no doubt, an ongoing process that spans an individual's life, and stops only at death. Further, if the shadow thesis only refers to individual human character, it demonstrates that notions of individuality and personal identity has always been part of African ontology and conception of human nature even in a predominantly communitarian

society. Furthermore, by drawing from human character and conduct in its exposition, the shadow thesis can immediately be categorized as a normative conception of personhood. Issues of individuality, conduct and gradual development of personhood characteristic of the normative conception of personhood also constitutes the communitarian thesis discussed earlier in this chapter. Specifically, both theories appeal to human character in their formulations, and to the view that personhood is a gradual process that is defined and refined as one's character developes overtime. Apart from the fact that the communitarian thesis leans more on community life and on the promotion of the common good as the means by which personhood status can be attained, both theories agree that personhood is attained and is linked to morality. Kaphagawani's explanation of the shadow thesis below, when compared with Menkiti's on the communitarian thesis, demonstrates the parallels between the two theories, especially when one looks beyond the details provided by Menkiti. Kaphagawani (2004, p. 339) writes on the shadow thesis:

> Individual identity is felt to be as problematic to pinpoint as personhood. Thus, ascribing a metaphorical meaning to ''shadow'' seems to lead to the conclusion that the Chewa in particular, and possibly the Bantu in general, regard personhood more as a process than as an essence…

A detailed explanation of the communitarian thesis by Menkiti comes to the same conclusion, viz, that personhood is attained through a process; and is therefore not an essence:

> The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of

> ethical sense-an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one. (Menkiti, 1984, p. 318)

Just like the proponents of the communitarian view of personhood, Kagame observes that Bantu ethics or body of codes of social conduct is so strong that, in his estimation it revolves around the concept of the finality of man. When discussing Kagame's theory of man, Masolo (1983) points out that according to Bantu philosophy, "the finality of man has been traced not from his vital principle, but from his body". Masolo's interpretation of the Bantu's philosophy may not be entirely correct on this point. This is because he seems to separate man's essence from man's body and sexuality. But it appears that man's body and sexuality should constitute part of his essential nature in African thought. This is because African ontology is not known to separate the physical and the non-physical nor distinguish what is essential from what is not. This point is made in view of the important link that sex and procreation in particular have to one's personhood status in most African cultures. Masolo (1983, p. 453) confirms this when he argues that "since man is realized in two sexes, Bantu traditional philosophy concludes from it that man's greatest purpose of being is procreation, the perpetuation of the lineage". This point by Masolo, which finds support from both the force thesis and the communitarian view of personhood, portrays the centrality of human sexuality and sexual mores in attaining personhood. Masolo (1983, p. 454) goes further to demonstrate the role played by procreation in defining the human person in African thought:

> Perpetuation of one's lineage is the biggest concern for all, such that death without or before getting an offspring is considered the greatest evil that can ever befall a man. All virtuous and vicious acts are judgeable so according to how they affect this great concern of men, how they affect one's own or another person's permanence or stability of lineage. All laws or regulations of con-duct must therefore conform with this finality.

4.2.2.3 Objections to Kagame's philosophy on personhood

Kagame has been criticised for being too Aristotelian in his explanation of the Bantu conception of being and personhood (Masolo, 1994). According to Masolo, Kagame started by scrutinising the cultural differences or similarities in the application of the categories to the concept of being between specialised Greek thought and the Bantu worldviews. He then concluded, based on the similarities he discovered, that both produce a unity of the metaphysical principle of being (Masolo, 1994). A similar observation regarding Kagame's work was made even earlier by Mudimbe (1983), who pointed out that Kagame's work was an attempt to restore the dignity of African the culture ontologically, He did this "by finding in African culture the equivalents of Aristotelian or Thomistic categories" (Mudimbe, 1983, p. 134). Masolo objects to Kagame's formulation of the Bantu concept of a person and being in general by pointing out several errors that are identifiable with the attempt. One of them is the attempt by Kagame to demonstrate, through his linguistic analysis, the universality of the principle of unity through his rather forceful creation of the category of *ntu* as an indication of the unity in beings. Masolo goes further to explain this error of Kagame:

> This ingenious linguistic analysis is also due to the fact that Kagame seeks to explain too much and consequently also formulates too many concepts that are unknown to the Bantu, not because they cannot formulate them, but rather because such notions as unity, causality, categories of being, etc., lie outside the focus and interests of ordinary experience. (Masolo, 1994, p. 93)

It is not clear from the above whether Africans have notions of metaphysical concepts such as unity and causality, or make such concepts part of their metaphysics. However, the underlying objection against Kagame's version of African personhood raised by Masolo and several other scholars is that Kagame imported Western method of understanding in articulating notions associated with African personhood and identity. As a result, what was

supposedly African at its origin was realigned to suit Western thought; particularly the Aristotelian paradigm.

Ukwamedua (2011), in his objection to Kagame's approach, argues that Bantu philosophy as articulated by Kagame conforms to the contours of Europe. He points out that while initially Kagame attempted to distance himself from Tempels' position, he later adopted the Tempels practice of fitting African concepts into Western categories in order to render them comprehensible to the Western audience. Ukwamedua also makes reference Oladipo's (2000) critique of the same work by Kagame, asserting that Oladipo was right when he wrote:

> … what he is busy doing is to promote an order of knowledge which is largely informed by a socio-economic experience, that is, at least in its fundamental aspects, anything but African. (Oladipo, 2000, p. 20, 21)

The result of Kagame's and similar approaches, according to Oladipo, is that the contemporary African philosopher acquires his educational training from cultural sources that are foreign or different from African culture.

4.3 Some examples of Metaphysical Conceptions of Personhood from West Africa

Following Kaphagawani's (2004) brief but informative survey of the African conceptions of a person (Wiredu, 2004), this section focuses primarily on the Akan and the Yoruba perspectives of personhood. The main features of these perspectives will be explored and their basic arguments or positions appreciated. Further, issues and problems that may emanate from these perspectives will feature throughout the discussion. At the end, common features between the two perspectives will be highlighted with the aim of relating them to other sub-Saharan conceptions of personhood discussed earlier in the chapter.

4.3.1 The Akan conception of a person

Wiredu (2002) identifies the Akan as a group people in West Africa who speak closely related languages known as 'Akan', and include groups such as the Ashantis, Akims, Akuapims, Fantes, Kwahus, Wassas, Brongs, Nzimas and the Denkyiras. These groups are mostly found in Ghana and in certain parts of the Ivory Coast. Like many African conceptions of personhood, the Akan understanding of a person is both descriptive (metaphysical) and normative categories (Wiredu, 2002, p. 313). For the sake of clarity, it must be noted that the descriptive or metaphysical aspect of the person has to do with the analysis of the physical and/or non-physical parts of the human person as understood by different African groups and scholars (Wingo, 2008). The normative category focuses on the notion that in Sub-Saharan Africa, personhood is generally defined by the level of respect for one's communal norms and values. In this case the achievement of personhood in the final analysis depends on one's ability to use communal norms to guide one's actions (Igbafen, 2014, p. 126). To illustrate this further, Gyekye (1992, p. 102) explains the normative aspect of African personhood by making reference to the Akan experience as follows:

> Communitarianism sees the human person as an inherently (intrinsically) communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated atomic individual. Consequently, it sees the community not as a mere association of individual persons whose interests and ends are contingently congruent, but as a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds, biological and/ or non-biological, who consider themselves primarily as members of the group and who have common interests, goals and values.

Making reference to both the descriptive and normative notions of personhood, Igbafen (2014) contends that personhood as a concept is one of the ideas in which generalization can be made about Africans because "from the whole gamut of varied conceptions of person, it is less a contested issue that a person in the African world is both a normative and metaphysical

being". Igbafen (2014) also considers the claim by philosophers such as Ikuenobe (2006) that it is not possible to fully comprehend the normative nature of personhood without first considering its metaphysical nature. This, Ikuenobe argues is because the latter aspect is necessarily dependent on the former. This is to say that any description of the metaphysical nature of a person involves a breakdown of the essential ontological nature of the same being. This exploring of the metaphysical or ontological nature of a person makes it possible to address the question of how the mind and the body relate and interact with each other. It also enables one to determine whether a person is essentially material or immaterial or both (Igbafen, 2014). In his recent work on the moral and aesthetic view of personhood in African communal traditions, Ikuenobe (2016, p. 145) argues regarding normative and metaphysical personhood in African thought:

> There are two plausible conceptions of personhood. One is the descriptive, physical-metaphysical and the other is the normative, moral-social. In many African traditions, the idea of a person has both descriptive (physical and metaphysical) and normative (social, moral and aesthetic) dimensions. A descriptive conception of personhood seeks to analyze the features and ontological make-up of an isolated individual. It examines whether a person is immaterial or material, or whether a person is made up of one or two essential natures…… The conception of personhood in African world view is not a purely descriptive metaphysical conception of an isolated and atomic individual, but primarily, a normative (social, moral, and aesthetic) conception.

Ikuenobe further argues that even though the conception of personhood in African world view is primarily normative, that is, social, moral and aesthetic, such conception of personhood is dependent on or presupposes a metaphysical or descriptive conception.

A typical African concept of a person that is both normative and metaphysical is the one associated with the Akan groups in West Africa. According to this view, a person is a union

of three closely related, ontologically inseparable, and yet descriptively different elements. These elements are; the life principle *(okra);* the blood principle *(mogya)* and the personality principle *(sunsum).* Making particular reference to the Asante version of the Akan conception of a person, Appiah (2004, p.28) summarizes these three aspects of a person as follows:

> A person consists a body *(nipadua)* made from the blood of the mother (*the mogya);* an individual spirit, the *Sunsum,* which is the main bearer of one's personality; and a third entity, the Okra. The *Sunsum* derives from the father at conception. The *Okra*, a sort of life force, departs the body only at the person's last breath; is sometimes, as with Greeks and the Hebrews, identified with breath; and is often said to be sent to a person at birth, as the bearer of one *nkrabea*, or destiny, from *Nyame*. The *Sunsum,* unlike the *Okra*, may leave the body during life and does so, for example, in sleep dreams being thought to be the perceptions of person's *Sunsum* on its night peregrinations.

As mentioned above, the okra is generally viewed as the innermost part of the human person or the very essence of being a person. According to Gyekye (1995) and Appiah (2004), this basic element of the human person is also responsible for keeping and transmitting the destiny or fate of the individual it inhabits. In this way, the okra is described as the "spark of the Supreme Being [Onyame] in man," which then makes this element divine and "as having an ante-mundane existence with the Supreme Being'' (Gyekye 1995, p. 85). Gyekye's view here is consistent with Akesson (1965, p. 280), an earlier writer on the issue, who argued that:

> The belief in immortality, in the soul's survival after death, is a concept Akans do not repudiate. It is natural for the Akan to hold the concept because the belief in immortality has its very origin in the word the Akan uses for soul. The Akan term for soul, KRA or OKRA (meaning "goodbye ") reflects the origin of the concept. Leaving aside for the moment the Akan idea that the souls of new-born children are either emanations of ancestral souls or reincarnated former lives,….According to the Akan, the soul (KRA or OKRA) of a man existed with Nyame, God, long

> before it became incarnated. This soul may be the soul or the spirit of a kinsman or sometimes of another person, but one who belongs to the same tribe.

Since every human being is said to possess the okra, a divine element that comes directly from God, it means that every human being is naturally valuable or has intrinsic value. To that extent, the Akan seem to hold a transcendental or inherent concept of a person in the sense that being human means the same thing as being a person. As alluded to in earlier chapters of this work, the transcendental understanding of a person contend that a human being is a substance; a distinct unity of essence that exists ontologically prior to any of its parts (see Sullivan, 2003, p. 19). Consistent with this typical transcendental view of personhood, Wiredu (2002, p. 313) writes regarding the Akan as it relates to the concept of human rights:

> By virtue of possessing an okra, divine element, all persons have intrinsic value, the same in each, which they do not owe to any earthly circumstance. Associated with this value is a concept of human dignity, which implies that every human being is entitled in an equal measure to a certain basic respect.

Making particular reference to Wiredu's version of the Akan understanding of a person, Sykes (2016) points out that the Akan word '*onipa'*, can be translated as both person and human being in the English language. This double meaning of the word, according to Sykes, suggests that it has on one hand a descriptive or non-complementary sense that implies that all human beings are born persons. The second meaning entails a commendatory or approving sense where one's achievements of social obligations and responsibilities give him or her recognition into the community of persons. Understood in the laudatory sense, "personhood is a type of achievement. Based on one's fulfilment of their obligations, one can rise in degrees of personhood" (Sykes, 2016, p. 8).

Generally, the nature of the relationship between the okra (soul) and nipadua (body) raises a number of ontological and relational problems akin to the mind-body problem in western philosophy. This age-old problem in Western philosophy is concerned about the nature of the relationship between the mind and the body, that is, between the mental realm (the realm of thoughts, beliefs, pains, sensations, emotions) and the physical realm (matter, atoms, neurons). This leads to a mystery of how a physical system like a brain could give rise to mental states. It raises questions about the nature of mental states such as consciousness, intentionality and the self, and how each of them is related to the brain and the body. However, Wiredu is of the view that the divine element *(okra*) described earlier should not be translated as or taken to be equivalent to the 'soul', a concept commonly found in Western philosophy and religion. This view is rejected by Gyekye, another authority in this area, who contend that *okra* can be rightly translated as 'soul' and understood in the same sense as in the Western world. He argues that ''the okra can be considered as the equivalent of the concept of the soul in other metaphysical systems. Hence, it is correct to translate okra into English as soul'' (Gyekye, 1995, p. 85).

The main reason advanced by Wiredu for rejecting the idea of equating the 'okra' to the 'soul' is that the "soul" as understood in the Western literature is a purely immaterial substance unlike the okra which, according to him, is a quasi-material substance. That is, the okra, "…is not, of course, supposed to be straightforwardly physical, as it is believed not to be fully subject to spatial constraints. It is also not perceivable by the naked eye. Nevertheless, in some ways it seems to be credited with para-physical properties'' (Wiredu, 1987, p. 161). Supporting Wiredu's position above, Imafidon contends that the fact that the Akan believe that if very good traditional doctors with "medicinally heightened perception" can locate another person's okra shows that the *okra* is quasi-material. This assertion appears to imply that only "highly developed medicine men with medicinally heightened perception"

can percieve quasi-material substances. This appears to suggest that such diviners do not see or locate other people's *okra* with normal perceptual organs, otherwise the okra will be visible to everyone and there will not be any need for 'heightened perception'. Furthermore, not all the Western dualist accounts that Wiredu and others are contrasting with the *okra* hold a quasi-material notion of the soul; many hold a notion of an immaterial soul that is somehow capable of inhabiting a material body (examples of these include Aristotle's idea of the union of body and soul and Descartes substance dualism). Imafidon (2012) makes a more convincing argument for the quasi-material nature of the okra, when he observes that, among the Akan, there is a belief that each person's okra needs food that is specific to it if he/she is to function well or flourish physically. They believe further that eating food that is not specific to one's okra may lead to allergic reactions and physical illness. This means that even though the okra is a divine or immaterial element, it needs specific physical substances as its food and this makes it (okra) quasi-material. While this point may be accepted on its strength, a question may be raised as to why it is necessary to suppose that the okra, or the spirit element, is quasi-material, and not suppose that the physical elements of the person, or the human body itself, is 'quasi-immaterial'. The problem that usually arises from an attempt to relate a divine non-physical element such as the okra with a non-divine physical thing is the interaction between them. It is also not clear that positing the existence of a new phenomenon that can be called 'quasi-material' necessarily solves the problem concerning how the body, which is 'purely' physical, interacts with the okra or soul, which is purely non-physical. This will naturally lead us to the notion of 'quasi-material'. The implication of introducing this new phenomenon (the quasi-material) is that neither the body, which is part of the physical elements of the person, nor the okra (or soul according to Gyekye, 1995) are in their pure states, owing to the interaction and harmonious existence of each with the other (opposite) element.

Apart from the above problems associated with positing a quasi-material okra, Gyekye is of the view that an understanding of the okra similar to the one held by Wiredu is incompatible with the Akan's general metaphysical and ontological scheme. This is because physically dead people are believed to survive their death in a non-physical state in the spiritual realm (Kaphagawani, 2004). But it appears that despite Gyekye, (1995), Wiredu (1987), appears unwilling to give up his position that the Akan do not have a concept of life-after-death that is purely immaterial but a rather quasi-material one. Sykes' (2016, p. 11) analysis of Wiredu and Gyekye's accounts below is consistent with the one done by both Kaphagawani (2004) and Imafidon (2012):

> Focusing on their descriptions of the okra, we can see one good way where Wiredu and Gyekye differ on the Akan conception of persons, For Wiredu, okra is the key distinguishing element for his, which he claims is incorrectly frequently translated into English 'soul.' As we have seen, Wiredu thinks okra is soul-like but "quasi-physical," or "almost physical," while Gyekye cites the Akan belief in the ancestral world, where the ancestors' spirits live on after death, to discredit Wiredu's claim. Gyekye thinks the Akan believe okra persists after the death of the person, but should it be quasi-physical, it would lose life with the body.

Another important distinction between Wiredu and Gyekye is that for Gyekye, the Akan's conception of personhood include the view that both the *okra* and the *sunsum* make up the spiritual aspects of a person. He also contends that it is the okra that determines or contains a person's destiny (Gyekye, 1987, p. 85). It is clear that by destiny Gyekye has in mind all the choices that one makes in life, the effects or outcomes of such choices, as well as what and where one will turn out to be in life. It is on this basis that Gyekye equites the okra to life and aserts that it is the same as the soul. Thus unlike Wiredu's quasi-material understanding, Gyekye provides a dualistic and interactionist account of the Akan understanding of a person where the spiritual and physical aspects of a person exist harmoniously together. Thus Gyekye advocates for a somewhat uncomplicated, if not naive, integrated dualist view of the

Akan understanding where a person is simply made up of the okra (which he interprets as soul) and nipadua (body) (Gyekye, 1984, pp. 200-08). Sykes (2016) opines that okra is given by God and becomes one of the three spiritual aspects or souls of a person at the moment of birth, the other two spiritual aspects being sunsum and mogya. It is the okra in particular, according Sykes, which forms a person's conscience and moral judgment, prompting and motivating a person's thoughts and the kind of moral decisions one makes throughout life. Her version of the Akan conception of a person reflects Wiredu's account and differs from that of Gyekye, albeit in a very insignificant way. According to her, new born babies are made up of the mother's blood and the man's spirit with a contribution from God in terms of the okra, which then returns to him at death. Thus, apart from the okra, a person in the Akan understanding is also made of the body (nipadua) which is formed through the mother's blood and a person's individual character or personal spirit known as the sunsum. The sunsum, according to Appiah (2004), comes directly from the male parent at the moment a baby is conceived, it is believed to be capable of freely going in and out of the person's body at different times throughout life such as during sleep. Dreams are actually believed to reflect a person's Sunsum on its night journeys outside the body. In this case, a person's dreams are taken seriously because they are messages or communications from the Sunsum. On this point Appiah (2004, p. 28) points out that "Since the Sunsum is a real entity, dreaming that you have committed an offence is evidence that you have committed it, and, for example, a man who dreams that he has had sexual intercourse with another man's wife is liable for the adultery fees that are paid for day time offences".

To a greater extent, Wiredu's account on the notion of Sunsum is in agreement with Appiah's account above. The Sunsum, comes from the father, albeit indirectly, and is the personality principle (Wiredu, 2002). Wiredu further observes that while the inherent characteristics of a new person or baby comes from both parents, the father in particular gives a certain inherent

or indwelling characteristic of the individual, and this is what the Akan call the Sunsum. He opines that, "In this sense, Sunsum is not an entity, it is, rather, a manner of being. But it is assumed that there must be something in the person that is the cause of the characteristic in question" (2002, p. 313). It is therefore worthnoting that there are a number of disagreements among scholars regarding the nature and origin of the sunsum. Whereas Wiredu regards the sunsum as coming from the male parent, Gyekye regards it as coming from the Supreme Being (Sykes, 2016). Also for Gyekye, the sunsum is a spirit, and together with the okra, they constitute the spiritual component of the human person. This view is disputed by Wiredu who not only argued that sunsum is not from God but from the father, but also that it is mortal in that it dies when its possessor dies. This difference of opinion between Wiredu and Gyekye is acknowledged by Teffo and Roux (2002, p. 171) as follows:

> There are even contradictions between accounts of conceptions of the same cultural group. For example, Wiredu (1987) argues that thinking is not part of the spiritual aspect of a person. He even remarks that this insight prevented the Akan from committing the category mistake of confusing concept and entity, as happened in the case of Western philosophy. Gyekye, again (1978), specifically makes thinking part of the spiritual aspect of the person.

Sykes (2016), whose account somehow adopts a compromise position between Wiredu and Gyekye claims that the sunsum is a spiritual substance (non-physical), but comes from the father not the Supreme Being. She opines that the Sunsum "is responsible for the character, genius, temper or quality of a person and it is qualitatively the same as the father's" (Sykes, 2016, p. 11).

Although, as the above discussion illustrates there are differences among Akan scholars regarding the metaphysical constitution of a person, it is also clear from the above that there is general consensus among them concerning aspects of Akan personhood. This is also the case with scholars of Bantu personhood in Eastern and Southern African who, despite

differences in detail agree that a person is basically dualist in nature, consisting of a physical and non-physical or spiritual element. This is notwithstanding the fact that many African scholars such as Wiredu (1987) claim that the African version of dualism do not have the same kind of problems as Cartesan dualism. This is because, as Teffo and Roux (2002, p. 172) point out, the spiritual elements of the person in the African metaphysics somehow have material qualities, such that "there is no radical or categorical difference between the spiritual and the material". While it may be true that the African version of dualism does not have the same problems often associated with Western dualism, it definitely has problems of its own that will be fully explored in other chapters of this work.

4.3.2 The Yoruba Concept of a Person

In discussing the concepts of ori and human destiny in traditional Yoruba thought, Balogun (2007), presents the Yoruba as one of the major ethnic groups of modern Nigeria who effectively occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Ekiti, Lagos and a substantial part of Kwara State. The Yoruba are also found in large numbers in many parts of Africa besides Nigeria, and these include South-Eastern part of the Republic of Benin, Togo and Dahomey in West Africa, the West-India and South Africa. According to Balogun (2007), there is also a flourishing Yoruba culture in South America and the Caribbean, particularly Brazil and Cuba where the descendants of the immigrants to the new world have been able to keep their identities and guard their cultural heritage.

In his discussion of the Yoruba concept of a person, Gbadegesin (2002), points out that the Yoruba word for person is eniyan, and that the word has a normative as well as an ordinary meaning. He maintains that the Yoruba actually put more emphasis on the normative dimension of the person. The normative aspect indicates ‘‘the moral standing of the human being who is thus determined as either falling short or living up to the expectations of what it

takes to be recognized as such'' (Gbadegesin, 1998, p. 149). In this regard, the Yoruba seem to be in agreement with the Bantus of Eastern and Southern Africa, as will be discussed later in this chapter. Gbadegesin (2002) goes further to claim that eniyan is a product of the Supreme deity, known as Olodumare and other lesser deities. Kaphagawani explain that *emi*, which one of the components of *eniyan*, is a non-physical, life-giving element that is given by the deity, and it is often understood to be an aspect of God's "breath". This element, according to Idowu (1966), is closely linked to breath (eemi) and the total breathing or respiratory system of the human body. As a result, *eemi*, is believed to be a manifestation of the continued presence of *emi* (Gbadegesin, 2002). Imafidon (2012, p. 6) reiterates Kaphagawani's explanation above, pointing out that "*emi* is the element that provides the animating force or energy without which a person cannot be said to living at all, talk less of being conscious". *Emi* is therefore regarded as the basic principle of life, and the very foundation of human existence. Imafidon claims that, as a life giving principle, *emi*'s presence in a person means that the person is alive, and its absence means that the person is dead. Gbadegesin (2002, p. 178) explain this point further, highlighting the view that the element in question is provided and sustained or kept present at the deity's will:

> The presence of emi ensures that the human body, previously lifeless, now becomes a human being - a being that exists. Since *emi* is part of the divine breath, it will continue as the principle of life for a particular human being at the pleasure of the deity. When it is called, the human being ceases to exist. So emi is more of the determinant and guarantor of existence.

Gbadegesin (2002) makes more interesting claims regarding the nature and purpose of the *emi*, as well as the inherent value attached to a being, especially a human person, embodied with *emi*. Second, he alleges that this active element of life is not only found in all human persons, but is found in all living creatures. Both of these claims are significant and relevant

to earlier and later discussions of other African conceptions of personhood such as the force thesis, hence the need to represent the author's view correctly:

> It is the breathing spirit put in a human body by the deity to turn it into a human being. Having emi thus makes one a child of the deity and therefore worthy of protection from harm. Reference to one as an *elemi* is an indirect warning against being maltreated. It is interesting that this usage is also extended to other creatures, including insects, because they are believed to come into being by the creative activity of the deity. (Gbadegesin, 2002, p. 178)

The above view by Gbadegesin (2002) imply first, that the Yoruba attaches intrinsic value to personhood; a view that is, consistent with most transcendental views of personhood. All human beings are born with an inherent worth and deserve to be treated with dignity. Since the Yoruba seems to put greater emphasis on the normative dimension of personhood (Gbadegesin, 2002), the question araises as to how the group harmonizes their transcendental understanding of a person, with a social/relational understanding that they emphasize through the normative dimension. That is, is one regarded a full person worthy of dignified treatment, rights and worth even before any judgment of his/her moral standing in society solely because *Olodumare* created him/her with that worth? On the other hand, is one's moral standing considered before personhood (or a certain degree of personhood) can be conferred on him/her?

The *emi* is not the only component of *eneyan* (person).The Yoruba people have a tripartite conception of personhood. These three aspects of a person are the ara (body), emi (vital principle) and ori (destiny) (Imafidon, 2012). The above claim by has been contradicted by scholars such as Gbadegesin (1998) and Kaphagawani (2004) who claim that a person in Yoruba thought consists of four instead of three elements. Those who advocate for a four element personhood add the *okan* (heart) to the other three as another separate element that should be treated and understood independently of the others. They argue that all these

elements work together to bring about a complete functional human person. According to Gbadegesin (1998, p. 150) the okan ‘‘…is acknowledged as the physical organ responsible for the circulation of blood, and it can be thus identified. On the other hand, however, it is also conceived as the source of emotional and psychic reactions.’’ Scholars such as Adeofe (2006) who advocate for only three elements of a person believe that Yoruba thought basically reduces a person to two general aspects or divisions, which are physical and spiritual elements, with the spiritual element further divided into two. Thus Adeofe (2006) contends that a person is a merger of the body (*ara*), the mind/soul (*emi*), and the inner head (*ori*); and that both emi and ori are mental (or spiritual), while the ara is physical. Adeofe further claims that even though the *ori*, just like the emi, is spiritual, its existence is ontologically independent of the emi and *ara*, thereby making this African conception of a person tripartite as opposed to being dualistic.

However, Imafidon (2012) goes on to explain that each of the three elements play a distinct role in human personhood. For instance, he observes that the *ori* or destiny, constitutes one of the essences of a person in that “it rules, controls, and guides the life and activities of the person,” (Imafidon, 2012, p. 5). Gbadegesin (2002) explain that *ori* is conceived as the carrier of a person’s destiny as well as the basis of personality and character. The Yoruba account of how the *ori* or destiny is acquired or how individual destinies are determined goes as follows. Once the speck of the divine substance known as *emi* (the life principle) has been put in place, it goes before the deities to bid them farewell before coming to the world to be born of man and woman and occupy *ara* (the body). It is at this meeting with one of the deities known as *Ajala* that each potential human person picks his or her package or ‘case’ containing their individual destinies without knowledge of what the destiny entail. According to this account, the entity either suggests a destiny before God, which he (God) either approves or modifies, or it simply kneels before God and has a destiny attached to it. On the

choice of destiny, Gbadegesin (2002) maintains that the individual bows down before Olodumare (God) to choose, by verbal declaration, what he/she would be or do in the world. It seems the issue of contention here is whether the ori itself is the package containing the individuals' destinies, such that by choosing a particular destiny one is actually choosing his ori, or, it is the ori itself, "as a fully conscious personality –component of the person", which goes to God to choose its destiny (Gbadegesin, 2002, p. 180). Gbadegesin argues that his own view concerning the induividual's acquisition of the ori avoids a number of philosophical questions that may be raised regarding the nature of ori. For instance, questions such as how the ori, which is perceived as either non-physical or quasi-physical, can interact with or live in a physical body, will not arise (Gbadegesin, 2002). Whatever the case, what is not in dispute in the different versions of this account is that it is God who ultimately apportion destiny to individuals human persons. Imafidon opines that the fact that ori comes directly from the Supreme Being (Olodumare), means that the human person is closely united with God, and the two share an essential nature. It further means that a human person cannot exist independent of God, for it is Him (God) who causes the human person to come into being. Naturally, the above discussion on *ori* raises fundamental questions regarding issues of free will, responsibility, rewards and punishment as well as relational personhood, among others. Of more relevant to this work is the question of destiny itself, as it relates to gender and gender identity, all which will be explored in final chapters of this work.

Apart from the *ori*, the *ara* is another important element of the human person, and it is best understood as "a collective term for all the material components of a person most important for the Yoruba of which are opolo (the brain), okan (the heart) and ifun (the intestine)," (Imafidon 2012, p. 5). The above explanation by Imafidon, of what the *ara* is, is consistent with Gbadegesin's view that it is the ''physical-material part of the human being and includes its external and internal components, viz., flesh, bone, heart, intestines, etc.'' (1998, p. 149).

Imafidon claims that Ifun (intestines) is often associated with a person's inner strength and resilience, such that if one displays a deficit in these virtuous traits, such person is said to "have no intestines". On the other hand:

> Both Opolo and Okan are regarded by the Yoruba as having some connections with human conscious activities— thinking, feeling, etc. Opolo is regarded by them as having connections with sanity and intelligence. Thus when a person is insane, they say "Opolo re ko pe" (his brain is not complete or not in order)… Okan, (physical heart) which, apart from being closely connected with blood, is also regarded as the seat of emotion and psychic energy. A person who is courageous is said to "have a heart" (oni okan)… (Oladupo, 1992, quoted in Imafidon 2012, p. 5)

Oladupo's account on the *okan* quoted above is consistent with Kaphagawani's (2006) view that the Yoruba regard the *Okan* as a physical organ which serves a dual function of circulating blood as well as serving as a source of emotional and psychic reactions. On this point, Gbedegesein (2002) observes that for the Yoruba, the emotional conditions of a person are taken as functions of the state of their *okan.* Gbedegesein (2002) seems to also agree with both Oladupo and Kaphagawani on the part played by the body organs in defining personhood. He points out that in order for a person to function properly, internal organs such as the intestines (*ifun*) and the head (*opolo*) must perform their critical functions. That is, just as the intestines build a person's strength through its contribution in the metabolism activity of the body, the head is regarded as "the life-line of logical reasoning and ratiocinative activities" (Gbedegesein 2002, p. 176). Similarly, a person's lack of resilience is attributed, figuratively, to lack of or malfunction of the intestines (*ifun*) as indicated above:

> A person who misbehaves is described as having no opolo or a malfunctioning *opolo*. A mentally retarded person is one whose *opolo* is not complete, while the insane is one whose *opolo* is disrupted. *Opolo* is thus a material component, and the functions and activities it performs are carried out and recognised on the physical plane. (Gbedegesein, 2002, p. 176)

Thus, according to Gbedegesein (2002), even though the *okan* is a material component, the effects of its functions have psychical, emotional, and psychological consequences on the person. If Gbedegesein and other scholars' analyses above are correct, it begs the question as to whether the *okan* should be categorised as a physical or spiritual entity. It also gives raise to the old age question on the body-mind interactions. If the *okan* is physical, as Gbadegesin (1978) and Imafidon (2012) allege, how does it interacts with, or cause into being non-physical states such as love, fear, hate, joy and other psychic reactions? Gbedegesein (2002) thinks that beyond the physical and visible *okan* there is something invisible and spiritual which is accountable for all forms of a person's conscious life. However, he is unable to say exactly what that thing is except to argue that certain expressions in the Yoruba language imply that indeed there is a spiritual entity over and beyond the physical entity, and that reference to such physical organs as *okan* is just a manner of speaking. To demonstrate this point, Gbedegesein (2002, p. 177), opines that expressions such as "he does not have a heart" are used in the Yoruba language to describe a coward. This, however, should not be taken literally to mean that the person does not have a physical heart, for such person would not live without this organ. Thus the meaning of such expressions should be understood metaphorically where

> the pumping and circulation of the of blood by the physical heart is construed as so crucial that its results are connected with the state of a person's thoughts and emotions at any point in time, and that, therefore, between *opolo* (brain) and *okan* (heart), conceived in physical terms, we may account for the mental activities and emotional states of a person". (Gbedegesein, 2002, p. 176)

It is clear from the foregoing, that the Yoruba believe in the unity of all the aspects of the human being for a fulfilled and meaningful existence. On this point, Stern (1990), points out that the group believes that personality does not entail of isolated and conflicting selves, rather, all of one's selves unify and articulate themselves through the body (ara) and through

the agency of the heart-soul (okan). These sentiments by Stern (1990) clearly find their origin from Lucas (1948) who argued that the unity of man's personality is a vital element in the Yoruba conception of man.

4.4 Conclusion

Metaphysical personhood in African traditional thought was a mixture of a physical component, which is the body, and one or two (or in some cases three) non-bodily and/or quasi-physical life-giving principle or components such as the soul, spirit, force, fire and shadow. Since these were regarded as life giving principles, their continuous habitation of the physical body kept it alive and active, and their departure brought death to it. In some instances, some of these life principles, such as the force principle, were believed to be fluid and open to manipulation. That is, it could be increased or made stronger, or diminished or made weaker, to one's advantage or detriment, respectively. It is generally agreed that this life principle came directly from the creator or God and this explained why such life principles as the Akans' *okra* was described as a speck of the divine substance and carrier of one's God given or predetermined destiny. The idea of a life principle, however, raised a number of ethical questions. One of such questions was whether there was a correlation between one's behaviour and destiny or purpose in life. In other words, whether it was possible for individuals to behave and make decisions that were contrary to their destiny. If one's earthly career had been sealed prior to commencement of one's earthly life, should such people be praised or blamed for what they did or did not do? Could one's gender identity, such as being a homosexual, be regarded as part of the person's God given destiny? The answers that could be given in respect of these and related questions have implications for the nature of personhood as understood in the African traditional thought.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPLORING AFRICAN VIEWS ON PERSONHOOD: THE NORMATIVE DIMENSION

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to continue to lay the foundation for chapters seven and eight, which aim to relate gender identity to the different African conceptions of personhood. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the main purpose is ultimately to make a determination on the personhood status of the non-heterosexuals. One way of doing this is through a comparative analysis of both the theories of gender and gender identity discussed in chapter two, and the different African conceptions of personhood discussed in this chapter and the previous one. Unlike the previous chapter, this chapter explores views on the normative dimension of personhood associated with Sub-Saharan African traditional thought, with a special focus on the communitarian view. In addition to discussing the main arguments for the communitarian view, the challenges and pitfalls of the approach are explored.

5.1 The Communitarian View-the main argument

The communitarian view of African personhood is perceived, experienced, and established as part of an existing system of social relationships. According to De Craemer (1983) this view of personhood emphasizes the social context, namely a group or category, or both. De Craemer (1983, p. 24) further explains that

> In this central African outlook, then, the personhood of an individual is defined and embedded in a system of relationships that are located in the "inner" and "invisible" world, as well as in the "outer" and "visible" worlds that are regarded and experienced as continua.

Based on the assertion that the concept of a person is a social or communal concept, this approach further argues that achieving personhood is conditional on social achievements that contribute to the common good or to the whole cosmic reality and not just the individual. Further, the relationship of the individual to kinship and the whole community of the living and the dead is so constitutive of the self that any serious disruption in these relationships does enormous, and sometimes irrepairable damage to both the person and those in his line of relationships (Mbiti, 1970). It is even "believed to be supernaturally, as well as naturally threatening and potentially destructive to the family and the community as a whole" (De Craemer, 1983, p. 23). Thus, the African notion of person relates to both the metaphysical and the physical world. It includes hidden and invisible realities as well as empirical and perceptible realities. Both Mbiti (1970) and De Craemer (1983) observe that personhood in African thought fits into a structure of relationships that includes the unborn and the dead, in addition to the living. Therefore, personhood in this case is a connection in a sequence of forebears and progeny.

5.1.1 Communitarianism vs. Individualism

There is an important question regarding metaphysical personhood that philosophers have attempted to answer. Gyekye (2002, p. 297), articulates this question thus:

> whether a person, even though he/she lives in a human society, is a self-sufficient, atomic individual who does not depend on his relationships with others for the realization of his/her ends and who has ontological priority over the community, and whether he/she is by nature a communal being, having natural and essential relationships with others.

Most proponents of the African communitarian view agree that the first part of this question can be answered in the negative in relation to most African scholars and communities whereas the answer will most likely be in the affirmative when considered from a Western

perspective. This view entails that Africans, in general, deny the atomic individuality and self-sufficiency of the person, while Westerners affirm it. Further, with regard to the second part of the question, it is generally agreed by proponents of the African communitarian view that a person is, by nature, a communal being who has essential relationships with others. The same, however, is not true of Westerners who are seen as more sedentary and individualistic.

In distinguishing African communitarian view from the Western views on personhood Menkiti (1984, p. 171) notes that most Western views

> abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description "man" must have, the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focusing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather man is defined by the environing community.

Menkiti proceeds to points out that according to the African view, it is the community which defines the personhood, and not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory, (1984). He further explains that personhood in Africa is something that has to be achieved and not acquired by simply being born of human seed. Thus Menkiti concludes that in as "far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse" (Menkiti, 1984, p. 173). Nobles (1973), one of the psychologists who have employed the African worldviews in examining consciousness and cognitive processes of psychology, also made a similar distinction between the African and Western conceptions of personhood, pointing out that:

> Accordingly the African worldview requires that when focusing on the self, one not be bound to the examination of distinct, separate individuals, but, rather, one should examine the dynamics of the "we" or the feelings of belonging to as well as being the "group." Unlike Western conceptions which examine independent and

> individual selves, research involving the African worldview cannot make a critical distinction between the self (I) and one's people (we). (Nobles, 1973, p. 24)

In making reference to Nobles' and similar views on African personhood and their relevance to psychological analysis, Fairfax (2008, p. 6) observes that inculcating this view within the African American community may be a possible treatment to "behaviours that are individualistic, violent, pedantic and anti-community in environments that plague many segments of the Black community in America".

Moreover, Mbiti (1970, p. 141), who is considered to be the first African scholar to articulate the inseparability of the individual from the community (Kaphagawani 2000, p. 72, Matolino 2009, p. 161), expressed this idea thus:

> Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man.

This postulate by Mbiti is considered to be not only an adaptation of Rene Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), but also a demonstration of the sharp contrast of ideas that exist between the African and the Western understanding of a person. On this alleged distinction between the European and African view, Comaroff & Comaroff (2001, p. 267) write:

> From our disciplinary perspective, 'the *autonomous* person', that familiar trope of European bourgeois modernity, *is* a Eurocentric idea. And a profoundly parochial, particularistic one at that. To be sure, the very notion that this generic person might constitute a universal is itself integral to its Eurocultural construction, a part of its ideological apparatus.

Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) also note that there seem to be a suggestion that to the extent that 'the autonomous person' is a European invention, its absence elsewhere implies a deficit, a failure or a measure of incivility on the part of non-Europeans. Thus Western philosophy has been accused of conceiving the idea of an individual that is capable of existing by itself, and ignoring the inseparable connection between all living and non-living beings, all which make one family. Africans on the other hand do not have this view of sedentary individuals. An African person intimately connected to the community and foundation of this intimate connection is the family. The African understanding of family to which each person belongs is said to have a much wider and infinite membership than the word suggests in the West. In the African thinking the family includes extended family members who can go up 100 people and consists of departed (dead) relatives, extant relatives, as well as the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living (Mbiti, 1990).

For Comaroff & Comaroff (2001), however, neither European individualism nor African communitarianism with their associated values exists exclusively in any real society. When explaining further the implusiblility of exclusive having individualism or exclusive communitarianism Comaroff & Comaroff (2001, p. 267) write:

> Neither, of course, does the classical contrast between (i) the self-made, self-conscious, right-bearing individual of 'modern Western society', that hyphenated Cartesian figure epitomised in the Promethean hero of Universal History, and (ii) the relational, ascriptive, communalistic, inert self-attributed to premodern others' can possibly exist independently and wholly.

According to them, such an independent existence is a mere imagination of the mind where, for instance, '*the* autonomous person' as the definite, singular article exists as an unmediated sociological reality.

5.1.2 Radical versus Moderate Communitarianism

In an interesting discussion of *the Tswana* personhood, Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) emphasize an aspect of this conception of personhood which has been overlooked by many scholars. Their version suggests that personal achievement/advancement is very much a part of the communitarian personhood. This may be said to be a departure from some rather extreme or strong versions of the communitarian view of personhood which tend to conceive a person as wholly constituted by the community. Gyekye (1997) observes that such strong versions of communitarianism fail to appreciate the individual in its unrestricted emphasis on the community, thereby weakening the individual's rights and talents. It is this individual aspect that Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) expouse in their version of communitarian personhood:

> Among those peoples who, during the colonial encounter, came to be known as '*the* Tswana', personhood was everywhere seen to be an intrinsically social construction. This is in two senses: first, nobody existed or could be known except in relation and with reference to, even as part of, a wide array of significant others; and, second, the identity of each and every one was forged, cumulatively, by an infinite, ongoing series of practical activities....selfhood was not ascribed: status and role were determined by factors other than birth or genealogy.... the Tswana world of the time was at once highly communal and highly individuated. From within, it was perceived as a rule-governed, hierarchical, and ordered universe, and yet as an enigmatical, shifting, contentious one: a universe in which people, especially men, had to 'build themselves up' — to constitute their person, position, and rank — by acquiring 'wealth in people', orchestrating ties of alliance and opposition, and 'eating' their rivals. (Comaroff & Comaroff 2001, pp. 268-269)

According to this view, individuals within the Tswana social universe had to take initiative and responsibility to "build themselves up" in order to become persons. This emphasis on self-construction may be said to be consistent with the view of other scholars that the African

conception of a person is a practical rather than a theoretical or abstract matter (Matolino 2009). It is also consistent with the view that personhood is attained through one's relations with others in his/her particular community (see for example, Dzobo 1992, pp. 128-131; Sogolo 1993, p. 190; and Boon 1996, pp. 70-74). Contrary to some common views on African communitarian personhood, this emphasis on self-construction entails that some form of individualism and autonomy are essential for personhood among the Southern Tswana. Again according to Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) the achievement of personhood status through self-construction is embodied in the Sestswana idea of *tiro* (labour) or *go dira (*to labour/work). "*Go dira,* in Setswana means 'to make', 'to do', or 'to cause to happen'. Not only were social beings made and remade by *tiro*, but the product —namely, personhood — was inseparable from the process of production itself" (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 273). This view is supported by Alverson (1978, p. 132) who argues that, 'an individual not only produce[d] for himself, but actually produce[d] his entitlement to be a social person'.

The Tswana version of communitarian personhood articulated above, may be said to represent what Gyekye (2002) refers to as soft or moderate communitarianism. According to him, moderate communitarianism is different from the other extreme or radical versions that immediately sees the human person as 'an inherently communal being, embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, and where due to its emphasis on communal values, collective good and shared ends, the moral autonomy and personal initiatives of the individual are ignored (Gyekye 2002, pp. 298/9). In explaining this version of moderate communitarianism Matolino (2009, p. 160) notes:

> He (Gyekye) proposes that his version of moderate communitarianism ought to be the acceptable version. According to Gyekye radical communitarianism rides roughshod over the individual's autonomy and rights. On the other hand moderate

> communitarianism takes full cognisance of the individual's autonomy and her rights.

Gyekye objects to what he calls radical communitarianism on the ground that it does not take individual rights and capabilities seriously and also on the grounds that it advocates for among other things the notion that old age is the only means or time when the requicite moral excellences and therefore full personhood could be attained. His view, however, does not impress Matolino who is of the opinion that Gyekye's proposed moderate communitarianism does not have a superior appeal to radical communitarianism. He argues against Gyekye's claim that he is advocating a distinct version of communitarianism, pointing out that it is no different from Menkiti's radical communitarianism. This is because both Menkiti and Gyekye anchor their definition of persons on moral achievements. Outlining another point that makes the two versions essentially the same, Matolino (2009, pp. 166, 168) points out:

> Menkiti claims that personhood is not a static quality that is acquired at birth but is acquired as one gets older and becomes morally responsible. Gyekye concedes that in the communitarian conception personhood is not innate but acquired in the moral arena. This puts him on par with Menkiti as both are claiming the criticality of moral achievement in the determination of personhood…. He (Gyekye) wants to affirm the importance of rights and the fact that moderate communitarianism is equipped with the necessary structure to recognize them. But at the same time he, in a very puzzling manner, claims that the very same moderate communitarian society cannot allow itself to be obsessed with rights. I think it is fair to inquire as to what Gyekye's moderate version will be obsessed with. Gyekye says it will prize harmony, peace, stability and solidarity. If that is the case I suggest that there is no difference between the radical communitarian and Gyekye. They are both not obsessed with rights and they value harmony, peace, stability and solidarity. Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is on that score the same with radical communitarianism.

Further to this, Matolino refutes Menkiti's view, saying that the community cannot be the one and only determinant of personhood. He points out that if personhood is decided exclusively by relations to the community, individual rights will not be acknowledged within that

community. He argues instead that a person who is talented in whatever way is not commonly regarded as a danger to her communitarian community as long as she adheres to its moral requirements. That is, the community has no reason to feel threatened by her unless her talents or outstanding abilities are directed at causing some social disorder in one way or the other (Matolino, 2009).

5.1.3 Personhood and The kinship system in traditional African society

In a broad sense, a kinship system is a culture's system of accepted family roles and relationships that clarify the privileges and responsibilities, as well as setting the margins and limits of interaction among the members of a self-recognizing group such as a tribe or its sub-group, a clan (Radcliffe-Brown, (1941). In traditional African cultures, kinship systems go wider and deeper to include the departed and those yet to be born and creates a network that gives its members a sense of belonging (Siegel, 1996). Furthermore, the African kinship system unites members of a family, clan and community by providing them with a sense of identity. Through this system, members grow to realise that they belong to a single community, and that they derive their own individual identity from this "larger imagined tradition of greatness" (Nevadomsky, 1993, p. 65). African kinship systems also produce "a feeling of deep rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 103). It enhances a sense of security through strong bonds among members of the community. Thus unlike the Western or modern ideas of family, the traditional African family circle is much wider and deeper mainly because it is profoundly founded on, and ontologically rooted in, one's ancestors and descendants:

> For the African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. …the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children…The family also includes the departed relatives, who we have designated as the living dead. African concept of family also include the unborn members who

> are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished. (Mbiti 1969, pp. 104-105)

In traditional African society everyone in the family as described above is ontologically connected to everyone else in a complex and infinite web of connections (Tempels, 1959; Ogbonna, 2016). As a result, an individual's personal identity is understood and made possible only in terms of the particular relations and connection he has with everyone else in his lineage, clan and community. This claim is consistent with De Craemer W. (1983, p. 22)'s observation that:

> Whereas in American terms selfhood is a much individuated, discrete, private, bounded entity, sufficient unto itself, in an African framework it is defined, understood, and experienced as part of a living system of social relationships. What is emphasized in this view of the person is social context, namely a group, a category, or both.

This means that the individual's essential nature and metaphysical identity is inseparably linked with his kinship ties which is defined by his membership of a clan or community. The result is that, one's identity is not an individualized or personalized status as in the Western concepts of personal identity. This is mainly because, as mentioned above, it is derived from the metaphysical nature and 'identity' of the whole. In this way human persons in the African context are defined and individuated communally (Tempels, 1959, p. 58). It should be further noted, that in a way the individual also contributes to or is part of the identity of the whole community. This is because his actions and utterances can contribute to the opinion that others have of his community and its moral status within the league of communities. Identity therefore, is not personal but collective, interdependent and mutual. Therefore, any change in an aspect of the person's individual being or nature affect the metaphysical position and identity of everyone around him, including his tribe or community. This is because, as Mbiti

(1969) observes, in the African understanding of personhood, a person has to be born in the clan, community or tribe, the membership of which, he cannot withdraw from. The implication is that an African person's membership of his tribe or community is more than a geographical and physical association. It is even more than a mere biological or genealogical bond between of such persons and other members of the group. Rather, it is a predetermined, unbreakable metaphysical or ontological bond. Conceptually therefore, any change in an individual's identity or being changes the identity of everyone who is ontologically related and connected to him. Such a change may ultimately bring a chain of changes to all other beings to which the individual is metaphysically connected in an intimate way, including the non-human beings in the spiritual realm. Thus, the decisions and actions that an individual undertakes cannot just be a personal affair but has to be seen in the context of all the relations that the individual has to both human and non-human beings. This shows that in traditional African kinship system the living have various responsibilities which it is expected to fulfil both to the unborn and the dead (Mbiti, 1969). Community members are expected to carry out their responsibilities toward others, contribute positively to the wellbeing and continuity of the community, as well as preserve the cultural identity of their community. Such identity is preserved partly by accepting communal beliefs and participating in community rituals within the kinship system (Bone, 2016; Sanni, 2016). Such rituals promote harmonious relationships by defining expected behaviour between members of the community (Nevadomsky, 1993; Mbiti, 1969). Thus the African kinship system enables members of same clan to support each other especially during times of crisis. In this connection, it even set out punishment for delinquent members of a clan or community.

African kindship systems do not only define the relationship between the individual and the community but is also the medium through which new relationships are created and managed through marriages between different families. It is the means through which the African

comes into being, get socialised or nurtured, and matures into full personhood. The intricate network of relationships that is established through kinship and its importance to personhood is further outlined as follows:

> It is kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community: it governs marital customs and regulations, it determines the behaviour of one individual towards another. Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the 'tribe' and is even extended to cover animals, plants and non-living objects through the 'totemic system'. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kinship system. This it is which largely governs the behaviour, thinking and whole life of the individual in the society of which he is a member. (Mbiti 1969, p. 102)

The above status obtains precisely because it is impossible and even undesirable for the individual exist alone. This is because the individual owes his existence to people around him, thus the community has a responsibility to make, build, or produce the individual. The result of African reality described above is that "each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother in law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else". Ultimately, a single person actually "has literally hundreds of fathers, hundreds of mothers, hundreds of uncles, hundreds of wives, hundreds of sons and daughters," (see Mbiti, 1969, pp. 102–109). Again in the light of the foregoing, it can be concluded that in many African societies, identifying and defining one's personhood is only possible through other people within the kinship system. This is because only in relation to others does the individual develop consciousness of his own being, his own obligations, his freedoms and accountabilities towards himself and other people" (Mbiti, 1969).

5.1.3.1 Communitarian personhood and the Rites of passage

For the communitarian view, personhood is a socially achievable status with physical existence as a mere indication of the potential for personhood. In many African communities, individuals may not be recognized as persons until they have gone through some physical changes and associated rituals marking the different stages of life. Such stages include opening of the eyes as a baby, cutting the first tooth, puberty, marriage, bearing the first child etc. De Craemer (1983, p. 23) concludes that personhood "is at the dynamic center of the cycle of rites of passage that delineate and make sacred the stages of human existence". It follows from the above that not all human beings attain the status of being a person and that physical existence (as in the case of a child) is merely an indication of the potential for personhood (Coetzee, 2002). This is especially the case among the Akan where, as Coetzee points out, the potential for acquiring personhood is only given biologically to all human beings. Amanze (2002) presents a similar position in his discussion of the African concept of a person, pointing out that according to African philosophy, man is only definable in terms of becoming. Thus, a new born baby may not be recognized as a human being until he has gone through some physical changes such as growing teeth. Dzobo (1992, p. 131) on the other hand, puts the standard for personhood much higher, arguing that "the person who has achieved a creative personality and productive life and is able to maintain a productive relationship with others is said to 'have become a person'".

The rites-of-passage angle of this conception of personhood suggests that becoming a person is developmental, making personhood

> ..a state that is progressively achieved through stages, and by degrees, including ancestorhood. This evolutionary conception of "person" also implies that some individuals and categories of individuals never obtain full personhood (for example, women who are barren and thus unable to give birth to a child), and that others are

> considered to be "nonpersons" (for example, slaves, as long as they remain in that status). (De Craemer, 1983, p. 24)

This means that prior to the process of initiation into society one is only partially a person (or not a person at all). The cumulative nature of the process also entails that certain individuals such as infants, outcasts, and deviants may not be given (full) personhood status. The thinking by some of the proponents of the communitarian view such as Fortes (1958) and Strathern (199) is that, where personhood status is linked to rites of passage, there is a tendency to look at personhood a developmental process. This led scholars such as Tsekenis (2011), to further argue that full personhood is only attainable at the very final stage of life, namely death. On this point Tsekenis (2011, p. 6), writes:

> The ritual trajectory of the person (and its states) is linear and one-way. Adulthood is the first step of a linear progression and the person achieves completion (becomes a full person) only at death e.g. is fully incorporated in the total society by accessing to ancestry. This understanding of initiation rituals and of personhood presumes that: a) before entering initiation rituals, the person is into a pre-socialized state, and: b) as far as gender is concerned, adulthood affirms an unequivocal gender for both man and woman.

Menkiti's (1984) explanation that African personhood is defined by the community, and not by certain human qualities, is a clear reaction to and denial of Western capacity-based or cognitive theories of personhood discussed earlier in this work. The capacity-based view for instance, regards an entity as a person only if it possesses certain cognitive conditions such as; self-consciousness (of oneself as existing over time); capacity to act on reasons; capacity to communicate with others by command of a language; capacity to act freely; and rationality. Based on the assumption that these capacities develop naturally in most normal human beings Menkiti deduces that this turns the capacity based approach to the transcendental approach. Thus under this approach, most individuals are considered persons

since most individuals are capable of displaying these capacities. Menkiti on the other hand argues that under the African communitarian view personhood is status that has to be achieved and is not acquired by possessing capacities that are common to most people.

Clearly, the difference between the capacity-based approach and the African communitarian view is that while the former approach points to internal aspects of the individual as the defining factor of personhood, the latter points to the external factor, namely social relations. However, it may be naïve to assume that human capacities that the proponents of the capacity based approach advocate for as markers of personhood are entirely internal to human beings. This is because such internal capacities often need external factors for their formation, growth and expression. Similarly, for social interactions to contribute in shapping and nurturing the public persona of an individual, internal human capacities such as rationality and capacity for speech must be present. This means communitarian personhood cannot truly exist without human cognitive capacities as expressed in the capacity-based approach. In a way, both the capacity-based approach and the communitarian approach acknowledge that personhood is a developmental. They both agree that having a human form or a humanly shaped body alone does not make one a person. It follows from the above that they both may be guilty of denying the personhood of infants, and the mentally and socially challenged human beings who cannot differentiate right from wrong actions.

5.1.4 *Botho (Ubuntu)* and Communitarian personhood

Another variant of communitarian personhood which emphasises the importance of morality in determining the personhood status of an individual is commonly associated with various Bantu groups of southern and eastern Africa. *Botho (Ubuntu)* which can be understood to mean ‘humaneness’ is essential to what has been described as a proverbial (Southern) African

notion of personhood: the view that a person is a person through other people (see Shutte, 1993; Bamford, 2007). Metz and Gaie (2010) assert that a good starting point for comprehending Sub-Saharan African morality is the Sotho-Tswana expression; *"Motho ke motho ka batho babang"*, or its Zulu/ Xhosa equivalent; *"Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"*. Both of these expressions are translated as "A person is a person through other persons". According to Nussbaum (2003, p. 21), "Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community". Nussbaum (2003, p. 21) further claims that Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that: Your pain is my pain, my wealth is your wealth, and your salvation is my salvation. Perhaps in contrast to the Western concept of social personhood, Bamford (2007, p. 85) explains that the aspect of *ubuntu* that is linked to the concept of person is not simply a way to refer to an aggregate of individuals, but rather acknowledges "the practical and conceptual interdependence of persons, taking relationships (rather than properties) as primary". Bamford (2007) observes that reciprocity, which is one of the notions considered intrinsic to the concept *ubuntu*, entails that the character of persons changes as the relationships between persons change. Therefore, persons in this African thought is considered to be "works-in-progress, and psychological development over time might also be reflected in ethical development," (Bamford, 2007, p. 85; Shutte, 1993, p. 50). Likewise, Mkhize (1998, p. 1) claims that the *self* is embedded in the community in a number of traditional African cultures in South Africa, and that the African view of personhood denies that a person can be described solely in terms of the physical and psychological properties. It is mainly with reference to the community that a person is defined and understood.

Consistent with the above point, Nussbaum (2003) makes an interesting demonstration of the selflessness displayed by individuals who are guided by the philosophy of *botho* in everyday

life. She gives an example of how Shona greetings (in Zimbabwe) are normally done, where in the morning time it goes like:

> *Mangwani, marara sei?* (Good morning, did you sleep well?)
> *Ndarara, kana mararawo* (I slept well, if you slept well.)
> And at lunchtime:
> *Marara sei?* (How has your day been?)
> *Ndarara, kana mararawo?* (My day has been good, if your day has been good.) Nussbaum (2003, p. 22).

Nussbaum concludes that this kind of greeting which apply to both close family members and to strangers shows that the individuals are so connected that if one did not sleep well, or if one is not having a good day, neither can the other sleep well or have a good day. Amanze (2002), while contending that the concept of *botho* is derived from *motho* (human person), describe *botho* as entailing values such as sharing, hospitality, honesty and humility. He points out that these values constitute the common good, and so is the nature of *botho*. Amanze also argues that *botho* demands that the welfare and achievements of the individual should be within and compatible with the welfare and achievement of the community, which is the common good. *Botho (Ubuntu)* sees community advancement rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood (Nussbaum 2003). The good of the community is considered paramount, because what is best for the community is, by virtue of reciprocity, also and immediately best for the person (Shutte, 1993, p. 90). Bell (2002) relates the accepted wisdom of humaneness, respect/dignity (or *ubuntu*) with personhood. He further argues that *ubuntu* can also operate as conceptual shorthand for an ancient traditional African outlook of reconciliation, unity, friendship, love, forgiveness and generosity especially in post-apartheid South Africa (2002, p. 89). This, according to Bamford (2007), provided some context for Desmond Tutu's well-known remark that, if a person lacks *ubuntu*, then that person is not really human. Thus since, the concept of *botho (ubuntu)* is derived from *motho*

(human person), and us usually held to entail such moral values as sharing, hospitality, honesty and humility, it is safe to assume that there is a necessary connection between ethics and metaphysics in this conception of African personhood.

In light of the foregoing, the African communitaran view of personhood could be said to be consistent with Nussbaum (1995)'s contention that there is a rational way to establish ethics in an account of human nature. Nussbaum position on the interdependence of ethics and human nature is consistent with some Western conceptions of personhood, such as the capacity-based approach some advocates of which try to establish a connection between metaphysical personhood and moral personhood (see for instance Dennett, 1976, p. 176; Tooley 1983, pp. 95-122; Harris 1985, pp. 14-21; Singer 1993, pp. 95-99, pp. 181-184; Korsgaard 2004, pp. 103-104). In discussing Nussbaum's account, Poltera (2005) observes that Nussbaum's advocacy for an objective account of ethics by denying relativism also suggests a basically similar account of personhood that is universalist in nature. "Her (Nussbaum's) account of human nature depends on the idea that we as humans share certain deeply held beliefs about what it is to count as a human being, which are inescapably moral," (Poltera, 2005, pp. 88). Thus just like the notions *botho* and personhood, morality and human nature are seen to be intertwined or inseparable. The tendency to associate morality with personhood/human nature in African thought is not limited to Southern Africa where the notion of *Ubuntu/botho* is commonly held, but also extends to West Africa. Kwame Gyekye expresses a similar view regarding the Akan conception of personhood;

> African personhood is a larger-than-self conception that encompasses more than the physical being. It determines how a human being should conduct him/herself in relationship to a collective responsibility. It delineates standards that promote moral and ethical behaviours that are practiced amongst persons. African personhood is evidence of the responsibility one has toward others (Gyekye, 1984, p. 199).

5.1.5 Objections and Challenges for the Communitarian view

Although the communitarian conception of personhood is widely held, there are some logical difficulties associated with it. The first is the apparent contradiction in asserting that an individual is by nature a communal being while at the same time asserting that one has to work towards achieving or being awarded personhood by the community. It stands to reason that if an individual is already a communal being, then he should at birth be imbued with all the communal attributes that will ensure that he attains personhood status within the community. The fact that an individual has to work towards achieving personhood and could fail at a communal life is an indication that human beings are essentially not communal. Gyekye (2002) for instance argues that 'the human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, that is, community life is not optional for any individual person, the human person is naturally oriented toward other persons and *must* have relationships with them' Gyekye (2002, p. 300). If the above is true, then the relationship between human beings should be completely free of problems and it should be impossible for human beings to fail at relating to one another. This also entails that human beings should automatically qualify for personhood since doing so would be part of their nature.

The above argument by Gyekye, could be classified as the metaphysical argument for communitarian personhood and is supported by prominent African socialist leaders such as Nkrumah (1964) and Senghor (1964). For these leaders personhood in African thinking is naturally and involuntarily communal/social. A different and what could be classified as a biological argument has also been offered for the idea that a person, in African thought, is naturally and involuntarily communal/social. Tsékénis (2011, p. 19) for instance, argues that, "The possibility for persons/groups to detach parts of themselves and to produce persons implies that the foetus (or at least the child) is already a social being before initiation rituals".

What Tsékénis is saying here is that the social nature of a human being is already determined by the fact that human seeds from two separate individuals have to come together to produce a new person. He also seems to be arguing that this social nature is further concretized by various initiation rituals that follow the birth of a child. This biological argument, however presents some difficulties. The first is that the joining of the two human seeds that creates a new human being cannot be regarded as a social event in the same way as we cannot say that the reproduction in frogs is social because it involves more than one frog. Moreover, new human beings are not always created in a socially acceptable manner as in cases of rape, defilements and forced marriages. The biological argument therefore does not appear to be appropriate for communitarian personhood.

From the above, it is clear that the whole communitarian argument that the human person is naturally and involuntarily communal/social cannot be sustained. The difficulty here is that if an individual is by nature a communal being, and at the same time such individual needs to display behaviour consistent with communal life to be recognized as a person, then it is not clear whether according to this conception of personhood one is a person by nature or through a process of socialisation. This point can be made in light of the fact that the very definition of a person in African communitarianism cannot be divorced from communal life and a concern for the well-being of others within the larger community to which he/she is naturally connected and dependent. This raises the question as to whether according to this view, all human beings, living, dead and unborn are in fact persons. The question arises because of their connections and chain of physical and metaphysical relationships within the kinship group and the rest of the community. If all human beings are persons in this way, it will entail that contrary to what most proponents of this approach propose, personhood in this variant of African thought is in fact inherent and not social. It follows that if individuals are naturally oriented towards others, there would be no need to urge such individuals to have

relationships with others. It also means that such individuals cannot fail at being persons, nor would they need to be awarded such status. In other words, individuals do not need the community to award them personhood status, since they are already born persons by virtue of being born communal beings. Proponents of this view of personhood may rebut the above critique by pointing out that a thing needs not to be born with an attribute or status for that (attribute or status) to be regarded as part of its nature. That is, even though human beings acquire the status of personhood at a later stage in life, (as opposed to being born with it), this does not rule out the possibility of personhood being part of human nature. There is, however, a problem with this counter-argument. First, it does not address the contradiction that arises from alleging on one hand, that an African is born socialized (Nyerere, 1968), and on the other, that one needs to be socialized so as not to fail at being a person. It also fails because an attribute/status cannot be regarded as essential nature if it is controlled and allocated by someone that is external to the recipient. Furthermore, if being relational or upholding a communal life is human nature, it means that one does not need to be persuaded to live a communal life. It should be natural to everyone to want to relate to, care for others and to uphold the common good. The view that a child is a person only in potentiality and that personhood is something that one has to first qualify for could have bearing on one's judgment on some moral issues such as abortion and insanity (mental ill health). This implies that a baby cannot be regarded as having attained the status of a person, and as such could be treated as a non-person without any moral sanctions. Even where such sanctions are applied they may not be to the same degree that one is expected when such transgressions apply to human persons.

5.2 Conclusion

The normative personhood in African traditional thought entailed that a person was not merely the physical human form or body but also had non-physical aspects that constitutes

the metaphysical dimension. Asserting the normative dimension involved saying that, in addition to the fixed, inborn, metaphysical components, an individual needed to ascend to the status of a moral person. This status is only attainable through a certain degree of moral maturity and social responsibility. Wiredu (1987) observed that the degree of moral competence associated with the African concept of a person was not merely additional to it but is rather an integral part of it. More than that, it was appropriate to also assert that the degree of moral competence associated with normative personhood was not merely grounded on the metaphysical personhood discussed in the previous chapter, but was actually continuous with it. This means that the metaphysical person was fully realised and expressed through the moral person. For instance, while it might be assumed that one had in him a certain degree of divine principle such as 'vital force' or 'okra', it was actually what he did that affirmed not only his personhood, but also the kind of human being he was. That is, a human being with a strong personality that was predicated on his possession of a strong 'force principle' or okra, would display high moral and social status and integrity compared with a human being with a weak or diminished 'force'. As a result, personhood in the normative sense became a matter of degree, meaning that some individuals were more of persons than others, while others might completely fail at personhood. This disparity in the degree of personhood was often explained in terms of individuals' moral maturity and social responsibility. In a sense, individuals whose bad behaviour rendered them as 'not persons', might still be regarded as persons in the metaphysical sense. This is because according to some African traditional conceptions of personhood, every human being had a speck of the divine substance. Such a person could, on that ground alone, be regarded a person who deserved to be treated with respect and dignity (Wiredu, 1996). However, when African personhood was conceived and explained in this way, it remained unclear whether there was any connection between metaphysical and normative personhood. And if there was, what was

the nature of this connection or relationship? Was it a causal relationship as presumed above, where the moral dimension emanates directly from the metaphysical aspects of the human being? As already mentioned, some versions of this conception of personhood maintained that at least some of the metaphysical constituents of the person originates from God, and as such contain a God given destiny. It is therefore expected that the moral person proceeding from these basic metaphysical components would display behaviour consistent with the nature of that destiny. This analysis will be taken further in the proceeding chapters especially as it relates to gender identity issues that could arise in homosexuality. The next chapter highlights some of the similarities and differences that exist between the different African conceptions of personhood as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER SIX

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SOME AFRICAN IDEAS ON PERSONHOOD

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the similarities and differences that exist between the dominant African conceptions of personhood discussed in chapters 4 and 5. The approach is similar to Kaphagawani's (2004) brief but insightful work in which he surveyed and expounded on the various conceptions of a person in Africa South of the Sahara. In doing so, this chapter will consider the strength of shared or solitary features of some of the African conceptions of personhood. It will then determine the extent to which the various African ideas on the nature of a person are (dis)similar, complementary (or opposed), and even reducible to each other. This endeavour is carried out against a background of compelling arguments that the very talk of an African philosophy is an illusion, as it implies that African thought is a fixed, absolute, homogenous thought 'abstracted from history and progress' (See Houtondji, 1983, p. 33; Imafidon, 2012, p. 2). In order to achieve the objective of this chapter, a combination of explanatory and argumentative analysis is used in which the different conceptions of personhood are compared and contrasted in relation to one another. In section 6.1, the chapter begins with a comparative discussion of the Akan, Yoruba, and other African conceptions of a person with a focus on both *normative* and *metaphysical personhood*. This is followed by a discussion of the *Force thesis* and the *Communitarian* conception of personhood in section 6.2. As will become evident throughout the discussion, the idea that stands out in this chapter is that there are far more similarities than differences between the various conceptions of personhood. Therefore, it can be concluded that these conceptions of personhood generally agree on what constitutes the essential nature of the human person.

6.1 A comparison of the Akan, Yoruba and Other African conceptions of the Person

6.1.1 Metaphysical personhood

The Akan and the Yoruba seem to agree on the existence of a non-physical, life giving, basic element that constitutes the person without which the human body cannot be alive. The Akan and the Yoruba refer to this life principle with different terms, which are the *okra* and the *emi* respectively. However, they both regard this entity as the immortal constituent of the human person which is given directly by the creator before the human person is born into the world (Imafidon, 2012). For instance, with reference to the *emi*, Gbadegesin (2002, p. 178) explains that it is ‘‘the nonphysical, active principle of life, the life-giving element, put in place by the deity’’. Similarly, Wiredu (2002, p. 313) explains that the *okra* “is held to come directly from God, it is supposed to be an actual speck of God that he gives out of himself as a gift of life along with a specific destiny”. The fact that the *okra* is believed to be a carrier of destiny in addition to being an active life principle counts as the main characteristic that differentiates from the *emi* (Gbedegesein, 2002, p. 183). As can be seen from this perspective, it is not the *emi*, but the *okra*, which is the bearer of destiny in the Yoruba conception of the person. Having considered the conceptions of personhood among the Akan and the Yoruba, it is worth noting that the idea of a divine eternal element which gives life to the human person is not exclusive to the Akan and the Yoruba groups. Other groups in different parts of Africa hold more or less similar ideas with regard to the essential, metaphysical nature of the person. One of such examples is discussed by Stoller (1989), who states that the notion of bodily and life processes as sustained by a life force or vital principle is part of the religious beliefs of the Nuer. The Nuer are a cattle-herding people who dwell in the Nilotic Sudan, and they refer to this vital principle as *yiegh* (translated as both ‘breath’ and ‘life’*)*.

Similarly, when expounding on the Force thesis, Tempels (1959, p. 55) had claimed that in Chichewa, "*Muntu* (person) signifies a vital force endowed with intelligence and will". In view of Tempels' claim, Kaphagawani (2004, p. 335) opines that the Tempelsian notion of vital force seems to have similarities with that of *sunsum* and *okan* among the Akan and Yoruba respectively. Kaphagawani's view appears to be informed by the qualities of intelligence and will. These qualities are among the Luba's idea of the vital force, and are also associated with the *sunsum* and *okan* (Kaphagawani, 2004). However, Tempels' explanation of the person as living force rendered below provides a stronger association of his notion of vital force with the essentially non-physical entities of *okra* and *emi* than with *sunsum* and *okan*, which are sometimes conceived to be quasi-physical:

> The Bantu sees in man the living force; the force or the being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals and minerals. These lower beings exist by divine decree, only for the assistance of the higher created being, man. (Temples 1959, p. 97)

Tempels' notion of man as a living force is particularly similar to the notion of *emi* in another sense. This can be illustrated by Gbedegesein (2002, p. 178) explanation that the presence of *emi* is taken as a determinant and guarantor of existence. This means every person is a child of the deity and therefore should not be mistreated or violated. Most importantly in this case, protection against maltreatment is extended to non-human creatures such as animals and insects since they are also brought into existence through the same the same active element of life known as *emi*. Consistent with the Yoruba notion of the *emi*, the underlying thinking in the Tempelsian force thesis is that all living beings, and all their essences, can be subsumed under the concept of vital force. However, it must be noted that unlike the *emi*, Tempel's vital force forms part of essences of all existing things including non-living objects such as

minerals. In this case, the person, as conceived in the force thesis is explained as a vital force that has got not only intelligence and a will, but is closely connected with other forces (both in the animal and inanimate worlds). The view that the life giving principle is equally found in both living and non-living objects does not come out strongly or clearly with regards to both *emi* and *okra* among the groups in question. Apart from the Luba and Chewa metaphysical thought where Tempels derived his idea of vital force, Stoller (1989), claims that the Songhay of Niger also believe in "the energy of life" principle. Similarly, David (2007) is of the view that the Nupe group, located primarily in the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria, hold that in addition to having the body, the human person has the *rayi and fifingi*, which are translated as the "life force", and the "shadow" respectively. The latter is believed to remain visible after death and occasionally haunt people physically or in their dreams, (David, 2007, p. 36). On the same principle of shadow advocated for by Kagame (1989), Kaphagawani (2004, pp. 338-339) explains that for the Bantu a human being is both a complete animal and a being endowed with intelligence. In this case, the human being is believed to be 'complete' because he or she possesses ''the vital principle of animality known as shadow" Kaphagawani (2004, p. 338). The concept of the shadow among the Bantu is comparable in some respects to that of *sunsum* among the Akans (see Kaphagawani, 2004, p. 341). Kaphagawani (2004) further adds that Kwasi Wiredu, who is one of the scholars who have written extensively on the Akan philosophical thought, had indicted to him in personal communication, that in fact the word *sunsum* literally means ''shadow.'' Both notions, namely, the shadow and *sunsum*, may be understood as personality principles, based on the fact that they both seem to make reference to the person's individual characteristics and personal presence. As argued by Wiredu (2002, p. 313) "sunsum is not an entity, it is, rather, a manner of being". Similarly, Jackson and Karp (1990, p. 18) observe that among the Chewa, as also among the Bantu of the Lower Congo, the ''shadow of a person is a perfect

symbol of individual identity". The reason for this thinking, as explained by Kaphagawani (2004), is that just like a shadow, personhood is ever changing, and it is "a persistent process in which personality is continually reinvented", and only death marks the end of this creative process. As a result, it is a common saying among the Chewa for instance, that 'a dead man does not have a shadow', which, according to Kaphagawani (2004), should be understood metaphorically to mean that once dead, the person's character, personality and individuality also cease. Kaphagawani's (2004) point with regard to the shadow, is comparable to Gyekye's (1987, p. 89) description of the nature of *sunsum*. Gyekye argues that it - *sunsum* - is something that perishes with the body, and that this fact alone makes this entity physical in nature. Sykes (2016, p. 12) holds a similar view with regard to *sunsum*, and points out that unlike the *okra*, *sunsum*, or the basic character, dies with the person and is the same as the one that a person's biological father has. Taken together, the points raised by Gyekye (1987), Sykes (2016) and Kaphagawani (2004) with regard to the mortality of *sunsum* may not mean that a person's *sunsum* or shadow is necessarily *forgotten* once he/she dies. It is generally believed that a person's character or personality survives its owner after death, and can even ensure his or her immortality and elevation into ancestorship. This view is supported by David's (2007) point, mentioned above, that the "shadow" is believed to remain visible after death and sometimes disturb the living in dreams, or make physical visitations. Before ending the discussion in this section it is important to touch on a notable difference between the shadow principle and *sunsum*. Unlike the shadow principle, the *sunsum* is believed to be derived from one's male parent, a view that may also be used to account for its perceived mortality. In particular, Busia (1954); Danquah (1968); and Gyekye (2002) point to this difference in their discussion of the Akan account of the person. It seems an evaluation of the nature and functions of the *sunsum* makes it equivalent not only to the notion shadow, but also to the notion of *okan* held by the Yoruba. That is, both entities are postulated as the

bearers of thought and feelings. Gbedegesein (2002, p. 184) observes that while the *sunsum* and *okan* can be said to be equivalent in terms of their functions stated above, the former is further believed to be "the determinant of power, success, and wealth", but the same cannot be said of the latter.

6.1.2 Normative Personhood

As it will be noticed below, notwithstanding Gyekye's (1997) discussion of the Akan conception of the person and his contended position of "moderate communitarianism", it can still be argued that his position is just an interpretation or another form of normative personhood. Arguably, he has not in any way divorced the idea of normative personhood from the Akan group, but rather he has merely set limits to the extent to which normative personhood can be understood and expressed. However, unlike Gyekye, Wiredu's (2002) understanding of the Akan concept of personhood as normative is in total agreement with classical African communitarian conception of the person as expressed by Mbiti (1969) and Menkiti (1984). Consistent with Mbiti's (1969) now classic remark that the African individual "can only say 'I am', because we are", Wiredu (2002, p. 289) points out that:

> It is that, for the Akans, a person is social not only because he or she lives in a community, which is the only context in which full development, or indeed any sort of human development is possible, but also because, by his/her original constitution, a human being is part of a social whole.

Thus Wiredu is in effect advocating for the view that a person in the Akan thought is essentially or naturally a social being. Wiredu makes a case for a metaphysical basis for his claim above. His general position seems to suggest that the metaphysical aspect of the person as held by the Akan naturally leads to a normative understanding of the same. This makes the metaphysical and normative dimensions of personhood interdependent. He calls our attention to the fact that the person in the Akan understanding consists of three elements. The first of

these is the *okra*, which comes directly from God thereby making all human beings children of God. The second one is the blood principle from the mother and is responsible for the body. The last element is the charisma principle from the father which is responsible for the degree of a personal presence (Wiredu 2002, p. 289). In Wiredu's view, the maternal and paternal principles place a person in his/her specific social units; the lineage and clan by the maternal principle, and another group symbolising goodwill on the father's side where one is placed by the paternal principle. In light of the foregoing Wiredu (2002, p. 290) concludes:

> The point now is that, on this Akan showing, a person has a well-structured social identity even before birth. Thus, when an Akan maxim points out that when a human being descends from on high he or she alights in a town *(se onipa siane fi soro a obesi kuro mu)* the idea is that one already has well defined social affiliations.

Wiredu's view above echo some of the voices of contemporary advocates for African communitarianism already mentioned in chapter two. It is also parallel to the views held by some earlier African scholars cum politicians who, through their preferred political ideology known as African socialism, preached that the 'African is born socialised' (see Nyerere, 1968; and Kenyatta 1965). Kenyatta (1965, p. 297) for instance, points out that "according to Gikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual. Or rather, his uniqueness is a secondary fact about him; first and foremost he is several people's relative and several people's contemporary." Similarly, Senghor (1964, p. 49), the former leader of Senegal, observed that "Negro-African society is collectivist or, more exactly communal, because it is rather a communion of souls than an aggregate of individuals". The question that naturally follows from the above discussion is what then does it mean to be born to society and to be communal. Both Wiredu (2002) and Gyekye (1997) agree that embedded in the idea of communal existence is the notion that there are certain basic norms and ideals that the human person must conform to. Wiredu observes that according to the Akans, failure to conform or follow these ethos of the community means that one cannot be regarded as a person *'onnye*

nipa' (he/she is not a person). This view by Wiredu is also strongly expressed by Menkiti (1984) in his explanation of what it means to be a person according to the African communitarian view. Both Wiredu and Menkiti claim according to this African view, there is a distinction between being human and being a person. This distinction is centred on the idea that while every individual will be regarded as a human being by virtue of being created by God and possessing *okra* in the case of the Akan beliefs, not everyone may be regarded as a person, at least not to the same degree. Just as Menkiti (1984, p. 172) has argued that "personhood is something which has to be achieved, and is not given simply because one is born of human seed", Wiredu (2002, p. 292) also argues that "an individual who remained content with self-regarding successes would be viewed as so circumscribed in outlook as not to merit the title of a real person". Thus, for instance, an adult who does little or nothing to make livelihood for family and a wide group of kin dependents might drop to the level of simply a human being. Such individual will only be accorded the basic dignity and the unconditional rights characteristic to the status of being a mere human being. Further, such a human being will never be regarded as a person or accorded respect, dignity and additional rights worthy of persons in society. Wiredu's (2002) work on the distinction between a human being and a person is complemented by Wingo (2008), who points out that an individual's fall from personhood never goes beyond the status of being a human being. The reason for this is that all individuals possess an *okra* which sets lower bounds on how far they may descend on the scale of personhood. In this sense all humans have moral value that enables them to enjoy basic dignity and unconditional rights whether they have accomplished the status of personhood or not.

Gyekye (2002) seems to provide an account of communitarian personhood that contradicts the one provided by Wiredu and others above. He argues that the idea that it is the community that outlines and determines personhood may be derived from some expressions

in the Akan language. Gyekye (2002) explains that some people mistakenly interpret these expressions to mean that the community has an all-engulfing moral authority to determine all things about the life of the individual person. For instance, some Akan expressions such as 'onnye nipa', and 'oye nipa,' literally mean 'he/she is not a person' and 'he is a person' respectively. Even though these expressions make reference to an individual's performance in terms of social achievement and personal relationships, Gyekye denies that such performance is used as a measure of personhood in the Akan conception of the person. He admits that the fact that a person is born into an existing community in itself implies that a person is a communitarian being by nature. In other words communal life is not voluntary for such person, and social relationships are not conditional but necessary (Gyekye, 2002, p. 300). However, his point of departure is that while indeed a person is by nature a communal being, he/she is also by nature other things as well. Therefore there is no reason in singling out any one of those natural attributes as being more central to personhood than the rest. According to Gyekye (2002), Menkiti and his cohorts have erred by first exaggerating the power of the community vis-a-vis that of the individual. They also made a mistake by concluding that, based on the power that the community allegedly has over the individual, it is the community that both defines and confers personhood upon the individual. Gyekye (2002) further refutes Menkiti's assertion that certain individuals in the society such as children and social deviates have not yet achieved the status of personhood. On this point he argues that

> A human person is a person whatever his/her age or social status. Personhood may reach its full realisation in community, but it is not acquired or yet to be achieved as one goes along in society. What a person acquires are status, habits, and personality or character traits: he/she, qua person, thus becomes the subject of acquisition, and being thus prior to the acquisition process, he/she cannot be defined by what he/she acquires. Gyekye (2002, p. 302)

Thus in Gyekye's view, status, not personhood, is what people achieve in society, and when one loses certain status for whatever reason, it does not mean that such person has lost any degree of personhood. In light of the foregoing, it does not seem like Gyekye will support the idea of 'degrees of personhood', or what Menkiti call 'some sort of ontological progression' of personhood. In principle however, Gyekye's view above is consistent with Wiredu's position articulated earlier in that they both argue that a human being is never without moral value or worth. This is inspite of whether such individual is regarded as a person or just a human being. One's human worth is also not dependent on the extent to which he/she has failed in terms of upholding societal expectations. This view by Gyekye is parallel to the Yoruba normative understanding of the person as expressed by Oduwole (2010, p. 5) below:

> When the Yoruba says *ki se eniyan* (he/she is not a person) they are not in any way saying that one is a beast or non-human being but they are making a judgmental statement on the moral standing of the human being who in one way or the other has fallen short of the expected moral standard. This expected moral standard is to a large extent taught, inculcated and instilled upon by the society.

Thus, just like in the case of the Akan, it can be said of some human individual in the Yoruba language that 'he or she is not a person' (*Ki i se eniyan*). According to Gbadagesin (1991, p. 27) such expression is a "judgment of the moral standing of the human being who is thus determined to fall short of what it takes to be recognized as such". Oduwole (2010) is of the view that ideally, a complete human being is one who has the structural, religious and normative aspects. However, a human being has to be alive and live in a society in order to fully attain and express these aspects. As mentioned earlier, in Yoruba language the word *eniyan* means a person. Even though this word is used both in a normative and ordinary sense; "greater emphasis is placed on the normative dimension of *eniyan*" (Gbadagesin, 1991, p. 27). It is thus clear that the concept of a person in African thought embodies ethical presuppositions.

6.2 Reducing the force thesis to the communitarian view

A further look at three of the African approaches to personhood, namely, the communitarian view, the force thesis and the shadow thesis, reveals that they have always been held to be separate and alternatives to one another (see Kaphagawani, 2004). This is because the theories have always been held to be mutually exclusive and unrelated to each other. Yet when one looks at the communitarian view and the force thesis the exclusivity that has hitherto been alleged is not clearly apparent, rather there are similarities that cannot be ignored. This section attempts to understand those similarities. It argues that though the two conceptions of African personhood are different, they do not contradict one another, an indication that the tenets of the two approaches can be held side by side. It also argues that a closer look at the two approaches suggests that the absence of mutual exclusivity is not accidental but rather an indication of profound similarity between the two. It attempts a reconciliation of the two, arguing that the force thesis can be reduced to the communitarian view without absurdity or in the very least; the two approaches to personhood can be viewed as complementary to each other.

Africans are commonly held to subscribe to a communitarianism conception of personhood and this has been variously expressed by the different ethnic groups in Africa. In sub-Saharan Africa, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* or variations thereof is sometimes held to reflect this communitarian outlook (Eze, 2008). *Ubuntu* has been identified as a form of communitarianism due to its total focus on humans beings and its emphasis on the moral fabric of society, as well as its position that the community is ontologically prior to the individual (Christians, 2004; Eze, 2008). It has also been described by some as the worldview

of African societies and the foundation upon which perceptions that control social behaviour among a broad spectrum of African ethnic groups is established (Gade, 2012; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Littrell, et al. 2013). Ramose (1999) for instance, argues that *ubuntu* represents a common and unifying worldview and social ethos of Africans and is not limited to the Bantu-speaking peoples for whom the term is a linguistic. He argues that despite the linguistic and cultural differences among Africans, there is a 'family atmosphere' between them and it is this atmosphere that explains such commonly held worldviews as Ubuntu. Ramose (1999, p. 35) insists that there is a philosophical affinity and kinship among the peoples of Africa, for "the blood circulating through the family members is the same in its basics". Similarly, some scholars such as Menkiti (1984) and Ikuenobe (2016) believe that there are similarities in the traditions of the different nationalities in Africa and therefore it is not out of place to characterise communitarianism as common to many African cultures.

The unitary view of personhood predicated of Africans by Ramose and supported by Menkiti and Ikuenobe has however been rejected by Matolino (2011a), who points to three different theses identified by Kaphagawani (2004), as articulating the different African views of personhood (Matolino 2011a, p. 23). These three views on personhood are: the 'force' thesis, mostly associated with Placide Tempels; the 'communitarian' view mostly associated with John Mbiti and the 'Shadow' thesis propounded by the Rwandese thinker Alexis Kagame. Out of these three, the force thesis and the communitarian view are the dominant conceptions of personhood. The shadow thesis is only championed by Kagame and a handful of his followers and has not really been considered as a credible view of African personhood. The view that there are many other African conceptions of personhood seems to find support in Comaroff & Comaroff (2001), who do not think it is appropriate to talk of African personhood. They claim instead, that African notions of personhood are infinitely complicated and therefore any talk of a generic account of '*the* African conception of

personhood' is false (p. 268). However, while Matolino (2011a) acknowledges the existence of other conceptions of personhood apart from the communitarian view, and thinks that these various conceptions have irreconcilable differences, he seems to support the idea that 'talk of a generic account of African personhood is false'. On the contrary, he argues that each of the conceptions have their proponents, who defend their particular view to the exclusion of the others, and portray their view as epitomising the accurate African understanding of a person. As stated above, the purpose of the discussion in this section is to consider two of the conceptions of personhood, that is, the force thesis and the communitarian view, and demonstrate that there are more areas of similarity between them. In addition, it attempts to demonstrate that some of the perceived differences between the two views are actually reconcilable, complementary and reducible to each other. Therefore, the aim is not to join the foregoing debate between the different scholars about which of the theories epitomises African personhood, or to argue for a generic account of African personhood. In order to keep to the focus of this chapter, in the following sub-section the chapter reviews the two dominant African conceptions of the personhood, comparing and drawing relations between some of the features that constitute the arguments for both.

6.2.1 The force thesis and communitarian view: A comparative discussion

The first noticeable difference between these two African conceptions of personhood is in relation to the explanation that each offers about the nature of a person. The two conceptions seem to emphasize two different, but not contradictory categories of personhood. It would be noticed that while the force thesis defines a person in terms of his metaphysical dimension, the communitarian view defines a person in terms of his normative dimension. A number of scholars such as Gyekye (1997), Gbadegesin 2002, Metz and Gaie (2010), Igbafen (2014), and Ikuenobe (2016) assert that personhood in African traditions has both descriptive and normative dimensions, and that one equally needs the two dimensions in order to be a whole

person. When the force thesis and the communitarian view of personhood are examined closely, it appears that these two dimensions of personhood are not given the same weighting in the African scheme of things. A metaphysical conception of personhood, such as the one put forward by the force thesis, is descriptive since it investigates the elements and ontological make-up of an entity; for instance, whether a person is physical or non-physical, or whether a person is made up of one or two basic natures (see Ikuenobe 2016, pp. 144 - 145). On the other hand, normative conceptions of personhood of which the communitarian view is an example, basically understands and defines a person in moral and social terms. The communitarian view emphasizes the place and the role of the individual in the community, as well as how he behaves and interacts with other members of his community.

Traditionally, the force thesis is commonly identified as presenting a metaphysical conception of personhood which offers a descriptive account of what it means to be a person. A clear example of this is Tempels' (1959) notion of a vital force which identifies personhood, not with any of the physical features of the individual but with an unseen vital force that can be enhanced or diminished. This emphasis on the metaphysical dimension however, is not completely bereft of references to the normative since the metaphysical dimension presents the grounds upon which any idea of the normative aspect rests. Indeed, the normative plays a vital role in Tempels' description of the enhancement and diminishing of the vital force since it is good deeds that enhance the vital force of the person and bad deeds diminish it. Thus, Tempels' metaphysical personhood relies on normative agency for progression from a state of minimal vital force to a state of strong vital force, which is the highest degree of personhood. In the same vein, proponents of the communitarian view do not completely discount the metaphysical aspects of the person despite their emphasis on the normative aspects of a person. Ikuenobe (2016) makes this point when he observes that any normative conception of personhood such as expressed in the communitarian view, simply

assumes that there is a metaphysical, physical and descriptive dimension of a person a priori. This is because, "one cannot satisfy the normative, moral and aesthetic criteria of personhood, if one does not have descriptive metaphysical-physical features" (Ikuenobe 2016, p. 145). The point Ikuenobe is making is that the normative and relational aspects of a person cannot exist independently from the metaphysical and physical self. Thus when the communitarian view claims that the essential nature of the human person is evident in social relations, normative standards and mutual dependencies, it does not mean that such normative dimensions are possible without the physical and metaphysical dimension.

As discussed above, the tendency by each of the conceptions of personhood to emphasise one dimension of personhood over the other does not mean that each dimension denies or objects to the other dimension that is not emphasised by either of the conceptions. On the contrary, metaphysical personhood is a necessary condition for moral personhood, such that the particular metaphysical essences of the person which, for the communitarian view, is the body and the spirit (see Wiredu, 1991, pp. 32-33; Lesiba *et. al,* 1991, p. 146) must subsist for moral personhood to be possible. On the other hand, the human force and its distinguishing properties (such as reason and will) which the force thesis regards as essential for personhood, require moral agency to be effective. It therefore follows that rather than contradicting and being opposed to each other, these two African conceptions of personhood complement and reinforce each other. The descriptive conception of personhood provides a narration of the ontological constitution of an isolated individual, (Imafidon, 2012, p. 125; Ikuenobe, 2016), and it explains whether a person is essentially immaterial or material. On the other hand, the normative conception investigates whether the same person, with a particular metaphysical description or ontological make-up, has acquired, achieved, or exhibited the attitudes and behaviours that are consistent with that ontological nature. In other words, it is believed by the proponents of the force thesis that through positive interactions

with other human and non-human forces one sustains and even increases his own force thereby growing and establishing further one's personhood. In the same manner, it is equally believed by the proponents of the communitarian view that it is the individual's good and selfless interactions with his environing community, which is inclusive of the physical environment, the living and the 'living dead' (that is, ancestors) that his personhood status is established and mature. This shows that the normative dimension of personhood emphasized in the communitarian view appears to reinforce the descriptive dimension often stressed in the force thesis.

Another perceivable or seeming difference between the force thesis and the communitarian view is that while the former conception makes reference to some human cognitive attributes and capabilities such as rationality in their explanation of a person, the latter does not but rather relies on the environing community to define a person. Tempels (1959) attests to metaphysical properties that constitute the human vital force, and claims that in Bantu thought humans as vital forces, are separate from other beings by the attributes they possess such as reason and free will. Thus; "…on the Tempelsian thesis of being as force, it should apparently be possible to distinguish between rational and non-rational forces, and voluntary and non-voluntary forces. For, according to the force thesis of beings as forces, there must be a radical difference between vital forces that have intelligence and those that do not" (Kaphagawani, 2004, p. 336). This position can be interpreted as not only resembling Western conceptions of a person, but as a contradistinction to the communitarian view as articulated by Menkiti (1984, p. 171) where he notes that most Western views

> …abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description "man" must have, the African view of man denies that persons can be defined by focusing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather man is defined by the environing community.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the distinction between the communitarian view and the force thesis is merely superficial. Indeed a closer look at the two conceptions shows that both actually define the human person by the environing community, despite the fact that reference to the environing community is suppressed in the metaphysical conception of personhood. It is also evident that both conceptions make reference to the metaphysical dimension of the human person in their explanation of personhood, even though this dimension is less emphasized in the communitarian view. The force thesis makes reference to metaphysical attributes such as rationality and freewill, and argues that they do not define the essence of personhood on their own, but are distinguishing features between the human forces and other non-human and non-living forces to which human forces are interdependent and mutually connected. The defining essence of the human person is the vital force; an essence human beings share with the environing community. This suggests that according to the force thesis, the whole reality, including human beings, involves some intimate ontological relationships and interactions where no single force can be seen in isolation. This view is consistent with Onyewuenyi's (1995, p. 426) presentation of the African view of reality in which he claims that "the concept of force or dynamism cancels out the idea of separate beings or substances which exist side by side independent of one another". This means that unlike some of the conceptions of personhood commonly associated with the Western tradition, where a 'person' in the metaphysical sense denotes a kind of thing that endures through space and time and has its own identity, integrity, independence, or self-sufficiency (see Sapontzis, 1981, p. 608), the force thesis sees the human forces to be inseparably connected and dependent on other forces. In light of the forgoing ideas, it clear that the force thesis relates more to the communitarian view than to such Western conceptions of the person mentioned above.

An evaluation of the force thesis and the communitarian view in light of some of the known moral and metaphysical issues associated with personhood brings out another area of possible contrast between them. One such issue is whether personhood, as perceived within these conceptions, should be viewed as an inherent condition to human beings or simply as an acquired status. It appears that while the force thesis affirms the personhood of all humans and affirms that every individual is born with a certain intrinsic human value, the communitarian view understands personhood as a progressive value or status that individuals gradually acquire as they go through life. In other words, the force thesis builds its conception of personhood on a metaphysical notion of force or essential energy which is a very basic and unifying element among, not only human beings but the whole reality. It will appear that personhood under this conception is an inherent human value. On the other hand, to the extent that the communitarian view puts more stress on the social and moral person where normative standards and value commitments are regarded as the basis upon which one can be recognised as a person, this conception suggests that personhood cannot be generalised to all human beings unconditionally (see Dzobo 1992; Tedla 1992). In fact, some proponents of the communitarian view such as Menkiti (1984) have suggested that not all human beings may be regarded as (human) persons simply on condition of being born human. On this position Matolino (2009, pp. 166, 168) points out;

> Menkiti claims that personhood is not a static quality that is acquired at birth but is acquired as one gets older and becomes morally responsible. Gyekye concedes that in the communitarian conception personhood is not innate but acquired in the moral arena. This puts him on par with Menkiti as both are claiming the criticality of moral achievement in the determination of personhood.

However, in an apparent agreement with the communitarian view as articulated above, the force thesis seems to make a distinction between the state of being 'human' on one hand, and the state of being a 'person' on the other. This is evidenced by Tempels' (1959, p. 57)

argument against translating the Chichewa word *munthu* as ‘‘human,’’ suggesting, rather, that it be translated as ‘‘person”. The argument put forward by Tempels (1959) is that ‘human beings’, as a species of beings, have universal applicability, whereas *munthu* translated as ‘‘person,’’ involves a socio-centric view of personhood, which varies from one culture to another and from one time to another within the same culture, due to the dynamic nature of culture and society (Kaphagawani 2004, p. 336). However, unlike Tempels, Kaphagawani (2004) is of the view that the Chichewa words equivalent to the English words ‘human’ and ‘person’ can have a universal as well as a limited or socio-centric application and meaning depending on the context they have been used to refer to the same being. Nevertheless, both Tempels and Kaphagawani maintain that within the context of the force thesis; the human person is both a universal (essential) force, and a social, (even ethnic or cultural) entity. The universal and essential nature of the human person, suggests an inherent and unconditional value to being human while the socio-cultural and ethnic nature suggests an external and socially constructed value. What this means is that the force thesis understands each person in universal as well as in particular or socio-centric terms. It further implies that the universal nature of the human person transcends any particular cultural identity or normative existence, thereby accommodating every human being at a transcendental and metaphysical level. The above notwithstanding, personhood is still perceived and justified normatively in terms of cultural and ethnic identity at a limited socio-centric level.

The contrast of the state of ‘being a person’ with that of ‘being human’ as expressed by Tempels (1959) and Kaphagawani (2004) above is consistent with the communitarian position that not all human beings are persons (Menkiti, 1984, p. 173; Wiredu, 2009, p. 15), and that one has to satisfy certain socially defined criteria in order to be fully incorporated and accepted in the community of persons (Tedla 1992, p. 7). For the communitarian view the criteria for personhood is based on the individual’s full integration into the values and

standards of behaviour of the community, whereas based on Tempels (1959) and Kaphagawani's (2004) explanation and usage of *munthu* referred to above, one can assume, that the force thesis equally recognizes and accepts a non-universal, socio-centric category of personhood. This is predicated on ethnicity or ethnic identity and by extension, the individuals' observation of cultural beliefs and practices as well as adhering to the world view of his particular ethnic group, (Tempels, 1959, p. 57). Therefore, the limited, socio-centric perception of personhood expounded in the force thesis, compares well with the communitarian view of personhood where a person is defined mainly in terms of communal and normative existence, thereby making the two conceptions similar on this score.

Lastly, both the force thesis and the communitarian view attempt to show that the concept of personhood in African thought is in contradistinction to the Western concept of a person. African concepts of personhood as objectified in both the force thesis and communitarian view put a premium on the contextual, relational nature of personhood, its inseparability from social solidarity, and its ritual aspect (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Kelbessa, 2015). On the contrary, Western conceptions of the personhood is sometimes seen as essentially individualistic, legalistic and rational or analytical (De Craemer, 1983, p. 32). This view has been expressed by a number of proponents of both force thesis and the communitarian view including Tempels (1959), Menkiti (1984), and Wilkinson (2002). For instance, in her discussion of how cultural differences between races influence perceptions on gender in South Africa, Wilkinson (2002, p. 355) observes that:

> White South Africans owe their heritage to the world-view that has been inherited from the Greeks, influenced by Cartesian dualism, Kantian rationalism, and the resultant liberalist values of individualism….the overriding ethos is that of Western individualism.

Further, Nobles (1973, p. 24), one of the psychologists who have employed the African worldview as a theoretical foundation for examining consciousness and cognitive processes in the field of psychology, made a similar distinction between the African and Western conceptions of personhood, pointing out that:

> Accordingly the African worldview requires that when focusing on the self, one is not to be bound to the examination of distinct, separate individuals, but, rather, one should examine the dynamics of the "we" or the feelings of belonging to as well as being the "group." Unlike Western conceptions which examine independent and individual selves, research involving the African worldview cannot make a critical distinction between the self (I) and one's people (we).

Similarly, in articulating the African view in contrast to the Western view, Okolo (2002, p. 213) points out that "it is the community which makes the individual, to the extent that without the community, the individual has no existence". This is consistent with Mbiti's claim that, within the African context, personhood is defined by the aphorism, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am", (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108). This restatement of the Ubuntu principle, which captures the essence of African personhood and is sometimes held to mirror Rene Descartes' cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), vividly stands in contrast to Western conception of a person as some 'isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory', (Menkiti, 1984, p. 172). Perhaps the best statement of the contrast between Western and African views is given by Tempels (1959, p. 103):

> Just as Bantu (Black African) ontology is opposed to the European view of individuated things existing in themselves, isolated from others, so Bantu psychology cannot conceive of a man as an individual, as a force existing by itself and apart from its ontological relationship with other living beings and from its connection with animals or inanimate forces around it.

In light of the above, it clear that, not only do the force thesis and the communitarian view complement each other but also that both contrast with Western conceptions of personhood.

Both conceptions of personhood reject what appears to be a radical, self-serving and autonomy of the modernist notion of the person often associated with the Western world. Both the force thesis and the communitarian view, in contrast to Western views hold that personhood cannot be conceived without recognition of a person's dependence upon and ultimate union with the whole of reality. In his articulation of the force thesis, Tempels (1959), "strongly believed in a radical conceptual difference between Africans and non-Africans on the essential nature of beings and entities in general, and human beings in particular" Kaphagawani (2004, p. 335). Thus, proponents of the force thesis argue that Bantu ontology is dynamic; there is a constant vital interaction and interdependence among forces or beings, including the human forces, and this, according to Tempels (1959, p. 58), should be contrasted with the Western ontology or views which are perceived to be static and beings are isolated or individuated. Similarly, the proponents of the communitarian view argue that unlike in the Western thought where a person is defined in terms of secluded abilities such as speech, thought processes, and memory, (Menkiti, 1984, p. 172), being a person in the African view means standing in a particular relationship with all there is, both visible and invisible (Ruch and Anyanwu, 1981, p. 124). According to this view, personhood is largely defined by a communal structure; the thesis centrally holds that personhood is something that is attained in direct proportion to one's moral worth and one's relations with his/her surrounding community (Matolino, 2008). This communitarian conception of a person is consistent with Kaphagawani's (2004, p. 335) explanation of how Tempels used the Luba and Chichewa languages to demonstrate the view that words in Bantu languages denote force and that this African view (force thesis) of reality can be easily contrasted with the Western view of reality:

> Tempels goes on to claim that those words or phrases, kufwa and kufwididila in Luba, and kufa and kufadi in Chichewa, for instance, indicating different degrees of

> loss of vital force ‘‘the superlative of which signifies total paralysis of the power to live,’’ should not be translated in English as ‘‘to die’’ and ‘‘to die entirely’’ precisely because, for Tempels, Westerners ‘‘hold a static conception of ‘being’, (and Africans) a dynamic (one)’’. (Kaphagawani, 2004, p. 335)

The thinking expressed above is attributable to an underlying ontological outlook which both the force thesis and the communitarian view equally hold regarding the traditional African conception of reality upon which their individual conceptions of personhood are deeply embedded.

Further to that, both the force thesis and the communitarian view attempt to show that the concept of person in African thought is in contradistinction to the transcendental concept of a person characteristic of some Western religious and philosophical traditions. The transcendental perception views all human beings as persons and asserts that the intrinsic quality of personhood begins at conception and is present throughout life. Under this view, "...individuals are not potential persons or "becoming" persons; they are persons by their very nature. There is no such thing as a potential person or a human non-person" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 19). This view is opposed to both the force thesis and the communitarian view to which personhood is both a matter of degree and a gradual process towards full maturity in the social space. For instance, according to the communitarian view, personhood is something that has to be achieved and one is not a person simply by being born of human seed. Based on this view, Menkiti concludes that in as "far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be competent or ineffective, better or worse," Menkiti (1984, p. 173). Similarly, Tempels argued that Bantu ontology admit that one should be able to grow, make effort to increase his force every time, thereby becoming better and stronger or even attaining higher degree of personhood (Matolino, 2008, p. 56). Thus both views understand a person only in terms of becoming, and that the struggle for personhood is an ever going endeavour from birth to death.

6.3 Conclusion

From the preceding sections, it is evident that, at least with respect to the force thesis and the communitarian conceptions of personhood, the areas of similarities between the different ideas of personhood associated with various African groups outweighed whatever differences that could be detected between them. As demonstrated above, both the force thesis and the communitarian view affirmed the view already articulated by a number of writers on African personhood including Ikuenobe (2016, p. 139) that the African view of a person did not differentiate, in terms of ontology and essential nature, between human persons and the phenomenal world of 'animate' and 'inanimate' objects, as well as between 'the living' and 'non-living' objects; they are interconnected and continuous with one another. Thus both conceptions held the view that human persons are relational beings created for mutuality, and that the human person could not be conceived without a recognition of dependence upon and ultimate union with the whole of reality. A comparison of the two conceptions of personhood in terms of each other also suggested that to a large extent, the metaphysical and normative dimensions that are emphasized by the force thesis and the communitarian view respectively appeared to complement and reinforce, rather than polarise, each other. Therefore, based on the strength of shared features between the two conceptions in question, and the extent to which they appeared to complement each other, it could be established that the two conceptions are compatible with each other. Having established the compatible and complementary nature of these African views on personhood, the next chapter relates these conceptions to dissident sexualities such as homosexuality. In so doing, these African views on personhood will be further explained, evaluated and understood.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AFRICAN PERSONHOOD AND THE STATUS OF THE HOMOSEXUAL

7.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, focus was on exploring the similarities and differences that exist between the different African conceptions of personhood. Several of such conceptions were discussed to draw similarities and differences. The purpose of the present chapter is to relate the African traditional conceptions of personhood that have already been discussed, to dissident sexualities such as homosexuality. This is carried out in light of some of the major theories and views on gender and gender identity. In applying the different African conceptions of personhood to homosexuality, it is hoped that these conceptions will be further expounded. To this end, the chapter seeks to establish the personhood status of the homosexual. The discussion is centred on whether or not being homosexual meets the conditions considered necessary for recognition or acceptance into the community of persons as conceptualised in African traditional conceptions of personhood. Overall, the present chapter attempts to demonstrate that, when understood in terms of gender identity, homosexuality is incompatible with African traditional conceptions of personhood. As a result, individuals who are homosexual, including those who are part of the LGBT community, may not reach any or full personhood status in African traditional thought. The chapter also highlights some of the moral issues and difficulties arising from traditional African conceptions of personhood when related to un-conforming gender identities especially homosexuality.

7.1 Homosexuality and the African Conceptions of Personhood

The argument put forward in this section, which is also the main thesis of this dissertation, is that African conceptions of personhood are incompatible with non-conforming sexual identities. As already explained, by non-conforming sexual identities is meant here deviant sexual identities which result from perceived deviant sexual practices such as homosexuality or more generally LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender). The common claim that homosexuality is "un-African", "inhuman" or "immoral", (see Msibi, 2011), should be understood not so much in terms of African human experiential and historical realities, but in terms of its philosophical, idealist outlook in relation to personhood. It means that homosexuality, both as a gender identity or a mere sexual practice, is inconsistent with some of the dominant African metaphysical and normative conceptions of personhood. This alone renders homosexuality immoral or unacceptable and therefore "un-African".

The African conceptions of personhood cannot be divorced from the general ontological and metaphysical outlook about reality as held by different traditional African societies. This is because it is within this ontological reality these conceptions of personhood and everything else is deeply embedded. Therefore, not only is homosexuality at odds with some of the African conceptions of personhood, it is also incompatible with the general worldview of many Africans in traditional societies. For instance, some of the dominant African philosophical conceptions of personhood such as the communitarian view and the force thesis find their expression through a kind of social formation known in anthropological terms as kinship relations or system. Through the kinship system, people are brought up early in life to develop a sense of bonding with large kinship circles (Siegel, 1996). This solidarity begins from the immediate family and moves outward to encompass the extended family, the lineage, the clan and the tribe at large. This bonding has a metaphysical as well as a normative meaning and has implications for the personhood of the individual. That is, there is

reciprocity based on obligations and rights between the individual and the large groups of kith and kin. This reciprocity leads to an eternal normative and metaphysical connectedness that goes beyond any individual human beings to include the non-human and the supernatural beings. Thus, the corresponding conception of a person would be of a morally up-right adult who consistently demonstrates through his actions, a sense of duty towards family, lineage, clan, society and reality at large (Worsley, 1956). As demonstrated below, this normative conception of a person stems from the metaphysical connectedness, harmony and interdependence in the kinship system and the whole reality; all of which have implication for the personhood status of the homosexual.

7.1.1 Kinship, homosexual identity and African philosophy of personhood

As already mentioned in Chapter four of this study, kinship is a culture's system of accepted family roles and relationships that clarify the privileges and responsibilities, as well as setting the margins and limits of interaction among the members of a self-recognizing group such as a tribe or its sub-group called a clan (Radcliffe-Brown, 1941). To the extent that the African kinship system in particular goes wider and deeper to include the departed and those yet to be born, it creates a network that gives its members a sense of belonging and depth (Siegel, 1996). It also produces "a feeling of deep rootedness and a sense of sacred obligation to extend the genealogical line" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 103). To this end, it becomes clear that the kinship system as an expression of African ontology is one way through which it can be demonstrated that homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) is inimical to full personhood status in African traditional thought.

The general and leading view among scholars largely of western origin is that while gender identity can be understood as one's personal experience of one's own gender, this identity (as man/masculine or woman/feminine) may or may not always correlate with one's assigned sex (as male or female) at birth (see, for example, Egan & Perry, 2001; Carlson & Heth, 2009).

However, it must be noted that inspite of the occasional incompatibility mentioned above, in most cases the sex assigned at birth matches the child's future gender identity (see Reiner, 1997). In traditional African societies (as was the case in many other traditional societies in the world) sex assignment (sometimes known as gender assignment) was achieved through a simple act of examining the genitals of a new born baby by the midwife or family members. This can be distinguished from what obtains today, where sex assignment can be done through prenatal sex discernment by the nurse or physician using modern, technological means (see Reiner, 1997). However, with reference to traditional African societies in particular, once the sex has been assigned the expectation was (and still is, for most people) that the future gender identity of the child will develop in line with both the genitalia and the gender assigned at birth; the latter being, supposedly, inherent in the physical anatomy or sex assigned. However, as indicated above, it is generally believed, especially among Western scholars on gender identity, that there are cases where the sex or gender assigned to an individual does not align with his future gender identity. This leads to such individuals identifying themselves as transgender or claiming other gender non-conforming identities such as homosexuality. What happens in such situations, according to this view, is that these individuals end up having a gender identity or gender expression that differs from what is normally associated with their assigned sex. Consequently, the concerned individual experiences a lot of distress, also known as gender dysphoria, emanating from the mismatch between their assigned sex and gender and the person's 'actual' or 'personal' gender identity. This distress or discomfort often goes beyond the individual affected to include his or her significant others such as parents and siblings. This is partly because, as Dreger (2009, p. 27) observes, "having a child who is gender atypical, or gay, or transgender will matter even more; not only is this likely to make your child different from you and different from the

child you expected, but the social shame attributed to these children gets mapped onto you, the parent."

Giordano (2012, p. 34) notes that transsexuals often report that a larger percentage of their suffering emanates from 'the disillusion of expectations' that their immediate family members such as parents, create around their gender. To illustrate this point, Giordano (2012) makes reference to one of the victims of such family expectations. In his view, the problem with gender is ''not just about you, it is about those you love and the social environment you have to live in. It takes tremendous courage to wear your soul on your shoulders and go and show the 'real' you to the world, even more so to your parents, who have dreams and aspirations that are in line with physical gender'' (Giordano, 2012, p. 34). Although this appears to be a serious problem in the West, it is much more of a problem in African societies. This is because within the African traditional and metaphysical set-up gender is much more complicated than is described by Giordano (2012) above. This is because for the African, gender is not just "about those you love and the social environment you have to live in". The African circle is much wider and deeper than that, since it is also deeply founded on, and metaphysically rooted in, one's forbearers and progeny:

> For the African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. …the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children…The family also includes the departed relatives, who we have designated as the living dead. African concept of family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished. (Mbiti 1969, p.104-105)

Furthermore, in traditional African thought everyone in the family as described above is ontologically connected to everyone else in a complex and infinite web of connections (Tempels 1959; Ogbonna, 2016). As a result, an individual's personal and gender identity is

understood and made possible only in terms of his particular relations and connection he has with everyone else in his lineage, clan and community. Thus, the understanding of gender identity as one's personal experience of one's own gender (see, for example, Egan & Perry, 2001; Carlson & Heth, 2009), may be un-African to start with.

The claim made above is consistent with De Craemer's (1983, p. 22) observation that:

> Whereas in American terms selfhood is a much individuated, discrete, private, bounded entity, sufficient unto itself, in an African framework it is defined, understood, and experienced as part of a living system of social relationships. What is emphasized in this view of the person is social context, namely a group, a category, or both.

This means that the individual's essential nature and metaphysical identity, which is inclusive of one's gender and gender identity, is inseparably linked to his kinship, relatives, clan and the community. The result is that, consistent with this thinking, one's identity is not an individualized or personalized identity in a strict sense of Western philosophy of personal identity. This is mainly because it is derived from the metaphysical nature and 'identity' of the whole. In this way human persons in this African context are defined and individuated communally (Tempels, 1959, p. 58). It can be further noted that, in a way, the individual also contributes to, or is part of the identity of the whole community of those who are standing in proximity to him, and this identity is not personal but collective, interdependent and mutual. Therefore, any change in any aspect of the person's individual being or nature affects the metaphysical position and identity of everyone else around him, including his tribe and community. This is because, as Mbiti (1969, p. 101) observes, in the African understanding of personhood, a person has to be born in the clan, community or tribe, and he cannot change his membership. The implication is that an African person's membership to his tribe or community is more than a geographical and physical association or location of such

personhood, but rather, a predetermined, unbreakable metaphysical or ontological bond. This is why, as already alluded to, any change in an individual identity or nature will effect change in the identity of everyone who is ontologically related and connected to him. Therefore, it follows that transition from one gender identity to another cannot just be a personal affair as it will involve other beings, including the non-human beings in the spiritual realm to which the individual is metaphysically connected in an intimate way.

In view of the forgoing argument, it is inconceivable for the individual to effect change that will alter the order of the whole ontological reality, for it is the wider community that should give the individual his identity, including gender identity, and not the other way round. Thus, changing oneself, either through surgery in terms of one's biological anatomy from being a man to being a woman or vice versa, or by assigning to oneself a gender identity and expression that is different from the one assigned to oneself by the community at birth, does not only take away the identity and personhood of the individual concerned (which is only derivable from the collective or community), but is opposed to the general African metaphysical outlook as expressed through social structures such as family and kinship. This is precisely because:

> It is kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community: it governs marital customs and regulations, it determines the behaviour of one individual towards another. Indeed, this sense of kinship binds together the entire life of the 'tribe' and is even extended to cover animals, plants and non-living objects through the 'totemic system'. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationship can be understood and interpreted through the kinship system. This it is which largely governs the behaviour, thinking and whole life of the individual in the society of which he is a member. (Mbiti 1969, p. 102)

It follows from the view expressed above even if the homosexual is not actually responsible for experiencing a particular gender identity rather than the one assigned to him, it is still

inconceivable for him to bring change on the whole ontological system so that it suits his personally experienced identity. This is precisely because "the individual does not and cannot exist alone but corporately… he owes his existence to other people…. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual" (Mbiti, 1969, pp. 108–109). Since kinship controls social relationships and the manner in which individuals behave towards one another, "each individual is therefore a brother or sister, father or mother, grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother in law, uncle or aunt, or something else, to everybody else" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 102). What this means is that ultimately, a single person actually "has literally hundreds of fathers, hundreds of mothers, hundreds of uncles, hundreds of wives, hundreds of sons and daughters" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 102). It is therefore the duty of each person to find out how he is related to every other person especially within his clan so that he can behave towards each person according to established behaviour set down by the society in accordance with the kinship system. However, it may prove difficult to apply the above kinship scenario to individuals whose gender identity is homosexual, including those who are transgendered. Firstly, it may not be easy to locate the transgendered within their group or the kinship system in general since they would have moved from their initial position in relation to everybody by mere change of sexual anatomy and identity. Secondly, the identity of the homosexual and LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) could be problematic due to having adopted a gender identity that is different from the one assigned to them at birth by family and society. Conceivably, this will make it impossible to account for their place in the kinship system and, by extension, the wider African ontological scheme of things. In the light of foregoing discussion, it is clear that gender and gender identity play a role in identifying individuals in relation to other people and beings particularly within the African metaphysical outlook. It is also evident that gender and gender identity are some of the conditions for identifying individuals in their current state and appearance with the way they appeared and

were perceived at earlier times within the kinship system. Therefore, apart from raising the usual personal identity questions or difficulties, a change in both gender identity and sex anatomy complicates further the notion of identity of individuals involved when viewed in the context of African conceptions of personhood and kinship system. For instance, an identity question can be raised about what makes an individual who existed as a man at an earlier time as per the gender identity assigned to him by the community, to be the very same person who is now identifying himself as a woman.

The persistence of one's identity despite physical anatomical changes is usually considered to be a question of life and death in personal identity, as any answer rendered in its respect determines which types of changes a person can undergo without ceasing to exist (Korfmacher, 2017). However, in respect of the African conceptions of personhood, any answer given to this question has far reaching metaphysical implication for not only the homosexual or transgendered individual involved, but also for everyone in his or her line of relationships, including the dead and the yet-to-be-born. If for example, a transgendered individual was an uncle to another person within his kinship prior to changing his sexual anatomy and/or gender identity, it may be assumed that based on this change, he will cease to be an uncle and now become something else (maybe an aunt or no relationship) to that person. However, in the African metaphysical thought, being an aunt or whatever relation to another person is not just a matter of relation to one's immediate family or one's biological sex. His new position as an aunt should be satisfactorily explained in relation to all individuals in his kinship system, including his ancestors and future descendants. Therefore, as alluded to, it would appear that the identity of everyone related to the individual who has undergone gender re-identification or transition and sexual re-assignment is somehow affected by this adventure at both metaphysical and normative levels. Therefore, personal identity questions that are normally raised about the individual escalate to become identity

questions about the collective reality connected to this individual. That is, a change of individual identity in terms gender impacts on the identity of everyone else because all (human) beings are metaphysically interdependent.

At a normative level, it may be impossible to determine the appropriate manner in which other members of the kinship should relate to the homosexual or transgendered individual. The reason for this is that a 'sister', for example, may not be accorded the same kind of duties and responsibilities as a 'brother'. Thus, whether individuals treat each other as equals, or give more respect to the other and so on, is determined by how they are related to each other within the African kinship system. And this relationship is always gendered or interpreted and expressed along gender lines. Since a change of sex or gender identity may change relationships, it may lead to a situation where an individual who initially was accorded more respect due to his/her position in the hierarchical order of existence and kinship, loses it and so on. Based on the above observations, it can be concluded that homosexuality and LGBT in general brings about conceptual and practical problems for not only the African kinship system, but by extension, to issues of personhood and identity. This leads to confusion and possible instability in the African metaphysical and normative environment.

Again in light of the foregoing, it appears that in many African societies, a person's paternity and maternity are crucial in identifying and defining one's personhood within the kinship system. "Only in terms of others does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people", (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106). This is evidenced by the fact that in many African societies, after assigning an unambiguous sex and a potential gender identity depending on whether he is a boy or girl, a child is given one name for the clan on the father's side, and another for the one on the mother's side. This means that everyone could straightaway recognize which groups a person is part of by the mere mention of the person's name (Mbiti, 1969, p. 103). The

composite names are so accurately revealing or telling of the child's position in the total system of lineage and available family names. This is to say that the paternity and maternity systems which are based on gender, as well as the individual's sex and gender identity automatically place him/her in a certain position in relation to the total system of lineage, including his descendants and ancestors. In fact, it is a common custom in some African societies to give a child a name belonging to the child's grandparents or even one of the ancestors in order to demonstrate the family belief or observation at that time that there are behavioural and physical traits in common between the child and that particular ancestor (Mbiti, 1969, p. 115). Therefore, changing one's sex or sexual anatomy, say, through surgery as some of transgendered people do, or choosing a different gender identity due to a discomfort a person may have for the one assigned at birth, have a potential to bring confusion to some of the practices within the African system of kinship and lineage described above. Such a change also places the homosexual or transgendered individual outside the recognizable categories with this African system of kinship and lineage. As alluded to earlier, it is conceivable, in view of some of the African conceptions of personhood and ontology, to say that the identity of the family, the clan and the whole lineage is somehow implicated in the gender identity of its members, whether homosexual or heterosexual. That is, in African personhood and ontology, the seemingly simple matter of whether the family has a daughter or son will matter, metaphysically and normatively, to the identity of the family, clan and its lineage.

7.1.2 Homosexual Identity, the Continuity of life, and African Personhood

According to some traditional African traditional thought, personhood is a status at which one can be better, worse or fail (Menkiti, 1989). An individual is considered to be a person if, among other things, he/she contributes towards the perpetual existence or continuity of life of his kinship, clan and community through child bearing, among other virtuous activities. In the

light of the above, homosexuality could be viewed as a potential threat to continuity of the African family, lineage, clan and the community at large. This is because if more individuals engage exclusively in homosexual sex, then less number of children will be conceived. In particular, the family and lineage of the homosexual will be threatened with extinction or simply become very 'poor' since in traditional African societies, children have always been a sign of wealth and hope for the future. This overall idea is reflected in a quotation from Achebe (1949) below:

> We do not ask for wealth because he that has health and children will also have wealth. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen. An animal rubs its itching flank against a tree, a man asks his kinsman to scratch him. (Achebe 1949, p. 132)

This is consistent with Mbiti's (1969, pp. 104-105) claim that, the "African concept of family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, and each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished", (Mbiti 1969, pp. 104-105). Therefore, an individual who fails to ensure continuity of life, such as one who fails to marry and establish a family in which they can bear children, and those who are barren, would fail at personhood. Individuals who practice homosexuality as a gender identity and choose not to bear children as a result of this identity do not contribute to continuity or perpetual existence of their kinship and community due to absence of procreation in such relationships. This argument finds support in an observation made by Gbadegesin (1984, p.184) and many other scholars on the African conceptions of personhood to the effect that:

> A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute his own quota to the continued existence of the community, which nurtures him and partakes in his destiny. This is the ultimate

> meaning of human existence. The crown of personal life is to bear fruit (beget offspring); the crown of communal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence.

Thus individuals who fail at procreation due to a homosexual identity would have failed at personhood at a normative level.

Apart from contributing to the continued existence of one's lineage and community through child bearing, there are other metaphysical and religious benefits to it at a personal level. By having an offspring one would also be guaranteeing his 'personal immortality', which is made possible if there are people in the family who continue to remember the one who has physically died. This is affirmed by Siegel's (1996, p. 3) argument below:

> Accordingly, Africans still view marriage as a means for begetting children rather than a strategy for maximizing landed estates and class positions. There is no tradition of idealized celibacy, and many societies take a relatively casual view of premarital sex. Infertility and infant mortality are terrible personal tragedies, for children are desired and loved, Children are also the markers of adult status and are essential for becoming an immortal (i.e., remembered) ancestor; therefore, all normal adults expect to marry—and not just once, but often several times.

According to this African belief, as long as there are people (such as one's children) who think about or have memory of the person who has physically died, it means the person has not really died, he remains immortal (see Omoregbe, 1990; Mbiti, 1969). Mbiti (1969, p. 131) explains this important belief as held in traditional African societies further by stating that:

> Unfortunate, therefore, is the man or woman who has nobody to remember him (her), after physical death. To lack someone close who keeps the departed in their personal immortality is the worst misfortune and punishment that any person could suffer. To die without getting married and without children is to be completely cut

> from the human society, to become disconnected, to become an outcast and to lose all links with mankind.

Thus, as already mentioned, maintaining an exclusive homosexual identity means that one will not have children of his own to carry forward his lineage and personal memory of himself. Consequently, the individual would have disengaged himself from both the living and the dead (ancestorship). It also means that the homosexual is perceived to be living in perpetual poverty and loneliness in as far as he fails to have offspring of his own, and he may never ascend to a state of full personhood. This is demonstrated in Epprecht's (1998, p. 202) description of this African view below:

> Children were thus valued as crucial economic and political assets, not merely little bundles of joy. Furthermore, producing children was the defining characteristic of social adulthood for both women and men. To remain childless or to be impotent was to remain a perpetual child oneself. Heterosexual marriages resulting in successful pregnancy was thus the vocation that children were taught from their earliest years.

The implication of the above view in relation to homosexuality is that by identifying oneself with a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth, or by surgically changing one's physical anatomy to suit one's preferred gender identity, the individual concerned diminishes his personhood status, both at a metaphysical and normative levels. The reason for this is that:

> In sum, a person in Africa is both a metaphysical and normative being. And to that extent, one cannot be so called a person if he or she loses his or her ontological or metaphysical essence. Neither can he or she be regarded as a person if he or she fails in normative and communal consideration. As we have seen, a person's relation with society is crucial in defining who he or she is and what he or she is, given the belief held in nearly unanimistic way, that is, that Africans do not think of themselves as discrete individuals but rather understand themselves as part of a community. (Igbafen 2014, p. 134)

It therefore follows that in seeking to establish the personhood status of homosexual, that is, whether or not being a homosexual meets conditions considered necessary for recognition or acceptance into the community of persons according to the traditional African conceptions of personhood, the answer is clearly in the negative. In the light of the above discussion, the following section investigates whether or not African conceptions of personhood such as the communitarian view offers any hope of re-gaining personhood status for the homosexual.

7.2 Communitarianism and the Homosexual Identity

The communitarian view holds that the whole of existence, for the individual, is a struggle for personhood. Many proponents of this view claim that, unlike in the Western world, African personhood is never static but dynamic and progressive (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001; Ng'weshemi, 2002). This implies that the most struggling individual at personhood, or one whose character is judged to be incompatible with societal norms such as the homosexual or the drunkard, could never be ruled out of the possibility of becoming better or reaching a certain degree of personhood. Therefore, by describing certain individuals as 'not persons' or having 'failed at personhood' (Menkiti, 1984) should not be understood to be 'closing the door' of hope for personhood in respect of the homosexual and similar individuals. Consistent with this point, Ng'weshemi (2002, p. 15) agree with many other proponents of the communitarian view claim that "for Africans, one is not human simply by birth. Rather one becomes human through a progressive process of integration into society". This means that there may not be a point when one can be ruled out of *becoming* a person, as long as one is alive. This is because African communitarianism is a process in the direction of accomplishing humanness, and it takes an individual through a number of stages of development through societal integration (Dolamo, 2013). In this connection, Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) narrate what constitutes the communitarian personhood among some

Tswana groups in Mafeking. In their narration, they demonstrate not only the progressive nature of personhood, but also why an individual could not be ruled out of the struggle for personhood regardless of how hopeless and distasteful his situation may appear to be. They narrate that in the course of undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in Mafeking in 1970, they were sitting in a courtyard with a local ward headman by the name of Mhengwa Letsholo, together with his family. While talking, an elderly woman who was clearly well past childbearing age walked across the public meeting space just a short distance from where they were sitted. Upon seeing the elderly woman, the headman's wife said 'There goes Mme-Seleka', pointing towards her. Comaroff, & Comaroff (2001, p. 272) point out that in the local language "'Mme-' denotes 'mother of', although its usage and application is broader than that. This led them to enquire whether Mme-Seleka had sons or daughters, just as a way of trying to place her in the social space. In response to this enquiring the headman said, 'No, not yet'. Comaroff & Comaroff observe that:

> At face value, this seemed a refractory answer: there was no doubt that, given her age, Mme-Seleka was not about to fall pregnant. But it made perfect sense. For one thing, there were conventional means — such as the levirate and sorority — by which offspring might be 'born' to a person who could not physically produce them. But there was another, less pragmatic dimension to Mhengwa's response: to answer in the absolute negative would have been to consign the woman's active life to the past tense, to pronounce her socially dead. (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2001, p. 272)

Comaroff & Comaroff (2001) go on to explain that according to this African view, as long as Mme-Seleka was alive and had the capacity to feel, perceive and reason, it meant that there was still a possibility that she would become pregnant and have a child because 'she was still in the process of becoming.' Comaroff & Comaroff (2001, p. 272) conclude that "'Not yet' implies the continuous present, just as 'no' puts closure to something that once may have been but now no longer is". Therefore, in the same manner, the African communitarian view that certain individuals such as homosexuals, who are considered to be moral perverts due to their allegedly 'unethical' and 'un-African' sexual identity and

practice, and are regarded or labelled as 'not persons' should only be understood as describing a temporary state about such individuals. Therefore, communitarian personhood, as described in the story above, does not leave such individuals in a state of hopelessness and rejection; feeling left out and cut from humanity. Anything to the contrary should be viewed as contradicting the very same concept of communitarian conception of personhood where a person is understood only in terms of becoming, and where the struggle for personhood is an ever going endeavour from one's birth to one's death. Further, the homophobic and discriminatory acts often carried out against the homosexual in some African societies that are supposedly anchored on the hall marks of *ubuntu* does not only raise questions as to the ability of the philosophy in question to tackle, in a humane manner, the diverse human experiences of the modern society, but may also render this philosophy self-defeating.

7.3 Homophobia and the Communitarian view

It is generally believed that African conceptions of personhood mostly deny the atomic individuality and self-sufficiency of the human person (see Mbiti, 1969, and Menkiti, 1984), while traditional Western philosophy in general affirm this. Moreover, African conceptions of personhood emphasize that a person is indeed by nature a communal being who has essential relationships with others, while traditional western philosophy seems to put premium on the opposite view commonly known as individualism. Due to the different areas of emphasis, it is clear that there is a sharp contrast of views between the African and Western camps regarding what or how a person should be perceived. In light of this, it is often held that *Ubuntu*, which is the Southern African approach to ethics grounded on African communitarianism, provides a unitary basis for a variety of normative and empirical conclusions that are viewed as a serious option to the prevailing Western perspective (see Metz & Gaie, 2010). Similarly, Nabudere, (2005) makes an interesting observation with regard to the philosophy of *ubuntu* and its alleged supremacy over Western philosophies, pointing out that:

> …although Africa had lagged behind Europe technologically and economically, it was far ahead of Europe in terms of its social and political philosophies and systems. These systems, which revolved around communal relationships, had developed a deep respect for human values and the recognition of the human worth based on a philosophy of humanism that was far more advanced than that found in the European philosophic systems at that time. (Nabudere, 2005, p. 1)

It is therefore the position of many proponents of the communitarian view, that through African values and its Sub-Saharan ethic (*ubuntu),* Africa could contribute much to world moral consciousness (Nussbaum, 2003). In the light of this, there may be a legitimate expectation from the global community that African communities founded on communitarian ethics will provide moral guidance to the world. Specifically, they will act as moral agents and show the way on issues of global moral concern today of which homosexuality and associated homophobic attacks on LGBT people are some of them.

As alluded to before, what is central in the communitarian conceptions of personhood and its ethic as expressed through *ubuntu* is the criticality of moral achievement in the determination of personhood. In addition, the standard for such morality is a collective system of values among which harmony, peace, stability and solidarity are the most prized (Gyekye, 2002). It is therefore clear that, at least in principle, any discrimination, harassment, hate crimes and violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against homosexuals and other members of the LGBT community, as well as women and children are not consistent with the communitarian ethics. That is, the type of violence that targets a specific group with the victim's gender as a primary motive common in some parts of Africa today demonstrates that these African communities are not tolerant and accommodative, and therefore at odds with their shared personhood and moral philosophy. It appears that, virtues such as endurance, hope, compassion and being accommodative, all of which constitute the communitarian philosophy of *ubuntu,* ought to act as a constant guide to the ethical conduct of adherents of

the this philosophy. This African ethic reminds its adherents and African communities of the need to put up with individuals deemed to be deviant in their conduct such as homosexuals, rather than rejecting, discriminating and carrying out acts of violence against them. That is, as members of the communitarian societies anchored on the philosophy of *ubuntu,* Africans are expected to be tolerant and hospitable or accommodative to all human beings including the homosexual as stated by Gathogo (2008) below:

> For in Africa, an ideal person is primarily hospitable. This hospitality is ideally extended to all people: friends, foes or/and strangers. It is also extended to all departments of life… What is African Hospitality? Basically, African hospitality can be defined as that extension of generosity, giving freely without strings attached. In view of this, it can be simply seen as the willingness to give, to help, to assist, to love and to carry one another's burden without necessarily putting profit or rewards as the driving force. (Gathogo, 2008, p. 2, 19)

Therefore, *ubuntu* and African communitarianism in general is about showing empathy and putting effort into building relationships.

In principle, African norms and values do support notions of human dignity, equality and the protection of all human life. This means that in as much as non-conforming sexual relations such as homosexuality are un-African, homophobic attacks on homosexuals and other members of LGBT community are contrary to communitarian ethics, and therefore equally un-African. This appears to be true at least in theory, despite the common incidents of hate crimes and homophobic attacks on homosexuals and other members of the LGBT community in many parts of Africa, and despite the utterances of some political leaders on the continent inciting such attacks under the pretext that homosexuality is 'un-African'. For instance, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa said the following in support of the African Ubuntu philosophy:

> Africans have this thing called UBUNTU... the essence of being human. It is part of the gift that Africans will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is person through another person, that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours. When I dehumanise you I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary individual is a contradiction in terms and, therefore, you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community, in belonging. (Desmond Tutu quoted in Nabudere, 2005, p. 5)

It appears that Africa will have no gift to offer to the world, and cannot contribute much to world moral consciousness, if it applies moral standards in its adherence to and application of the philosophy of *ubuntu* and communitarianism.

7.4 Conclusion

In light of the forgoing, it can be concluded, consistent with the main thesis of this dissertation, African philosophical conceptions of personhood were incompatible with any non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender). What accounts for this conclusion is the undeniable fact that views of personhood held by traditional African societies were notably communitarian, and the individual was born into this strong communalistic foundation with an extensive circle of kith and kin. The individual had to see himself/herself as presupposing the group (Gyekye, 2010), or the whole collective reality, which was inclusive of the dead, the living and the yet-to-be born (Mbiti, 1975). As a result, the identity of the individual, including his gender identity, was founded on and derived from the whole metaphysical and normative reality, which was a collective, interdependent single reality. Consequently, the decisions and actions of an individual person in this African set-up had to always be alighed to that of the community. This extended to the attempts at attaining personhood which

entailed maintaining solidarity with the rest, as well as carrying out one's obligations to a large set of other individuals in his line of relationships (Gyekye, 2010). This meant that even if the individual, based the common understanding of gender identity as a personal feeling about oneself as male or female (or rarely, both or neither), (Ghosh, 2015), he might not pursue any gender identity that compromised, or happened to be at variance with communal solidarity. As already discussed in this chapter, it was evident that as a gender identity, homosexuality did not only appear to be incompatible with the traditional African conception of personhood and ontology, it also did not help the individual in his pursuit of and struggle for personhood in the present life, and personal immortality or ancestorship in the hereafter. This conclusion does not deny the difficulties, complexities and limitations of the traditional African conceptions of personhood in question, especially as they relate to the homosexual individual. Thus, it is worth noting that, even though an argument is made in this chapter to the effect that common claims on homosexuality as being un-African, unnatural or not human could have its basis on some of the traditional African conceptions of personhood and ontology, this does not mean such African conceptions are without weaknesses or limitations. It only means that the widely held African position on homosexuality could be explained on philosophical grounds, in spite of whatever weakness that may be inherent in the same philosophy. Therefore, the next chapter of this study will discuss some of the philosophical complexities, issues and difficulties arising from traditional African conceptions of personhood when related to un-conforming gender identities especially homosexuality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AFRICAN PERSONHOOD AND THE STATUS OF THE HOMOSEXUAL: SOME PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFICULTIES

8.0 Introduction

As was mentioned at the end of chapter six, the conclusion that homosexuality appears to be incompatible with the traditional African conception of personhood brings out some complex philosophical issues that need to be highlighted. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the philosophical issues that arise from the application of some of the African conceptions of personhood to gender identity. To this end, the African metaphysical and normative conceptions of personhood discussed in earlier chapters will be appraised and expounded further in light of the philosophical questions and issues raised. This will determine, among other things, the (in)ability of different African views on personhood to explain and accommodate diverse human sexual experiences; all which signify the complexity of human nature. As part of this endeavour, some of the philosophical issues that will be raised and explored include whether personhood in African thought is a subjective, objective or both. Also, in order to explore some of the philosophical issues that arise from the application of the communitarian conceptions of personhood to homosexual identity and practice, an imaginary narrative of a fictional figure named Rasebaga is used below.

8.1 Would that still be him? An imaginary tale of an African male homosexual

According to this narrative, it is imagined that Rasebaga is a man who lives in a traditional, predominately heterosexual African society. In Rasebaga's society, any other form of sexual identity apart from heterosexuality is shunned, and individuals that are believed (whether real or imagined) to indulge in non-heterosexual behaviour are not only regarded as sexual perverts but are subjected to very harsh forms of punishment. However, Rasebaga has a closely guided secret that he has never disclosed to anyone; not even to his wife of 30 years.

He is sexually attracted to other men, and because of those feelings, he may be regarded as a gay person who has not yet 'come out of the closet' in modern terms. This scenario raises question about the personhood status of a closet homosexual, since his circumstances are different from one who has come out of the closet. That is, can he be accorded personhood and can he really be a person simply because his identity as a homosexual is not known to people in his community? If he is accorded personhood, it then means that the only reason he is a person is because he was not truthful about his identity. It can then be asked whether the African personhood would rather value and honour a dishonest person who hides his identity, or one who is brave enough to face the world with his true albeit unpopular identity.

Notwithstanding his homosexual feelings and attractions, Rasebaga has worked very hard over the years and became wealthy and highly respected in his community. He soon became one of the community leaders and advisors to the chief in his village, a position that was preserved for a few individuals who have proved their worth. After taking his third wife, the number of Rasebaga's children increased to 25, with several grandchildren. Further to that, Rasebaga was also well known for his humanitarian activities. He gave to the poor and took care of those who were disadvantaged not only in his village, but in neighbouring villages as well. There is no doubt that within the context of African communitarianism, Rasebaga is 'a real person' since he behaves according to customs and the notion that "individuals become real only in their relationships with others in a community or a group" (Okolo, 2002, p. 213). Secondly, since the communitarian view demands that the welfare and achievements of the individual be realized within the welfare and achievement of the community (Amanze, 2002), sharing his wealth with the community propells him to higher degree of personhood, thus making him a community icon. However, since Rasebaga lives as a heterosexual even though he holds strong homosexual feelings, several issues may be raised in relation to the conception of personhood as held by the communitarian view.

It may be asked whether a supposedly straight (heterosexual) individual such as Rasebaga, who has a secret sexual attraction towards people of his own gender, may remain a person in right standing in the community as long as he does not act on those feelings. The answer to this question seems to be decisively affirmative purely on communitarian grounds, for it would appear that it is not what individuals think, feel or desire that counts for personhood, but what they do especially in the public space. In other words, if Rasebaga manages to keep his sexual preference a secret for the rest of his life, he may still be recognized as a person in that he did not act on those feelings. In fact his strength of character in resisting his personal urges could be cited as further recommendation for personhood. This is because he would have chosen societal expectations or the sexual identity ascribed to him by the society over his personal, intimate feelings. However, this raises questions regarding moral intentions vis-à-vis moral action in determining an individual's moral worthiness for purposes of awarding or denying personhood on communitarian grounds. It seems that according to the African communitarian view of personhood, a person's moral actions are the only means through which his moral worthiness and subsequent personhood can be determined. However, intentions represent a key element of the human moral apparatus in the sense that they determine the extent to which the moral standards of society can be used to judge the moral behaviour of an individual. The assumption is usually that, an individual does not suddenly act in a certain way, either good or bad, without first having the feelings and intent to act in that particular way. In view of this, the question may be posed as to whether one's feelings and intentions play a part in deciding if he is a good or bad person. Does the homosexual only become one at the moment that he engages in homosexual acts, or he is one even before he acts in as far as he had those homosexual feelings and intentions. Since human action is simply a manifestation of human feelings and intention, the tendency by the communitarian

view to base personhood on solely on human action could be adjudged to be a limited and naïve understanding of human nature.

Moving further with the narrative, it can be imagined that at a later time in his life, Rasebaga decides to act on his homosexual feelings and starts a love affair with another man, albeit in secret. This immediately raises the question whether this means that as long as Rasebaga's sexual practices (as a homosexual) remains a secret, his personhood status remains intact or recognized even though he acts, albeit secretly, against accepted ethical conduct. Again it appears consistent with communitarian view of a person, that all that the homosexual needs to do is to keep his *perverse* sexual behaviour a secret, and display publically acceptable sexual behaviour to ensure that his personhood status remain intact. Just like Rasebaga, the homosexual may even marry several wives or husbands of the opposite sex and have children in addition to performing other communal duties which helps him to maintain the right public image. This is because, it is implied in the African communitarian view of personhood that what the individual privately feels and secretly engages in does not affect his personhood status in any way. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that trying to determine who a person really is beyond publicly observable behaviour is also problematic because we do not have access to what people's feelings and intents. However, if Rasebaga's personhood is dependent on perceptions or assumptions held by the community about him, and in this case, a wrong assumption regarding his sexuality, it would appear that personhood is not integral to the self. The idea that personhood may not be an essential part of an individual's nature, but may merely be an acquired status attributed to him by society raises very important questions both for communitarian personhood and the whole idea of a normative conceptions of personhood. The idea that communitarian personhood is merely superficial and not based on an essential part of human nature means that it is fraudulent and unjustifiable. Indeed, there is nothing to this conception of personhood that recommends it to be at par with either the

transcendental or the capacity based conceptions of personhood. Furthermore, suppose that a closet homosexual such as Rasebaga continues to dissemble society and is recognized as a person until his death, based on wrong assumptions about his sexuality. Suppose further that the community gets to discover his true sexual orientation after his death, can society retroactively withdraw his personhood status after death? Suppose that his enhanced personhood status carried with it social and material privileges, all of which Rasebaga enjoyed in his lifetime, can society seek reparation from his family for such previleges? Finally, supposed that the community had given Rasebaga a funeral befitting an individual with enhanced personhood status and he had been buried alongside other great men and women in the community, can society take steps to reverse these various honours?

The above scenario is similar to an individual who secretly lives a life of crime but succeeds in displaying a good, even heroic public life. Common intuition would suggest that an individual who leads such a life should be morally blameworthy even if this fact about his life is known only to himself. In the same way, if being a homosexual is immoral and therefore diminishes one's personhood status, then every homosexual should fail at personhood regardless of whether this fact about the individual's sexuality is publicly known or not. Again, proponents of the communitarian personhood may not accept this position, for by so doing they would be forced to also accept that personhood is not dependent entirely on the community. In other words, that some individuals are persons or non-persons independent of how they are outwardly perceived by the community. It will also mean that one's public or observable actions may not be the only way through which one's moral character is evaluated.

In light of forgoing discussion, it is not clear as to what degree, according to communitarian view of personhood, one should up-hold the public good or contribute to the wellbeing of the society in order to be accorded some degree of personhood. That is, can an individual be

accepted into the community of persons or awarded some degree of personhood based on his contribution to some common good, even though he continues to fail in this endeavour in other areas of his life? While the transgendered and homosexual individuals could be unsuccessful at personhood on account of failing to uphold certain societal values, norms and virtues regarding sexuality, marriage or procreation, it is not clear whether, if at the same time, they successfully uphold other, different set of societal values such as being compassionate and helping the needy will count for personhood in their favour or not.

Suppose that, like many other traditional African societies, people in Rasebaga's community believe in immortality, ancestorship and life-after-death (see Mbiti, 1969). In this connection, many people in Rasebaga's community already believe that he has by now attained personal immortality and qualifies to be an ancestor in the hereafter. Given his reputation and heroic acts, Rasebaga will not just be a family ancestor, but a community one, which is the highest level of ancestorship (Mbiti, 1969). The fact that he is married and he has children means that his line of physical continuation is not blocked and 'the fire of life is not quenched', partly because some aspects of his personality and physical characteristics are passed on to his descendants (Mbiti 1969, p. 130). In addition, Rasebaga's community believes that marriage and procreation as well as the good works Rasebaga performed in the interest of his own people guarantee him personal immortality in that there will be people to remember him for generations to come after he has long gone, (see Gbadegesin, 1984, p. 184; Siegel, 1996, p. 3; Mbiti, 1969, p. 130). In light of forgoing discussion, it is not clear as to what degree, according to communitarian view of personhood, one should up-hold the public good or contribute to the wellbeing of the society in order to be accorded some degree of personhood. In other words, can an individual be accepted into the community of persons or awarded some degree of personhood based on his contribution to some common good, even though he continues to fail in other areas of his life? While the transgendered and homosexual

individuals could be unsuccessful at personhood on account of failing to uphold certain societal values, norms and virtues regarding sexuality, marriage or procreation, it is not clear whether, they could be accorded personhood if at the same time, they successfully uphold other sets of societal values such as being compassionate and helping the needy and so on. Further to that, given that what counts for personhood according to the communitarian view is good public image, it appears that if two homosexual of the opposite sex agree to live together as a married couple and secretly adopt children while declaring to the community that the children are biologically theirs, they could be accorded personhood. The homosexual could attained not only personhood status, but also ancestorhood since his adopted children would guarantee him personal immortality. Moreover, it appears that the homosexual ancestral status is made possible by the fact that according to the African view of personhood, it is not really the act of bearing children that makes one an ancestor, but the fact that they will be living people who continue to remember him in a good way. All these render the African view of person in questions implausible, limited and insufficient approach to personhood in as far as it open to deception and wrong, unauthentic image and identity about oneself.

Suppose that Rasebaga died and his community never got to know that he practiced homosexuality in his life-time, would he go on to be an ancestor in the after-life based solely on the respect, good works and continued good memory of him by the living? On the other hand, will the secretive and supposedly immoral sexual life that he led alongside his heroic public life hinder or alter his identity and status in the spiritual realm? If this is the case, it means that personhood is no longer accorded by the community but that community action is somehow regulated by some transcendental power. However, it would appear that most proponents of communitarian conception of personhood would not have any issues with what Rasebaga did or did not do in his private sexual life, for what was required or expected of

him by the community was for him to honour the obligation of marriage and procreation as well as upholding the public good. This will be consistent with Mbiti (1975, p. 104)'s explanation that:

> ..marriage is looked upon as a sacred duty which every normal person must perform. Failure to do so means, in effect, stopping the flow of life through the individual, and the diminishing of mankind upon the earth. Everything that deliberately goes towards the destruction or obstruction of human life is regarded as wicked and evil. (Mbiti 1975, p. 104)

However, it is clear that according to this African thought marriage is not viewed as an end in itself, but a means to several ends including child bearing. Marriage is also looked upon as a platform upon which children are effectively incorporated into the community, thereby beginning their own journey towards personhood. Thus as mentioned, a homosexual who 'remains in the closet', or who chooses not to make public his sexual orientation, but opt to publicly identify with the gender communally ascribed to him could still be regarded as a community icon. This conclusion is supported in the following:

> A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute his own quota to the continued existence of the community, which nurtures him and partakes in his destiny. This is the ultimate meaning of human existence. The crown of personal life is to bear fruit (beget offspring); the crown of communal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence. (Gbadegesin, 1992, p. 184)

However, given the seemly inseparable nature of gender identity and personhood discussed earlier in this study, issues may still be raised with regard to the personal identity and personhood status of Rasebaga. If Rasebaga chose to keep his sexual identity a secret and went along with what was expected of him by his community, *would that still be him?* That

is, would there be a problem in determining who the real Rasebaga is in the story. Is the true Rasebaga the homosexual man who led a secretive homosexual life and never really came out of the closet? Or is Rasebaga the community icon who satisfied all the verifiable requirements of his community for the attainment of personhood? The answer one would give to this question depends on how central gender and gender identity, (that is, being-a-man or woman, and being heterosexual or homosexual or both or neither) is to one's identity, and not on how central one may choose to make it. Moreover, the interplay and interdependent nature of some of the personhood constructs including the metaphysical and normative dimensions of African personhood provide answer to some of the questions and issues raised above? The discussion below reveals how an evaluation of some of the seemingly polarised concepts that make up the African conceptions of personhood raises more problems, some of which are similar or related to the ones discussed above.

8.2 The communitarian view and the human value of the homosexual

Some of the fundamental issues regarding personhood that proponents of communitarian conceptions of personhood have attempted to address have been articulated by Gyekye (2002). The same issues are raised and discussed here in relation to gender identity and the personhood status of the homosexual. This is done with a view to bringing to the fore some of the weaknesses of the conception of person under discussion. First, Gyekye (2002, p. 297) raises the issue as to whether a person should be regarded as an independent and autonomous being despite living in a community and having relationships with other people. An attempt to resolve this issue usually leads to other related problems that have proved to be difficult to resolve, yet not necessarily viewed as difficult by the proponents of the African communitarian view of personhood. These include the questions as to whether the person or the community, comes first; in other words whether a person has ontological priority over the community or vice versa. How one chooses to answer this question can have several

implications for the identity, acceptability and personhood status of the homosexual. It will also have a bearing on the very concept of gender identity as understood and accepted by most scholars in the area of gender identity today. That is, by defining personhood on communal grounds as the communitarian conception does, one is asserting that personhood is necessarily relational. If personhood is relational in this way, it follows, as a matter of necessity, that it is also gendered (see Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014 on a similar view). This is because all societies have a set of gender categories that can function as the basis upon which a person's social identity is moulded in relation to other members of society (Moghadam, 1992). Human beings can only be understood or perceived as belonging to one gender category, usually male or female, and never as genderless or gender neutral. This supports the idea that there is a necessary relationship between gender identity and personhood. Thus, communitarianism as a conception of personhood makes gender identity an integral part of personhood by its mere appeal to social relations. However, the paradox for the proponents of communitarian personhood is that, even if a gender identity is acknowledged, ascribed and reinforced by society, it still remains within the domain of the individual to personally perceive and feel himself as belonging to that gender. That is, for instance, a male person must personally and intimately feel male, regardless of whether that gender identity was assigned to him by the society on the basis of his birth sex or not. However, according to the communitarian view, it is the community that defines and even award personhood and not some other in-born condition or transcendental being. This means, as already alluded to, that this awarded personhood (when viewed from the normative dimension) is necessarily gendered due to its relational nature. Therefore, it follows that the common Western understanding of gender identity as a personal perception of oneself either as male or female (or rarely, both or neither) is incompatible with the communitarian conception of a person. This is precisely because such understanding of gender identity gives the individual

ontological priority over the community, and this is opposed to the African view in question. More than that, it will also render at least certain versions of communitarianism (such as Menkiti, 1984 and Mbiti, 1969) false in as far as they attribute the creation or awarding of human personhood to the community.

If it is indeed the case that gender identity is a personal feeling one has about oneself, it can also be assumed that personhood is similarly a condition that one has to experience or feel about himself at a personal level. The reason for this is that, as argued above, personhood is inseparable from, or cannot be conceived apart from gender identity. Given this intimate relationship, proponents of the communitarian conception of personhood have no choice but to deny that gender identity is a personal conception of one's gender. Instead they have to insist on the contrary view that gender identity, being a necessary category of personhood, is produced by or emanates from the community. But denying that gender identity is a personal conception of one's gender makes it (gender identity) appear to be merely superficial, and not an intimate or inherent part of the person. This is contrary to what seems to be supported by ordinary intuition which is that individuals, regardless of the gender identity, do not identify themselves as males or females merely because the society identifies them in the same way. It, however, seems to be more appropriate to assert that in addition to being identified or assigned a particular gender identity by the community, individuals should personally feel or identify themselves in that way, that is, as males or females. This is what makes gender identity critical and fundamental to one's personhood and identity. And this is the reason why personhood, contrary to some versions of communitarian view, should not just be an entirely communal affair; but should also be something personal that is experienced and expressed at an individual level. If the above argument is accurate, communitarian conceptions of personhood may be faced with an absurdity in their approach and dealings with homosexuals. If, based on the communitarian view of personhood, the homosexual is deemed to have been

unsuccessful at personhood due to his failure to identify with the gender identity ascribed to him by the society, it follows that both personhood and gender identity are impersonal and not intrinsic to the nature and identity of the individual. Perceiving gender identity in this way will at in variance with the essentialists' position that homosexuality (like other such phenomena), is natural, inevitable, and biologically determined (Irvine, 1990). Instead, the communitarian view will be consistent with social constructionist view that gender and gender identity are external to the individual, and is defined by social understanding and discourse. It also means that even heterosexuals are externally identified as such by the society and not by their gender identity as experienced by themselves. If, however, the communitarian conceptions of personhood recognises that gender identity is a personal feeling that individuals have about themselves and not just a status ascribed to them by the society, it would follow that an individual who claims, contrary to societal expectation and prescription, that he feels differently about his gender identity could be right, and there will be no basis upon which to refute his claims.

The second and related metaphysical issue articulated by Gyekye (2002) with regard to personhood, is whether a person is essentially a communal being who has fundamental and vital relationships with others without which he cannot be perceived as a person. Like the first issue discussed above, this issue has implications for the personhood status of the homosexual and how he may be perceived and treated based on human value. As already discussed, proponents of the communitarian view argue that personhood is a communal concept and that achieving the status of a person is conditional on social achievements that contribute to the common good. It would seem to follows from this that, just like other individuals whose behaviour is regarded as deviant such as murderers and rapists, homosexuals may not succeed at attaining the status of being persons. As argued in chapter six, the reason for this is that just like criminals, their gender identity and practice of

homosexuality is perceived to be working against the good of the society. At the same time, the communitarian conceptions of personhood assert that physical existence, as in the case of a child, is only an indication of the potential for personhood (Coetzee, 2002, p. 277). With particular reference to the socio-cultural perspective of the Akan people, Coetzee emphasizes this point by arguing that the potential for acquiring personhood is only given biologically to all human beings. What this means that, at a certain point in their lives, both the heterosexual and the homosexual are not yet persons. Since, according to the African view in question, a new born baby is regarded as a person only in potentiality, it would seem to follow that every child, irrespective of their future sexual orientation have this potentiality. Given that under this view of a person, personhood is only attainable in the public and moral arena, the debate on whether people are born homosexuals or not arises. That is, assuming that personhood is gendered, the question of whether any gender identity (be it homosexual or heterosexual or any other) is a practice or condition that people are born with is a key when issues around the human value of the homosexual are considered. The communitarian view holds that a baby need to grow and go through some physical changes such as growing teeth and so on before it can reach any degree of personhood. Most importantly, at a later stage, the same baby will have to go through some social changes and transitions, usually marked by rituals of incorporation as it goes through life, to enable it attain personhood. Thus, according to this view, 'man is only definable in terms of becoming' (Amanze, 2002, p. 123), and due to its emphasis on social category, 'it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory,' (Menkiti, 1984, p. 172). This means that personhood is something that has to be achieved and it appears that no one, regardless of gender, will be accorded personhood simply because he is born of 'human seed.' Given the relational nature of such personhood, it may also mean that gender identity,

as a category of personhood, is something that is achieved in the social space as well, and no one is born a heterosexual or a homosexual.

There seem to be a logical difficulty arising from the above discussion, especially as it relates to the personhood status of the homosexual. That is, there appears to be something paradoxical in the attempt to define personhood as both essentially social (in terms of human nature) and socially conditioned. The paradox is in asserting that a human being is by nature a social being (see Obioha, 2014; Gyekye, 2002; Nkrumah, 1965; Senghor, 1964), on one hand, and that one has to work towards being awarded personhood by the community, on the other hand. According to the communitarian view, should one fail at a communal life, he ultimately fails at personhood (Menkiti, 1984). That is, on one hand, human beings are regarded as social beings by nature since, according to communitarian view, it is impossible for them to live and thrive outside society (Obioha, 2014; Gyekye, 1996; Wiredu, 1983; Gbadegesin, 1991; Iroegbu, 2000). This means that the view in question "sees the human person as *inherently* communal, and embedded in a context of social relationships and interdependence, never as an isolated, atomic individual" (Obioha, 2014, p. 250). On the other hand however, the communitarian view also holds that the individual must strive for communal validation characterized by moral achievement. The standard for such morality is a collective system of values such as harmony, peace, stability and solidarity; and this is considered critical in the determination of personhood (see Obioha, 2014; Gyekye, (2002). It would appear that if an individual is by nature a social being as the communitarian view allege, it is not expected for him to struggle or even fail at personhood in the social space. Rather, it should be anticipated that the individual will thrive socially by displaying behaviour consistent with societal values, since it is inherent in him to be social. This point finds evidence in, among others, Obiaha (2014, p. 14)'s observation that a number of African thinkers "agree that society is not only a necessary condition for human existence, but it is

natural to man". This implies that according to the said African thinkers, and perhaps contrary to Thomas Hobbes account of human nature, human beings are naturally born fit to enter and actively live in society, and do not just happen to develop a desire for it. Based on the above observation, and contrary to versions of the communitarian view (for example, Menkiti, 1984), it will also appear that the individual does not need the community to award to him personhood, since he is already born a person by virtue of being born a relational or social being. This point is made in light of the fact that the very definition of a person, according to the communitarian view, cannot be divorced from being social and having a concern for the well-being of others. It is on this basis that the communitarian or communal personhood has been understood as "the idea that the human person has a natural sociality that defines his being", (Obiaha, 2014, p. 14). The apparent paradox inherent in the communitarian view of personhood is highlighted further if one considers Gyekye and similar discussions on personhood. According to Gyekye (2002) 'the human person does not voluntarily choose to enter into human community, that is, community life is not optional for any individual person', and that 'the human person is *naturally oriented* toward other persons and must have relationships with them', (Gyekye, 2002, p. 300). However, as already pointed out, it seems that if the homosexual, just like any other human being, is naturally oriented towards others as per the view expressed above, there is no point in urging him to have any 'proper' relationships with other people, or to uphold societal values and the public good. In view of this, it appears that the homosexual cannot fail at being a person, neither does he need to be awarded the status of personhood. This will render the communitarian view not only inconsistent but also absurd, for the same argument, a rapist, murderer and other social miscreants cannot fail at personhood. It is a fact that some human beings do fail at communal existence by not living up to moral standards reflecting the collective system of values. Therefore, it would appear, contrary to the communitarian view, that human beings are not

inherently social. If being social or relational is not inherent in human beings, it means, to the extent that personhood is determined on communitarian grounds, that personhood does not constitute the essential nature of the human being. Therefore, individuals are not born with an inherent human value, because this is what the status of personhood denotes. Instead, the community is wholly responsible for creating and producing the human person, including the homosexual. The proponents of communitarian conception of personhood may rebut the above critique by pointing out that a thing needs not to be born with an attribute or certain status for that (attribute or status) to be regarded as part of its essential nature. That is, even though human beings acquire the status of personhood at a later stage in life through integration into the community, (as opposed to being born with it), this does not rule out the possibility of personhood being part of human nature. This could mean that human beings are only born with the potential for personhood, and its full realisation can only be achieved in society as one goes through life. The proponents of the communitarian view may even make an observation that the idea of potentiality and degrees of personhood is not unique to the communitarian understanding of a person. The capacity-based approach equally view personhood in the same way, since it appeals to qualities such as reason and self-consciousness, most of which are gradually realised as one matures in life. It would appear that the proponents of the communitarian view of personhood can rescue the thesis from the apparent illogicality by explaining that human beings have a nature of sociality that defines their being (Obioha, 2014; Gyekye, 1996; Wiredu, 1983; Gbadegesin, 1991; Iroegbu, 2000), only in potentiality. And that one needs to be socialized in order to achieve the potential for personhood he is born with. It is failure to live up to this inborn potential that will result in one failing at being a person (as per Menkiti (1984)'s version). However, such counter-arguments may not stand for three reasons. Firstly, even though the communitarian view of personhood share a similarity with the capacity-based approach in that they both seem to

suggest that personhood is a matter of degree, and that a human being is only born with a potential for personhood, the two differ on a very important aspect. While the gradual development of the ability to reason is one of the criteria for personhood according to the capacity based approach, individuals are not held directly responsible for its development, maturity or loss. That is, even though human beings are awarded or denied personhood on the basis of whether or not they depict reasoning ability according to the approach in question, its absence or loss is considered to be a defect and not moral failure on the part of the person who lack it. The same cannot be said of the criteria for communitarian personhood where the ability to relate well with others and uphold the public good is ultimately the responsibility of the individual involved. Secondly, if, according to the communitarian view, man is a social construct, then society is what constructs every individual and as such the same society cannot turn round and condemn its own construct. It is therefore illogical and unfair to blame individuals for what they are not essentially in terms of their nature, and for what they cannot make themselves to be. Finally, and as already alluded to, if being relational and upholding a communal life is part of human nature, it means that the homosexual does not need to be persuaded to live a communal life and to identify with a gender that is in harmony with societal values. It will be in every human being to naturally want to relate, to care for others and to uphold the common good.

8.3 The dimensions of personhood and the status of the homosexual

Based on 'the deep respect for human value' often associated with the communitarian conception of personhood (Nabudere, 2005, p. 1; Dolamo, 2013, p. 3), the above discussion and the logical difficulty it poses opens up further issues for discussion. One of them is the question whether the communitarian view understands human value (or personhood) as intrinsic or extrinsic to the human person. Owing to the metaphysical and normative conceptions of African personhood and ontology discussed in earlier chapters, it would

appear that most African conceptions of personhood hold an understanding of human personhood that is intrinsic and extrinsic at the same time. As discussed in chapter five, even though the communitarian view and the force thesis appear to put premium on the metaphysical and normative dimensions respectively, they both suggest a dual understanding of personhood. On the one hand, the metaphysical dimension of person suggests an inherent or intrinsic construct of personhood. This implies that personhood is not entirely a creation of the society; a human being's metaphysical essence is not given, and may not be altered or removed by society. When viewed in this way, personhood is, to an extent, transcendental; it is an intrinsic nature or value that one is born with. On the other hand however, the same views hold a normative dimension to personhood, which presents what may appear to be a contra perspective that being a person is a conditional state of value defined and bestowed by society. As already discussed, the normative dimension entails that no one is born a person, instead, human beings develop into persons as they go through life. The interplay of the two dimensions and how they constitute personhood is articulated in Igbafen (2014)'s argument below:

> In sum, a person in Africa is both a metaphysical and normative being. And to that extent, one cannot be so called a person if he or she loses his or her ontological or metaphysical essence. Neither can he or she be regarded as a person if he or she fails in normative and communal consideration. As we have seen, a person's relation with society is crucial in defining who he or she is and what he or she is, given the belief held in nearly un-animistic way, that is, that Africans do not think of themselves as discrete individuals but rather understand themselves as part of a community. (Igbafen 2014, p. 134)

While this quote does not pose any problem for the proponents of the communitarian and other African views of personhood, it raises several questions concerning the personhood status of marginalized individuals in the society such as women and homosexuals. That is, there might be a conceptual difficulty in making sense of the consistency within African

conceptions of personhood, especially as it relates to whether one is a person only intrinsically and also through social relation at the same time. For instance, Ikuenobe (2016) explains that any normative conception of personhood such as the communitarian view, simply assumes that there is a metaphysical, physical and descriptive dimension of a person a priori. As a result of this "one cannot satisfy the normative, moral and aesthetic criteria of personhood, if one does not have descriptive metaphysical-physical features" (Ikuenobe, 2016, p. 145). In addition to this 'one cannot be called a person if he or she loses his or her ontological or metaphysical essence' (Igbafen, 2014, p. 134). As already discussed, if the essence of personhood is metaphysically prior to the social existence of the individual, it would follow that the (in)capacity for personhood is predetermined or unalterable, and that it cannot be lost or gained on the basis of what the individual does or does not do within the social sphere. This is not to say every human being is a person in the normative sense, it only means that failure to ascend to the status of social personhood could be explained on metaphysical grounds. This will mean that an individual whose behaviour is considered deviant or contrary to social norms such as the homosexual or any other members of the LGBT community, is essentially due to his metaphysical dimension or make up. Since it is not possible for one to satisfy the 'normative, moral and aesthetic criteria of personhood' if he does not have metaphysical features, it means it is the metaphysical dimension that makes it possible for a human being to live a morally up-right life consistent with societal expectation, thereby attaining normative personhood. This will mean that in the case of the homosexual, or any other individual whose conduct is viewed as deviant, he could be the way he is because of his metaphysical dimension, and in such case he is not meant to be a person. It also means no amount of effort will make the homosexual change his gender identity or develop into a person, and any attempt in that direction will not only be superficial, but tantamount to trying to make him what he is not in terms of his metaphysical nature. It will

therefore be futile, illogical and unfair to blame individuals for what they are not essentially in terms of their metaphysical being, and for what they cannot make themselves to be.

8.4 Is the role and sanctity of the community exaggerated in the African view of a person?

In the African communitarianism conception the community is depicted as the yardstick for moral excellence and personal progress. It is held that it is only in the community of other human beings that the life of the individual can have meaning or significance (Agulanna, 2010). Yet, it is possible that this view is exaggerated and biased in favour of the community. There are instances when the community fails in its role of enabling individuals to achieve their goals and aspirations, and when this happens, the blame is always placed on the individual while the society appears to be excused from failure or wrong doing. Furthermore, it is possible that some of the basic beliefs associated with African communitarian conception of a person promotes the discrimination and abuse of some marginalised members of the society. For instance, the communitarian view that a child is a person only potentially, and that personhood is something that one has to first qualify for, could have a bearing on one's judgment on some moral issues such as abortion, insanity (mental ill health) and most importantly for this study, homosexuality. This may imply, in principle, that since a baby cannot be regarded as having attained the status of a person due to its pre-socialization status, treating it in a way that is not consistent with treating persons may not be regarded as morally wrong, at least not to the same degree or level of morality that one is expected to show towards persons. This could be the case for individuals who consistently display what may be regarded as socially non-conforming gender and sexual behaviour such as homosexuals and other members of the LGBT community. Furthermore, if individuals such as homosexuals whose sexual behaviour is considered to be deviant fail to acquire personhood because they did not live up to the expectations and common values of the society, it then raises the

question of whether such individuals are wholly to blame for such failure. If Rasebaga's (the character in the fictional narrative in the preceding section) homosexual inclinations and practice were due to some unfortunate family up-bringing and other social factors, to what extent does the society bear the blame for producing such an individual? In addition, how does that which is unnatural or simply learned or acquired socially cause change to what is natural and inborn, that is, if indeed human beings are by nature social beings as some proponents of the communitarian view argue (see for example Gyekye, 2002, p. 300; and Obioha, 2014, p. 250 on this view). By alleging that human beings are by nature communal, it is assumed that human beings are naturally oriented toward others, that they have moral responsibility towards society and other human beings. If all human beings are inherently communal and therefore are born with an inherent human value, at what point in life does a homosexual lose his personhood, if at all he does? That is, was such an individual born a person and later on lost personhood, or does it mean that he was never a person? In other words, is personhood simply a product of the society or is it inherent in the human being, so that one only needs to grow and mature into it through the guidance of the society? It appears that it is not entirely up to the homosexual, or any other individual, whether or not he is able to fulfil the requirements that will award him personhood, therefore the community is to blame in part for failing such individuals. This is because according to some accounts of communitarian personhood, "it is the community which makes the individual, to the extent that without the community, the individual has no existence", (Okolo, 2002, p. 213). Furthermore, "it is the community which defines the person as a person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory" (Menkiti, 1984, p. 172). In particular, African communitarianism sees community rather than self-determination as the essential aspect of personhood (Nussbaum, 2003). It therefore seems acceptable to assume that whether or not human beings acquire acceptable ethical standards is subject to a whole lot of factors, some

of which are not dependent on the individual. Consequently, individual human beings cannot take the full blame for not conducting themselves well in relation to a collective responsibility. For instance, the homosexual, like any other human being, does not choose the family he is born to, or the kind of people who bring him up. He does not always choose the kind of place and circumstances he finds himself in. In some way, human beings are products of their unique circumstances, as much as they have freedom to decide against societal expectations. Therefore, the view that one may be awarded or denied the status of being a person on account of whether or not he is able to show character consistent with collective morality (See Menkiti, 1984; Mmualefhe, 2007) not to be balanced against the extent to which the community has been able to play is role in socialising the individual. Thus some versions of African communitarian conception of personhood may be viewed as extreme in that they over-emphasizes the authority of the community over the individual. The interdependent and reciprocal nature of the relationship that exists between the community and the individual is often ignored. As already mentioned, in cases of anti-social behaviour such as homosexual acts carried out by some members of the society, the community appears to be totally excused from any moral blame. Yet, as already indicated, it is the society that provides the enabling environment through its structures such family for personhood to thrive or fail in the first place, and therefore if an individual fails at personhood, it could be partly the fault of the community.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter raised a number of philosophical questions and problems for the African conceptions of person particularly the communitarian view. There seemed to be a problem in saying that Rasebaga (the homosexual in the narrative discussed at the beginning of the chapter) was a person, (on communitarian grounds) simply because no one knew that he was homosexual. It followed that the communitarian view was faulty since it was dependent on

observable conduct and not on who the person was in reality. On the other hand, trying to determine who a person really was beyond publicly observable behaviour was also problematic because we do not have access to such information. This meant that personhood could be based on fraudulent claims which made the whole idea of normative personhood suspect. The other questions raised in this chapter included whether an individual could be held fully responsible for what he was or became in a communitarian set up. If there is a possibility that what one did or experienced could simply be something not of one's own doing, it could be assumed, based on communitarian view, that one could be a homosexual because it is part of what he was. That meant it could be what circumstances and social forces has made him to be, or part of a fulfilment of a divine, metaphysical nature about him. All these possibilities constitute some of the basic beliefs of African conceptions of personhood as discussed in previous chapters. Further, an argument was made in this chapter to the effect that if being relational and upholding a communal life was part of human nature according to the communitarian conception of personhood, it meant that the homosexual did not need to be persuaded to live a social life and to identify with a gender that was in harmony with societal values. This meant that if the communitarian view was true, it would be in every human being to naturally want to relate, to care for others and to uphold the common good. Conversely, it should be accepted, again in keeping up with some versions of the African communitarian view of personhood that no human being was born a person, and that it was the community that accorded individuals such status. Either way, the communitarian view of personhood failed to account for the gender identity of the homosexual, and by extension personhood in general, without involving in some form of philosophical difficulty and self-contradiction. The chapter had also demonstrated the philosophical challenges inherent in the African view of personhood by analysing some of seeming polarised constructs that constitutes its concept of person. This rendered the African communitarian view of person

unattractive and unconvincing in so far as it appears to exaggerate the role played by community in producing the person, and at the same time exonerate it from any failures in carrying out this task.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to first provide a general conclusion that aims to explain the role that each chapter of this dissertation had in explicating the relationship between African conceptions of personhood and gender identity, as well as the implications of these for the personhood status of homosexuals. Secondly, the chapter serves to present the findings of this research on whether the hypothesis adopted at the beginning of this thesis had been confirmed. It is a known fact that homosexuality is generally frowned upon in most contemporary African societies. However, what is not readily known, and which this thesis attempted to explicate through argument and analysis, was the possible reason for this phenomenon. The thesis also attempted to establish the implications of African conceptions of a person on the personhood status and identity of the homosexual, including other members of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community. In view of the general rejection of homosexuality in Africa, this work sought to establish whether or not being a homosexual was in breech of any of the conditions considered necessary for recognition or acceptance into the community of persons within the African traditional conceptions of personhood. The attempt to establish the personhood status of transgendered persons, particularly homosexuals within the context of some of the common African traditional conceptions of personhood brought to the fore some philosophical issues, questions and absurdities.

In the course of the research the recurring question has been whether or not individuals who engaged in non-conforming sexual practices or otherwise assumed gender identities that are categorized within the LGBT could qualify as persons within African thought. In other

words, did African traditional conceptions of personhood exclude individuals with non-conforming sexual practices and such gender identities as homosexuality and the LGBT.

In doing so, the thesis did the following:

a) Reviewed traditional and modern theories on gender and gender identity.

b) Discussed leading, philosophical conceptions of personhood and how they relate to gender identity.

c) Explored African traditional conceptions of personhood, with specific focus on Africa South of the Sahara.

d) Compared some of the leading conceptions of personhood in Africa South of the Sahara.

e) Related African traditional conceptions of personhood to gender identity issues, focusing on homosexuality.

f) Made a critical analysis of African traditional conceptions of personhood in the light of gender identity issues, focusing on homosexuality.

g) Discussed philosophical issues that arise from the application of some of the African conceptions of personhood to gender identity particularly homosexuality.

h) Explored the compatibility of African traditional conceptions of personhood with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality.

9.1 Résumé of conclusions

In reviewing the traditional and modern theories on gender and gender identity, the research in chapter one discussed the complex phenomenon of sex, gender and gender identity. It further explored debates about the origins or causes of homosexuality or same-sex sexual relations. It was evident from the discussion that there was no conclusive scientific evidence about what causes homosexuality and other deviant gender identities. There were only theories that link homosexuality directly to genes and hormones. There were also some

studies that attempted to make a connection between the brain and the different forms of gender identity. Similarly, there were studies that purported to show how upbringing, early childhood experiences, and the social environment contributed to the development of homosexuality. It remained evident from that discussion that scientists did not know what precisely caused or influenced an individual's sexual orientation. However most theorists were of the view that it was determined by an intricate interplay of genetic, hormonal, and environmental stimuli, and did not view it as a choice. Discussions in this chapter raised questions regarding the fundamental nature of human existence especially as it related to what normal human sexuality (or normal gender) was. What the role of sexuality (or gender) was, in human existence and personhood? Whether the instinctive desire of species to survive was sufficient justification for saying that homosexuality (or whether gender variance) was a disorder? Whether societal values on gender and sexuality influence should help to define the concept of personhood? In answering all these questions, chapter one attempted to establish a correlation between gender identities, particularly homosexuality, on the one hand and some conceptions of personhood on the other. This served as a background for a discussion of some of the dominant African traditional conceptions of personhood which were undertaken in the three subsequent chapters.

The thesis also evaluated leading, philosophical conceptions of personhood and how they related to gender identity. Specifically, chapter two explored and scrutinized the dominant views on the concept of personhood in Western philosophy, including the capacity-based approach, the inherent/transcendental approach, and the relational/ social approach. The chapter also attempted to establish a relationship between issues of gender and identity discussed in the preceding chapter and the different conceptions of personhood. This was because, for most people, to exist as a person was to exist as a male or female. Thus, a

consideration of the parallels between personhood and gender identity placed gender identity at the centre of personhood, self-identity, and self-image.

This work also explored different traditional African conceptions of personhood, focusing on Africa South of the Sahara. In chapters three and four, metaphysical and normative dimensions of personhood associated with African traditional thought were respectively discussed. Chapter three discussed metaphysical personhood in African traditional thought as a mixture of a physical component, which was the body, and one or two (or in some cases three) non-bodily and/or quasi-physical life-giving principles or components such as the soul, spirit, force, fire and shadow. Normative theories of personhood in African traditional thought was premised on the understanding that a person is more than the physical human form or body and the non-physical aspects that constitute the metaphysical dimension. The normative dimension was discussed in chapter four and in that discussion, arguments were made for the notion that in addition to the fixed, inborn, metaphysical components, an individual needed to ascend to the status of a moral person. This status was only attainable through a certain degree of moral maturity and social responsibility. The chapter also discussed the idea that the metaphysical dimension was a divine substance and carrier of a person's God given or predetermined destiny and highlighted the questions raised by this for the normative person. These included questions as to whether there was a correlation between one's behaviour and his destiny or God given purpose in life. Also the possibility of individuals behaving and making decisions that were contrary to their destiny, and whether they should be praised or blamed for actions that flow from such destiny. Again the chapter explored the possibility that one's gender identity, such as being a homosexual, could be part of a person's God given destiny. All these and related questions had implications for the nature of personhood within African traditional thought, as well as for how individuals identified as homosexuals should be perceived.

A comparison of some of the dominant conceptions of personhood in Africa South of the Sahara was made in chapter five. Based on the strength of shared or solitary features, the chapter made a determination on the extent to which the various African ideas on the nature of the person were (dis)similar, complimentary (or opposed), and even reducible to each other. The chapter noted that there were far more similarities than differences between the various conceptions of personhood discussed in chapters three and four. It also noted what appeared to be a general agreement between these conceptions of personhood on what constitutes the essential nature of the human person in African thought. The work also noted that, at least with respect to the force thesis and the communitarian conceptions of personhood, the areas of similarities between the different ideas of personhood associated with various African groups outweighed whatever differences between them. Both conceptions held the view that human persons are relational beings created for mutuality, and that the human person could not be conceived without a recognition of a dependence upon and ultimate union with the whole of reality. Also, comparison of the two conceptions of personhood in suggested that to a large extent, the metaphysical and normative dimensions that were emphasized by the force thesis and the communitarian view respectively appeared to complement and reinforce, rather than polarise, each other. Therefore, based on the strength of these shared features and the extent to which they appeared to complement each other, the chapter argued that the two conceptions might be compatible with each other.

The discussions in chapters six involved an analysis of traditional African conceptions of personhood in the light of gender identity issues, focusing on homosexuality. The analysis was done by first relating the African traditional conceptions of personhood to homosexuality based on some of the major theories and views on gender and gender identity such as essentialism and social constructionism. The chapter argued that being a homosexual did not meet conditions considered necessary for recognition or acceptance into the community of

persons according to the African traditional conceptions of personhood. This observation was made based on the undeniable fact that traditional African societies were notably communitarian, and the individual was born into this strong communalistic union with an extensive circle of kith and kin. The chapter showed that in order to be regarded as a person, an individual should see himself as part of the group, or the whole collective reality, which was inclusive of the dead, the living and the yet-to-be born. As a result, the identity of the individual, including his gender identity, was founded on and derived from the whole metaphysical and normative reality, which was a collective, interdependent single reality. Therefore, the decisions and actions of the individual in an African set-up should always be in pursuit of personhood through maintaining solidarity with the rest, as well as carrying out one's obligations to a large set of other individuals in his line of relationships. This meant that where an individual subscribed to the common understanding of gender identity as a personal conception, or had feelings that dictate to him or her that s/he was of a different gender from the one assigned to him/her at birth, he or she might not assume such a gender identity. This was because such (new) gender identity would compromise, or be at variance with communal solidarity. Homosexuality as a gender identity therefore, did not only appear to be incompatible with the traditional African conception of personhood and ontology, but also hindered the individual in his pursuit of and struggle for personhood in the present life, and personal immortality or ancestorship in the hereafter.

The use of homosexuality to evaluate some of the common African traditional conceptions of personhood brought to the fore some philosophical issues, questions and absurdities which were discussed in chapter seven. Questions raised in this chapter included whether a supposedly straight (heterosexual) individual who secretly harbours sexual attraction towards people of his own gender, might remain a person in right standing in the community as long as he did not act on those feelings. This and other ancillary questions illustrated the absurdity

of the communitarian position that it was not what the individual thought, felt or desired that counted for personhood, but what he actually did in the public space. In other words, if the homosexual managed to keep his sexual preference a secret for the rest of his life, he might still be recognized as a person. This absurdity did not only result from the dexterity of the individual in hiding his/her publicly sanctionable behavior but also arised where society had mistaken or false impression of the candidate for personhood. Thus apart from the homosexual, other community members with socially deviant behaviour (including criminals), might attain personhood if society was unaware or otherwise mistaken about their 'perverse' sexual behaviour or other socially unacceptable behaviour. This raised the question as to whether the communitarian view was an adequate theory of personhood. It also raised the question as to whether the various African theories of personhood could be defended. These questions were beyond the scope of the current work and presents interesting prospects for additional research in this area.

9.2 Final Conclusion

This research found that the hypothesis surmised at the beginning of this thesis holds true. The basic hypothesis that underlay this thesis was that individuals who are homosexuals, including, by extension, LGBT, that is, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender; those who undergo gender re-identification; and those who do not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex; as well as those who undergo surgery to change their biological sex, may not reach any or full personhood status. This conclusion was grounded on African traditional thought and the cosmic view of reality upon which the African conception of personhood is deeply embedded. The conclusion was informed by the analysis of traditional African views articulated in this work; and the implications that such views had for the personhood status of the homosexual.

It was observed that according to some of the African traditional views, personhood was an achieved status that one could be better, worse or fail at. An individual was considered a person (or better at personhood) if, among other things, contributed towards the perpetual existence or continuity of life of his kinship, clan and community. An individual who failed to contribute to community; such as those who failed to uphold the shared interests and common good; who did not marry and establish families; those who were barren, and so on, would have diminished or failed status of personhood. An exclusive practice of homosexuality (including some of the LGBT pracices) did not contribute to continuity or perpetual existence of the community due to lack of procreation in such relationships. Thus, individuals who practiced homosexuality would have diminished or failed status of personhood as long as they engaged exclusively in this sexual orientation.

Further to that, it was observed that in African traditional conception of personhood, everyone was ontologically connected to everyone else in an intricate and endless web of connections. An individual's identity, which was inclusive of one's gender identity, was derived from, and understood in terms of one's particular relations and connection to everyone else in the community of beings. This meant an individual's gender identity automatically placed him in a certain position in relation to the whole community, which is the total system of lineage, including one's descendants and ancestors. Therefore, it was the community and the collective reality that gave the individual his personhood status and identity (including gender identity). Individuals who underwent gender re-identification; and those who did not identify with some (or all) of the aspects of gender that are assigned to their biological sex; as well as those who underwent surgery to change their biological sex, would have deviated from the initial gender identity ascribed to them by the community. Consequently, changing one's sex or/ and gender in that way would hinder such individuals from attaining personhood and as such theorizing alternative genders would be counter

intuitive in African thought since the personal or private identity of such person would be disconnected from the community, system of kinship and lineage.

It was also observed that the interconnectedness and interdependent nature of relationships in the African view of reality meant that the identity of the individual had a bearing on the identity of those who were standing in proximity to him. Ultimately, this could also have a bearing on metaphysical and hierarchical structure of one's kinship, relatives, clan and larger the community. Thus, conceptually, a change in any aspect of an individual affected the identity and status of everyone that was connected to him. Since any change in an individual's being had the potential to effect change in everyone else and, ultimately on all other structures and spheres including the spiritual realm, this could bring about confusion and possible instability. Thus, changing oneself biologically from being a man to being a woman and vice versa, or assigning to oneself a gender identity that was different from the one that was assigned by the community affected not only one's identity, but had potential to change the identity of others ontologically connected to him. As mentioned, and based on African metaphysical scheme of things, the impact of such change could be generalized to the whole community of the living, the living dead (ancestors) and the yet to be born. This is because according to this African view, no individual existed alone as an entity; but only as part of the whole. As a result, it was the community that should give the individual his personhood and identity, including gender identity. Therefore, since it was undesirable for the homosexual to bring change on the whole system so that it suited his new identity (for it was this system that gave the individual his identity), and his new identity was not derived from, given by, and consistent with the identity of the reality around him, the homosexual could not be properly accommodated in the African conception of personhood. This was to say that African traditional conceptions of personhood were incompatible with non-conforming sex relations, practices and gender identities such as homosexuality and/or LGBT. Such relations

and identities inhibited the personhood status of individuals and explained the aversion to same sex relations in African societies.

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