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Personhood and Gender in a Traditional African Community

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic project to my family, Joel, Margaret, Darlison, Roosevelt, Tiwonge, and Vynida, for the support and love shown to me.

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Lastly, I am grate to the university and faculty for the financial support throughout the years of my study.

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis has been composed by myself and that the work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. I confirm that the work submitted is my own, except where work that has formed part of jointly authored publications has been included. My contributions and those of the other authors to this work have been explicitly indicated below. I confirm that appropriate credit has been given within this thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

The work presented in Chapter Three has been published in the *South African Journal of Philosophy* as Nyirenda and Sesanti, "Understanding Gender Identities in an African Communitarian World View" (42(3):176-191, DOI: 10.1080/02580136.2023.2275231), as part of the special issue on gender in African philosophy. The chapter is written by me, Vitumbiko Nyirenda and the ideas expressed therein inform those expressed in the paper co-authored with Simphiwe Sesanti. I came up with the ideas and crafted the work into a published paper. Professor Sesanti, who was selected as a mentor for the special issue offered guidance and constructive criticism following the requirements of the special issue.

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ABSTRACT

There is a common assumption that traditional African societies were gender-neutral and lacked hierarchical gender ordering. Proponents of this view argue that women in these societies held significant positions, challenging notions of subordination and oppression. They contend that women have historically been leaders, advisors to kings, queens, soldiers, and landowners. However, some scholars argue that this assumption does not reflect the lived experiences of many African women, who face discrimination and oppression by men and society. This perspective suggests a distinct conception of personhood, indicating that African communities are inherently gendered, which in turn shapes their concept of personhood. The primary claim is that personhood has often been presented in non-gendered terms, based on the general assumption of gender neutrality in traditional African communities. However, this does not align with the realities of these communities. This dissertation thoroughly explores the intellectual divergence surrounding various understandings of gender in African society and its relation to discussions on personhood. Regarding gender, I argue that in the African context, it is viewed as complementary, fluid, and relational, indicating healthy and positive gender relationships within the community. Concerning personhood, I argue that it is often presented in non-gendered ways. Those who fail to recognize this perspective often conflate modern social issues with the dominant values of traditional African communities.

Keywords: Personhood, Sex, Gender Inclusivity, Complementarity, Fluidity, Relationality

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INTRODUCTION

a. Background

African philosophy as a discipline is concerned with many branches of philosophy that may range from metaphysics, ethics, logic, politics, aesthetics/art, epistemology, etc. In all these branches the subject matter ranges from causation, epistemic marginalisation, personhood, gender, democracy, justice, etc. In this dissertation, I am concerned with the distinct and overlooked relationship between personhood and gender. By "personhood" reference is made to the status of being a person. But what it means to be a person can be understood in metaphysical and normative senses. The metaphysical definition captures the nature of a human being given that in most African languages the word "person" captures a human being. For instance, of the different languages spoken in my country, Malawi, among the Chewa, *"munthu"* means a human animal, and the same goes for the Tumbuka where *"munthu"* points to a human being. Other languages such as the Akan *"onipa"* or Yoruba *"eniyan"* all capture a human being (Gyekye, 2010; Gbadegesin, 1998). Interestingly, the same word also carries normative connotations. Thus, the sense in which one has moral status. Therefore, to be "*munthu", "onipa"* or *"eniyani"* also means to enjoy some level of moral respect. While the extensive and profound literature on personhood discussing how these concepts are fleshed out in African philosophy is impressive, the focus shifts significantly regarding gender. Gender as a subject matter in African philosophy is fascinating given that it is new compared to other subjects and such conceptual analysis is scant. Little has been written in the analysis of the nature of both gender identities and roles.

This gap opens great avenues for research in the academic field, exploring how gender is understood and conceptualized based on values embedded within the culture(s) of African people. To attest to the lack of African philosophy's engagement with the subject of gender, one barely

finds articles on sex and gender in the discipline. In my academic journey, my first engagement with gender as a topic in African philosophy was during a summer school in 2020, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. Following this was the 5th biennial conference organized by the African Philosophy Society at Gulu University, in Uganda, in 2023. The theme of the conference was "Gender Dimensions of African Philosophy". It was at these gatherings that I found African philosophers expressing interest in engaging with the topic, but at the same time bemoaning the silence they have had on the topic. This is not to say that no work on gender has previously been done, but rather that the discipline lacks a deeper engagement with the topic compared to other topics mentioned above.

Several reasons for the lack of scholarship on gender have been suggested. Some scholars such as Oluwole (1998), Oyowe and Yurkiviska (2014) argue that there is a general neglect of philosophical engagement of gender issues. Perhaps the lack of scholarship and negligence to discuss gender points to the fact that gender is not a problem for African philosophers as it is for other non-African philosophers. In other words, it is possible that of the many problems that inspire philosophical engagement on traditional (precolonial) African communities, gender did not make it on the list. I specifically mention and limit the strength of the claim to "traditional (precolonial) African communities" because one cannot ignore the obvious problem of gender in the current modern/post-modern African communities. Nonetheless, claiming that gender *was* not a problem for traditional African communities requires an understanding of the structure and values of traditional African communities themselves.

Along this line of thought is Imbo (1998) who has argued that there is a general assumption that African traditional communities are assumed to be gender equal hence ignoring the structures of

oppression and marginalization of women.[1] Traditional African cultural values tend to be (on a more general scale) gender inclusive (without discrimination)- hence more neutral, rather than gender oppressive. This may explain why gender does not come out as a big social problem (Oelofsen, 2018; Oyewumi, 1997, 2004). Scholarship on traditional African communities, extending back to ancient Egypt, suggests that women held important positions of power and privilege, a view that rejects any assumptions of subordination and oppression of women. Women were in top positions as pharaohs, advisors, queens, soldiers, landowners, etc., and were wealthy (Diop, 1974, 1981; Momoh, 2000; Nzegwu, 2004; Amadiume, 1987; Sesanti, 2016). This arrangement is different from patriarchal societies where women tend to be in a position of subordination and have strict gender roles (Sultana, 2012; Oyewumi, 2005). Diop (1974, 1981) and Amadiume (1987, 1997) argue that this does not reflect traditional African communities which were matriarchal and did not adhere to strict and rigid gender roles.

However, some scholars have argued that this assumption does not reflect the lived reality of most African women who are discriminated against and oppressed by men and society (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Sanni & Ofana, 2021). But again, a proper analysis ought to make a distinction between the experiences of women in modern societies and those in traditional societies. As mentioned above, when it comes to traditional African societies, presumed matriarchal and heterarchical gender structures set by communities are inconsistent with the claims made as well as the general oppression of women, as evidenced during and after colonialism. Oppression and marginalization of women are associated with the imposition and assimilation of patriarchal gender

[1] By community, I refer to a group of people who share certain values, and norms or ideology in general. By traditional community, I use the word to refer to precolonial African communities. Note that I do not use the word tradition to refer to something backward or undeveloped, rather in a more general sense I point to established practices, values, norms and ideologies that people identify with as a true reflection of their identity. Precolonial societies, tend to reflect such values and norms, because they are societies that had a culture without colonial influence.

ideologies linked to colonialism and slightly prior to that, religion, especially Islam and Christianity (Nzegwu, 2004; Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 2004).

Arguments relatd to the above claims have been put forward by scholars who have pointed out how a Eurocentric vision distorted the representation of African cultures (Beattie and Middleton, 1969, 169; Reiter, 1975, 49). These scholars such as Momoh, Amadiume and Cheikh Anta Diop have cautioned against the misleading nature of Eurocentric scholarship about traditional African communities. By Eurocentric scholars, I refer to those scholars who advance a worldview that is centered on Western civilization or a biased view that favors it over non-Western civilizations. It often involves interpreting histories, cultures, and social phenomena from a European or Western perspective, which can lead to the marginalization or devaluation of non-European societies (Blaut, 1993; Momoh, 2000). Scholars who have opposed this Eurocentric vision have argued that much of what is known about traditional African societies is not entirely true. Eurocentric scholars misrepresented African societies as patriarchal with all the assumptions of oppression of women, yet most African societies are known to have been matriarchal. But this only shows that they were interpreting African cultures from a European perspective (Momoh, 2000; Amadiume, 2005; Diop, 1987, 1989, 1991). I furnish the details of this claim in the second chapter.

Nonetheless, granted that philosophers study the problems of their day, one may wonder why early philosophers who focused on traditional African communities - which, as shown above, did not have significant gender issues - still did not seem to engage deeply with gender, even in a positive light. I believe there is a reason for this negligence. Most scholars, especially those credited with the development of African philosophy, could not have deliberately ignored gender issues, rather, they were primarily concerned with establishing the legitimacy and existence of African philosophy in the face of claims that it did not exist. One could simply say that they were laying

the groundwork for the subject matter to be discussed by philosophers like myself. Nonetheless, this is not a sufficient reason, given that decades have passed since discussions of African philosophy came into the limelight. The scantness of gender issues even in modern times, sadly shows how philosophers have ignored W.E.B. Du Bois's admonition and suggestion in his 1920 work *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil,* where he argued that the issue of gender would need immediate and urgent attention after the issue of racism. On this, Du Bois notes: "the uplift of the women is, next to the problem of the colour line and the peace movement, our greatest modern cause" (1920:172). While Du Bois recognized the double burden of discrimination faced by African American women and believed that true liberation could not be achieved without gender equality, his point can equally be applied to the African context, wherein after dealing with racial discrimination in philosophy, gender has become another problem, hence, it could be said that Du Bois's call was not taken seriously.

One would argue that this call would better be answered by the presence of female figures within the discipline. Osha (2008) and Graness (2015) have pointed out the lack of women and/or female figures among the scholars accredited with the development of the discipline. The assumption is that if there were women figures, gender discussions would come into the limelight rather than depending on men who are already in a position of privilege. While there is a strong reason to believe in women amplifying their experiences with their voices, one cannot ignore the view that the problem of gender ought not to be discussed by women alone even if patriarchy to a great extent affects women more than it does affect men. Men can write about gender even when the victims tend to be women, but by adopting a certain attitude. This attitude is one addressed by bell hooks in her 1989 book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black,* where she addresses the ethical responsibilities of privileged groups writing about disadvantaged communities. She

stresses the importance of humility, authenticity, and proper representation, urging privileged writers to amplify the voices of marginalized people rather than speaking for them. hooks emphasises the need to understand power dynamics and practice solidarity by supporting and elevating silenced voices. As she puts it, "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences" (hooks, 1989: 70). It remains unclear whether male philosophers could not have taken this attitude to write about gender issues or whether it is just a matter of preference in *writing what one likes* to borrow Steve Biko's phrase or a matter of neglect (Oluwole, 1998; Biko, 2015).

b. Problem statement and thesis

What I have been presenting so far is the problem of gender in African philosophy but at the same time, the motivation for engaging with this topic. However, I do not discuss gender as a stand-alone subject matter. In this dissertation, I seek to engage a conceptual understanding of gender in relation to personhood. Thus, the intention is to understand gender from an African cultural worldview and provide conceptual clarity concerning its relationship with personhood. My interrogation of the relationship between personhood and gender, within the African context also includes an analysis of the community in question. Thus, the relationship between personhood and gender takes into consideration whether one makes the argument from a traditional African context or a colonial and (post-colonial/neo-colonial) modern African context. In short, the dissertation titled "Personhood and Gender in a Traditional African Community", explores profoundly the intellectual discord that exists in the various understandings of gender in African society and the relationship it has to discussions on personhood. Most importantly, it explores whether the relationship takes cognizant of the distinction between tradition and modernity.

In exploring the relationship between the two, I do acknowledge that gender is a complicated topic, and so presents another complication when relating it to personhood. One can distinguish between gender roles and gender identities. But whether one is talking about gender roles or gender identities, I work with the basic idea that one is dealing with how individuals relate to each other. That is, how individuals interact at the level of identification expressed as gender identity, or at the level of performance expressed as gender role without the implication that a particular identity entails a particular role. The point I seek to express here is that how individuals relate to each other, whether at the level of identity and role, the relationship can be positive or negative. The positive one is slightly obvious, as such, I comment on the negative one expressed as gender inequality or gender disparity. In society, this is expressed as problematic relations between members, that is, when one group, say women, faces oppression or is discriminated against by the other group, men. This kind of discrimination raises questions about moral equality, given the fundamental assumption that every person ought to enjoy some basic level of respect (Gosepath, 2015). The word "person" here is deliberately placed, it underlies personhood discussions and carries the connotation expressed in my background discussion above. To be specific, the discussion in this dissertation draws heavily on the normative conception in as much as I also allude to the metaphysical conceptualization. Therefore, the negative relationship, where a person is discriminated against or treated as unequal based on one's gender, implies a violation of one's personhood.

The discussion here is pointing to the general view of the relationship between personhood and gender. Gender is in this case the contingent expression of personhood. The respect or moral status that an individual enjoys comes from the fact that one is a person in the first place, and not just because the person in question is gendered. Thus, one is respected as a person "who just happens

to be gendered" and not because one is gendered. This understanding, in my view, not only remains consistent with the folk psychological or "street" understanding of gender and personhood but also reflects a partial sense of how personhood and gender are related. Partial in the sense that it shows a loose view of the relationship where the two come together as shown so far or come apart as in this alternative view. An alternative view is that personhood and gender are not related. Here, one would be drawing on the claim that a person may be subjected to all kinds of harm, as a person, but without being disrespected in terms of one's gender. Under this view, the discrimination itself would be based on the fact that one was not accorded respect as a person, without any presupposition of one's identity or role. One can be a person with moral status even without a gender identity or role. Under this view, those who do not identify any socially constructed gendered identities and roles (at least in the community in question defines them) can argue that gender is entirely separate from one's personhood.

Additionally, there is another way of thinking about the relationship between personhood and gender, in a stricter way, this is the sense such scholars like Manzini (2018), and Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) in the literature have presented the problem. I regard it as strict for one simple reason. Suppose under review is a normative conception of personhood, specifically, as Menkiti (1984) argues, personhood is something that is acquired. A strict view shows how one's acquisition of personhood entails one's gender. Thus, whether such acquisition would exclude other individuals within the society or include them but assign different degrees of moral status based on their gender. Under this view, having personhood or being a person of a certain degree of moral status can be understood as a result of or because of one's gender. This sense of understanding personhood is that it is a gendered personhood. At this stage, I am not stating that this is the way

the scholars mentioned here seek to present personhood or analyse personhood, but I take this view to be an intuition of what comes from analysing their views to their best conclusion.

In this dissertation, I explore the multifaceted ways in which the relationship between personhood and gender are related, but more importantly, guided by the above interpretations. One of the general arguments I advance is that personhood is not gendered.

c. Limitations to the study

It is important to state some limitations. It should be noted that in discussing the claims highlighted above, I am not presenting a feminist paper. I am not in any sense arguing for the sense in which African feminism can or should be understood. By "African feminism", I consider a "feminist epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments...that validate the experiences of women of Africa and of African origin against mainstream feminist discourse" (Western feminism) (Goredema, 2010, 34). Western feminism here refers to the epistemology and a form of rhetoric that has provided arguments that validate the experiences of women of Western origin, particularly white women. This is not to deny that part of the discussion may either draw on claims in feminist literature or impact how feminism is understood. According to the former, I merely adopt some claims from the available literature on African feminism to provide clarity to a conception of gender that I discuss in relation to personhood. Regarding the latter, as I indicate in my recommendations, in the last chapter, the discussion and the claims I put forward may certainly impact the conceptualization of African feminism. Thus, how relationships are framed between men and women, and where the flaming is dependent on an account of gender under consideration, may bring some insights into how feminism may be constructed or flamed on the African continent.

In any case, in this dissertation, I am merely looking at gender issues in general and proposing new ways in which gender can be understood. But in doing so, I draw heavily on personhood. The motivation is to provide clarity or interrogate claims that show personhood as gendered. Thus, while some chapters are dedicated to discussing some conceptions of gender, some chapters discuss new ways of understanding personhood in ways that avoid the "gendered interpretation". Some chapters are dedicated to responding to arguments that have presented personhood as gendered.

d. Methodology

In my dissertation, I employ an "armchair analytic" approach. By "armchair," I mean that the material or research discussed is not the result of conducting experiments or other qualitative methods of data collection. Instead, the main task has been the systematic review of argument-based publications/research on personhood and gender, found in various databases, especially philosophical ones. The analytic approach involves a critical appraisal of these articles to understand their arguments and ideas. The goal is to use these arguments to develop and advance my philosophical ideas in a clear, precise, and logically coherent manner, which as Grayling argues, is the goal of philosophy (1996:15). In essence, and regarding my project this method involves a conceptual analysis of the concepts of "personhood" and "gender" and an exploration of the relationship between both. I believe that the armchair analytic methodology is well-suited to achieving my objectives of bringing clarity to the concepts of personhood and gender and their relationship.

I am aware that some researchers within the African philosophical discipline might question this methodology, viewing it as a seemingly Western method. However, this concern often stems from the perception that the analytic method is predominantly used by Western philosophers. This perspective overlooks the broader history of philosophy and assumes that Africans have a distinct method.[2] The question then arises: do Africans have a particular or distinct method, or do they have and utilize various methods, including the analytic methodology? I support the latter view and I suspend the justification of this claim because it would take this discussion in a different direction. What is important is my belief that the use of the analytic method does not fundamentally affect the truth of the claims made in this dissertation. If the method distorts my arguments and conclusions, then it would warrant concern. However, I do not believe that this is the case here. What matters, at least for me, is the knowledge obtained and how it relates to the realities of one's context. As pointed out above, the claims in this dissertation are not driven by the method itself but by my philosophical inclination to understand the concepts as they are used within the African context. It is the latter that drives the method chosen.

d. Outline

The dissertation is structured in the following way. In the first chapter, I discuss some conceptions of personhood. I use the literature in African philosophy and look at some of the conceptions one may find in the literature. I am not claiming I present an exhaustive list but a few of the ones I consider to be dominant in African philosophy and discussed by African philosophers. The aim is to provide a general understanding of personhood from the African cultural worldview.

[2] I have in mind Scholars who regard Westerners as the originators of Philosophy and its methods (see Allais, 2016).

Having discussed some conceptions of personhood in the literature, in chapter two, I turn to discussing some conceptions of gender. I consider the two dominant conceptions, gender complementarity and gender fluidity. I discuss these two because they represent various ways in which gender is discussed in literature. For instance, some scholars like Nkiru Nzegwu (2004) discuss the complementarity of the division of labour that is gender roles, in the African cultural worldview, a discussion that has implications on the understanding of the gender identity of man and woman. Another account of gender that I discuss is attributed to Ifi Amadiume (1987) who focuses less on complementarity but more on fluidity. women can take on men's identities to perform gender roles ascribed to men. I argue that the conceptions of gender I discuss in the chapter could be cashed out or could be various interpretations of gender within a culture such that they are not mutually exclusive, at least, this is the sense I treat them in the chapter.

In chapter three, following what I consider to be the limitation of the current conception of gender (the ones I discuss), I propose another conception of gender. Thus, drawing from one of the conceptions of personhood, personhood as personal identity as proposed by Molefe (2017, 2019), I argue that this conception helps understand gender identity in the Afro-communitarian worldview. This is what I call the relational account of gender. Under this account, I argue that gendered identities are essentially defined by the community. I employ a standard form argument that gendered identities are essentially defined by norms, norms are essentially defined by the community, and therefore gendered identities are defined by the community. Nonetheless, I argue that both the community and an individual have a role in the acquisition of the identity. In this case, I argue that identities are not entirely self-chosen nor wholly socially conferred but incorporate both aspects of the community and the individual.

In chapter four I discuss arguments that have presented personhood in gendered ways. These are claims made by scholars such as Manzini (2013), Oyowe and Yurkivska (2013), among others. Their accounts present an understanding of personhood as gendered and biased. In response to this view, I argue for a conception of personhood that is not gendered. Based on Menkiti (1984), I argue that personhood is not based on gender but on seniority. This chapter relates personhood and gender by providing conceptual clarity concerning how personhood ought to be understood. I argue that the conception of personhood that has been called into question is based on traditional African communities, communities that took seniority as the organizing principle and not gender. To show the main problem for the accounts, I argue that the accounts conflate sex with gender. Personhood is based on seniority, and it considers sex differences because they serve a purpose in the structuring of rites of passage which are necessary for the achievement of personhood. I argue that the accounts by the scholars named above have merit but only when understood to be inspired by the modern African cultural context where gender seems to be central in the organization of society, an influence of colonialism and unchecked patriarchy.

Following observations in chapter four, I argue that scholars find the traditional account of personhood problematic because it fails to account for some post-colonial social problems. I argue that the claim that presents personhood as gendered and biased is one of the many claims. Given this, I argue for a secular account of personhood. Thus, I distinguish between the precolonial (traditional) account of personhood and the modern account of personhood; I attempt a reconstruction of a modern account of personhood. However, the construction does not seek to draw a very distinct account of personhood than the one discussed in the dissertation, in chapters one and four, but rather, I reconstruct an Afro-communitarian account of personhood that maintains the relevance of virtue and the primacy of the community but excludes some of the themes that

were found problematic by scholars in the fourth chapter, such as rites of passage and by extension, seniority.

In the very last section, I offer my conclusion to the paper and recommendations for future research. Thus, I restate some of the conclusions I have drawn in the paper, as well as make a general conclusion. Under recommendations, I propose some areas of research that would be beneficial in developing African Philosophy, especially under the topic of gender. Furthermore, I show the impact of the research and the claims made in the development of African feminism in particular and African Philosophy in general. I also show the sense in which the research would be beneficial in developing policies regarding gender.

CHAPTER ONE

PERSONHOOD IN AN AFRICAN CULTURAL WORLD VIEW

1.1. Introduction

Personhood is a robust and widely discussed concept in moral and political philosophy. The *English Cambridge Dictionary* defines personhood as the status of being a person. But this meaning is rather secular and begs the question of what it means to be a person. Answering this question is not an easy task in Philosophy and one needs to be clear on what concept has been adopted and what conception articulates the concept. But in making this statement, I bring another problem into the mix. Thus, it will help the reader to take a detour and explain the concept-conception distinction. According to Adam Swift, the *concept* refers to the "general structure or perhaps the grammar of the term," whereas a *conception* is a "particular specification of the concept" (Swift, 2006, 11). One can also appeal to Hardimon's (2003) concept and conception distinction. For Hardimon (2003), when philosophers disagree, they have a reasonable disagreement, insofar as they disagree upon the same thing, whatever that is, that is a concept. The concept is the core meaning of the term they are trying to articulate. The different perspectives they have on the concept, are conceptions.

To offer an example of the above, personhood as a concept carries various meanings. There are differences when the term is used in legal, metaphysical, or ethical (morality) studies. Personhood as a moral term or normative concept picks out beings that are worthy of moral consideration or beings that can be said to have moral status or dignity (Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 1997; Ikuenobe, 2016; Behrens, 2013; Molefe, 2019; Metz, 2012). In articulating what it takes to have moral status, different conceptions of personhood arise. Some conceptions ascribe moral status based on the

possession of capacities, some on the achievement of virtue, possession of a body and embeddedness in a community, etc. As a metaphysical concept, to be a person or to have personhood does not spring from questions about moral status but questions about the nature of the "being" a person is, as part of the things that make up the world, or the structure of the world. It touches on the question of the nature of being or existence, in this case, a being's existence as a person. Various conceptions frame what kind of being a person is. To be a person would mean to be a biological being, a spiritual being, a being endowed with intelligence, rationality, memory, will, sentience, an initiator of action, etc. (Singer, 2009; Hughes, 2001; Chappell, 2014; Sapontzis, 1981; Kittay, 2009). While the metaphysical and normative deal with different questions, the two are not mutually exclusive. In some instances, metaphysical concepts that establish the sense in which an individual is a person are used as conditions for personhood in the normative sense. For instance, the Kantian view has it that one is a person in virtue of having rationality, but in some instances, rationality becomes the condition, not that which defines personhood but a condition to acquiring virtue, a view that defines personhood in the normative sense, in a different context, such as the Menkitian view of personhood (Toscano, 2011; Molefe, 2019; Sapontzis, 1981; Darwall, 1977; Menkiti, 1984; Ikuenobe, 2017). Personhood as a legal concept is mostly found in academic disciplines of law. To be a person is to be a being that can be a subject and object of law. The basic idea is the legal status of persons, and this may include corporations, animals, natural objects, artificial intelligence, and foetuses. By legal status, the question is mainly about the rights and obligations owed to persons within the confines of the law (Kurki, 2019). The discussion is centred on the question of whom or what counts as legal person(s) and under what grounds they qualify as legal persons.

In this chapter, the focus is on normative and metaphysical personhood. Additionally, it is important to note that in discussing personhood, I am not discussing the persistence question, the question about personal identity, that is, necessary and sufficient conditions that determine whether a "thing", a person, remains the same over time (Orson, 2007). I believe the persistence question is a secondary question given that it specifies the conditions under which a being remains a person. Instead, my focus is on a primary question, what makes a being a person in the first place, normatively and metaphysically? Furthermore, given that there are various conceptions of personhood, in this chapter, I limit myself to African conceptions of personhood. The basic idea is to understand the various ways through which personhood is understood within the African context and later relate these conceptions to gender by appealing to values that flame gender relations.

1.2. Some considered African conceptions of personhood.

In African philosophy, several scholars such as Menkiti (1984), Gyekye (1995), Etieyibo (2020), Molefe (2017), Chimakonam, 2022), and Behrens (2013), have discussed several normative and metaphysical accounts of personhood. These conceptions are not an exhaustive list of all there is in the literature on African philosophy but merely include the ones I am aware of. Secondly, by stating that they are found in African philosophical literature, I do not mean that they are only applicable to African people, but (I) are discussed by African philosophers in articulating some African concepts, and (II), they are dominant in the African cultural context. The second option does not limit the conceptions to the African context but also allows for the universalisation of these concepts even when they start from a particular position. Nonetheless, in discussing these concepts, I will be referring to other non-African philosophical traditions.

Of the many conceptions one may find in the philosophical literature, I limit myself to discussing the inherent or transcendental conception of personhood, the capacity-based notion of personhood, the metaphysical view of personhood, the body or situated-embodied view of personhood, personhood as personal identity and lastly the social-notion view of personhood (Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 1992; Behrens, 2013; Molefe, 2017; Etieyibo, 2020). It is the claims from some of the conceptions that I discuss in this chapter that I use to develop and discuss accounts of gender in the next chapters.

1.2.1. The transcendental notion of personhood

The first notion of personhood to be discussed is the transcendental notion of personhood, also known as the inherent notion of personhood (Etieyibo, 2020). It is a metaphysical notion of personhood given that it deals with the nature of beings that "persons" are. It focuses on persons as constituted by certain ontological features which distinguish them from non-persons. For most accounts found in the African philosophical literature, persons have physical, quasi-physical and spiritual features (Wiredu, 1992; Gyekye, 1992; Gbadegesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004). The basic view is that to be a person is to be a human being and vice-versa. The task of a sympathizer of this view is to account for what it means to be a human being or show the sense in which a human being is different from a non-human animal.

While the above presentation provides a general overview of this conception of personhood, I now turn to some philosophers who have offered various views on what it means to be "human." The views discussed in this section are primarily from scholars who have engaged with this concept within the African cultural worldviews of the Akan and the Yoruba (Wiredu, 1992; Gyekye, 1997; Gbadegesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004). Despite focusing on these two West African cultures, the similarities across different African cultures mean that these views can often be applied more

broadly across the continent. However, the challenge of comparative work lies in the fact that there is little to no written literature in some African cultures. As a Tumbuka from Malawi, I acknowledge the lack of written work on this view of personhood in my own culture, which highlights the need for further philosophical exploration. Nonetheless, I find the presentations by Wiredu and Gyekye to be resonant with what is commonly understood about the Tumbuka.

Furthermore, it is important to note that while the views discussed pertain to the Akan and Yoruba, I do not claim that this presentation is an entirely accurate descriptive account of Akan culture. Within the Akan community, disagreements exist over the correct translation and conceptualization of personhood (Kaphagawani, 2004).

1.2.1.1. Being "human" among the Akan

The first view under the transcendental notion of personhood to be discussed comes from Wiredu and Gyekye who were writing on the Akan cultural worldview (Wiredu, 1996; Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992). Wiredu's and Gyekye's views have been central to conceptualising personhood in the African context (Kaphagawani, 2004). According to the Akan, the word for "person" is *onipa*, and does not have a specific translation, it either refers to a biological human animal or a particular status an individual occupies in a community. By "status" here I am referring to moral status, a view I will discuss under the normative notion of personhood.[3] The non-specificity of translation shows the richness of the concept as well as the various ways Akan understand personhood. In any case, under the transcendental notion of personhood, the concern is about *onipa* as a "biological human being". For Wiredu, *onipa* has several distinguishing features and the major ones include *mogya, sunsum, okra* and *nipadua* (Wiredu, 1987, 160-161). While Gyekye agrees with Wiredu

[3] There are different views regarding status, Wiredu (1992) supports Menkiti (1984) in arguing that it is a status given to an individual upon achieving moral excellence, or what has been referred to as true humanity. Gyekye differs from Wiredu in arguing that it is a status one is born with (Gyekye, 1995)).

on *onipa* as having a *nipadua*, which is translated as the biological human body, their disagreement is over the nature of the other entities (Kaphagawani, 2004).

To start with *Okra*, For Wiredu, *okra* is a life-giving entity, the innermost self, the essence of the individual person and is "quasi-physical" in nature, neither a completely spiritual nor a completely physical substance (Wiredu, 1987; Kaphagawani, 2004). This *okra* is understood as the o*krateasefo*, which translates to English "living soul," a translation that Wiredu might not agree with in so far as the English "soul" refers to something *purely non-physical* and the translation is influenced by the Christian tradition (Kaphagawani, 2004, 332-333). But as a life-giving entity, it shares meaning with the Christian view of the *breath of God.* The "breath of God" from the Christian point of view is associated with the "spirit". Translating *okrateasefo* as the living soul might not necessarily capture what the "spirit" is from the Christian point of view because of the distinction Christians make between spirit, soul (as mind) and body (1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 4:12; Job 21:25; Psalms 84:2). Nonetheless, *okra* as "soul" among the Akan and "spirit" among the Christians have a similar function, the life-giving function (Genesis 2:7). As Wiredu (1995) states, the presence of the *okra* in a person means that a person is a living being and its absence means death.

Different from this view is Gyekye's belief that the *okra* is a divine or spiritual entity, and it is purely spiritual in nature (Gyekye, 1995, 85). Gyekye's version aligns with the English translation of the nature of the soul. Gyekye argues that Wiredu is wrong to think the *okra* is quasi-physical because such a view fails to explain the Akan belief in life after death (Gyekye, 1995). Among many African cultures, it is believed that death is only a limitation to physical life and not spiritual life. They believe that after death an individual who lived until old age and had a morally upright life becomes an ancestor, a spirit being. Hence, life continues even after death (Mbiti, 1970;

Kaphagawani, 2004). But one would understand Wiredu's (1987) motivation for translating the *okra* as quasi-physical because this translation is better at capturing how the *okra* interacts (acts or is acted upon) with *nipadua*. The two would interact if they shared certain properties. On the other hand, Gyekye's (1995) motivation would be about the consistency with other beliefs about life after death. Nonetheless, I share Kaphagawani's sentiments that what is important is not so much about the disagreement on the nature of *okra*, but rather what the presentation tries to achieve with respect to showing the ontological features that make up *onipa* (Kaphagawani, 2004).

Apart from the *okra*, the second important element is the *sunsum*, which Wiredu understand as symbolic of someone's personality. It is believed to originate from the father. Unlike the okra, the nature of *sunsum* is questionable given that it is presented as mortal. It dies when the possessor or person dies, therefore it is not spiritual (Wiredu, 1987; Kaphagawani, 2004). On the other hand, for Gyekye, the *sunsum* is a spirit (spiritual) and immortal and comes from the Supreme Being. The sunsum is spiritual because as something responsible for personality, traits such as courage, gentleness, etc., these traits "are psychological, not sensible, or physical" (Gyekye, 1995; Kaphagawani, 2004, 333). Nonetheless, both Gyekye and Wiredu agree on the function of the *sunsum*, as that which is responsible for a person's personality (Wiredu, 1987; Gyekye, 1995).

The third entity that makes up an *onipa* is the *mogya*. This is translated as blood and according to Wiredu, *mogya* enters a human being at conception. It is believed to originate from the mother; therefore, it is not just any blood but one that is the same as the individual's mother. For Wiredu, it is partially material. On the other hand, Gyekye (1995) is not explicit about this feature of *onipa*. Nonetheless, given the importance of kinship relations, not only is the *mogya* an important feature in placing the individual within the lineage, but its linkage with the mother features nicely with the view that the Akan are a matrilineal group.

Lastly, as mentioned above the two scholars share one uncontroversial part of a person, *nipadua*, translated as the human flesh or body. The *nipadua* constitutes the physical body and all there is to it (Kaphagawani, 2004). It is not clear how to describe this feature because it is intuitive among many but at the same time, one would wonder if there were anything essential to the body, whether it's the parts that make it or its shape (see Sapontzis, 1981). All these features together are what define a human being *qua* person among the Akan.

1.2.1.2. Being human among the Yoruba

A similar but slightly different view from the Akan comes from Gbadegesin (1998) who writes about the Yoruba conception of personhood. Like the Akan's duo meaning, the Yoruba word for "person" is *eniyani* and it refers to a biological human being as well as a status human beings acquire with respect to their character. That is, it has both ontological and normative meanings. According to Gbadegesin, it is the normative dimension of the concept that is more dominant among the Yoruba than its counterpart ontological dimension (Gbadegesin, 1998). As I mentioned above, the focus of this section is on a person as a human being. Among the Yoruba, *eniyani* is made up of four major ontological features, "*ara", "okani", "emi"* and *"ori"* (Gbagedesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004, 333).

The first ontological feature to discuss is *ara*, which translates to the English word "body". It represents the human biological body with all the external and internal organs. According to Kaphagawani, the Yoruba do not bother articulating the nature of the body as definitive of personhood because it is obvious to them that the body is not all there is to a human being (Kaphagawani, 2004).

The other important feature is *emi*. This is difficult to translate because there are disagreements over its nature the common view seems to be its function, as a as a life-giving entity. It is that

which gives life to a "lifeless" physical body. It is this function of quickening a lifeless body that I liken the *emi* to the Christian view of the breath of God or what is referred to as the spirit of the person (*see my biblical references above*). Among the Yoruba, it is not clear whether it is a standalone entity as a natural thing or whether it is merely a force influencing various human behaviours or activities (Kaphagawani, 2004; Gbadegesin, 1998).

-Moving on, another important entity is the *okan*. Gbadegesin provides two conceptions of the *okan*. In one sense, the *okan* is interpreted in physicalist terms as referring to a physical human organ, the "heart" in English. The same biological organ that is responsible for pumping (or circulating) blood in the human body. Another sense captures "consciousness", the centre for "psychic and emotional states" (Gbadegesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004, 334). According to Gbadegesin (1998), this latter translation is not surprising considering the usage of the English word "heart" as a euphemism when expressing one's emotional state (also see Garcia, 1996, for similar usage). As a figure of speech, its meaning is contextually defined by the intentions of the speaker (see Grice, 1989, on speaker meaning). For instance, an individual who utters the statement *"my heart does not agree with this,"* could simply be expressing the proposition "I have a bad feeling about this", or similarly, an individual may state *"my heart is weak"* to mean "I lack courage" to convey an emotion of "fear." Therefore, the Yoruba view of *okani* is that it is a physical organ or that which stands for consciousness or emotional states.

Another element that constitutes an *eniyani* is *ori*. According to Gbadegisin, *ori* has two natures. On the one hand, it refers to the physical human head and on the other hand, it is a spiritual head responsible for human destiny. The matter gets more complicated when it comes to the actual conceptualisation of destiny given the various views among the Yoruba (Makinde, 1985; (Gbadegesin, 1998; Balogun, 2007; Majeed, 2014). As Kaphagawani (2004) points out, the

disagreement over which conception is correct is not important to a non-Yoruba like me. What is important is the recognition of the richness of Yoruba's views about human beings given the various conceptions.

Given the above view of personhood, there are of course interesting implications when it comes to healing, that is, whether healing is all about the physical body or something more than the physical given that human beings are made up of both the physical and spiritual. Another implication could be on transhumanism, that is, if a human being is both physical and spiritual, what ought to be the actual focus of transhumanism and why? That is, what is it that is transcending the human, the physical or spiritual? In this dissertation, my focus is on gender. In Chapter Four, I discuss the implication of this view of personhood on gender, under the said chapter, I discuss the genderwhat it means to be a man or woman by appealing to the transcendental notion of personhood. I reserve this discussion for chapter four.

1.2.2. The social notion of personhood

The other notion of personhood common in the literature of African philosophy is the social notion of the person (Etieyibo, 2020; Kaphagawani, 2004). Unlike the above view of personhood, this view is mainly normative, that is, it deals with the question of moral status. This notion of personhood has been given different labels. Menkiti (1984) calls it the maximalist conception of personhood. Etieyibo (2020) calls it the social notion of personhood. Molefe calls it "personhood as a moral virtue (Molefe, 2020). Behrens (2013) calls it the agent-centred notion of personhood. Regardless of the various terminologies, the most basic premise of this view of personhood is that to be a person is to achieve virtue or moral wisdom (excellence). This implies personhood is something that is acquired. In accounting for how individuals achieve or acquire virtue, I consider three basic themes, the primacy of the community, that is, the community's role in conferring

personhood onto individuals, the necessity of rites of passage and obligations to the community, and lastly, the time factor, that is, the role of seniority (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992; Masaka, 2019; Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Etieyibo, 2018, 2020; Nyirenda, 2019; Molefe, 2018, 2020).

1.2.2.1. The primacy of the community

There are several ways of understanding the primacy of the community in relation to this view of personhood. On the one hand, one would understand personhood as that which is conferred onto individuals by their communities. The community plays a vital role under personhood such that Menkiti (1984) takes the community as the prescriber and catalyst of norms. It is the community that sets the norms necessary for personhood and offers the space for individuals to pursue virtue. It is in acting in ways that align with communal norms that individuals acquire personhood. Here, one would think of personhood as being a non-starter outside the community. Another way of flaming this view is to state that the community has epistemic primacy. It is that which knows what is best for individuals, morally speaking. Menkiti (1984) sees the community as that which gives individuals moral knowledge. Individuals are born as blank slates but come to acquire moral knowledge as they participate in the moral life of the community (rituals of transformation). That is, it is the community which gives individuals moral wisdom.

On the other hand, the primacy of the community would be understood in a more literal sense, that is, the community as having ontological primacy over individuals. Menkiti distinguishes between two kinds of communities, communities that are products of individuals; and communities that are o*ntologically* prior to individuals such that individuals are products of their communities (Mbiti, 1970; Menkiti, 1984). There is a sense in which one would frame the ontological primacy of the community. According to Gyekye (1992), part of the meaning of the primacy of the community is that individuals are born into a community and cannot exist and develop outside the community.

To support this statement, Gyekye cites some Akan maxims. One of the maxims states that "when a person descends from heaven, he descends into a human society", *or onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom* (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992, 105). That is, one's life begins in the context of the community, and by implication, it is sustained by the community. Another maxim is that "one tree does not make a forest", which, according to Gyekye, illustrates the self-insufficiency of the individual (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992). For Gyekye (1992), it is incomprehensible to think of an individual as prior to the community because that would require that the individual exists and develops on her own. However, individuals are not self-sufficient, and so the existence of a lone individual is almost impossible. Individuals are born in a community of others such that "others" are part of how individuals define their identities, goals and aspirations (Gbadegesin, 1991; Metz, 2017). The community is more of the beginning and end of the individual. Other scholars such as Okot p'Bitek (1998) express this view in strong terms by stating that "humans are not free, and because they are not born free, they are everywhere in chains", that is, the chains of the community (Etieyibo 2020, 61). Even upon death, persons are never free, their spirits are still venerated by the community as ancestors, which illustrates an endless cycle of human beings moving from one kind of community to another (Mbiti, 1970; Menkiti, 1984, 2004). Rianna Oelofsen (2018) shares the same view and argues that an analysis of the individual in the African context cannot ignore the community. She likens this to Martin Heidegger's (1996) "being" and the "world" where the two are inseparable. The basic idea here is that personhood is impossible without the community.

1.2.2.2. The rituals of transformation

I have highlighted above that this notion of personhood takes personhood as an achievement, different from the capacity-based or the transcendental notion of personhood based on the possession of certain capacities or certain ontological features (Gyekye, 1997; Menkiti, 1984;

Behrens, 2013). Achieving personhood or becoming a full person is understood normatively as an evaluation or normative judgement of one's character, a judgement that may be positive or negative (Gyekye, 2010; Gbadegesin, 1991, 27). An example of a positive judgement is something like "*una umunthu"* (in Tumbuka) meaning "you have personhood" or "you are a person." This expresses the thought that an individual's actions are consistent with moral ideals and standards set by the community. A negative judgement comes with denying the individual her personhood (Menkiti, 1984).

Now the important question is what it takes to achieve or fail at personhood. Menkiti's account presents personhood as a journey or an ontological progression from "it" to "it", that is, an "it" of childhood to an "it" of collective immortality or as per Etieyibo's suggestion "*it-it"* (Menkiti, 1984; Etieyibo, 2018). Along this journey, individuals are to attend various rites of passage. Menkiti mentions several of them including name-giving ceremonies, puberty rites of passage, marriage, procreation, and death. According to Menkiti, when an individual is born, such an individual is a mere dangler, without any sort of personhood. An individual's birth may be followed by a name-giving ceremony. The naming ushers the individual into the process of personhood by making an individual a member of a community. According to Etieyibo, "When one says that X is a person what that involves is to suggest that X has been named and such naming both picks out that person as a particular person and imposes on one so named certain obligations" (Etieyibo, 2020, 66). I take Etieyibo to refer to obligations about personhood, and it is the successful carrying out of such obligations that individuals attain personhood. For Menkiti (1984, 2004), names impart membership into a community. That is, being given a name means that one is incorporated into a community. This is supported by the fact that the loss of names means loss

of personhood and the loss of any connections one had with the living community, such is the case with the nameless dead (Menkiti, 1984).

This then raises an interesting question about an individual that does not have a name. Menkiti calls an infant with no name an "it" and argues that there is no personal pronoun attached (such as "he" or "she") because they are like mere objects. He argues that even when such a child dies, the family would say "We rushed the child to the hospital, but before we arrived *it* was dead," a claim that shows ontological difference between the infant and the grown person (Menkiti, 1984, 173). Furthermore, he argues that infants are not given elaborate or ritualised burial ceremonies, ceremonies associated with adults or those who are persons. Some scholars have identified problems with this characterisation of infants. For instance, Matolino argues that the usage of the word "it" is misplaced because this word has no moral significance in the English language, a claim that Molefe contested (Matolino, 2011). According to Molefe (2017), Menkiti ought to be interpreted in ways that he uses the pronoun "it" normatively and not in terms of conventional or dictionary meaning.

After being given a name, and as the child grows, the child is supposed to carry out certain obligations required for personhood. From childhood to adulthood, there are rites of passage individuals must go through, these include (but are not limited to) birth, naming, adolescence, marriage, childbearing, death, etc (Menkiti, 1984, 2004). It is through rites of passage that individuals gain the moral knowledge necessary for excellence in conduct or virtue (Eze, 2018; Turner, 1969). For instance, in some communities, when boys or girls reach puberty, they are taken to various excluded places where they are given instructions on issues of life.[4] These ceremonies

[4] Communities may differ with respect to whether they are taken to an uncle's house, a forest, a mountain, etc. The methods and places of seclusion might be different but the very tradition of separating them from their family and bringing them back is shared by several cultures and has among other things moral significance for the community. In the modern (post-colonial) times, initiation ceremonies are still practiced. What has changed about them has been the

remain relevant as vehicles for instruction on gender roles, responsibilities, marriage, respect for elders, duties to strangers, the sick and the elderly (Munthali & Zulu, 2007). Because of their usefulness in bridging the gap between childhood and adulthood, societies tend to expect every adolescent to attend these ceremonies such that failure to attend is interpreted as a failure to fulfil one's duty as a male or female member of the community. After puberty rites come other adult-based rites of passage such as marriage, procreation, and death. In general, at each rite of passage, there are duties and moral instructions that are passed onto the young; and only through successful completion of attending these rites of passage and others during adulthood such as marriage, childbearing, etc. can individuals earn the status of being called persons (Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 2010).

1.2.2.3. Seniority

When it comes to personhood, time is an important asset, and for Menkiti (1984), personhood is attained in time. Menkiti (1984) sees personhood as something that is attained as one grows older. He makes a distinction between the elders and the young. He sees elders as full persons than the young (all things considered). What makes a difference between adult human beings and the young is the underlying assumption that this difference reflects differences in moral knowledge. It is undeniable that (again, all things considered) the young cannot have the same experience as the adult. The adults have attended various rites of passage and through time have acquired the relevant experience and knowledge necessary for personhood. Menkiti alludes to this when he cites an Igbo proverb *"What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up."* This means that adults are seen as having a moral vision greater than that of a young person (Menkiti, 1984,

removal of harmful practices such as improper circumcision as well as changes regarding the time they are conducted and duration. Changes to time came with crushes with the school calendar.

173).[5] Thus, for Menkiti (1984), there is a correlation between moral growth and physical growth. This does not mean that anyone older is necessarily morally excellent, it is in such special cases that a senior member of the community would fall short of the ideals of personhood, such that the young person would become morally better than the senior in question (Wiredu, 1992; Eze, 2018; Chimakonam, 2022).

Given this view of achievement of personhood and failure, Menkiti also highlights how personhood can be lost (Menkiti, 1984, 2004). Loss of personhood should not be strange to a defender of the capacity-based view of personhood. That is, if personhood means having a certain capacity such as rationality, those who develop mental illnesses and end up having a diminished rationality would be said to have lost their personhood (Sapontzis, 1981; Hughes, 2001; Moody, 2003). Under Menkiti's personhood, loss of personhood is associated with loss of names. The main point is about incorporation. Losing a name means one is no longer part of the community. But what it means to lose a name is not a matter of name change but something to do with the lack of a referent of a proper name. This lack of the referent of the name comes when no living member of the community can remember the name in question (Menkiti, 1984). That is, no one is the direct bearer of the name nor remembered as the direct bearer of the name. A being (spirit being) is called the nameless dead or collective immortal (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984, 174-175). These are beings that were ancestors, but because the living generation of the community has forgotten their names, they move from ancestral hood to collective immortal. Unlike ancestors who save a moral function, because they are part of the community and still have their personhood status, the nameless dead are not members of the community and have no personhood (Menkiti, 1984). Just like babies with

[5] In Malawi among the Chewa, (commonly found in the central region) there is a similar proverb, *"akulu akulu ndi m'dambo mozimila moto"* which literally translates to "elders are a pool of water that extinguishes the fire." Meaning that elders are a source of wisdom for issues of life. This proverb speaks to the wisdom elders have that cannot be found among the young, hence the young must rely on elders for guidance.

no name are an "it", these beings are also an "it", but scholars like Etieyibo (2018) suggest that the nameless dead be referred to as an *"it-it"*. This double hyphen suggests that the nameless dead have moral force, something newborn babies do not have. The former's deeds have now become part of the tradition of the community, a contribution that newly born babies have not made (Etieyibo, 2018).

The above-detailed discussion of Menkiti's (1984) view of personhood is meant to show what the social notion of personhood is. In the next chapters, I will discuss how this view of personhood would relate to gender. I will consider some of the objections that have been raised against Menkiti's (1984, 2004) view of personhood, and some responses in the literature, as well as consider my intervention, including a reconstruction of this view of personhood in ways that account for modernity.

1.2.3. The capacity-based notion of personhood

Another notion of personhood dominant in African philosophical literature is the capacity-based notion of personhood. Unlike the transcendental notion of personhood which identifies human beings as persons, this notion of personhood distinguishes between a person and a human being (Behrens, 2013; Molefe, 2019). Central to this notion is the view that all persons are human beings but not all human beings are persons. The possession of capacities distinguishes human beings who are persons from non-persons. But like the social notion of personhood above, it has also been presented as a normative account of personhood. Thus, when interpreted morally, those who are persons in virtue of having capacities are morally considerable or are said to have moral status (Behrens, 2013; Oyowe, 2014; Molefe, 2017). In this chapter, I look at three conceptions, namely, the capacity for rationality (Gyekye, 1992), the capacity for sympathy (Molefe, 2019), and the

capacity for the community (Metz, 2011); more importantly, how having these capacities make someone morally considerable.

1.2.3.1. Gyekye's capacity for rationality

One of the capacity-based notions of personhood in the African philosophical literature comes from Gyekye (1992). I consider Gyekye's (1992) view to be inspired by some individualist views such as the Kantian view of personhood, according to which, to be a person is to have rationality (Korsgaard, 1986; Menkiti, 2018). For Kant, especially in his humanity formula, a human being who is a person has rationality, and ought to be treated as an end and not merely as a means. Under this view, personhood is something inherent in individuals because they are born with the said capacities, and thus, individuals have inherent value (Korsgaard, 1986). Gyegye's (1997) view of personhood is presented as a critique of Menkiti's view of personhood presented above. However, in the critique, Gyekye (1997) seems to endorse Kantian individualism by citing capacities such as rationality and autonomy as the basis for moral status or personhood. Gyekye's (1997) view is individualist because it renders the community as less important for personhood. The individual qua individual is a person without the intervention of the community. He uses this view to object to one of the basic views stated above, that personhood is acquired through the attainment of moral excellence or achievement of virtue and conferred by the community. According to Gyekye (1997), personhood is not something individuals achieve but something they are born with. Gyekye considers individuals to be born with autonomy; hence they have inherent value or intrinsic worth (see Korsgaard, 1983, 2005). For Gyekye (1997), individual autonomy is the possession of a will, "a rational will of one's own, that enables one to determine at least some of one's own goals and to pursue them and to control one's destiny" (54). Gyekye sees the community as (having) instrumental (value) in the realization of an individual's goals. Furthermore, respecting autonomy

allows individuals to question and distance themselves from their communities. This implies that he sees Menkiti's view of personhood as something that cannot give individuals the freedom to question their culture (Gyekye, 1997; Chimakonam, 2022).

The point of contention for Menkiti and Gyekye is the power that the community has. Gyekye (1997), does acknowledge that the individual "needs society and all that it makes available for the realisation of the individual's potential, and for living a life that is most worthwhile" (Gyekye, 35). This is in line with the view that he sees individuals as necessarily social and the community to hold some primacy, but only in the moderate sense. He sees Menkiti as giving the community too much power, and this can lead to trumping of individual rights. Thus, he tries to provide a conception of personhood that would balance individual rights and one's duties to the community. For Menkiti (1984) rights are secondary to duties. This means the possession of moral worth for Gyekye does not necessarily (only contingently so) require the community, personhood is something individuals are born with by having the necessary capacities, that is, rationality and autonomy. Since they are capacities that individuals are born with, individuals have inherent and intrinsic value that cannot be sacrificed at the altar of the community. According to Gyekye, it is by recognizing this value that individuals have that they can fully realize and express their individuality (Gyekye, 1997, 40). In this case, personhood has nothing to do with participating in rituals of transformation, what gets transformed is social status and not personhood.

Furthermore, even with seniority, Gyekye (1997) argues that it is not the case that seniority entails moral excellence. He states that "surely there are many elderly people who are known to be wicked, ungenerous, and unsympathetic: whose lives, in short, generally do not reflect any moral maturity or excellence. In terms of a moral conception of personhood, those kinds of elderly people may not qualify as persons" (Gyekye, 1997, 49). Nevertheless, Gyekye agrees with Menkiti that some

individuals who display morally reprehensible behaviour may not be recognized as persons, but such an individual does not lose her rights as a human being (Gyekye, 1997, 50). Gyekye sees personhood conceived in terms of moral achievement as something important but not in ways that should be detrimental to individual rights.

1.2.3.2. Metz's capacity for community

Another attempt to develop a unique notion of personhood based on capacities from the African context is from Thaddeus Metz. My reading of Metz's paper shows that he did not specifically intend to present a unique theory of personhood. I consider his motivation to be a discussion of dignity in the African context *vis-a-vis* human rights. But I still find Metz's discussion important to personhood and can be interpreted as a notion of personhood given that his views seem to answer a question of moral status, cashed out in terms of dignity (Metz, 2012). That is, it shows beings that have dignity and those that do not. Metz grounds his idea of dignity in his theory of Ubuntu. However, an account of Ubuntu can be traced back to his earlier works where he presented Ubuntu as a moral theory. According to Metz, Ubuntu is grounded in his interpretation of what he calls harmony, and harmony is defined by two concepts, shared identity, and goodwill (Metz, 2017). Shared identity in simple terms is a matter of having a common identity and goals with a particular community. Goodwill is more of an attitude and actions that seek to promote the interests of others. For Metz, the capacity for Ubuntu *qua* shared identity and goodwill justifies moral consideration. Thus, the capacity for Ubuntu means the capacity for community (or to commune with others). To have dignity, therefore, is to have the capacity for community. It is in virtue of this capacity that one has moral status or intrinsic value. As I mentioned above, focusing on capacities that are in individuals makes the value intrinsic. In light of our discussion on personhood, it means that one

is a person (has personhood) *if* and *only if* the individual can share an identity with others and have goodwill for them (Metz, 2012).

However, Metz's theory was not well received by some scholars. Oyowe comments on this critique by doubting whether there is such a thing as a capacity for community. For Oyowe, what is seen as a capacity for community could be an effect of capacity for deliberative choices, such that, the choice to commune with others is one among the many choices that individuals make (Oyowe, 2014). According to Oyowe,

> the so-called capacity for community appears to hinge heavily on the Kantian capacity for autonomy or voluntary decisions. This is evident in Metz's description of that capacity…as Metz conceives it, the capacity for community upon which dignity is based is in his view closely tied to the capacity for autonomy or deliberative judgment. This leads naturally to the problem of which one is doing the work for Metz's conception of dignity…it is impossible to imagine that there are people who possess Metz's capacity for community independent of the capacity for deliberative choices…Kant's capacity for autonomy…is doing the important work in Metz's account (Oyowe, 2014, 342).

For Oyowe, the capacity for community is based on the capacity for autonomy. This means that what makes picks as the basic capacity is not basic at all. This means that an attempt to come up with some essential feature of a human being that captures the communitarian values fails. Oyowe's view of bringing the Kantian capacity as basic renders Metz's theory redundant (Oyowe, 2014).

A similar view that appeals to capacities but is somewhat different and presented as a critique of Metz comes from Ikuenobe. Ikuenobe's view is that the focus of the African cultural worldview

is not the mere possession of capacities for harmonious living but the use of such capacities. It is how individuals use the capacity to promote love, friendship, positive identity, and active solidarity that has value. In other words, it is about actual relationships or actively participating in communal life, and not merely possessing the capacity (Ikuenobe, 2017; Oyowe, 2014). Unlike Metz, who develops an account of dignity from his theorisation of a moral theory of Ubuntu, Ikuenobe's view is inspired by the social notion of personhood discussed above, where the individuals need to actually pursue a moral life and develop other regarding virtues and not merely have the capacity. Ikuenobe sees capacities not as having intrinsic value but only instrumental. He only considers them necessary for some other value (Ikuenobe, 2006). This is what distinguishes Ikuenobe and Metz in terms of how they characterize what is valuable. Ikuenobe's (2017) account allocates value in relationships and capacities are merely instrumental, hence the capacities do not have value in themselves, and individuals who possess them do not have intrinsic value, their value is extrinsic. Metz's (2012) view locates value within the individual because he accords capacities with value and so individuals have intrinsic value.

I have stated that Ikuenobe sees capacities are instrumentally for the promotion of the relationship. This means that it is the relationship that has the utmost value. Since Metz sees individuals as ends in themselves, Metz's view would mean that whether one acts in ways that promote social cohesion or not, the mere possession of capacities places the individual under moral consideration. This view is better in that it is consistent with the view that dignity is usually seen as a static quality, one that you either have or not (Metz, 2012). It is easy to understand why this is the basis of rights as something that you have as a human being regardless of one's functionality. Ikuenobe's (2017) view implies that dignity admits of degrees depending on how one's capacities are being used. In other words, dignity as based on the social notion of personhood means that it follows the same

principle of personhood which states that personhood comes in degrees, some have more of it and others have less of it. This view would make it difficult to be the basis of human rights because it would mean rights can be achieved in terms of degrees. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that interpreting Ikuenobe's view in this way is a disservice to the view because the foundation of his view of dignity, which is the social notion of personhood, takes duties to be primary and rights as secondary (Menkiti, 1984; Ikuenobe, 2017; Molefe, 2019). Therefore, what matters in this context is a question of moral status as a function of one's duty to promote harmonious living and less of a question of rights.

1.2.3.3. Molefe's capacity for sympathy

Another notable scholar Motsamai Molefe developed an account of the capacity-based notion of personhood, but his view was presented as a critique of Ikuenobe's (2017) view above. Molefe (2019) critiques Ikuenobe by arguing that the account excludes the mentally disabled and infants from the question of moral status. According to Molefe (2017), the mentally disabled and infants cannot use their capacities as demanded by the account. This means that they do not have a dignity. Failure to recognize their dignity would subject them to harm and a violation of their rights. Molefe's (2017) methodology is different from Ikuenobe's in that he develops an account of dignity by appealing to capacities and Ikuenobe looks at the actual use of those capacities. For Molefe (2017) the value an individual has the capacity, the capacity for sympathy. Sympathy is the basic virtue that leads to all other-regarding virtues such as compassion, love, friendship etc, which are captured in African communitarianism, in general, and personhood, in particular. He captures the idea of personhood in terms of sympathy, thus, "to possess personhood is to be sympathetic" and to be sympathetic is to possess all those virtues listed (Molefe, 2020, 55; Wiredu, 1996). Furthermore, to be sympathetic is to have the ability to hear and listen to others. Hearing

and listening are understood as having a moral sense (Molefe, 2020; Menkiti, 1984). This means to feel for others, not only to recognize their presence but to be moved by their presence.

While the above view would also exclude infants and the mentally disabled, Molefe (2019) invokes the idea of potentiality, and this is where infants and the mentally disabled differ. He argues that infants have partial moral status because they have the capacity potentially. But with regards to the mentally disabled and (with the inclusion of animals), Molefe argues that do not have the capacity and so are not subjects but objects of sympathy. As objects of sympathy, they have lower moral status (Molefe, 2019). It is not clear to me what makes a *being* qualify as an object of sympathy given that one would extend the same to a host of all other beings. At the same time, it is not clear to me that animals do not feel sympathy for their young such that they can also be subjects of sympathy. Molefe's theory much as he desired to extend it to non-human animals, seems to be very anthropocentric (Singer, 1972; Saponztis, 1981). Nonetheless, according to Molefe, what is central is the capacity for sympathy but to be both an object and subject of sympathy seems to give one higher moral status, or dignity. To lack possession of capacity means to be merely an object of sympathy and to be in this position is to partial moral status (Molefe, 2019).

From the foregoing, I have managed to present the capacity-based notion of personhood. I have discussed different views from different scholars and how the scholars respond to each other. I have argued that the capacity-based notion of personhood is a view that seems to be shared by scholars from the African and Western tradition. Since the dissertation is on gender, I will discuss in chapter four how the capacity-based notion of personhood would respond to gender.

1.2.4. Personhood as personal identity

Just like the transcendental notion of personhood, there is another metaphysical account, personhood as personal identity presented by Molefe (2017). I classify it as metaphysical because it is not concerned with the evaluation of the character or actions of individuals, instead, it seeks to provide a view of identity as a product of the community. Under this framework, the community is necessary for the formation of individual identity. I will not go into details about this view of personhood at this stage because I have developed it further in Chapter Three, as a basis for a relational account of gender identity. In this section, I will focus on some of the major views Molefe discusses.

The notion of personhood as a personal identity for Molefe (2019) comes from his analysis of Menkiti's view of personhood. In the analysis, Molefe argues that there is a conception of personhood that is implicit in Menkiti's (1984) presentation, and he appeals to Menkiti's discussion of Mbiti's (1969) views about personal identity. Menkiti discusses Mbiti's view about the primacy of the community, and by extension how the community produces the individual. According to Mbiti, in the Afro-communitarian context, an individual understands her identity as a product of the community. This is reflected in his dictum, *"I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am"* (Mbiti, 1969, 170). What the dictum shows is that the community holds some primacy over individuals and the community makes or produces identity, by implication, it means that without the community identity is impossible. Menkiti (2004) flames this view by appealing to the notion of the extended self (in Chapter Three, I have adopted the notion of the relational self to express the same idea). According to Menkiti (2004) "…in the absence of others, no grounds exist for a claim regarding the individual's standing as a person. The notion at work here is the notion of an extended self" (324). The question now is about what Menkiti means by extended self and how this is captured in Mbiti's dictum above.

To understand what Menkiti (2004) means by extended self, one can distinguish it from its counterpart notion, minimal self. The minimal self is sometimes understood as a biological self, that is, that which has subjecthood and agenthood without the inclusion of all the unessential features such as thinking or reflection (Heersmink, 2020, 2; Gallagher 2000, 15). Subject-hood refers to a sense of awareness of one's own experience and claiming ownership of it whereas agent-hood means awareness of oneself as the source of the action (James, Burkhardt, Bowers & Skrupskelis, 1890; Heermink, 2020). Suppose a person decides to move his leg, such a person would regard himself as the source of the action and at the same time having felt the leg move. The latter is subject-hood, and the former is agent-hood. Lack of agent-hood would mean being made to move the leg just like a person who has his legs moved by a physiotherapist. Most of the time people's experiences involve both subject-hood and agent-hood but there are times when the two come apart just as in the example above. Nonetheless, these two concepts, subject-hood and agent-hood make up the minimal self (Heersmink, 2020).

On the other hand, the notion of the extended self goes beyond the minimal self. The underlying claim is about how things that are external to the individual could become part of the self. For example, suppose there is an individual who is playing a dangerous sport and accidentally trips and breaks his arm. The injured person hurts his arm so bad that the doctors recommend amputating the arm and replacing it with a synthetic one. However, due to advancements in technology, the synthetic arm can do the basic operations or functions that the normal biological arm would do. One would imagine that at some time, the boundary or line between what counts as biological and what counts as synthetic blurs or completely disappears such that the individual sees the synthetic arm as a biological one. If someone were to harm the synthetic arm, the harm done to the arm would be felt as harm done to the self. In this case, an object that is external to the

individual becomes to be identified as part of the self, that is, the self is now extended to include what was initially the "other" (Heersmink, 2020). I believe this is what Menkiti (2004) has in mind in relation to the community or an individual's relations. That is, the person identifies oneself with others such that the level of care one has for the community is the same care that would be directed to the self. I will develop this view later by appealing to scholars to demonstrate what I have in mind, but the intuition is that if a person understands one's existence to be relational, then there is a sense in which the well-being of a person is connected to the well-being of the community or others. Harm to the community which would affect its well-being would be considered harm done to the self (Metz, 2017).

Therefore, personhood as personal identity means that being a person in an Afro-communitarian worldview means that one is not just an atomic person whose community is considered contingent to the conception of the self, rather the community is essential to the conceptualisation of the self. The personal is communal or relational. As mentioned above, this is just a brief presentation of this view of personhood as presented by Molefe, but I have developed it further and used it to develop a relational account of gender.

1.2.5. The situated-embodied agent view of personhood

Central to the conceptions of personhood discussed above is the question about the nature of a person. The various accounts that I have discussed so far have tried to respond to this question as a metaphysical or normative question. The accounts have either been metaphysical such as the transcendental notion of personhood or normative such as the social notion of personhood. In some cases, it is a blend of metaphysical and normative properties, where one acts as a necessary condition for the other. In this last but one section, I seek to discuss the situated-embodied agent view of personhood which to a certain extent is a blend of both the metaphysical and normative

accounts. Like the "capacity-based" notion of personhood, it describes certain metaphysical properties that make a person and shows the sense in which a being that has them has moral status. Furthermore, just like the "social notion' of personhood, it also takes into consideration the role of social context. The basic principle under the "situated-embodied agent" notion of personhood is that to be a person requires that an individual be situated in a particular context, embodied and be a rational moral agent (Hughes, 2001). Therefore, an account of personhood I will discuss in this section will focus on highlighting these three conditions, namely, situatedness, embodiment and agency.

The situated-embodied agent notion of personhood can be traced back to ideas shared by some scholars such as Ludwig Wittgenstein's discussion on body and characteristic (i.e., physical and psychological) relationship, Martin Heidegger's concept of *"dasein"* translated as "being there" and Merleau Ponty's discussion which was more of an extension of Heidegger's *Dasein* (Dreyfus, 1990; Hughes, 2001). This notion of personhood has received a lot of attention in the field of applied ethics, especially in bioethical discussions. In bioethics, this notion of personhood has been cited by scholars discussing the personhood of patients with dementia and other related illnesses. Thus, the focus is on whether patients with advanced forms of dementia have moral status as persons. Establishing their moral status provides grounds for the kind of care and respect owed to them (Hughes, 2001).

The reason there is a somewhat different grounding for the personhood of persons with dementia is that there was dissatisfaction with theories in the literature that could not secure their personhood. Such dissatisfaction can be traced to some "traditional" views of personhood and personal identity especially the ones put forward by John Locke and Derrick Parfit (Locke, 1960; Parfit, 1984; Hughes, 2001). According to Locke, a person is a being with certain cognitive

features. That is, a thinking intelligent being (consciousness), and what defines identity is some psychological connectedness (continuity from the past), that is, memory (Locke, 1960). What these two views have in common is that they cash out personhood and personal identity in terms of the ability to think and remember one's own experiences. But what this view does is exclude those with advanced forms of dementia because they cannot demonstrate the ability to recollect the past.[6] The task now is to figure out the sense in which human beings with dementia have personhood with respect to the situated embodied agent view of personhood.

I mentioned that there are three conditions to this notion of personhood, situatedness, embodiment and agency. The first two conditions, situatedness and embodiment, go hand in hand. To understand this view one ought to go back to Heidegger's of *Dasein.* It is difficult to figure out exactly what Heidegger's view of *Dasein* means and that difficulty reflects in the way the concept can be applied. The general or dominant view is that it refers to individual humans as well as the different circumstances they find themselves in. That is, it is concerned with questions about human nature and its relationship to human experience. Human beings make sense of themselves as they are in a society, experiencing different moods and seeing themselves as performers of various roles. The context within which one finds oneself and what one does in that context (in relation to other human beings as one interacts with the world) are the basis for making sense of one's own identity. However, to interact with one's world requires that there be a body placed in that world existing in space and time. The body in this case is the subject of experience and can be cashed out as being individualistic and relational (Dreyfus, 1990; Hughes, 2001). That is, as an individual subject of experience and at the same time as a being that is in relationship with other

[6] In addition, as Locke stipulated, two disconnected memories of the same human being or individual would represent two distinct persons within the same human being (Locke, 1960). This view has received a lot of criticism from Philosophers.

bodies. This is not a complete view of Heidegger's *Dasein* but a snapshot of views that relate to the current discussion.

It is this view of body-subject highlighted above that Ponty develops. Stressing the importance of the body, he argues that the body exists as a subject of experience and is necessary for experience. It is a body that experiences and plays an important role in shaping one's experience of the world. This experience helps in making meaning in the world, a meaning that comes through one's interaction with the world through perception. Perception is more than a reaction to stimuli and what is perceived is processed through an individual's capacity for reason (Ponty 1962, 1968). This understanding has normative implications. Normatively, one's subjecthood can be the basis for special treatment or care. This special treatment or obligation to care places constraints on the actions of other rational agents. It is such duties of care that distinguish an individual as a subject from a mere object (Ponty, 1945; Hughes, 2001; Priest, 2000). Hughes's situated embodied agent view of personhood adopts this understanding of the importance of the body.

According to Hughes, human beings are embodied beings, situated or embedded in a context that is always unique and complex in such a way that it provides a strong foundation for personhood. Human beings find themselves with a body embedded in a context that includes families, culture or society with varied social norms, historical and geographical settings, etc. For Hughes, human actions and decisions must be negotiated within this contextual framework (Hughes, 2001). The body is that which allows a human being to act in a particular context and bodies are part of how they understand the self (refer to the notion of the "self" discussed under personhood as personal identity). The body is a subject of life and the foundation for reflective or conscious acts (Hughes, 2001). The importance placed on the body is crucial in the sense that it differentiates this notion of personhood from its rival, Locke's or Parfit's views highlighted above. With the Lockean view,

the individual with dementia has lost a part of the "self" that can be understood through the memory of past knowledge but the other part of the self as a current subject of experience is not lost. Under the situated-embodied agent view, one would see why one's personhood is never lost in both senses of the self, from past experiences as well as current ones. If a human being with dementia is to be cared for in a morally non-objectionable way, then personhood ought to be cashed out not merely by appealing to memory but also by taking into consideration the body itself. Recognition of the importance of the body as a subject of experience is what secures certain duties owed to it. The basic idea here is that the body provides the material foundation for personhood. Even if someone appeals to Locke(an) or Parfit(ian) views about memory or consciousness, without the body, such appeal would be unintelligible (Hughes, 2001).

The bodies secure personhood by virtue of being subjects of experience (what Hughes calls "narratives"). It is the object against which narratives are created and made sense. There is a relationship between one's sense of identity and the narratives whereby identity is understood in a series of narratives (Hughes, 2001). Adding to this view, Schechtman (1996) argues that "a person's identity is constituted by the content of her self-narrative and the traits, actions, and experiences included in it are, by virtue of that inclusion, hers" (94). Heersmink characterises a narrative "as a subjective, affective, and personal story, containing a mostly accurate chronological depiction of a series of connected events and experiences that constitute a person's identity and self" (Heersmink, 2020, 3). According to Thomas Fuchs, without the "basal experience of self, then all biographical knowledge would be useless to us, as our self would be lost in an elementary sense" for there would be no reference to such knowledge (Fuchs, 2020, 667). Common to all these views is that bodies are a referent of the narrative that is constituted in the identity of the individual. This sense of identity entails not necessarily "what a person is" in terms of picking out a feature

but “who the person is” by referring to lived experiences that distinguish one individual from another (Hughes, 2001; Heersmink, 2020).

It must be pointed out that the above view of the body also takes spatial and temporal properties as important as the body. This is based on the view that narratives take into consideration certain spatial and temporal properties. By spatial and temporal properties, I am appealing to the role of context. The creation and unification of narratives always happen in a certain context. The context here is the social-cultural history within which an agent is embedded. It is within the context that the histories of individual agents are constructed and found and the changes that happen through time distinguishing one from another is what makes history intelligible (MacIntyre, 1984, 206-207). The context aids in understanding how bodies act on the world in the creation of narratives. This is the sense in which situatedness and embodiment as conditions can be understood. This then leads me to another condition of this notion of personhood, agency.

According to Hughes, the notion of agency can also be understood in terms of embeddedness or rootedness. Human beings are not just bodies in a particular context, but they are also agents. In their experiences and interactions with the world, they are not mere irrational and non-autonomous agents. On the contrary, human beings are active agents (as opposed to passive observers) who are constantly acting on the world in relation to other agents. The person is best thought of as a human agent who exercises one’s own choices in terms of how an individual acts and interacts with other human beings in a particular cultural and historical context. This is not just a contingent requirement of personhood, rather For Hughes, “it is constitutive of persons that they *must act on and, in the world*” (Hughes, 2013, 338, *emphasis mine*). Hughes does not justify why personhood has this strong requirement, but the importance of rationality and autonomy in the creation of meaningful history as well as morality in general provide good explanations for it. Furthermore,

for Hughes, the exercise of one's agency is not individualistic but relational. He states that human beings are not just individualistic autonomous agents, but agents who interact with other autonomous beings as interconnected and interdependent with them. The views of others matter and ought to be part of how humans act (relational autonomy). That is, one can ignore the existence of another human being but the response to one another is that of care (Hughes, 2001).

Therefore, given the three conditions above, one is a person in so far as one is an embodied being that has agency and is situated in a particular context. I have shown that this view of personhood was offered as a theoretical guide (in principle) on how patients with advanced forms of dementia ought to be treated or cared for. One does not need to look at memory as a grounding feature which would subject such patients to morally objectionable treatment given that it is a feature they do not have. This view of personhood recognizes the importance of patients as having a body that requires some kind of moral recognition as well as being persons situated in a particular context with agency. They are persons who have lost their memory, but the body remains an important feature that was central to the memories they lost. While I make my closing remarks by referencing persons with dementia, this view of personhood has a wider application in the sense that it could easily be applied to other human beings, as long as they are recognized as being situated embodied agents.

The only problem I have with this view of personhood is that it does not state which conditions are necessary and sufficient. It could help to explain the sense in which these conditions relate to each other. For instance, if one argues that they are jointly sufficient conditions, then one wonders whether individuals who have a body and act in a particular environment but are unable to demonstrate their agency could be described as persons. Nonetheless, I believe merely having the body and acting in a particular environment should be considered as necessary conditions with the

agency being an additional condition and not a necessary one. I believe restating the conditions this way would secure the person of mentally disabled individuals, humans that are not captured under a Kantian capacity-based view of personhood. Similarly, this view of personhood also captures babies. Under the Kantian capacity-based notion of personhood and the social notion of personhood, babies are not necessarily full persons, but this view would include them by virtue of having a body embedded in a context. In the later chapters, where necessary I reference this view of personhood and show its significance to questions about gender and moral status.

1.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has discussed several selected accounts of personhood found in the literature. I looked at several accounts of personhood to show the sense in which personhood can be understood. The first account of personhood, I discussed is the transcendental notion of personhood. The basic premise of this account is that one is a person by virtue of being human. That is, to be a person is to be a human being and to be a human being is to be a person. The major task of the section was to discuss various conceptions of being human. I also discussed the capacity-based notion of personhood. According to this notion, one is a person by virtue of having certain capacities. I looked at accounts that talk about different capacities such as rationality, capacity for community and capacity for sympathy. Furthermore, another notion of personhood I discussed is personhood as personal identity. Here I discussed views of identity from an African cultural worldview. I presented an account of personal identity that takes the community as essential. I also discussed the social notion of personhood. According to this notion, personhood is a moral achievement, something individuals can succeed or fail. The moral achievement here is about the achievement of virtue. Lastly, I looked at the situated-embodied agent notion of personhood. Under this notion, I argued that to be a person requires that one be situated, embodied,

and have agency. That is, a person is an individual who has a body and is embedded in a particular context. These are the accounts that I use to discuss gender in the next chapters. As argued in the chapter, the accounts are not an exhaustive list of accounts of personhood found in the literature, but enough to ground the discussion in the next chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

SOME CONSIDERED CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER IN AN AFRICAN CULTURAL WORLDVIEW

2.1. Introduction

In this dissertation chapter, I discuss some traditional conceptions of gender. It is important to note that in the literature that I have been using, the conceptions I discuss have not been presented as full-fledged conceptions but more or less like responses to the Western imposition of gender onto the African cultural worldview. In this chapter, I try to flesh out the discussion as separate conceptions. This means that the interpretation I offer to the claims might not be as intended by the original authors. However, I have tried to remain as close to their claims as possible and where I make a diversion, I indicate the sense I am using the claims as well as provide supporting evidence. The discussion in this chapter is a groundwork for what I propose as an additional account of gender in the next chapter. I propose another account to add to the different ways one would think of gender in the traditional African cultural context. As previously indicated in the introduction, there is a lack of literature on gender in African philosophy, therefore, any work on gender done in African philosophy makes a valuable contribution to the field.

In discussing African conceptions of gender, such a task requires separating it from views dominant in the Western tradition, and in doing that, I do not intend to make unnecessary comparisons between what is African and Western but to present accounts that align with the African worldview. The aim is to understand ways men and women relate in the African cultural context and doing so requires a dive into the African traditional cultural context by slightly ignoring the post-colonial gender ideology which seems to be influenced by Western values

(Nzegwu, 2004; Amadiume, 2005). I believe understanding gender can be of use in solving some of the current social problems of gender in African communities. The only challenge with the approach I take is that the work may be interpreted as a rehash of precolonial cultural tradition or a defense of ethnophilosophy. I do not seek to defend past ideas nor denounce modernity, rather the philosophical work is in understanding gender practice and developing workable conceptions. In reading about gender, and growing up in a post-colonial African context, as an African sometimes I face a crisis about what is known when interacting with my cultural gurus and reading about precolonial traditions and what has been taught in the academia and non-academic circles such as religion. This condition, to use Nkrumah's terminology is what is referred to as "Malignant Schizophrenia" (Nkrumah, 1964, 79). For Nkrumah, diagnosing such a problem requires true liberation.[7] In this chapter, I take such a diagnosis to uncover one's true identity separating it from an imposed identity, and mostly, willing to let go of the misconception about gender. According to Nzegwu (2004) and Wiredu (2002), the task requires getting rid of foreign concepts in thinking about one's cultural values. This is the intuition to the accounts of gender I present in this chapter. I believe this task forms part of what Biko suggests as rewriting one's history (Biko, 2015)

Before I discuss some of the conceptions in this chapter, it is important to offer some theoretical foundations, and this is the task for the next section.

2.2. Some theoretical foundations

There is a considerable amount of work done on gender in both academic and non-academic settings. But in all these fields, gender discussions are more specific such that there is no monolithic approach to studying gender. Thus, there are different approaches to gender, such that

[7] See Nkrumah's discussion on Philosophical Consciencism (see Nkrumah, 1964). His ideas about liberation which were mainly political can also be understood along ideas of other influential figures such as Steven Biko on Black consciousness (see Biko, 2015). Additionally, one can understand it through the lens of Wiredu's call on conceptual decolonization (Wiredu, 2002).

others choose to talk about gender equity, while others talk about gender roles, gender identity, gender inclusion, etc. Nonetheless, the different subject matters under gender are not mutually exclusive. In this dissertation, I am paying attention to two sub-topics, gender role and gender identity. These are the concepts that I appeal to in doing some analytical work on gender and I separate myself from such work in other disciplines such as sociology or gender studies, where the concern is mostly on the experiences of people with respect to their gender. That is, their focus is on how men and women experience gender violence or how the law or gender policies are applied. This approach, while having its benefits and achieving particular aims, begs the question with regard to the conception of gender implicit in such discussions. Thus, it is not clear to me what conception of gender scholars have in mind when discussing experiences of people having a particular gender identity or presumed to be performing a particular gender role or whether the law or policy is able to do the job it was meant to do.

Therefore, it is not surprising that one runs the risk of applying a wrong concept or conception and drawing questionable conclusions. That is, they risk what Wiredu calls the adoption of foreign modes of thought that do not align with one's values or norms (Wiredu, 2002). Furthermore, one risks applying a conception of gender that is circular. The circular conception of gender is generally held by people who probably have heard of the term "gender" or claim to possess a particular "gender identity," but have never attempted to question what it means to have that identity nor questioned their beliefs about their preferred ideologies of various identities. Instead, they take for granted that gender identities are self-evident (Jenkins, 2018). If one begins to question what it means to have a particular identity, such an individual finds oneself in a space where the identity is affirmed or rejected. But the common sense feeling I have for many individuals who never question their identities, or appeal to Socrates' phrasing, "do not examine their own lives" (in the

current context -identities), such individuals can be considered to be blind to the reality of the self. They take on identities without meaning (Ap. 38a). The circular conception of gender is what Jenkins calls the "folk conception of gender" (Jenkins, 2018, 174). Under this conception, gender refers to the "sense of oneself as a man or woman or some other gender" (Jenkins, 2018, 174). According to Jenkins, this conception lacks content, therefore, it is not complete until some account is offered about what it means for an individual to have a sense of oneself as a man, woman, or some other gender. Disappointingly enough, with respect to this folk conception, no such account is offered as part of the definition, and there is no consensus on what kind of account might be appropriate (Jenkins, 2018, 174).

The above highlights the need to conduct some analytical work on gender. Perhaps one would argue that the explication of concepts is the kind of work mostly left to philosophers, and so, if a conception of gender is to be found, philosophy is one location helpful in this search or analysis. However, even in philosophy, especially African philosophy, less attention has been given to the conceptual analysis of gender (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). However, I recognize the efforts of scholars such as Nzegwu and Amadiume, to whom I attribute the conceptions I discuss below. Nevertheless, as I show later, even their accounts beg the question about the actual conception of gender or how they define gender. Responding to this worry or filling this gap is the task I have dedicated to discussing in Chapter Three.

From those who have attempted to do some theoretical work on gender, their work follows various approaches, for instance, consider these two; on the one hand, there are scholars whose work may be considered descriptive; and on the other hand, there are those scholars whose work may be classified as ameliorative (Jenkins, 2018; Haslanger, 2012). Descriptive work is that which provides a conceptual analysis of the concept as it is being used in the daily life of people. Scholars

here look at the experiences of various people and use this experience to develop a conception or theory of gender. An example could be scholars working in Anthropology who look at the experiences of people in the Sub-Saharan part of the continent, and so what they discuss is a descriptive view of the lived reality or cultural worldview of the people. On the other hand, ameliorative work is that which is done by scholars who develop or provide a conception they believe should be adopted for a particular goal or vision. At times, ameliorative work grows out of dissatisfaction with a certain conception (born out of descriptive work) that may currently be in use but fails to do the job. The goal of coming up with another conception is to improve on the existing conception or provide (in the form of a suggestion and less of a prescription) a completely new understanding considered to be consistent with the goals of a particular group (McKitrick, 2015; Jenkins, 2018, 2016; Bettcher, 2017).

Theorizing about gender, whether in a descriptive or ameliorative sense is a kind of work that has been found among some scholars from different parts of the world. For instance, scholars such as Jenkins and Haslanger can be credited for taking an ameliorative approach. Their work is presented as a workable tool for trans-rights movements that seem to rely on a circular non-workable concept of gender. But whether their ameliorative inquiry solves the problem is a different question. But an important question for me is whether their ameliorative considers some contextual differences. Given that people's experiences are different, there are questions about the universalization of conceptions. For one thing, much of what has been presented in the African context as a conception of gender underlies a Western cultural worldview. As Oyewumi (2004) states, gender is contextual and is a product of a particular good of people, from a particular place at a particular time. Thus, gender (as a social kind) is not universal and timeless, and, in this dissertation, I attempt to discuss conceptions of gender from a particular worldview, the African.

When it comes to work done on gender, especially in the African context, a somewhat surprising view is that several scholars working on the discipline of African philosophy in general or African feminism, in particular, use gender concepts such as "woman" or "man" unquestionably when talking about "gender identity" and its counterpart notion "gender roles". This is regardless of the obvious point that these gender terms are rooted in the English language whose meaning in the language carries with it Western cultural values and norms. More importantly, even when translating them, they tend to ignore that their African languages do not have these concepts or for those that they do, they mean something different than it is in English.[8] Such neglect reflects the unquestioned assumption of taking the concepts as universal, a move I consider to be erroneous. But again, except for the few scholars I have read and whom I discuss in this chapter. Nonetheless, even when one assumes a Western conception of gender as a workable one or universal, there are problems with this particular view because there are so many Western conceptions of gender in the literature. Again, one would have to be specific on the conception adopted.

It would also seem that distinguishing a conception as African from its non-African counterpart does partially help but it does not solve all problems given that even within the African continent are various cultures. The basic idea is that even when working on gender within the African context, the context and culture that informs such a gender would be different from another. It is not surprising that while there is a debate on whether the Yoruba people have gender, other cultures are quiet (Oyewumi, 1997, 2004; Bakare-Yusuf, 2003). The sense in which a conception can be universalizable to other cultures is if one pays attention to the vast similarities shared by most African cultures. That is, if one can have a Chewa conception of gender, Yoruba conception of

[8] One ought to be careful when it comes to how language works. It could be a case that the lack of the concept just means that whatever is defined by the concept is either not important in the culture in question, but the activity or object exists, or that it is entirely non-existent.

gender, Akan conception of gender, etc., the sense in which one develops an African conception of gender that would be to some extent generalizable to all these cultures is if the cultures in question share some fundamental features that can be the basis for developing the said general conception. Furthermore, the conceptualization of gender in the African continent may also reflect different periods. This need is reflected in the view that the African continent, unlike other continents has undergone significant shifts in terms of values and political structure such that even a conception of gender identity ought to pay attention to the radical changes and how such changes affect people's understanding of how they relate to others and who they are (Amadiume, 2005). Africans have had to grapple with social problems that are different from those in Western colonial societies. They have had to deal with colonialism that not only was subtly distinct from one nation to another but led to the general imposition of non-African values and the demeaning (and to some extent, erasure) of African values (Goredema, 2010).[9] Thus, a conception of gender has to pay attention to the applicable period, that is, whether it represents a traditional (precolonial) African context, or modern (referring to the post-colonial). I am not claiming that the traditional conception cannot be applied to the modern context. Rather, a conception that describes traditional views of gender can also apply to the modern context if people's views of gender have not radically changed. But if it can be established that there are changes with respect to how gender is understood given changes in values or norms, then this calls for a conception that pays attention to modern African life. To understand the point, consider these general views reflecting the different paradigms. A general view one would find in literature is that the precolonial period is presented as a period of non-hierarchical ordering of genders. That is, gender relations between men and women were

[9] By distinct colonialism I am referring to the Americans, British, Germans, Portuguese and French people who colonized the different parts of Africa. Today when people talk about African cultures being radically different, they ignore this structure of colonialism which was different in itself. On the contrary, African cultures are more alike than they are different.

presumably equal (Saidi, 2020; Moagi & Mtombeni, 2020). The colonial period represents the major shifts or changes in political structure. Changes that came with the imposition of Western values and denigration of African ones, by way of (for instance) assimilating Christian and Islamic values and practices into the African cultures (Amadiume, 1987). One would imagine that a colonial patriarchal gender ideology led to the formation of gender hierarchies creating a privileged man and a subordinate woman (Oyewumi, 1997, 2004). The post-colonial period is presented as a period of recovery, a period of political independence which also awakened a consciousness about the equality of individuals regardless of sex, gender, race, etc. (Cheater, 1986; Amadiume, 2015). It is a period of reconstruction, but this reconstruction takes on various forms from one country to another given that different countries gained independence at different stages. Furthermore, this is not just a reconstruction of the past by appealing to precolonial heterarchical gender structures but one that also takes foreign norms into consideration.

Thus, the above discussion is a theoretical foundation for some of the guiding principles I employ in discussing gender in the chapter. I discuss some of the conceptions of gender found in the African continent. I specifically look at the complimentary account and the fluidity account. My presentation is more of a development of these views in a way that they could be understood as full-fledged accounts of gender identity even when the scholars I attribute the accounts to might not have intended to present them in this manner.

2.3. The “complementarity” account of gender

Gender complementarity is not a new phenomenon in literature. The work on the topic goes as far back as the 1930s and 1970s (Davis, 1995; Pintchman,1998). The underlying view under complementarity is the recognition of men's and women's contributions. Their contributions in terms of the *work* they do are discussed under the concept of “gender roles”. Implicit in the

understanding of roles is the assignment of equal value to each gender's contribution, whether in private family life or at the community level. The guiding principle under complementarity is that no gender occupies a central place over the other. In other words, genders are not understood as being hierarchical, where one is valued more than the other, and by extension, in opposition against each other, where opposition means that they work to destroy one another through discrimination and oppression, instead of contributing to each person's wellbeing or flourishing or to use a better terminology "complementary" towards each other. Thus, while one gender seeks domination, the other is subordinated. The basic idea of complementarity if one appeals to Innocent Asouzu (2004) is that there is a relationship of mutual dependency, even between seemingly different entities. Thus, genders can be opposed in the sense of being biologically different to each other, but they can still complement each other on a non-hierarchical basis. The basic idea here is that difference does not entail division. In my view, difference ought to entail a richness of contributions through the equal valuing of the genders. This is regardless of whether some roles might appear to belong to females only, for instance, giving birth and all responsibilities a mother does, the assumption is that biological reproduction is understood as a function of both males and females (Pitchman, 1998; Momoh, 2000). These are some of the underlying views I discuss below.

The section on complementarity is structured in the following way; firstly, I posit some theoretical foundations for the nature of social roles. Here I explain a way of understanding the logic behind these social roles. To do that, I appeal to Plato's idea of specialization by also pointing to the modern economic idea of the division of labour. Secondly, I provide a relational account of African metaphysics to show how objects in nature relate to each other and how this allows for harmonious continued existence. The underlying idea is to show how each object in the relationship carries

value that sustains the relationship as a whole. It is this value I consider to be in question when notions of privilege and subordination come into the picture.

But in relation to this structure, one question a reader would ask is about my appeal to Plato's work given that he is not an African scholar. Indeed, I do borrow some insights from *The Republic* by Plato, and I am aware that Plato does not write about the African context nor intended his views to be applicable in this manner (with a focus on gender) given that he was after a certain conception of justice. I appeal to Plato because of an important intuition about the specialization of tasks. This is the intuition I take on board and one I discuss by appealing to a more modern acceptable view in economics regarding the division of labour and its benefit to the economy and society. The underlying intuition in discussing the division of labour under specialization. is the idea that each person should do what that person is good at, either as a natural talent or through training. For instance, suppose Vitumbiko is a teacher in Mathematics, specialization demands that Vitumbiko focus on Mathematics so he can become the best Mathematician he can be. It is by focusing on what Vitumbiko is good at - that he can make a meaningful contribution to the community. The basic idea, for Plato, is that Vitumbiko ought to spend time cultivating his skills in Mathematics for the good of all. The recognition of Vitumbiko's talent is the ascription of value to what he does and the same applies to everyone who is working for the common good. The main idea is about cultivating excellence in one's craft for the common good. The "common good" here refers to "that which is essentially good for human beings, as such embracing the needs that are basic to the enjoyment and fulfilment of the life of each individual" (Gyekye, 2010). The basic idea here is that each role is created out of need and the needs give rise to duties or obligations, and fulfilling these obligations is a requirement for the promotion of the common good. The notion of gender complementarity I present in this chapter underlies this point about the common good. This

intuition features nicely with the African cultural worldview because of the close relationship between the notion of need and duty. Above all, Gyekye summarizes it nicely when he states that African ethics is a duty-based ethic (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 1992; Gyekye, 2010; Molefe, 2017).

2.3.1. Specialization

Not many African writers have interrogated the relationship between social roles and their contribution to the proper functioning of society (common good), and (better yet), how the discussion would relate to discussions about gender complementarity. As a way of discussing this relationship, I start by appealing to Plato's discussion of crafts (social roles) in a city. However, I discuss this view in relation to the economic view of the division of labour. In *The Republic*, specialization is related to either "function," "craft" or "role". Plato's idea of specialization is tied to his conception of Justice, but in this dissertation, I am tying it to "needs" value, production, and "common good" and how all that informs gender complementarity. A basic view here is that any society ought to have some specialized tasks to meet certain needs which require having expertise or what Plato would call "virtue" or "excellence"; this is because failure to meet such needs, which would be necessary for human survival, such a society would be headed for self-destruction. Gender comes into the picture when one considers that the tasks allocated to men and women are not so much about gender but under a deeper conception of specialization of tasks.

In *The Republic*, Plato, in the character of Socrates, begins his discussion of "specialization" in the presence of several interlocutors, but, most importantly, as he was responding to Glaucon's worry that Socrates did not successfully give an account of justice, whether justice is better than injustice. In responding to Glaucon's worry, Socrates starts by developing an account of justice by providing a picture of how a city is constructed and how tasks are divided to maximize production and fulfill

certain needs. The basic idea related to justice is that understanding justice from this view of the city would make it easier to understand justice in the individual (Rep. 368e-369a).

To understand how specialization comes into the picture and why it is so important is to consider its basis in *The Republic*. The basic idea under specialization is that of "self-insufficiency" of individuals in fulfilment of all their needs (Rep. 369b-c). For Socrates, the formation of a city or community is rooted in individuals who recognize their self-insufficiency and decide to come together to share what they have (it could be products or expertise) for the fulfilment of their needs (Rep. 369c6). The city is thus perceived as a hypothetical social contract for individuals who are in the state of nature, and the motivation for the social contract is the fulfilment of needs through cooperation (Mckeen, 2004).

Socrates starts by identifying some basic needs in his city, and the first being the basic need for food. It is ranked first because it is necessary for one's existence as a biological being. This is followed by the need for shelter (such as houses and clothes). This structuring of needs where the need for food is basic followed by security or shelter is similar to Abraham Maslow's views in his theory of human motivation. Maslow identifies several needs that drive human behaviour. For Maslow, at the very bottom of the hierarchy are basic needs, referred to as physiological needs, including the need for food, air, sex, water, etc. Second in the hierarchy are safety needs which in Socrates' terms are referred to as "shelter" needs (Maslow, 1943; Rep. 369d3). Maslow's structure does not have to be "identical" to the one in the Republic given that even Socrates does not provide a hierarchy just as Maslow did, nonetheless, it speaks to what human beings consider to be the most basic needs, or what Socrates calls, "necessary" needs (Rep. 369d10). These are needs that have to do with survival.

The identification of needs opens up the roles required for the provision of the needs in question. This may be understood as the obligation placed upon society to provide for the needs of individuals. Two important positions can be outlined. The first position is that this understanding invites the notion of production into the picture, that is, there ought to be that which fulfils the need in question; and secondly, the fact that the needs in question are basic makes the role taken by every person involved in their fulfilment valuable. Note that one is dealing with individuals who have agreed to a sort of hypothetical contract to be part of a community, the idea is that these individuals understand their obligations not only as obligations to the self only (which would be counterproductive) but also as an obligation towards other members of the community. The assignment of tasks for production does not require a forced division of labour. More importantly, this assignment is rooted in the recognition of an individual's inborn talent as well as through training. But in small and undeveloped societies like the one Socrates was presenting, this view is not difficult to understand because there are no special schools for people to be trained in particular crafts, hence the idea behind any chosen role is individual natural (inborn) talent. It is only when the community grows that avenues for learning particular crafts are established.

For Socrates then, the need for food would require farmers; shelter would require builders; and clothes would require weavers. To this list, he adds shoemakers and others "to take care of bodily needs" (Rep. 369d9-10). One thing to note is that Socrates has listed the needs and the skills needed for the fulfilment of such needs, but it is not clear how the different individual roles contribute to the common good. To answer this question, Socrates considers two positions, whether, on the one hand, the farmer should use her skill to produce more food to cater for other individuals who are skilled in different crafts (not particularly farming) while she also benefits from their crafts; or on the other hand, the same farmer should only provide food for herself while also learning other

crafts so she can provide all she need for herself. The latter option assumes a self-sufficient individual, and the very motive for constructing a city is that individuals are not self-sufficient. The former option agrees with what Adam Smith considers to be the function of specialization, the maximization of production. It is efficient and for Socrates, it comes from the recognition that people are born with different talents (innate dispositions). Some are innately disposed to being experts at farming, others shoemaking and so on (Reeve, 2004, Rep. 370a6-8). This implies that in the community being constructed, a person cannot do everything herself if quality work is to be done (Rep. 370b4). Therefore, each person should focus on cultivating one's skills and using her time to produce more. This is what ensures that there is maximum productivity. This is the underlying idea of specialization, the concentration of production on a narrow range of goods and services. The person can use what she has produced in exchange for what she does not have.

Since each person will specialize in a particular craft, this implies the need for more roles to be created to provide for other needs that may not have been listed earlier. Thus, specialization allows for job creation, as it opens up space for more skilled workers to work on other tasks. In the republic, Socrates adds "carpenters, metal workers, shepherds, cowherds, herdsmen and other craftsmen" (Reeve, 2004, Rep. 370d5-e3). Specialization does not only deal with individuals *qua* individuals, at a community level, one community would also specialize and trade with other communities. This in itself creates more roles such as merchants, retailers, ship captains, etc., and in turn creates economic activities such as "buying and selling" of goods, a marketplace, currency, manual labourers (wage earners as Socrates calls them), etc., (Reeve, 2004 371a10-d8). Since gender is about individuals, I stick to specialization among individuals. Among individuals (and in relation to gender), the basic idea is that there is a need, and the need creates a role that ought to be taken by some other individual. The gender question comes into the picture when the

allocation of tasks is based on gender and not talent. But as seen from the above presentation, the allocation of tasks is based on innate talent and later on as the city grows, it is based on trained skills.

However, the above claim about gender and specialization is not as easy as it seems. Socrates never mentions gender in *The Republic* and sometimes in the division of labour, the gender question becomes unavoidable especially if one gender is left to perform a particular task that the other gender could easily perform. This questions the value of the other genders in their contribution to society or production. In the Republic, it is not quite clear whether Plato (in the character of Socrates) endorses the equality of men and women. For some, equality among men and women appears to be the route Plato wanted to take but argues that such an approach is inconsistent with his other ideas on private property which limits women to the domestic sphere (Okin, 1975). Nonetheless, his argument seems to be better supported by other books other than *The Republic* where Plato discusses private property and women as belonging to the domestic sphere. Some scholars, like Julia Annas, reject the idea of attributing gender to Plato because Plato's views of abilities and talents, as cited above, consider sex (or gender) to be irrelevant. Annas argues that Plato only saw women as people with talents that could be put to use for the city. This has less to do with justice than with efficient use of available human resources (Forde, 1997; Annas, 1976, 1981). Annas' (1976) claim is forceful in that if one considers the capitalist model where what matters most is the maximization of profits, the welfare of individuals cannot be paramount. In this manner, like what Bloom argues for *The Republic, the equality of women would only be considered as a* "means" to an end, the end being the political good for Plato, and the maximization of production (as I have it in this dissertation). According to Bloom, Plato saw women's tendency

to focus on the private and the particular as something that would corrupt the guardians whose vision ought to be about the whole, all society (Bloom, 1968).

There are some reasons to believe that the gender question is irrelevant when it comes to specialization. not everyone agrees with the above view of women attributed to Plato. According to Forde in *The Republic* for example, what is important is human nature. For Plato, human nature has many parts, but the only idolized part is rationality, which ought to rule over other parts (Forde, 1997). I mentioned in chapter one that it is this view of human nature that other Western scholars such as Kant adopted for his moral theory. Kant saw rationality as that which defines humanity and personhood. But this idolization of rationality has been rejected especially when it was used against women. In most Western feminist literature, this view is morally suspect because discussions of the rational are associated with dualistic ideas of the Enlightenment period where the mind is considered to be separate from the body. When such views are applied to gender discussions, not only is gender seen in dualistic or binary terms, but also that men are considered as walking minds, and women, as walking bodies (Oyewumi, 2004; Wollstonecraft, 1963; Beauvoir, 1973; Nussbaum, 1995; *Rep.* 363-364). I will ignore this discussion for now and recap the basic argument for this section. What is important is the underlying claim that specialization has more to do with a person's ability, be it the use of rationality in performing a particular task of mere raw appetitive talent with little to no rationality needed.

The discussion of the social roles above and specialization highlights an important intuition to take on board. This is the view that social roles arise out of needs and interests in a community. The different roles are there to fulfil different needs and interests. This makes those contributing to this common good valuable or indispensable. The question now is to what extent is this intuition an underlying assumption or premise in the development of an argument about understanding social

roles in the African context in terms of complementarity? To respond to this question, I now turn to the idea of African relationality which also has its roots in African metaphysics.

2.3.2. Relationality, difference and unity

To take on board an intuition from the above discussion, there is a question that has to be answered. The question is about the relationship this intuition adds to the discussion of gender complementarity in social roles in the African context. To understand this view, one ought to understand how duties find their place in an African cultural worldview. The underlying theme of this worldview is relationality or communitarianism. I also posit that a better description of the African cultural worldview comes from some ideas about African metaphysics. A look at this metaphysical worldview would help flesh out how human beings relate to each other and how they divide labour amongst themselves as well as the basis and function these roles are meant to serve. Most scholars such as Tangwa (2004), Etieyibo (2017), Bujo (1998), Behrens (2010), Mbiti (1970), etc., when writing about the African metaphysical world, conceive it as a holistic universe. Thus, a world where individual objects do not exist as separate beings (atomic beings) but are interconnected in one greater whole (system) or relational beings. Objects in nature are not seen as being in opposition with each other but interconnected in one system, such that each item in the chain is as valuable as any other. The balance of the system depends on the welfare of all, and this balance is the harmony of all things in nature (Behrens, 2010). When considering the place of human beings in nature, according to Benezet Bujo, there is a harmony between human beings and nature as a whole, such that human existence is relative to this harmony (Bujo, 1998). Reiterating the same view, Godfrey Tangwa states that the African metaphysical worldview is about the recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful co-existence of objects in nature (Tangwa, 2004). According to Munyaradzi Murove, the well-being of human beings necessarily

depends on or is necessarily interlinked or co-exists with all that exists (Murove, 2004, 195 - 196). To some scholars, there is a sense of obligation that arises from this understanding. The obligation arises out of the need for continued existence whose requirement is the maintenance of harmony. It is in line with this view that Kofi Opoku argues that there is a community of all beings in nature such that human beings are part of that community with an obligation to respect and cooperate with it. This community is expressed in terms of identity and kinship, friendliness, and respect that exist among human beings in relation to other beings (Opoku, 1993). One other way to understand this relationship is to think of the relationships that exist in a family. Suppose that all objects in nature belong to one big family. Along this line of thinking are Odera Oruka and Calestus Juma who argue that the earth is a family unit, and the members have kith and kin relationships with one another (Oruka & Juma, 1994, 125-125). By extension, just as there are duties to promote the relationships in a family for its productivity, the same understanding can be applied to all objects in nature as belonging to one family, there are duties to promote this big family. But this duty falls on human beings because of their capacity for agency. Therefore, the basic idea here is that human beings must promote harmony with all beings in nature given that their continued existence and welfare depend on the welfare of all. This means that each being in its beingness has value or is a valuable member of the system.

Even when narrowed down to a community of human beings, there is the same sense of community that exists among them. Just as human beings see their connectedness to a larger family of beings in nature so do they see their connectedness among each other. The value ascribed to beings in nature as described above is not a value whose applicability is limited to certain (specific) kinds of beings, but it also includes each *individual* human being regardless of social status. This is the same understanding that is expressed in the famous Ubuntu phrase *"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"*

which means “a person is a person through other people” (Ramose, 2002; Shutte, 1990, 40). That is, one’s full humanity is acquired and expressed through recognition and interaction with other human beings. This view expresses some kind of interdependence between human beings or is expressed as the dependence of a human being on the community. A better rendition of this dependence is expressed in Mbiti’s dictum “I am because we are, since we are, therefore, I am” (Metz, 2017, 2012; Mbiti, 1969). Thus, one’s humanity depends on the existence of others. I discussed in the first chapter (on personhood as personal identity) that when expressed in the form of identity, it means that one’s identity is a product of these relationships. In terms of well-being, one would simply state that an individual’s well-being is dependent on the well-being of other human beings within the relationship.

The above discussion places value on the relationship. This is the highest value that individuals in a relationship seek to promote (Oyowe, 2013; Etieyibo, 2016). However, the promotion of this highest value is not to the detriment of the value of the individual members (Metz, 2012). For scholars such as Oelofsen, the value of the relationship is also promoted by the recognition of the value of each individual (Oelofsen, 2018). It is this kind of understanding about the promotion of the relationship that gives rise to a sense of duty, what in chapter one was called “other-regarding duties”. Under the Afro-communitarian worldview, human beings’ duties towards one another translate to what Wiredu calls, a system of reciprocities (Wiredu, 2008). The duties and the value obtained from performing one’s duties towards others are reciprocal in the sense that each person gets to benefit, and, in this manner, every individual is an important part of the relationship (Gyekye, 2011; Molefe, 2018).

Furthermore, given that an individual has value with respect to the relationship, and although the relationship has the highest value, the promotion of this value through the carrying out of duties

comes from the understanding that such actions fulfil the needs and interests of others It is not surprising that some scholars such as Gyekye and Wiredu, have expressed a strong connection between obligations and needs. According to Gyekye, "the attitude to, or performance of, duties is induced by a consciousness of needs rather than of rights" (Gyekye, 2010). Separating rights and needs here is a matter of emphasizing an attitude that underlies duties, which is about the promotion of the interests of the social group rather than individual interests. Nonetheless, the important point for Gyekye is that needs are shared by all human beings, and it is these needs that induce a consciousness of duty. A similar idea is shared by Wiredu who argues that "the sorts of things around which the obligations and rights revolve are all the different kinds of needs that arise in human existence and interaction" (Wiredu, 2008, 333). Thus, human beings can recognize other human needs and their fulfilment as necessary for survival. This is the same view that was presented in Plato's description of the nature of a community. Like Plato's first city, these needs are shared by all human beings and not just particular to one individual, and Wiredu expresses this view radically when he states that there is an identity of interests among human beings in a community. He expresses this view through the allegory of a crocodile with two heads and one stomach. The allegory illustrates the irrationality of two heads that are fighting for food that end up going into the same stomach. For Wiredu, there is a requirement for individuals to go beyond their superficial differences and discover identical interests that lie within them (Wiredu, 1995).

However, other scholars such as Eze push back on this view by arguing that there is no identity of interest, each head may have its irreconcilable interests, for instance, the desire to taste the food (Eze, 1997). Human beings for Eze are individualistic and have individualized needs that are at times irreconcilable. But I think Eze misses the point given that he is referring to "higher order" interests which he misconstrues for basic or "lower order" ones. That is the "lower order" one

would be the desire for food, but the "higher order" would be the taste for food, smell, etc. This is what we saw with Plato's move from a city concerned with necessary needs to one with unnecessary needs. Wiredu's notion of identity of interests refers to the most basic interests or needs that each individual can identify with as human beings or the kinds of needs that Plato saw to be necessary for survival and these needs are to an extent general for every human being with an interest in survival (Wiredu, 1995, 2001; Reeve, 2004). The same view is shared by Maslow's discussion I presented above (Maslow1943). Even when one grants Eze's view, which would to some extent be compatible with the nature of a luxurious city, a point can be made here that reconciling interests is not an impossible venture. Matolino recognizes this in his response to Eze when he states that human beings can reach a consensus on what may described as irreconcilable interests (Matolino, 2016). As mentioned above, for Mckeen, part of this process requires a redefinition of human interests (Mckeen, 2004). This redefinition is what guides communities on how to organize society for governance and social living. It is what gives rise to what society sees as the best political system. Nonetheless, the most important point is the recognition of needs as a precursor to duties.

The point here is that the recognition of common basic needs and the self-insufficiency of individuals to fulfil those needs gives rise to a sense of duty for others to take on tasks that address the needs in question. The underlying idea is the need for cooperation in the fulfilment of other's needs. This cooperation, as it occurs within a system of reciprocities, is in turn embedded in shared well-being or welfare (the notion of interdependence discussed above). Since well-being is shared, each person that makes up the relationship is valuable to the relationship. This is to reiterate Oelofsen's claim that having a productive relationship requires the recognition of the individuals who make up the relationship, and not just mere recognition of their presence but the *equal valuing*

of each member of the relationship. A relationship that devalues other members would not last given that it is the wellbeing of each member that contributes to the sustenance of the wellbeing of the relationship. In raising the issue of gender, an important implication of the claim is that the African cultural world, view as described above would not need to devalue women who are an integral part of the relationship (Oelofsen, 2018). In terms of gender inequality, then, one ought to ask, "To what extent do injustices done to other genders affect the stability of the relationship? "Would violation of women's dignity be a justification for the maintenance of harmony?" and by extension "Is the violation or discrimination justified in the fact that other members are essentially inimical to the relationship? How one answers any of these questions while considering a discussion of the important intuitions from Plato and the economic idea of specialization and the division of labour may determine whether one would accept an account of complementarity discussed below.

In summary, the point here is to understand the idea of relationality which underlies what is seen as obligations to the relationship. But I have redefined these obligations as social roles or better yet expressed (generally) as "goal-directed actions." The goal is the promotion of the relationship, or expressed in terms of the underlying view, the needs of all. But one has to keep in mind the theoretical account of the nature of social roles which was discussed under Plato's construction of cities and his idea of division of labour (or specialization). In the section below, I intend to adopt all these views in discussing an account of complementarity from an African perspective. I mainly rely on arguments and examples from Nkiru Nzegwu's presentation of gender in the Igbo tradition.

2.3.3. Understanding complementarity

It would have been easier to just present Nzegwu's (2004) account of complementarity without having the discussion above. But such an approach would be limited given that one would need an

account of social roles, and how roles have the value that they are thought to have given claims put forward under complementarity. Expressed differently, to have a proper argument for an account of complementarity requires a proper analysis of assumptions about the equal value of distinct genders. The justification for the said claims form part of the discussion above about the intuitions that I mentioned are vital for this account.

In discussing complementarity from the African perspective one of the go-to-authors is Nzegwu. Nzegwu provides an account of complementarity from the Igbo perspective (Nzegwu, 2004). The reference material I am using in this chapter does not state that Nzegwu characterizes her account as a complementary account or endorses the assumptions discussed above, instead, I get the characterization of her views as being a "complementary account of gender" as described by Oelofsen (Oelofsen, 2018, 51). Oelofsen makes a distinction between "gender complementarity" and "gender flexibility" or "gender fluidity" or what Nzegwu and Amadiume call "gender-bending" or "gender crossing" (Oelofsen, 2018, 51-52; Nzegwu, 2004, 566; Amadiume, 1997, 149).

The basic idea of gender complementarity is the equality of men and women. Equality does not have to be understood in terms of rights as in the modern discussions of gender. The idea of rights itself is suspect in most societies because of the strong emphasis it places on the individual self and to some extent at the expense of "others". For some scholars such as Menkiti (1984), rights, whatever they are, are secondary to duties. This has been part of the implicit assumption in the above discussion on relationality (Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye & Wiredu, 1992; Molefe, 2018). In thinking about equality, therefore, one ought to hold a somewhat basic idea of equality. Under this view, equality is "sameness with respect to some feature." This feature may be defined differently from one society to another. But under the current discussion and with reference to the claims I

made under rationality, equality can be generally understood as equality (of genders) in terms of value.

I discuss the conceptualization of a complementary account of gender as a departure from the traditional Western feminist views on gender. Additionally, I develop an account of gender complementarity, focusing on gender identity in relation to roles, with the notion of equality underlying both perspectives. As a point of departure, the concept of gender equality within the African cultural worldview may be surprising to someone raised in the Western tradition. Traditional Western feminist literature often emphasizes the biological differences between men and women, using these differences to determine social positions (Oyewumi, 2005; Haslanger, 2012). Consequently, these biological distinctions form the basis for the preferential treatment of men over women. This is evident in the hierarchical categorization and conceptualization of gender, where men occupy positions of privilege and dominance, while women are relegated to subordinate roles and bear the burdens of oppression. For instance, Haslanger (2012) defines a woman as an individual subordinated based on bodily features, specifically their function in biological reproduction, whereas a man is defined as an individual in a dominant position (also see Jenkins, 2016). Related traditional views (ones I alluded to earlier) posit that men are rational, and women are emotional, or as Nussbaum (1995) states, men are "walking minds" and women are "walking bodies." These views are traditional because modern feminist literature has rejected such ideas and redefined gender identities, emphasizing that women are just as equal as men (Talia, 2009; Mckitrick, 2015). Nonetheless, the underlying view of all these ascriptions of privilege and subordination, or rationality and emotionality is the false essential link between biological bodies and social identities. This is what Oyewumi calls the "Western biologic of gender" (Oyewumi, 2005). Under this bio-logic, a person is considered a woman because the individual has a particular

kind of body, and that body type defines an individual's position in society (Nussbaum, 1995; Ruth, 1990). This means redefining what it means to be a woman requires the separation of the biological from the social. For scholars such as Nzegwu, the Western bio-logic view of gender is founded on a metaphysics that is foreign to the Africans and has been imposed onto African cultures. However, for most of these cultures, it is not compatible with the social identities of individuals as well as the values held by people within their culture. Nzegwu provides an example of the Igbo culture (Nzegwu, 2004).

This brings me to the second view about social roles and gendered identities and the underlying idea of equal value. Nzegwu's (2004) view is that among the Igbo, a woman is not defined in terms of her social standing, rather the distinction between a man and a woman is merely biological. In the social space, men and women, are equal. For Nzegwu (2004), in the Igbo language, no word directly translates to the English word "woman." In the English language dictionary, a woman is an adult female human being (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). But one would notice that woman is a social term defined as biological. In gender studies, this characterization is rejected because of its limitation to include transgender individuals. But what is important is that it reflects a traditional Western view of women, a bio-logic approach. Different from this approach is the African traditional approach as informed by the Igbo language. In the Igbo language, there is no word for woman, but in ordinary usage, it comes close to the word for female which is "*nwanyi,"* and *nwanyi* refers to "female offspring." It includes both children and adult females. This means that if the English word "woman" were translated into the Igbo word *"nwanyi,"* it would not capture children given that in the English language, the word "woman" is applied to adult female human beings. The word for male is *"nwoke"* and it refers to a "male offspring." These two Igbo words

only function as biological sex markers just as English words “male” and “female”, as such they do not have social characterization.

Nzegwu (2004) further argues that these sex identities do take upon social roles which gives them social identities. For instance, *nwanyi* can also be described as *umuada* (as a lineage daughter, whereas a lineage son is *okpala*) or *inyemedi* (as a lineage wife). *Nwanyi* is a lineage daughter in so far as she is an offspring within the lineage (insider) but is a wife in so far as she married into the clan (outsider). Given this description of the wife based on being an outsider, it means that being a husband is about being an insider. This means that *nwanyi* can also be in a position of a lineage husband (in the position of *umuada*) to *inyemedi* (Nzegwu, 2004). Under this view, it is clear that not only the terms wife and husband are not attached to body type, but also stand in a hierarchical relationship. Wives are subordinates to their husbands. A view that is usually misinterpreted by Western scholars who see wives as being female only and being in a subordinate position (Momoh, 2000). However, Nzegwu is quick to say that this is not a permanent position because it is a position that is relative to others at the same time the inequality is subsumed by other considerations such as motherhood and seniority. I will say more about these positions later on. But a brief view would be that as a mother, *nwanyi* is given much respect and occupies an important position given the value of procreation. In terms of seniority, the underlying view is that one who is junior ought to respect those who are elders. Therefore, respect will vary depending on whether *nwanyi* is a junior or senior (Nzegwu, 2004; Momoh, 2000). The social identities here imply equality in two senses; firstly, is the view that women are never in a permanent subordinate position, but their position is relative to others in a lineage or family. Secondly, the distinction with men is not social but biological and this sexual difference does not have social ascriptions of permanent dominance and subordination in relation to the other sexes.

When it comes to the exercise of power and authority as well as taking up other social roles, women in the Igbo culture remain an influential force in the lineage. Nzegwu states that *Umuada* might be in a position of *inyemedi*, but even in this position, they remain influential and dominant in their natal families. They take up "juridical and peacekeeping roles" (Nzegwu, 2004, 563). This means that they are not viewed as lacking rationality or considered to be less intelligent. They have equal value to *nwoke*. Furthermore, a *nwanyi* who is successful can earn success bearer titles. These are the same titles given to successful *nwoke*. Examples of the titles include "*agwu* (tiger) *odogu* (the brave) o *bgatulu enyi* (one who felled an elephant)" etc. (Nzegwu, 2004, 564). Thus, rewarding success is not only for males but also for females. What the discussion has shown so far is the sort of relationship that exists between sexes, and it is one of equality even when translated into the social space. Men and women are considered to be equally important to society and in whatever role they find themselves in.

The value they have is also transferred to the role they perform such that their contributions are equally important. Thus, among the Igbo, a functioning society is one where women and men are considered to have equal value. It is this equal value that ties into Igbo metaphysics, which speaks to the idea of relationality that I have discussed at length above. The view is that a person is understood to be in a relationship with others and this is the thought that underlies Igbo ontology (Michael, 2018). But as indicated above, this way of understanding a relationship requires a claim about how such relationships are sustained and become productive. From Oelofsen's view, the productivity of the relationship requires a recognition of the equal value assigned to members of that relationship. Expressed in terms of men and women, this means the equal valuing of both sexes (Oelofsen, 2018). Furthermore, underlying such a view is that women and men can take up different roles, but their roles are valued because they are serving certain needs. The division of

labour ought not to be interpreted as a hierarchical ordering of value but understood in terms of the needs met. This makes their roles equally important. For instance, the need for food is satisfied by men and women taking up different roles. They are equally valuable in so far as they contribute to the survival of all. The fact that certain roles are taken up by men does not make such roles more important than the roles taken up by women. The two identities are equally valued and so are their roles.

Thus, the notion of complementarity is about how each gender is seen as carrying equal value even when there is a division of labour. This is a different kind of understanding than the *prima facie* understanding of modern policies on gender equality. For instance, the United Nations goal 5 (target 5.5) on the empowerment of women states that women ought to be in leadership and decision-making positions (United Nations, n.d.). As important as this is in terms of women being in positions where they can make decisions, it is undermined in *so far as* there is an implicit assumption that occupying a particular leadership position gives a woman the value that she lacks. This is because making such a move assumes that "the woman" has less value before the position itself, such that when "the woman" takes up that position, value is accorded to her. However, it should be noted that this view of women as subordinate members of the community has been central in Western forms of patriarchy, where men are dominant, and women are subordinate. Under this view, what a man does has more value than what a woman does. By extension, a woman will have equal value to a man if the woman does what a man does. However, as shown with an intuition adopted from my discussion on relationality, a woman has value by merely being in relationships and prior to any duty. A woman can do something completely different (as per Plato's division of labour), but what she does based on her talents is equally valuable to what a man does. What is important is not one's identity but the use of talents for the promotion of the good of all.

If the highest good is about harmony, this harmony ought to recognize the equal value of all members who make up the relationship (Bujo, 1998; Metz, 2012, 2017; Oelofsen, 2018).

It is this notion of complementarity that I consider to be present in the African cultural worldview, with an example of the Igbo, where men and women are equal. Concerning the nature of roles, it is the argument I have made above about the connection between roles and needs. If one wants to get too technical in identifying the nature of each role and the specific needs fulfilled, then one ought to dive deep into Igbo cultural practices, a task I consider to be beyond the scope of this paper. My presentation was merely about the notion of complementarity, a discussion on the connection between needs and roles was merely based on Plato's view of division of labour. But I believe this view underlies what is considered to be the nature of social roles in the African context as shown by references made to Gyekye and Wiredu. As shown at the beginning of the chapter, this is not the only account of gender that is found in the literature, there is another account called gender, gender fluidity.

2.4. **The "fluidity" account of gender**

There are different ways of identifying this conception of gender in the African context. Other names include "gender-bending," "gender crossing" and "gender fluidity" (Amadiume, 1997; Nzegwu, 2004; Oelofsen, 2018). A prominent scholar to whom I attribute the account is Amadiume, who was writing about gender in Nnobi society (Amadiume, 1987). Just like Nzegwu above, Amadiume does not reject that there is gender among the Igbo and also questions the imposition of Western understanding of gender onto African cultures. While both Nzegwu and Amadiume write about the same culture, what is interesting here is that the two, regardless of the many similarities in their accounts, seem to come to two different conceptions. It is in considering

this difference, which has also been observed by Oelofsen, that I decided to argue for a distinct account of gender with reference to Amadiume's views.

Thus, the flexibility account and the complementary account are both ascribed to the Igbo people, but these are two different approaches to gender. The differences are minor, and they rest on the tenets of the theories. I consider the underlying premise of gender fluidity to be the inequality between men and women, whereas, with complementary account, it is the equality of men and women. The inequality I am appealing to rests on a distinction between the implication of matriarchy and patriarchy on the position of men and women in society. By "position" I am referring to the sense in which men and women can be understood as sharing benefits in the society. The inequality is reflected in the view that either gender enjoys certain benefits that the other gender does not. But whether the lack of having a share in a benefit ought to be interpreted as a burden to that gender is a different question. What determines what gender enjoys a benefit depends on the social order that is adopted. Thus, under patriarchy, men will have an advantage over inheritance whereas under matriarchy, women have the advantage over men. While these two social orders are seen as different, in this chapter and the conceptualization of the fluidity account, I will show that the two are not mutually exclusive.

2.4.1. Making sense of gender fluidity

Gender fluidity is not like gender complementarity which is merely about the equality of men and women. Gender fluidity is mostly about gender identity and gender expression (Kate, 2016). One of the central tenets of the conception is the change in one's gender identity or expression over time and this change might happen more than once. Identity and expression can change either simultaneously or where one obtains without the other. Thus, there are three ways of understanding gender fluidity, The first scenario would be a person who changes one's identity but maintains

one's expression. A second scenario would be a person who changes one's expression but maintains one's own identity; and a third one is where changes occur in both identity and expression (Katz-Wise, 2020).

When it comes to gender fluidity, there are two approaches to understanding this notion. On the one hand, gender fluidity as described above, represents a phenomenon explaining changes in one's identity and expression. On the other hand, it is not just about changing identity, but the actual identity an individual could hold. According to the latter, suppose a person asserts that "P is gender fluid" to refer to an "identity" the individual holds. In asserting this statement, the individual is expressing the proposition that the person does not identify with the binary genders. However, there is a temptation here to identify this view of "gender fluidity" as an identity with a "transgender" identity. While the two may appear similar, being gender fluid is not necessarily the same as being transgender. One way this distinction has been cashed out is in the nature of change. Here is an example of a transgender identity. Suppose there is a boy who has a birth certificate stating that he is male (as gender). Suppose the child has had this identity for quite some time and then later when he is old enough, say in his early 20s, decides to identify as a girl. Suppose the newly found identity is what the person is now happy with and keeps for the rest of her life. This is an example of a transgender identity. But when it comes to gender fluidity, it is something that subsumes transgender. For example, suppose the boy before becoming a girl decides to remain non-binary for some time, and then later, at age 30, decides to identify as a boy again. This is a clear case of gender fluidity given that the changes have occurred more than once (Katz-Wise, 2020). In short, gender-fluid individuals can choose to identify as transgender or non-binary.

Given the definition of fluidity above, there is a sense in which one would argue for gender fluidity among the Igbo. If fluidity is about changing one's identity and expression, one ought to ask about

the sense in which identities changed among the Igbo. Furthermore, changes in identity also reveal the ways in which Igbo people view gender. For them, gender is a social construction, something that is not rooted in biology (Nzegwu, 2004). I discussed the view that there is a distinction between biological bodies and social gender. Therefore, the separation of the biological body and social identity implies that changes in social identity as an indication of gender fluidity have nothing or less to do with changes in the biological makeup of the individual. The latter, if it happens, ought to be considered to be a matter of individual choice and not necessarily a requirement of gender fluidity. This choice is reflected in the view that sometimes people make sense of gender by appealing to the appearance of their bodies. But the point is that social identity can change without making any changes to one's body.

The above understanding has implications on how fluidity can be understood among the Igbo. This means that gender fluidity ought not to necessarily require women to change their biological bodies through some medical procedures to suit their new identity. Furthermore, it does not necessarily require women to present themselves based on certain norms associated with men such as dressing, walking, manner of speaking, etc. This idea is central to how gender identity changes among the Igbo without necessarily changing gender expression. Since my focus is on identity, I will not dwell much on social roles as I did with the first conception. A focus on roles risks conflating gender fluidity for gender complementarity. But as mentioned earlier, the two conceptions are not mutually exclusive such that to understand fluidity, one ought to have a certain conception of roles because some of the identities concerned are identities in virtue of performing certain roles *(see* Igo Kopytoff in a discussion on role-based identities, Kopytoff, 2005).

2.4.2. Gender fluidity among the Igbos

The idea of gender fluidity among the Igbos appeals to how one understands certain identities and understanding identities seems to go hand in hand with how one understands the status of men and women among the Igbo. Given the above explanation of the views about fluidity, when I talk about fluidity in this part of the chapter, I am appealing to the notions of "identity" and "expression," but mainly identity. This appeal is not wrong because as I have indicated above, one (identity or expression) would be obtained without the other. However, it must be mentioned that there is more to the discussion than a simple notion of identity. It is mostly about how the identities in question relate to the overall social system, whether they belong to a patriarchal or matriarchal order. The underlying assumption is that the gender identities in question do not have the same status, and again, this is informed by a social system. A particular identity would seem to enjoy the distribution of benefits and burdens more than the other. One conception of benefit I will use in discussing fluidity is inheritance *vis-à-vis* dominant lineage.

Understanding patriarchy and matriarchy among the Igbos is itself a major point of discussion, more especially, when the question is about "who gets to inherit what." However, I do not intend to discuss patriarchy and matriarchy in detail at this point because it is not the focus of this chapter. Instead, I will only present a few points about these social systems, and these points relate to how gender identities are positioned in the social system. When it comes to patriarchy and matriarchy in the African context, some scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Amadiume make a strong claim that African family structures are matriarchal, and patriarchy is an inherited system (Diop, 1991; Amadiume, 1987). For Diop, this contention was made considering the higher social status that women in precolonial societies occupied in their societies than in the traditional Western societies (Diop, 1991). Amadiume then argues that the transformation from matriarchy to patriarchy (or a juxtaposed society) can be traced to colonial, Islamic and Christian influence on

the African continent (Amadiume, 1987). There are questions about the misrepresentation of African cultures, a move that tends to mask Islamic, Christian and colonial influence on these cultures.

Thus, there might be those who would object to this claim given that much of the literature about African societies does not portray these societies as matriarchal but patriarchal. Amadiume and other Afrocentric writers have expressed distrust with a lot of the literature about African societies (Clacke, 1984; Amadiume, 1987).[10] Biko was not an exception when he stated that the history of African cultures was reconstructed to suit colonial ideology. He argues that African history was misrepresented to justify white supremacy or privilege while violating the humanity of African people (Biko, 1977). Furthermore, such a misrepresentation of African cultures comes from a Eurocentric tradition, whereby scholars wrote about African cultures using European lenses (Amadiume, 1987; Cheikh Anta Diop, 1989). This failure to critically look at African cultures for what they are is influenced by tendencies to generalize concepts to cultures that may be different. A tendency Etieyibo calls "Western universalism" which exhorts the Western cultures as more important and undermines the value of other cultures (Etieyibo, 2016). Momoh adds that most Eurocentric scholars failed to see African cultures for what they are because they could not understand the difference between their own culture and African culture, such that they made sense of African culture from their perspective (Momoh, 2000). This led to the imposition of Western cultural logic and metaphysical concepts in African culture (Amadiume, 1987). It is not a surprise that Wiredu's call for decolonization speaks to the "elimination of Western modes of thought that came through colonization and remain in our thinking owing to inertia rather than our own

[10] By Afrocentric writers, I refer to those scholars who centre the experiences, perspectives, and contributions of African people and their descendants in the analysis and interpretation of history, culture, and society. As Molefi Kete Asante, states it is when one aims to "recentre African people in their own narratives and reclaim their cultural heritage from a history of marginalization and distortion within dominant Western narratives" (Asante, 2003, 2).

reflective choices" (Wiredu, 2002, 56). The basic idea here is the removal of Western epistemological underpinnings that have been presented as part of the African culture.

Therefore, patriarchy and matriarchy are social systems whose position in the African cultural worldview can be understood by undertaking the work of separating Western influences on African cultures. Even if this work is done, just as Amadiume and other Afro-centric scholars have done, it remains an undeniable fact that there is patriarchy and matriarchy in African cultures today (Amadiume, 1987; Oyewumi, 2005). The question is to understand how these social systems affect the relationship between individuals in society. Considering the present discussion, the point is how these social systems affect the relationship or interaction of men and women in a society, gender. Put differently, how they influence the conceptualization of gender identity. This is part of the task in this chapter. The intuition is that there is something about patriarchy as a system that has a bearing on gender fluidity. The assumption is that if one has patriarchy in mind, the identity of being a man or a woman in this social order has a bearing on one's social status. Gender fluidity underlies how men and women navigate their societies with respect to inheritance and marriage. To discuss this claim, let me start by offering a discussion of the identities (that are considered fluid) among the Igbo.

2.4.3. Gender fluid identities: female husbands and male daughters

An account of fluidity I appeal to in this chapter is about two main identities common among the Igbo people of Nigeria and these are "male daughters" and "female husbands" (Amadiume, 1987, 15). The terms "*male* daughter" and "*female* husband" are confusing titles at first glance, because of what the simple words refer to. They are confusing because the terms "male" and "female" are biological terms or sex markers, but they seem to be used as gender (or social) terms. one would assume a "female" person (biologically), who is a daughter (socially), decides to go for a medical

operation to become “male” by changing some bodily features. This then fits nicely with the meaning of a daughter who has become male, where the term “male” (a sex term) is a qualifier. Similarly, the identity of “female husband” assumes that husbands are always male, but as discussed in Nzegwu’s presentation, being a husband does not necessarily mean one is male (Nzegwu, 2004). This means that these identities (as compound words) do not have the direct meaning that can be obtained from the English (dictionary) meaning of their simple words. One ought to look at what these identities stand for among the Igbo as gender identities.

It would seem that the explanation offered above deals with the tension associated with the identities in question. But there is another concern in the literature about an implication that comes up when one questions the “bearers” of the identities in question. The worry is that the bearers of the identities are only females, and they acquire titles that are presumably “male-centred.” That is, females acquire the identities that are assumed to be the preserve of males (Magadla, Magoqwana & Motsemme, 2021). Think of the identity “male daughter,” for example, it suggests that there is a female person who has acquired a male status. The same goes for the “female husband” (Nzegwu, 2004). In light of all this, one may simply suggest that there is something about how a male person is perceived in this society, which prompts a cultural requirement for females to take up male identities. The argument I make, which also forms the foundational premise for understanding gender fluidity, is that there is a patriarchal social order at work. This is reflected in the conditions for inheritance and marriage as defined by a patriarchal system. These conditions spell out the context for an individual to be a female individual to be a bearer of the male identities in question. To understand these worries and the assumptions behind them, let me discuss these titles.

2.4.3.1. Male daughter

To be a male daughter means to acquire a title that allows one to be identified as a "male person" with responsibilities that would have otherwise been carried out by the male person. Thus, it is *prima facie* a male role that is not taken by any mere female unless special conditions call for it. By special conditions, I am referring to the view that there are reasons why certain females who stand in a particular position within their family or lineage group would be given this identity. However, the basic view is that to be a male daughter is to be in a position where one would be eligible for inheritance. It is merely an institution that ensures that wealth or resources remain within the family (Nzegwu, 2004). According to Nzegwu's presentation, the identity male daughter has two senses to it.

In one sense, one has in mind a daughter who may either choose to remain in her marriage or end her marriage and return to her natal family where the daughter may have children born through a paramour. These children belong to the family or lineage of the daughter regardless of the paramour (Nzegwu, 2004, 567). The reason is that there is no bride price paid to the daughter. More importantly, there is a reason why the daughter ought to have the children in the first place, and this is the need for the continued existence of the lineage and the preservation of the family's resources (Nwoko, 2012). The assumption is that the daughter's family does not have an apparent heir, and so the daughter takes on this responsibility which will be passed down to the children. But more important is that underlying this view is a patriarchal social order at work. Under patriarchy, it is the woman who moves to the husband's clan and everything she had in her natal home would be lost to the husband's family. Even the children that she has belong to the husband's lineage, they would take upon a husband's family name. Therefore, the institution of the male daughter is meant to preserve family inheritance where she takes on a role that would have otherwise been taken up by a male firstborn son of bearing children who inherit and remain within

the family or lineage and carry on the family name. In this case, the inheritance can remain within the daughter's natal family (Nzegwu, 2004; Amadiume, 1987).

Another sense involves cases where "there is no male successor to pass on the family name, and there is no wife of a childbearing age in the compound to produce a male child" (Nzegwu, 2004, 567). In this case, the daughter refrains from marriage to continue safeguarding the family's name and property (Amadiume, 1987; Nzegwu, 2004, 567). To add to this view, the childless daughter may be given a right to marry a wife who will bear children and carry on her father's family name. In this case, she becomes the female husband (Amadiume, 1987; Ukpokolo, 2010; Korie, 2017). The point here is not that the daughter produces children with a man who does not pay lobola whether out of choice or arrangement, but that she finds a wife for herself. I discuss female husbands below.

Whatever sense obtains, the motive remains the same, making sure that inheritance remains within the family. It is along these two senses that the identity of a male daughter is understood. One is a male daughter in virtue of taking up responsibilities that would under standard circumstances have been taken up by a son or male person. Since identity hinges on the fact that one is performing certain roles, it is important to understand that this is a role-based identity. This leads to the question of whether an individual would change her identity (again) if the role was no longer performed (Kopytoff, 2005). That is, say the daughter bears a male child who becomes the apparent heir in the family line, does the daughter stop being the male daughter or continue to be seen as a male daughter? I ignore this question for now because I am not necessarily concerned with the question of the persistence of a particular identity. My focus is merely to understand the sense or condition in which a particular identity, male daughter, is acquired.

2.4.3.2. Female husband

Another identity worth discussing is that of female husband, also known as woman-to-woman marriages. Like male daughters, the institution of "female husbands" was an established but not common practice among the Igbo as entailed by the conditions for becoming a female husband. There are different conditions or senses of understanding female husbands and these include barrenness and economic prosperity or success. When there is a barren couple, for example, a wife (W1) would decide to have children by marrying her wife (W2). The children would in this case belong to the W1 (Urama, 2019; Amadiume, 1987). According to Urama, same-sex marriages in Igbo culture were instituted to solve the problems of barrenness and male-child inheritance. Another instance would be a single and mature successful (wealthy) woman who decides to marry another wife. In the literature, this second sense is presented as a common one among the Igbo, where a successful woman who had acquired a title would marry a wife and sometimes even more than one wife. The husband had rights just as a male husband would have over her wife (Amadiume, 1987). But there are questions about whether this is a form of lesbianism.

According to Nwoko, a woman-to-woman marriage is not the same as lesbianism because the basis of such a marriage is not sexual attraction or driven by sexual emotions, something commonly associated with the latter. Instead, the former is best understood as an instrument of the preservation of patriarchy and its traditions (Nwoko, 2012, 69). In addition, Nzegwu (2004) states that some of the women who became female husbands were already in a conjugal marital relationship with a male partner. At the same time, the wife was in a sexual relationship with a male partner. Other scholars argue that female husbands completely stopped having any sexual relations (Oboler, 1980).

However, in cases where she would be married to a male partner, it raises questions about the structure of the relationship. According to Amadiume, female husbands had the title "*dibuno"*, a

genderless title which means master of a household or family (Amadiume, 1987). But as Nzegwu states, if a female husband would have a partner, then this partner ought not to have been staying in the house otherwise one would wonder about the one who was in the position of being the head of the family (Amadiume, 1987; Nzegwu, 2004). On the one hand, this structure would imply that there are two husbands and two wives, with one of the partners having a duo role of being a husband and a wife at the same time depending on the reference point of understanding her relationship. If the reference is a male figure, she is a wife, if the reference is a female figure, she is a husband. A pure patriarchal system would translate this as a polygamous union. But given the nature of marriage, it cannot be interpreted as polygamy because the man is not in a direct relationship of being a husband to W2. In extreme cases, say among the Kuria of Kenya and some parts of Tanzania, a female husband's wife would be barren that she should marry another her wife until a male child is born to secure the inheritance (Kjerland, 1998).

There are two important underlying views from the above discussion. One is the view that in the Igbo cultural worldview, women would become successful (even more) than men such that they would earn titles and be in a position of becoming female husbands. The mere acquisition of the title itself speaks volumes when it comes to her social position. This means that they had the same privilege of being "success" title bearers as men. The second and related view is the ability of women to marry other women but in the case of a woman, more importantly, the implication of this view on her gender. That is, whether she gets to be treated as a man. Whether it is right to ascribe a gender identity man to a female husband is a born of contention with the literature, with most scholars converging over an affirmative answer to the question. It should be noted that these two implications say something about patriarchy and the power it affords to men. Men are in a dominant position than women (Sultan, 2010/2011).

To explain the patriarchal undertone in the implications, let me appeal to the notion of power. The claim is that in this (patriarchal) social system, it seems that men have more power than women, such that when the woman marries other wives, she goes through the same process a man goes through and she has the same privilege and rights over another woman just as the man. In other words, she acquires the power that normally is afforded to men. By having this power or status, she also dominates other women (Lindsay, 2017). The reason I make a connection between power and men is that there is a sense in which Igbo men are socialized. Much of the literature on the Igbo suggests that Igbo men are socialized into masculinity. By masculinity, I have in mind Igbo's equation of masculinity with virility, valour, authority, and even the idea of men as providers and protectors of their families which gives them a sense of leadership (Amadiume, 1987, 93-94; Oluwagbemi-Jacob & Uduma, 2015, 227). Amadiume acknowledges that the institution of "female husbands" placed women in a position where they could acquire wealth, formal political power and authority (Amadiume, 1987). The basic view here is that the enjoyment of power and its requirement in taking on a man's position highlights the view that there is a patriarchal social system at work. Under this system, men have more power than women.

From the above view, the claim is that there is a *prima facie* distinction between men's and women's identities in terms of the privileges they enjoy. Men's privilege shows that they have more power than women. It is only by appealing to this difference that I understand gender fluidity. Gender is fluid in this case by asking a question about the gender of a female husband, just as one would ask about the gender of a male daughter. One scholar who raises this question is Regina Smith Oboler (Oboler, 1980). This question suggests that a female husband does become a man or remains a woman or becomes non-binary, that is, without any specific identification with binary genders. That is, a woman would simply state the role of being a female husband without specifically

identifying as a man or woman.[11] Given my definition and explanation of gender fluidity above, two responses would be fitting for "female husband" to be an example of a gender-fluid identity. Thus, either the female husband becomes a man or non-binary. I exclude the female husband remaining a woman because this would be gender mixing (or just another case of gender complementary) and less about fluidity (see Carrier & Murray, 2021, 258).

Evans Pritchard argues that female husbands are (have become) men because they marry just like a man, and they pay the bride price for the wife and the children belong to her just as they also acquire her family name (Pritchard, 1951, 108-109). In addition, one would argue that she is a man because the transfer of property from her to her sons (sons of the wife she married) occurs in societies where the conditions only apply to a man, as such a female husband is a man (Oboler, 1980). According to Nwoko, to be a female husband is to be a male in status (not biology). The female husband is treated like a man, and she is seen as a "first among equals." Her opinion is valued, and she is even allowed to break kola, a practice that is reserved for males (Nwoko, 2012; Collins, 2000). Female husbands could also attend male initiation ceremonies (Oboler, 1080). A somewhat different view comes from Jensen Eileen Krige who argues that they are non-binary but does not offer whether this position is itself another gender category (Krige, 1974). But one would notice that the gender question seems to imply that a female husband is a man because (generally) men tend to be husbands and women tend to be wives. But if this assumption is not made, woman-to-woman marriages (with respect to the gender question) would be characterized differently. For instance, Hugo Huber in writing about the Simiti found east of Lake Victoria, states that people

[11] While acknowledging the fluidity of gender, it should be noted that in traditional African societies, emphasis was placed on personal standing in one's community and less on gender. The organizing principle of society was age and lineage (Robertson, 1987; Momoh, 2000; Oyewumi, 2005). I will come back to this point in chapter four (on gender and personhood in traditional societies) where I discuss whether the gender question can be raised against African societies. For now, it would be of help to offer some views in the literature on the gender of female husbands while acknowledging the fundamental problems of raising the gender question.

never called a "woman" one who was in a role or relationship of a husband to another woman. The two women are mainly mother-in-law (W1) and daughter-in-law (W2). According to Huber, the Simiti have a saying, "*okoteta mokamona wa nyumba ntobu*," which translates as "to give cattle for a *daughter-in-law* on behalf of a poor house" where the "poor house" is about W1 with no male child (Huber, 1968, 746). The emphasis here is not so much about a gender identity much one's position in the lineage (refer to Nzegwu's discussion of the Igbo under gender complementarity).

The main point from the above discussion is that "female husbands" as an identity marker reflect gender fluidity. I discussed gender fluidity as a change in identity and expression. I have shown above that the newly acquired identities are an actual change in identity in the community because it opens up privileges in the social space that the woman would have otherwise not had. These privileges are allotted to special identities as part of how the community defines the interaction between its members. This shows that this is an actual change in identity, not a mere title-grabbing or a language game. There is a deeper sense of change in identity that is reflected in the way a female husband acquires new responsibilities and starts to operate with different norms. In the third chapter, I explain the relationship between norms and identity.

One important point to make is that as much as I have referred to patriarchy and matriarchy, an underlying view is that the version of patriarchy discussed in this chapter is different from the traditional Western notion of patriarchy. I illustrated this view with Nzegwu's notion of complementarity that women are never in the permanent subordinate position in the African cultural worldview (Lindsay, 2017; Oluwagbemi-Jacob & Uduma, 2015; Nzegwu, 2004). There are different identities that women have in society that allow them to be in superior positions. Momoh shows that one would find women in better positions as diviners or priestesses, queens and kings, soldiers or even bodyguards to the king, etc. (Momoh, 2005). Amadiume's view that

African societies are known to have been matriarchal implies that the transformation to patriarchy which came with religion and colonization meant a juxtaposition of the two systems (Amadiume, 1987). Nwoko sees the juxtaposition as a system with checks and balances, the matrilineal system controls the excess use of power of the patrilineal system (Nwoko, 2012, 72). Regardless of the co-existence of the systems and the nature of the juxtaposition, the argument I make is that the mediation even when giving women power, is one that ends up preserving certain patriarchal ideals as defined by inheritance and marriage. In special cases, as shown above, women have to become men for them to marry and inherit.

2.5. Conclusion

I close the discussion on the conceptions of gender in this chapter by providing some of the important views that come from the discussion. The first point made was concerning the methodological question that a person might raise while reading the chapter. One way I cashed this out was to state that one ought to be aware of the newness of the topic of gender identity and roles, or gender in general, in African Philosophy. As a new topic, there are only a few articles and books that one can rely on as a foundation for understanding gender, especially from the African philosophical perspective. Furthermore, it is not surprising that much of the literature on gender tends to respond to Western universalization of gender (Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005). The conceptions of gender I have discussed in this chapter are those that I consider to be heavily supported by the African cultural worldview. The conceptions come from African scholars who have made claims based on African values but tend to be presented as a reaction to Western universalization.

Secondly, and most importantly, is the view that gender is a rich field and there is never a single approach to it. Some understand gender from the perspective of roles men and women play in a family and society, and from such a view, argue that regardless of the role men and women perform they have equal value. This is the notion of complementarity I have provided in this chapter. For instance, children are socialized into different roles in Igbo culture. Boys are responsible for climbing trees whereas girls are responsible for gathering fruits. The allocation of this role to girls is not because they are the weaker sex and so cannot climb the trees but to avoid exposing the private parts of a girl to the public. This means that climbing trees is not more important than gathering fruits. The roles are equally valuable, and this equal value comes from the fact that the individuals carrying them out also have equal value as a requirement of a productive relationship. This is the sense of complementarity I presented in the chapter. Another way of understanding gender I discussed was a focus on gender identity and implications on the status of persons in a community. This is what I discussed as a fluidity account. I argued that gender fluidity can be understood from how women change their identities to become male daughters and female husbands. I showed the sense that this is a change in identity and expression (where one can obtain without the other) because it gives the woman privileges that are assigned to the gender of a man. I looked at the notion of inheritance and marriage.

Furthermore, a fundamental point to the conceptions discussed in this chapter is that these two accounts are different but not mutually exclusive. Related in the sense that they show that most roles in a community are not gender specific, men can take on women's roles and vice versa. However, the two can be separated. Thus, complementarity appeals more to equality, and on a deeper level, this separates it from fluidity. The reason is that with fluidity there is a sense in which women don't need to do what men can do, but they are doing what men can do only if they become

men. This was the case with examples of inheritance or marriage. I argued that this reflects a patriarchal social order at work, an order that sees women and men as unequal.

But a question that one would raise in reading the chapter is whether these two conceptions are the only way of understanding gender in the African context. An affirmative answer would be limiting the discipline and closing off the discussion. There are questions that one can raise with respect to these accounts. The accounts themselves fail to provide answers to the questions and so demand the development of another conception of gender. This is part of the task in the next chapter where I present a relational account of gender.

CHAPTER THREE

A PROPOSED RELATIONAL ACCOUNT OF GENDER IN AN AFRO-COMMUNITARIAN WORLDVIEW

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed some conceptions of gender from the African context, mainly the complementary account and the fluidity account of gender. One of the claims made towards the end of the chapter was that these two accounts help flesh out African views on gender with the assumption that some of what has been considered African conceptions of gender are a mere *imposition* of Western metaphysical categories of gender. However, these accounts are not helpful when it comes to understanding "gender" as a concept. Nonetheless, this is more of a general problem of African philosophy as a discipline given the newness of gender discussions than the accounts themselves (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). This chapter attempts to provide an account of gender from an African cultural worldview. That is, I seek to show how gender may be conceptualized and the resources one would use to define gender. I am not discussing whether gender identity is fluid nor the complementarity of roles, my focus is on the question "What is gender?"

One can attempt to answer this question by looking at the African philosophical literature, but again, given the newness of the topic, there is little material to appeal to. Nonetheless, aside from the little African philosophical literature, there are attempts in the Western analytic tradition to discuss the concept of gender. Examples of philosophical literature on the concept of gender identity include but are not limited to the dispositional account by Jennifer Mckitrick (2015) where gender is a disposition to behave in a particular way. The performative account by Judith Butler

(2002), where gender is constructed through repetitive acts and their effects. The self-identification account by Talia Bettcher (2009) where gender is a matter of how one identifies oneself. The norm relevance account by Katherine Jenkins (2016, 2018) where gender is a matter of relevant norms that define one's identity. As mentioned above, these accounts can be traced to the Western tradition, and thus, they have metaphysical foundations supported by that tradition or worldview. In other words, discussions on what counts as gender tend to be premised on an individualistic worldview. The individual is considered the primary concern of value compared to the community which is secondary. It is for this reason that I am not concerned with discussing the accounts of gender. To this extent, I seek to do analytical work on gender by appealing to metaphysical foundations supported by an African cultural worldview, with the assumption that the community takes priority over the individual.

The chapter aligns itself with debates on determinants of gender identity. That is, whether gendered identities can be conceptualized as innate, socially constructed, or self-chosen based on various factors. The conceptualization of gender identity as innate locates gender in some biological features such as hormones, chromosomes, etc., (Zhu & Cai, 2006). To be a woman under this view would be to point to an innate or inherent faculty that a person possesses as definitive of one's gender identity. But one would wonder whether this attempt does not conflate gender with sex, and so scholars argued for the separation of the two. Some early feminist writers such as Simone de Beauvoir (1973) made an outright rejection of biological gender stating that a person is neither born gendered nor destined to be gendered but that gender is acquired through socialization. Similarly, Oyewumi (2005) has characterized gender as a social construction, rejecting biology as destiny. For Oyewumi (2005), gender is a social kind, a product of socialization, and not a natural kind, it does not exist independent of human beings. This means that there must be a time, a people,

and a place where a gender ideology was constructed. However, gender as socially constructed could equally imply that gender is either defined by the community and conferred onto individuals, or that gender is self-chosen, a choice made independent of the community. Thus, there can be two distinct positions that can be analyzed independently of each other, the community-based identity *vis-à-vis* individual-based identity. Let me call these positions "radical". In this chapter, I present a moderate position, an inclusive approach that incorporates aspects of both individual agency and social belonging.

The moderate position's basic view is that the community essentially defines gendered identities. A simplistic standard version of the argument could be formulated as follows:

P1. Norms essentially define gendered identities.

P2. The community essentially defines norms.

C. The community essentially defines gendered identities.

To flesh out the above argument, I will discuss several important views. I start by discussing the problem of gender and gender identity from an African cultural worldview appealing to some empirical problems. I use this discussion to show the motivation for the proposal I make. But when it comes to the actual argument or proposal, start by discussing the view that identity is a product of the community (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Molefe, 2019). I appeal to Molefe's (2017) conception of personhood as personal identity. Molefe does not discuss gendered identities, but I apply his views to the discussion about gendered identities. Following this discussion, I look at how gendered identities may be defined. I adopt Jenkins' (2018) norm relevancy account of gender to show that gender is defined by norms, and by appealing to Menkiti (1984), I argue that norms are defined by the community. Hence the conclusion, gendered identities are essentially defined

by the community. Furthermore, I offer an account of how individuals adopt gender identity. I argue that since individuals learn norms as they participate in the life of the community, part of the learning process accounts for the adoption of gender (gendered) identities. I look at how individuals adopt gender identity by appealing to the process of maturation. I then consider a discussion of the virtues of the account. One possible interpretation and what I consider to be one of the virtues of the account is that gendered identities are understood in normative terms. This explains the social nature of identities and why they become complex over time given people's changing preferences in the interpretation of norms. I will come back to this view later.

3.2. Problem of gender identity

In this section, I limit my focus to some brief theoretical and practical views highlighting the problem of gender identity. As a theoretical account, I appeal to the philosophical problems of understanding gender as a concept whereas, in practical terms, I focus on political/social problems of gender identity as they manifest in various African communities. While philosophical discussions tend to focus on the former, there is more attraction in confirming theory with practice. The treatment of individuals in the community with respect to their gender elicits questions among philosophers seeking to understand whether the problem relates to how gender is defined in the first place. This is just one of the many ways one would cash out the relationship between the two. Nonetheless, when discussing the problem of gender (identity) from a theoretical perspective, one may simply appeal to the scholarly attempts to define gender as well as the problems facing the accounts. For instance, one may point to the above-listed accounts, the dispositional, norm relevancy, performativity, etc., as well as problems facing these accounts (Jenkins, 2016, 2018; Butler, 2002; Mckitrick, 2015). The debate helps us appreciate how much of a problem gender is and whether it is different from other identities such as sex, race, and class (Haslanger, 1995;

Butler, 1999; Byrne, 2020). One of the issues with the above-listed accounts associated with the Western philosophical tradition is that they are not clear on the metaphysical foundations underpinning them. One may assume that they have an individualistic metaphysical foundation given the tradition of philosophy within which they are found. But as pointed out, discussing these accounts is beyond the scope of my paper. In addition, one may also appeal to accounts discussed in the last chapter, the complementary account, and the fluidity accounts as well as the problem of the universalization of Western views of gender (Amadiume, 1987; Nzegwu, 2004; Oelofsen, 2018; Oyewumi, 2005). Again, the problem is that the accounts I have discussed so far (see Chapter Two for a discussion) do not offer an account of what gender is. They help flesh out how gender is flexible or how certain roles are complementary but do not offer an account of gender itself. As such, one would conclude that there is indeed a gap in the literature on the analytical work on gender. This chapter is an attempt to close this theoretical gap. Importantly, I close the gap by appealing to the metaphysical foundations supported by the African cultural context or worldview.

Just as there are theoretical shortfalls, so are some practical ones embedded in a social-political context. Practically, the problem of gender cannot be underrated. Almost every constitution of the African nation has a section on gender. It is not a secret that gender is one of the major social issues facing African countries today, whether in terms of expression, education, health, employment, political representation, etc. While there are efforts to close the gender gap in most African countries with reference to the agenda 2030, 2063, Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evidence of gender disparity in the aforementioned areas remains high (Mutume, 2005; UNICEF, 2022). When it comes to gender identities, African countries have taken different positions on how non-binary identities are recognized. For instance,

some countries such as South Africa have enacted laws to recognize non-binary identities, some countries such as Uganda have made laws to criminalize them, and in some countries such as Malawi, the position remains unclear (Gevisser, 2014; Sarah, Winkler & Stephen, 2020). The point is that gender (whether it captures roles or identity) remains a problem in most African countries, and a proper solution comes from understanding what "gender" is.

The point is that whether the problems seem to be practical or theoretical, there is one question that underlies them, "what is gender?" The same question can be framed (among the many ways), "Who/what is a man?" or "Who/what is a woman?" that having the identity in question warrants a specific form of treatment. I argue that the definition of these identities appeals to norms. That is, there are certain expectations or demands that the community places on its members and these are framed as norms. The norms spell out how individuals interact and what they expect from each other. Gender identity as a social identity through which individuals navigate the social space and express their personhood, is defined in terms of norms that guide this interaction. Since the community defines the norms, it then defines gendered identities. This view implies that just as the community licenses or regulates the norms, it also licenses or regulates these identities. Therefore, it is not surprising that the community determines what identities are recognized and that the recognition itself differs from one context to another depending on the norms. The task of this chapter is to discuss this view.

The conception of norms I have in mind follows Geoffrey Brennan, Lina Eriksson, Robert Goodin, and Nicholas Southwood's characterization of norms. According to these scholars, norms are socially accepted practices or principles of action. This is slightly distinct from considering norms as habits or objectively valid rules. In terms of habit, one might say, "It is a norm for most households in South Africa to eat boerewors once a week." This sense of using a norm only

suggests that one is referring to a habit or character that seems to be identified with most South Africans but may not necessarily conceived as an accepted social practice. As an objective rule, a norm may refer to a requirement of a normative theory. Brennan et al. (2013), provide an example of a utilitarian requirement of sacrificing oneself to save a thousand other persons. While this may be said to be a norm of a theory, in terms of being a rule, it is doubtful one would argue that it is a socially accepted practice (Brennan, Eriksson, Goodin & Southwood, 2013). Therefore, when I refer to norms in this chapter, I refer to socially accepted practices such that anything that subverts this practice would have consequences in the community.

Therefore, having highlighted some of the problems associated with gender identity as the motivation for the intervention I make, I now turn to flesh out the argument in more detail. Again, here is the standard argument:

P1. Norms essentially define gendered identities.

P2. The community essentially defines norms.

C. The community essentially defines gendered identities.

As pointed out in my introduction, the argument (mainly the conclusion) is premised on a fundamental assumption in the Afro-communitarian worldview, that the community defines an individual's gender identity. In the next section, I consider the relationship between the community and the individual to understand this fundamental assumption.

3.3. Identity as a product of the community

In the African philosophical literature, understanding the notion of identity requires understanding the relationship between the individual and the community. However, discussions of the latter are usually flamed, broadly, in debates between individualism and communitarianism (Menkiti, 1984,

2004; Gyekye, 1987; Matolino, 2009). My concern is not to show whether individualism or communitarianism is better; my interest lies in understanding the place (or position) an individual occupies in the community and the implication of having this position (relative to the community) in the understanding of the social self or identity. My concern is to present a distinction between these two ideologies to contextualize my conception of gender, a view that I take to rest on Afro-communitarianism.

3.3.1. Individualism vis-a-vis communitarianism

Individualism is a worldview that focuses on the value of the individual *qua* individual. The basic idea of individualism is the elevation of the interests of the individual above those of the community (Masolo, 2004; Lukes, 2023). This ultimate value or respect given to the individual is rooted in the recognition of certain facts about individuals, and these may include innate capacities, desires, beliefs, and actions (Lukes, 2023). Darwall (1977) expresses this view as recognition respect, which he argues, is the kind of respect that is given to individuals through the recognition of certain features that they have, such as autonomy, will, memory, etc. (also see Gyekye, 1992). The basic idea is the individual who is seen as separate from the collective. Therefore, the value that individuals have with respect to their interests against those of the collective, places constraints on the actions of others against the individual. The individual is considered to possess moral status or is morally considerable expressed through terms such as "intrinsic worth", "moral worth", "dignity", "high status", etc. (see Molefe, 2019; Toscano, 2011).

What is important is not just that the individual has the value, but this value is based on features that do not come from anywhere else, but features one is born with; hence it gives the individual in question some kind of "inherent value" (Koorsgard, 1983). Importantly, part of seeing individuals as possessors of this precious value is that they are ends in themselves. Kant reiterates

this in his humanity formula which places a requirement on the part of individuals that they ought to be treated not merely as a means but at the same time as an end (Rolf, 2012). The technical term "end" here is about value and is understood as "non-instrumental value" as opposed to being instrumental, or a value which is itself a higher value (Molefe, 2019, Toscano, 2011, Ikuenobe, 2016). The basic principle is that individuals are valuable as individuals and have features that allow them to stand as atomic individuals.

Furthermore, when it comes to identity, individuals are seen as the sole authors or framers of their views of the self. Individuals have the capacity to frame a view of the self that does not necessarily require the community. This is not to say that the community plays no role in the actualization of identity, but that it is not an essential feature of that identity.[20] In other words, what defines one's identity are the sort of features that belong to an individual as opposed to social factors (Molefe, 2019). The individual is conceived as being capable of making her own autonomous decisions and can frame her own identity. With respect to gender identity, this emphasis on individual choice presupposes a self-chosen identity. Views of gender that would fall under this logic include the Freudian psychoanalytic theories of gender that tend to appeal to an individual's psychic structure or subconscious mind, and how it manifests itself in the conceptualization of a person's identity (Freud, 1924). Under this view, one may also include McKitrick's (2015) dispositional account, Bettcher's (2009) self-identification account, or Bulter's (1999) performative account and any other account that cashes out gender identity as a product of an individual regardless of one's embeddedness in a social group. Again, the social group is merely instrumental (perhaps contingent) and not essential to how gender identity is framed. What plays a major role in constructing identity is the individual. This may not be a detailed account of individualism and its

relationship to identity, but it is enough to ground the distinctions I make between individualism and communitarianism.

On the other hand, communitarianism focuses on the collective. It places value on the community. It is easy for one to bracket communitarianism as African given the dominance of communitarianism in the African cultural context, but according to Masolo (2004), there are two forms of communitarianism, Western and African communitarianism.[21] He states that Western communitarianism focuses on the balance between individual interests (or rights) and one's duties to the collective. For Masolo (2004), Western communitarianism is presented as a critique of individualism for its strong emphasis on rights ignoring individual duties to the community. Several scholars are associated with this version of communitarianism, and these include Fredick Hegel, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Michael Sandel, just to mention a few (Hegel, 1967; MacIntyre, 1972; Taylor, 1979; Sandel, 1998). For Masolo (2004), Western communitarianism is an ideology whose roots and influence are a liberal tradition and therefore, it endorses some aspects of individualism but in a weaker sense. In this chapter, when I talk about communitarianism, I will be referring to communitarianism from an African cultural worldview, Afro-communitarianism.

Under Afro-communitarianism, the (utmost) value is on the relationship an individual has with the collective. However, the term "collective" or "community" can be cashed out broadly or narrowly. The broad view is about the individual and the natural world, and the narrow view is about individual human beings (Etieyibo, 2016). Broadly, it incorporates views associated with the "holistic metaphysical view of reality," views that focus on the relationship of all existing beings including spiritual beings (Behrens, 2014). For Tangwa (2004), the African metaphysical view is about the recognition and acceptance of interdependence and (peaceful) co-existence of objects in

nature (Tangwa, 2004). The basic idea is that objects in the world do not exist as separate entities but are interconnected in one greater whole. For Asouzu (2004), existing things are missing links to reality. Bujo (1998) expresses this interconnectedness as harmony among existing beings, and he calls this harmony the greatest good. Thus, for Bujo (1998), this harmony is a value that ought to be promoted, human actions are directed towards the promotion of this harmony. Metz (2017) argues that right actions are those that promote this harmony and wrong actions are those that subvert this good. From this brief presentation, one can see that there are two important views, the metaphysical foundations of the nature of reality as relational or interdependent and the ethical implication. The latter is reflected in the sentiments about right and wrong actions (Asouzu, 2004; Metz, 2017). When it comes to identity, one would then conceptualize identity in such a way that it takes into consideration the existence of all other beings. For instance, Stella Nyanzi (2014) argues for how the gendered spirits of ancestors may embody individuals in ways that contribute to how individuals understand their gender identities. Some theories of identity show how an individual's construction of the self is inseparable from the natural environment (Palmer, 1998; Mbiti, 1969)

The above broad view can be narrowed to an anthropocentric discussion. Under this view, when one looks at the collective or community, the focus is on human communities and all their capabilities and functioning, to use Nussbaum's (2000) terminology.[22] This is the sense through which I will be expressing most of my sentiments on gender identity. Since gender is a social kind, it is a product of human beings. This means that any discussion on gender identity as it relates to ancestors and non-human animals is not part of my conception. I consider gender identity as a product of human interaction, physically alive human beings. The basic idea under the narrow view, as I conceptualized it under Afro-Communitarianism, is that human beings are social, and

they see other human beings as essential to their identity (Menkiti, 2004; Molefe, 2019). A detailed discussion of this view is presented in a conception of personhood as personal identity below.

3.4. Personhood as personal identity

Personhood as personal identity is one of the many conceptions of personhood that I have discussed in the first chapter of the dissertation. In this section, I seek to highlight the main views of this conception of personhood. In the latter sections, my task is to develop a conception of gender identity based on this view of personhood.

Personhood as personal identity has been classified by Molefe as a "metaphysical" account of personhood because it deals with the nature of persons. However, the main feature of this view of personhood is that it focuses on the relational nature of identity. That is, it presents a conceptualisation of the self or identity to be beyond an individual *qua* individual by incorporating the community as an essential feature of that identity. There are two themes that I consider to be definitive of this view of personhood, the primacy of the community and identity as a product of the community. The latter comes as an implication of the former. But to understand the primacy of the community, one ought to understand a notion of the community Molefe presupposes. Molefe (2017, 2019) is not clear on what notion of community he has in mind given that there are various notions of community in the African philosophical literature. For instance, the earliest debate found in the literature pointed out two notions: radical communitarianism, attributed to scholars such as Tempels (1959), Mbiti (1970), and Menkiti (1984; 2004); and moderate communitarianism, attributed to Gyekye (Wiredu and Gyekye 1992). There is another debate which also highlights two distinct notions of community, the collectivist view and the constituted view (Ikuenobe, 2016, 2018). I will consider a discussion of these notions of community to

highlight the individual-community relationship I have in mind before I discuss the foundational themes of this view of personhood.

3.4.1. Radical vis-a-vis moderate communitarianism

The radical versus moderate communitarian debate is one of the earliest debates that highlights distinct notions of community in the Afro-communitarian worldview. This debate is traced back to a discussion on Menkiti's (1984) view of personhood. In this debate, one finds two main notions of community ascribed to the Afro-communitarian framework namely, radical and moderate communitarianism. I will only present some brief views that I consider to be relevant to the chapter, but I am aware of the many views one can find in the literature (see Adeate, 2023; Matolino, 2009; Molefe, 2018).

Radical communitarianism is attributed to scholars such as Tempels (1959), Menkiti (1984, 2004), Mbiti (1970) as well and Gyekye (1992) whom I also mention below for his support of the moderate version. They hold a strong view of the community as that which is epistemically and ontologically prior to the individual (Tempels, 1959; Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Mbiti, 1970; Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992). For radical communitarians, individual life begins (and ends) in a community, and this also means that the community has some sort of existence even before individuals (p'Bitek, 1998). In this kind of community, individuals are like blank slates who come to acquire morals, values, knowledge and identity as they grow and participate in the life of the community (Menkiti, 1984; Eze, 2018). Under this view, one would simply state that gender identity is a product of the community. But taken to the extreme, one would state that gender identity is wholly conferred by the community, a view I dismissed in the introduction for its radical stance. One of the contested views against this notion of community is whether individuals can fully be individuals *qua* individuals who are autonomous and have rights, as well as the freedom to rise above and go

against the demands of their community (Matolino, 2009; Molefe, 2018; Chimakonam, 2022). However, this view has been debated given that most radical communitarians do not deny rights, rather they state that rights are secondary to one's duties to the community (Menkiti, 1984; Ikuenobe, 2017).

The objection raised above comes as a foundation for another conception of communitarianism, moderate communitarianism. This view takes a weaker stance regarding an individual's position in a community. Gyekye (1997) is regarded as the chief proponent of this view, and claims about moderate communitarianism are presented in his critique of radical communitarianism, as presented above. Moderate communitarians believe that there are certain things about individuals such as autonomy, will and rationality that are never products of the community (Gyekye, 1997; Tshivhase, 2013; Molefe, 2019). The community does not have the primacy attributed to it under radical communitarianism. The community then cannot be the sole author of an individual's identity. However, the main contention with this view is the dilemma of collapsing into radical communitarianism or individualism (Matolino, 2009; Eze, 2018). When there are competing claims between the individual and the community, it is unclear whether it would prioritize the community, hence collapse into radical communitarianism; or maintain its moderate stance and prioritize the individual, hence collapsing into individualism. For Gyekye (1997), the problem was that he ended up collapsing the theory into radical communitarianism.

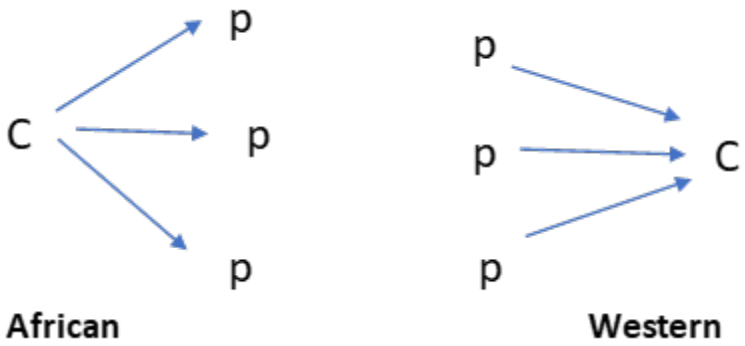
I will ignore this debate in this chapter because I do not see an important distinction between the two notions of community. Just like Wiredu's sentiment, I do not see Menkiti (1984) as a radical communitarian (Eze & Metz, 2015/2016; Matolino, 2009). Menkiti does not reject individuality, the autonomy that Gyekye prizes so much can be understood in relational ways (Ikuenobe, 2018; Molefe, 2019). I will come back to relational autonomy in the sections below. Nonetheless, I have

discussed the two notions of community because of an important intuition. That is, what is important is that they both endorse *the primacy of the community*. The primacy of the community does not mean the rejection of individuality (Molefe, 2019). Persons are still unique and separate even when they are part of the community (Eze, 2018). This way of flaming the individual-community relationship is not all there is in literature. African philosophers such as Ikuenobe (2016, 2018) have also attempted to flame the debate differently, in the section below I look at this flaming.

3.4.2. Collectivist and constituted view of community

Another distinction in the notions of community found in the African philosophical literature can be attributed to Ikuenobe (2016, 2018). This distinction is informed by Menkiti's idea of what he calls "Western" and "African" communities. For Menkiti, a community in an African cultural worldview is not a product of individuals or a result of a social contract. In the diagram below, it moves from community to individual, illustrating the ontological primacy of community. In the Western cultural worldview, it moves from individual to community. The community in this case is a product of individuals (Menkiti, 1984, 180). See the diagram below.

Diagram 1. *C (community), P (Persons):*



Following Menkiti's (1984) distinction, Ikuenobe (2016, 2018) distinguishes a "collectivist" community and a "constituted" community. For Ikuenobe (2018), "a constituted community "is a

simple aggregation of all individuals who choose voluntarily to be part of the community" (214). On the other hand, a collectivist community,

> is a complex organic set of individuals, relationships, values, cultural traditions, interests, and obligations that transcend individuals or their simple addition. The community is not reducible to the individuals and elements that make it up, because it is not the simple addition of the individuals and institutions. *It has transcendent social and moral norms, values, and relationships that mould individuals' identity*, character, conception of good, choices, preferences, and actions (Ikuenobe, 2018, 214, *emphasis mine*)

Adopting Menkiti's (1984) logic, a constituted community, by definition, is one that is established by individuals. Grammatically, the verb "constitute" refers to some kind of construction or establishment (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). This community is a product of individuals who voluntarily make it up. On the other hand, a collectivist community, Ikuenobe (2018) sees it as a collectivist in the truest sense. This community is not made but makes individuals. Thus, this community transcends individuals and so cannot be the product of individuals.

It is a collectivist community that I believe offers the sense of identity I have in mind. This community moulds an individual's identity through norms, values and relationships that transcend the individuals themselves (Ikuenobe, 2018). This claim means that this community has primacy over individuals. Again, referring to the intuition in the above section, it is the primacy of the community that I take to be important in understanding individual-community relationships, however, this kind of community does not reject individuality. The community is primary to individuals, but individuals have the power to affect the direction and shape of their communities. That is, individuals may be born into a particular community, in a particular tradition with values

and norms, but as they express their individuality or when one considers them to act onto their communities, they can shape the norms and values of those who might have gone before them and determine how those to come may experience the community (See a discussion by Murove, 2007, on Ukama on immortality of values). Regardless of the primacy of the community, a person is best thought of as a human agent who acts and interacts in a particular cultural and historical context with other human beings. This is not just a mere expression of contingent requirement of personhood, rather as Julian Hughes notes, "it is constitutive of persons that *they must act on and in the world*" (Hughes, 2001; Hughes & Beatty, 2013, 338, emphasis mine) such that their actions can shape the norms and values of the community.

The discussion above was meant to show the kind of individual-community relationship I have in mind, that is, one that respects the primacy of the community and individuality. The question now is how to understand the primacy of the community. In other words, what would be the justification for seeing the community as primacy? Merely stating that human beings are social or that they are born in a community is not enough. In the next section, I will consider a discussion of this view and its implication on identity as a product of the community.

3.4.3. The primacy of the community

In the above paragraphs, I have mentioned that there are two foundational premises to an account of personhood as personal identity, the primacy of the community and identity as a product of the community, where the latter is a logical implication of the former. In this section, I discuss the first foundational premise which I have been adopting as an intuition from the above discussion. I have argued that the radical and moderate communitarian debate helps in understanding the primacy of the community with a focus on one's rights, where the rights are secondary to duties. I argued that I did not see an important distinction between the two, and so choosing the version of community

I had in mind was unhelpful at that stage. But I also presented other notions of community (collectivist-constituted) which I argued helps us understand the structure of the community and have argued that the kind of community I have in mind is the collectivist one, but with a preservation of individuality. The basic assumption under this view of personhood is that the community transcends individuals and that its interests are primary to those of individuals. However, some scholars like Oyowe argue against such conceptualization of the community. According to Oyowe,

> The idea of the collective as 'producing' the individual implicates a questionable idea of community i.e., the idea of community as a natural formation. It is the idea of the community as some fixed, unchangeable entity existing independently of the individual… It is questionable because for the community to create or produce the individual its existence must be independent of and prior to the existence of individual human beings (Oyowe, 2014, 334).

Oyowe's criticism in general touches on the notions of community highlighted in the above paragraphs. It is about how the relationship between an individual and the community ought to be conceived, and for Oyowe, it is individuals who make up the community (Oyowe, 2014). There are several ways of responding to this objection. Firstly, I take this objection as resting on a somewhat distinct notion of community than the one he objects to. In other words, the objection ignores that there are different senses of "community" as shown by Ikuenobe, Gyekye and Menkiti's views above (Menkiti, 1984; Gyekye, 1997; Ikuenobe, 2018). Oyowe's objection advances (to use Ikuenobe's terminology) a "constituted" view of the community and uses that conception to critique a different conception, a "collectivist" view of the community, which in my view does not show what is problematic about the collectivist view of the community. A proper

objection would require critiquing the collectivist view in its merit, given that it has different underlying assumptions from the constituted view. In this sense then, Oyowe's objection has not provided sufficient grounds to show that a collectivist view of community is impossible. On the contrary, the objection assumes as if there is only one notion of the community.

Nonetheless, a proper response requires an argument that demonstrates how the community ought to be considered as having ontological primacy, that is, the logic behind a collectivist view of the community. One way of flaming this view of community is to simply state that the logical implication of seeing individuals as existing outside a community is to imply that individuals are self-sufficient. However, as shown in Chapter Two, in my discussion of Plato's notion of self-insufficiency, individuals are not self-sufficient. In the African philosophical literature, Gyekye discusses the same view and supports it by citing an Akan maxim which states that "when a person descends from heaven, he descends into a human society" or *"onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom"* (Gyekye, 1992, 105; Wiredu, 1992; Eze, 2018). That is, one's life begins in the context of the community. The Akan believe that any human being is born into a community, and no one is born outside the community. By extension, the maxim also highlights the view that no individual can sustain oneself without the community. To illustrate the latter part about sustenance, there is another maxim that Gyekye cites, "one tree does not make a forest" (Gyekye, 1992, 105). According to the maxim, it is impossible to think of an individual as a standalone person who does not need others. Thus, no individual can exist and develop on his or her own. It is through a community that the individual develops physically and morally. According to Tutu (1999), it is through a community that human beings attain their full humanity. The same is reflected in the famous Nguni phrase "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"* which means a person is a person through other people (Ramose, 2002; Shutte, 1990, 40). This view illustrates the interdependence and co-

existence of human beings. It highlights the importance of the relationship a person has with others in the realization of his or her humanity (Ramose, 2002; Mbiti, 1969; Shutte, 1990). A Malawian proverb *"kali kokha nkanyama, ali awiri ndi anthu"* which means "no man is an island" shows the vulnerability of a lone individual, that no individual can exist independently of others.

Seeing individuals as tied to their communities is an idea so pervasive in the African context that others have thought of it as something individuals cannot do away with. Okot p'Bitek's famous claim that "humans are not free, and because they are not born free, they are everywhere in chains" is a good illustration of this point (Etieyibo, 2020, 61; Bitek, 1998). Even upon death, persons are never free, their spirits are still venerated by the community as ancestors which illustrates an endless cycle of human beings moving from one community to another (Mbiti, 1969; Menkiti, 1984, 2004). In any case, the point here is that the community is prior, and individuals are products of their communities, and this idea comes from the self-insufficiency of human beings. But if individuals cannot exist outside the community, what is the implication of this view of the community-individual relationship? To answer this question, I will now discuss the second theme of personhood as personal identity, a claim about identity.

3.4.4. A claim about identity

The main claim under this view of personhood is that the community is necessary for defining individual identity. Molefe's (2017) adoption of Menkiti's claim on how the community defines individual identity is a testament to this view. He quotes Menkiti who states:

> …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 reference to the environing community. As John Mbiti notes, the African view of the person can be summed up in this statement: I am because we

are, and since we are, therefore I am" (Menkiti, 1984, 171; also see Molefe, 2017, 3)

Molefe notes that Menkiti makes a distinction between the Western view of a "person" and the African view. The Western view appeals to features of a lone individual such as rationality, autonomy, memory, will, etc., whereas the African view defines a person with reference to the community. Although this is a metaphysical account in some sense, he notes that this view of personhood should not be confused with the other descriptive views that pick out ontological properties that make up a human being, be it spiritual, physical, or quasi-physical, what has been referred to as the transcendental view of personhood in chapter one (Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992; Kaphagawani, 2004; Etieyibo, 2020). Instead, he argues that this view of personhood focuses on how individuals define themselves in the context of the larger group. For Molefe (2017), Menkiti's reference to the environing community means that he is after a distinct conception of personhood from the transcendental one because the community is not an ontological feature of human beings. Thus, Molefe argues that what Menkiti provides is a process of socialization, a process that makes individuals the kind of "person(s)" they are (Menkiti, 1984). In other words, to state that individuals are defined by the "environing community" is to state that the community makes individuals the kind of beings they (now) are.

If the community is that which makes individuals the kind of beings they are, how is the position of the community understood in the way identities are framed, as a contingent or necessary feature? Note that to claim that the community makes individuals assume an individual's embeddedness in a community (Molefe, 2017, 3; Menkiti, 2004, 324; Louw, 2004). However, this embeddedness as seen from the previous discussion about the collectivist community, does not take the community as contingent, but necessary to an individual's beingness. Molefe (2019) expresses this

same view by distinguishing between contingent shared relations and essential shared relations. Under contingent shared relations, the community is a contingent factor for an individual's identity, and this is the view I expressed under individualism. On the other hand, under essential shared relations, the community is necessarily responsible for identity. Note that stating that the community is essential (or necessary) is different from stating that the community wholly or partially defines an individual. I believe the latter is what scholars grapple with when reading Mbiti and Menkiti's views. I will come back to this distinction later. In this section, my concern is to show that a community is necessary for an individual's identity.

To state that the community is necessary for identity means the unintelligibility of one's conception of a self without communal aspects. Menkiti alludes to this claim by stating that "the sense of *self-identity* which the individual comes to possess cannot be made sense of except by reference to these collective facts" (Menkiti, 1984, 172). Collective facts here refer to the individual's social or communal world which Menkiti takes to have precedence over the individual (as per our first claim). Mbiti (1970) illustrates a strong causal connection between a person's sense of identity and the community. This is expressed in his quote above through the dictum, *"I am because we are, since we are, therefore, I am"* (Mbiti, 1970, 159). What the dictum illustrates is the idea that an individual's existence depends on others, the individual is a product of the community; or in strong terms, there cannot be an individual without the community. The phrases "I am" and "we are" are loaded phrases that express "individual's beingness" and "corporate beingness" (respectively) and these two are inseparable (Mbiti, 1969). Oelofsen expresses the same view when she states that one can speak of an individual as separate from one's community only in abstract terms, but these two are inseparable. She likens this idea to Martin Heidegger's "Being and the World," where there cannot "be" one without the other (Oelofsen, 2018, 45). The

basic point is that if individuals are products of the community, the community is necessary, the individual is essentially connected to others. It is through this community that the individual understands one's own identity, goals, and aspirations (Gbadegesin, 1997; Metz, 2017).

There is a sense in which one would flame the sense of self that develops from this understanding. Menkiti (2004) draws attention to the notion of the "self" when he states that "…in the absence of others, no grounds exist for a claim regarding the individual's standing as a person. The notion at work here is the notion of an *extended self*" (324, emphasis added). Menkiti (2004) uses the word extended self, but I believe it expresses the same idea with another term "relational self", a term I use in this chapter. I prefer the term "relational self" because it intuitively captures relationships as part of the self. The term "extended self" is broader because as it is used in psychology, it also captures technological artefacts as well (for a discussion, see Chapter 1 under 1.2.3). Nonetheless, to make sense of the notion of extended self, one may look at its counterpart notion, that of minimal self or merely referred to as "the self."[12] Attempts have been made and no agreement exists among scholars about the definition of the self. Richard Heersmink based on an explanation he adopts from Shaun Gallagher provides a view of the (minimal) self from a biological perspective. Heersmink takes the self as that which has subject-hood and agent-hood without the inclusion of all the unessential features such as thinking or reflection (Heersmink, 2020, 2; Gallagher, 2000, 15). "Subject-hood" refers to a sense of awareness and claim of ownership of one's own experience whereas "agent-hood" means awareness of oneself as the source of the action (James, Burkhardt, Bowers & Skrupskelis, 1890; Heermink, 2020). To provide an example of the biological view, suppose a person decides to move his leg, a person is, in this instance, no doubt a source or initiator of action. But more than that, a person feels that the leg has moved and, thus, has some awareness

[12] As much as I substitute the extended self for the relational self, a proper rendition of the counterpart notion of the latter is the atomic self.

of sought. The attribution of oneself as a source of action is what is referred to as agenthood and the latter, the awareness of the experience refers to subjecthood. Lack of agenthood would mean a scenario where one's leg is moved by another being. Underlying the idea of subjecthood and agenthood is immediate experience at the biological level or consciousness characterized by some brain processes such as proprioception, perception, and action (Heersmink, 2020). It is in this realm (and limited to this realm) that the notion of minimal self is understood. The notion of extended (relational) self builds onto this understanding of minimal self.

Therefore, the notion of extended self goes beyond that of minimal self. It includes anything beyond a biological body and how these external features come to be identified with the minimal self. The way this term has been employed in the psychological literature is that it tends to capture non-human objects, that is, an identity that captures aspects beyond the minimal self (Heermink, 2020). But as stated above, I use it to capture what Menkiti (2004) had in mind to include the social group. One example I used in Chapter One is that of a robotic leg on a person who had her leg amputated. The person identifies this artificial leg and treats it as a normal biological leg. The harm done to the leg is felt as harm done to any other part of the body (Heersmink, 2020). Therefore, when thinking of a community as part of the extended self in expressing a relational self, I use the same logic. Any harm done to the community is harm done to the self.

To unpack the above view, one can appeal to the notion of interconnected well-being or joy. Etieyibo (2017) expresses this sentiment that in African cultures when someone is sick in the village, and the question "How are you?" is posed, the people would say "We are not fine" not to express an individual sickness but to identify with the sickness of others, hence statements such as "your pain is my pain". In Tumbuka culture, people usually say *"tasuska"* in response to sickness or news about death. The word directly translates to "we oppose that" but it is simply an expression

of sympathy, an identification with the predicament of the other. The direct translation "we oppose that" simply points to the undesirability of seeing the other person sick. Asouzu's (2004) complementarity ethics shares the same view when he states that individuals ought to pay attention to how their actions affect the joy of being. One who acts selfishly for one's joy destroys oneself. Hence, *prima facie*, right actions are other-regarding. Metz expresses the same idea in his Ubuntu principle of right action, "an action is right just insofar as it promotes shared identity among people grounded on goodwill; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to do so and tends to encourage the opposites…" (Metz, 2017, 115). Wiredu reiterates the same view when he states that the African cultural worldview is a system of reciprocity and interdependence such that individuals understand their well-being as connected to others (Wiredu, 2008). This idea is rooted in his belief that the interests of human beings are identical (Wiredu, 1995).

The underlying idea in the discussion so far is that individuals do not see the self as atomic, but relational. If there is a link between one's well-being expressed through ideas about harmony, or there is a link between one's joy and that of others, or that the interests are the same, then there is a sense in which one ought to see one's identity as connected to others. Harm to the community would be harm to the self. Thus, identity is social, and Metz (2017) puts it, a person sees oneself through the eyes of the community by identifying with community goals and acting in ways that promote those goals, and reciprocally, the community does the same. If people can identify with the interests, joy, and well-being of others, it is logical that the conception of autonomy would be relational. Thus, if the individual conceives the self as deeply connected to others, the decisions she makes are likely going to affect others (Ikuenobe, 2018; Christman, 2004; Akpa-Inyang & Chima, 2021). The Chewa proverb *"mutu umodzi susenza denga"* which can be translated as "no man is an island" illustrates the importance of consulting with others given that no individual is

self-sufficient. Individuals can still express their individuality or autonomy but in relational ways (Molefe, 2019). An implication of this view on identity is not just that the self is relational but that even in the contraction of the self, individuals negotiate their identities with others. This means that identity cannot be wholly self-chosen, a view I dismissed in the introduction.

So far, I have presented the notion of personhood as personal identity by appealing to two major themes, the primacy of the community and (relational) identity as a product of the community. It is important to note that I have interpreted most views in ways that fit with my understanding of concepts in African philosophy and the task at hand, so there might be variations in the way Molefe (2019) whom I attribute this view interprets it. In the foregoing, I seek to discuss the implication of this view on gender identity.

3.5. Understanding gender identity: A relational account

The intuition adopted from the above discussion is that the community defines individual identity. My motivation for presenting the above discussion is to show the logic through which gender identity ought to be understood. Broadly, I conceive gender identity, or gendered identities, to refer to social identities through which biological persons interact with each other in a social setting. In other words, they are communally defined identities that individuals as biological human beings, acquire to navigate the social space. For instance, consider the gender identity "man", I take this to be an identity that is defined by the community, but one an individual adopts so that in interacting with others, part of that interaction is to be identified (including treated) as a man, among other identities an individual might have. As with any other identity, it may come with certain expectations, expressed as privileges or burdens. In adopting the identity, one is also adopting what comes with the identity in question. This is the reason a person who identifies as a man would be frowned upon when the person behaves and interacts with others as a woman. As a

social identity, gender identity defines a certain kind of beingness in the world, a social beingness. In this paper, I consider this beingness as something that is necessarily defined by the norms of a community. To show how the community defines gendered identities, I appeal to Jenkins' (2018) norm relevancy account of gender (see discussion below). I only present the account briefly and with some careful modification because Jenkins (2018) might not have intended to present her account as I do in this chapter nor had the ambition of considering the account to be universally applicable to include the African cultural context. I adopt Jenkins' (2018) theory because it discusses the concept of gender in ways that fit with my commonsensical understanding.

Importantly, I consider norms to be central to how identities are framed in the African cultural worldview. In this worldview, norms are products of the community and are important because they specify how individuals ought to interact with each other in a community (Gheaus 2023). The view that norms are products of the community aligns with my conception of gender (identities) as a social construct. Since the community essentially defines and licenses norms, by implication, it licenses gendered identities. Furthermore, norms, like any other social construct, are subject to change and modification such that gendered identities which I conceive to be essentially defined by norms have the potential to acquire new meaning. At the same time, this change could result in the creation of new identities. This is the sense I believe captures the fluidity of identities within a community. At the same time, norms also differ from one society to another, such that the way gendered identities are framed would vary across communities. A person with a gendered identity "woman" in Malawi would be recognized under a different identity in South Africa. For instance, a biologically male person, Tiwonge Chimbalanga from Malawi, lived in exile in South Africa for fear of imprisonment because Tiwonge was recognized as having a gendered identity "man" in Malawi, contrary to her perception of identity as a woman (Gevisser 2014). Thus, society dictates

the norms that define gender identity, a move that would have positive or negative implications for others. In my conception, I am not concerned with the normative implication of recognition of these identities, my focus is on how gendered identities are defined and consequently provide a picture of how they may be adopted by individuals. Before I discuss the view that the community is that which defines gendered identities, it is important to first understand what gender identity is, and to do so, I appeal to the norm relevancy account of gender.

3.5.1. Norm relevancy account, a brief view

According to Jenkins' norm relevancy account, given the subject, S, and gender identity, X, it would be stated that,

> S has a gender identity of X iff S's internal "map" is formed to guide someone classed as a member of X gender through the social and material realities that are, in that context, characteristic of Xs as a class (Jenkins, 2016, 410).

Jenkins' (2016) notion is based on a distinction between gender as an identity and gender as a class. Gender classes refer to human groups such as men or women. But what makes them belong to a class is that members of the group share certain social and material realities. The social and material realities refer to the norms of the community. Thus, gender identity is formed by individuals based on norms that define classes. Since many norms define a class, only a selected few relevant norms are important for an individual's gender identity. The identification of relevant norms is an individual's responsibility. It is left to the individuals' discretion to define their gender, which sometimes may or may not align with classes.

However, I do not agree with Jenkins' (2018) distinction of "gender as class" and "gender as identity" because of how classes are defined. The distinction is (adopted from and) influenced by her response to Haslanger's (2012) view of gender, where women are subordinated based on

presumed bodily features for reproduction, and men are defined based on privilege and presumed bodily features for reproduction. In the African cultural worldview, this conception of gender is questionable given that gender is presumed to be fluid and complementary (Amadiume, 1987; 2005; Nzegwu, 2004; Oelofsen, 2018). Thus, women occupy significant and privileged positions just like men (Momoh, 2000). The notions of privilege and subordination do not rest on gender or bodily features, but on seniority as the organizing principle in most African societies (Oyewumi, 1997, 2005; Momoh, 2000). This idea then suggests that a woman never remains in a permanently subordinate position (Nzegwu, 2004). It is for this reason that we do not consider Jenkins' (2018) discussion of classes, instead, we will only adopt her argument in its simplistic form.

For Jenkins (2016, 2018), gender identity is defined by norms. But not all norms, only those that are relevant to the person. That is, even if there are norms associated with women, not all such norms can be relevant to a particular woman, only a selected subset would be relevant. A person with a gender identity "woman" would only take a "significant subset of the norms associated with women and not a greater subset of another gender" (Jenkins, 2018, 731). This means that identity is not only formed with norms associated with women but also includes some that belong to another gender. Having norms that belong to another gender highlights the nature of relevancy expressed as "norm compliance" and "norm violation" (Jenkins, 2018, 731). To understand these two notions, consider this example: Suppose there is a woman who does not shave bodily hair on her legs and belongs to a society where it is socially accepted for women not to have bodily hair. Nonetheless, she remains conscious of her hairy legs. For Jenkins (2018, 731), the woman in question is violating a norm about a woman's body in her society, and "this awareness of norm violating nature...is something the woman can only have...in experiencing her behaviour in relation to norms associated with women...that legs should be hairless". Thus, even if she does not respect

the norm, it is relevant to how she identifies herself. It forms part of how she sees herself as separate from other women and even men as she navigates the social space. On the contrary, to be norm-compliant means that one adopts the norms that are associated with one's identity. In this manner, one acts in ways that are commonly associated with the social group as definitive of a particular gender. Therefore, for one to have a certain gender, it means an active process where one is consciously aware of the relevant norms, whether in compliance or violation. However, as stated, identity is defined by a larger subset of norms that a person complies with and a smaller subset (if there are any) of norms one violates (Jenkins, 2016, 2018).

What I have presented so far is a brief account of Jenkins's views, but which has important implications and underlies the view of gender I have in mind, a view that gendered identities are defined by norms, norms are products of the community, and therefore, the community defines gendered identities. I ignore a question about the nature of norms, that is, whether the norms are sex-based norms or not. I believe communities define norms differently, but what makes them definitive of gender is that they account for gendered identities, whatever these may be (Gheaus, 2023).

3.5.2. Normativity and identity acquisition

An important point I adopt from above is the social nature of gendered identities (Oyewumi, 2005). The sociality of gendered identities is framed as relying on norms, and so cannot exist independent of human societies. The very existence of gendered identities requires some social acceptance. Similarly, the acquisition of a gendered identity requires an individual's embeddedness in the collective or community. Central to how gendered identities are accepted in a community depends on acceptable norms that define them. This means a (communal) modification to norms would also modify these identities, and a rejection of norms would also mean a rejection of identities that

spring from them. Menkiti attributes the community as playing a major role in creating the norms and offering the space for individuals to act out the norms. Thus, according to Menkiti (1984), the community is the prescriber and catalyst of norms.

Since it creates and licenses the norms, the community must (or is obligated to) ensure that individuals live by the norms. This is the rational and best possible way for the community not to break down into anarchy or for individuals to relate with each other positively. One implication this view has on gendered identities is that these identities as defined by norms are products of the community, which creates and licenses them. Therefore, what this means is that individuals *qua* individuals are not responsible for creating identities. This is a view that would be supported by those who see gendered identities as self-chosen, but that an individual's responsibility is in how these identities are adopted. While Jenkins (2018) does not account for how these norms are adopted, one may attempt to fill this gap by appealing to psychological, social, and cognitive theories such as the one by Bandura (1999). Under this view, individuals, especially at an early age, learn by modelling observable behaviour (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Under social and cognitive theories, children watch and adopt behaviours that are rewarded and avoid behaviours that are punished. Gender identity in this case comes as a product of modelling gendered behaviours. According to Bandura (1999), children learn gendered behaviour from their parents. However, implicit in this account is the emphasis on the nuclear family as the model for gender. In an African cultural worldview, one would argue that the behaviours children adopt go beyond a nuclear family setup because they are behaviours that are generally accepted by society as a whole. More importantly, due to the emphasis on extended family, the child's family extends to a clan, lineage, and town as a whole (Wiredu, 2008). African proverbs such as *mwana wa nzako ngwako yemwe* ("your neighbour's child is your child" or "it takes a village to raise a child")

illustrate the communal responsibility in raising a child, and under social learning theory, this implies the development of a gendered identity modelled on the community as a whole. In other words, thus, concerning gendered behaviour, the focus then is on communally sanctioned and modelled gendered behaviour.

Thus, while social cognitive theories offer a good explanation for behaviour modelling and the construction of gendered identities, there is a questionable implicit assumption of the link between observable behaviour and norms. I believe these two can come apart because not all behaviours that children observe and learn are norm-based nor correspond to norms. My view is that a proper account of gender identity would account for gendered behaviours and norms that justify this behaviour. That is, it would be inadequate to argue that gender identity is defined by observable behaviour, which begs the question about the nature of behaviour itself, especially if there is no explicit assumption that the behaviour in question is based on certain norms. Furthermore, social cognitive theories cannot adequately account for the norm-violating nature of certain behaviours and how they influence the gender identity of children. Again, consider the example of a woman who refuses to shave her body hair (Jenkins, 2018). One would wonder how this behaviour would be modelled and influence a child's gender identity. It is not clear to me how behaviour that is acted out by a parent but linked to a norm should be interpreted and modelled by a child as a violation. Thus, the behaviour of the mother not shaving her body hair can be modelled by her child as one that belongs to women and not as a norm-violated behaviour that (actually) belongs to men in the community in question. The child would require some level of capacity and functioning to interpret the behaviour in its norm-violating nature. Therefore, because of these complications, I appeal to the simple intuition of norms as definitive of gender identity and separate the conception from social cognitive theories.

Moving on, to argue that individuals adopt relevant norms defined by their community which are definitive of gendered identities presupposes a capacity for an individual to choose and comprehend what is relevant to themself. This presupposes a rational ability and autonomy, which I have endorsed as relational autonomy.[13] With these capacities, individuals can identify with relevant norms as they interact with others and develop an identity that sets them as distinct from others. Thus, as I have argued, individuality and autonomy are never lost in this cultural setup regardless of the primacy of the community. I envision a community that respects individual's separateness and uniqueness (see Tshivhase, 2013; Molefe, 2019). Nonetheless, this individuality presupposes an extended "self". Thus, individuals never lose their individuality such that even if they take on an identity that is shared by others, they still have a unique and separate identity (Molefe, 2019). Again, this identity takes the communal facets as essential such that it is expressed in relational ways. However, the nature of uniqueness can be accounted for by appealing to norms. For example, there could be two individuals who define themselves as "men", but they see themselves as different men given the differences with respect to relevant norms. Sharing or subscribing to the gendered identity "man" only shows that most norms that they each identify with are those that define the identity of a man in that community (Jenkins, 2018). Furthermore, the choice of relevant norms, whether norm-compliant or norm-violator, is made by recognizing and negotiating with others. Individuals are in this community, other-regarding and understanding their autonomous choices to have a bearing on others (Ikuenobe, 2018; Molefe, 2019). Given this view, the implication is that I reject from my conception a view that there can be a gendered

[13] This is another important point that separates this conception from most conceptions such as the social cognitive theory because it does not offer an account of the place of autonomy. I assume that social learning theories as developed and empirically verified in the West tend to be predominantly individualistic. They do show the importance of the community, but either as instrumental and not having higher value as in African communitarianism, or as shown at the beginning of the chapter, this could just be an instance of Western communitarianism which is not about the ontological primacy of the community, but a balance between the individual and the community. If these views hold any sort of truth, then the metaphysical foundation guiding my conception and other conceptions is different.

identity that completely rises above the shared community norms. As I pointed out before, individuals do not just create their own identities and place an obligation on the community to respect their identity. Individuals cannot completely live a life outside the norms, nor elevate their interests above the expected norms of the community. The point is that individuals usually work with norms that they find in a community. They adopt what is available and can even be part of the process of modifying them, but only by deliberating with others. An identity that is formed above the norms of society would be rejected by the community. I do not argue for whether such rejection is justified or not. My point is that the logical consequence of the community being the author of norms is that it will see as a threat anything that goes outside these norms. This would be subverting the harmony that comes from relating positively with the norms, and by extension identities that come from them which enable them to navigate the social space. Again. changes that individuals may want to make to norms would have to be negotiated with others.

One last point to make is to present a process of socialization. The above discussion has highlighted the primacy of community in defining gendered identities and the place of the individual in identity acquisition by appealing to individuality and relational autonomy. I have not yet accounted for a process that can explain how identity is adopted. The above discussion was to establish the underlying assumption to this process that gender identity as defined by norms does not mean that individuals passively adopt the gendered identities in ways that they are wholly conferred onto individuals, but rather that the adoption recognizes one's individuality and respects an individual's choice concerning relevant norms. Furthermore, I am not arguing for a descriptive account where communities follow this process, but I seek to demonstrate the sense in which I see gender identity to be partially defined by community.

I have in mind Menkiti's (1984) views on personhood, especially the process of maturation. This process accounts for one of the ways individuals learn the norms of their societies. According to Menkiti (1984), from the point of birth until death, individuals go through various rites of passage and carry out certain obligations. During this long process, they are taught societal norms, and I would argue this includes gendered norms that are definitive of gendered identities. Thus, the process of maturation sees the community as an important part of an individual life and is actively involved in shaping the lives of individuals. Menkiti (1984) uses the process to explain how individuals develop their personhood, I use it to explain the adoption of gendered identities. Unlike personhood, which is attained when individuals grow older, gendered identities can be adopted even when one is still a child when one develops a sense of communal norms and how they impact a gendered self (See Chapter Four for a discussion of this view). The basic idea is that in the process of maturation or as individuals grow older, their mental capacities develop which allows them to understand the norms and participate in communal life in such a way that it affects their conceptions of self. The argument is that participating in communal life includes attending rites of passage and carrying out obligations as set by one's community. The rites of passage are a way through which communal norms and values are taught to individuals (Turner, 1969; Eze, 2018).

So far, I have argued that the community creates the norms and offers the space for individuals to articulate them. Gendered identities are flamed through the norms. Any identity that is not defined by communal norms warrants rejection. But as pointed out above, this conception does not state that communities should force identities on individuals, rather individuals merely choose what is made available to them. If the choices are not enough, individuals become part of modifying the norms such that new interpretations of gendered identities are formed. The adoption of gendered identities requires that individuals understand the norms and identity with relevant ones, where

relevance can be defined as individuals being norm-compliant or norm-violators. The process of maturation points to the growth of individuals as they develop mental capacities and participate in communal life through which they acquire knowledge of the norms of the community. Since norms are attached to gendered identities, the norms that individuals adopt entail the kind of identities that individuals have adopted such that when individuals express and act on these norms, the community can see their identities and treat them accordingly. This is the sense I have in mind when I take the community to define gender identities and how individuals play a role in adopting them.

In short, the above discussion highlights a standard form argument. The argument is that if gender identity is defined by norms, as illustrated by Jenkins (2018), and norms are defined by the community, according to Menkiti (1984), then I can conclude that gender identity is defined by the community. However, I have shown that the primacy of the community in defining gender identity does not trump individuality. Rather, there is an interaction of both the individual and the community, even when individuals understand that this interaction does not ignore that the community has primacy. I have argued that the community respects an individual's individuality and autonomy as expressed in relational terms. However, the points I have made in this section raise questions about the identity of children and those who lack certain capacities. In the next section, I offer what I consider would be a way of understanding the identity of children and those lacking the relevant capacities.

3.6. Identity dilemma

Given the above presentation about norms and how they define gendered identities, one argument that may be presented as a challenge to the claims is the view that I need to account for gendered identities that result from a clash between the community and the individual. This objection is

about children who are said to be gendered and who are treated as gendered by the community, and what happens when such an identity clashes with what the child chooses at a later stage in life. Part of the objection is that the community assigns an identity to a child, but given my view that individuals adopt the identity based on relevant norms, the identity assigned by the community may be different from the identity an individual chooses. Therefore, it is not clear the extent to which this community-assigned identity becomes foundational to an individual's identity given the primacy of community discussed in the chapter. The precursor to this argument is children's inability to learn the norms of society at the early stages of their development because they have not yet developed cognitive capacities such as rationality. Thus, at this early stage, the child has not yet developed the ability to make independent choices about their own gendered identity nor the understanding of norms to identify with (see Barnes, 2022, for a similar discussion about people with cognitive disorders). This would mean, according to the objection, that at that early age, any gender identity the child is presumed to possess is a community-conferred identity.

Thus, there is nothing in the conception that explains what happens (at a later stage) to this assigned identity. This leads to a minor dilemma, that is, either the child abandons a communally assigned identity, which would mean undermining the primacy of the community; or on the other hand, the child adopts a communally assigned gendered identity, which leads to gender incongruence or dissonance. This refers to the disparity between one's perception of one's gender identity and community-assigned identity, or some kind of double consciousness about one's gender (Aronson, 1969; Brivic, 2002; see Du Bois, 1987 *on double consciousness*).

One way of responding to this argument is to simply state that the individual has no choice but to continue with an assigned gendered identity because individual interests cannot be elevated above those of the community. However, this response assumes passive individuals who have no choice

or space to articulate their values, thus, it assumes a community where individuals cannot express their individuality or that their identities are forced onto them (Tshivhase, 2013; Chimakonam, 2022). Furthermore, this failure to articulate one's values assumes that the notion of relevance would mean nothing for individuals because it would not matter what norms are relevant for individuals in adopting a gendered identity since their identity is fixed anyway. However, a proper response to the above objection is that I do not endorse imposed identities. I have argued for the place of relational autonomy and individuality in the adoption of gender identities, and when it comes to children (especially babies), if they cannot make decisions nor have the capacity to identify with certain norms, then they do not have a gender identity. They are merely participants in different gender roles or assigned gender roles, with presumed passive identities, but do not have an identity as argued in this Chapter. This response is a logical consequence of the notion of relevance. Individuals have a gender identity based on certain relevant norms. Children whose rationality has not developed cannot articulate what norms are relevant to them. Therefore, what is referred to as communally assigned identity is not identity in the true sense of the word, but mere role-playing. One would also question whether the response about children would also suggest that as adults the gender identity they hold would not clash with the community assigned identity. But as argued to state the community assigns an identity is not to state that the community forces the identities onto individuals but that there is an interaction between individuals and their communities. It was stated earlier that the identities in question are not wholly assigned nor self-chosen.

3.7. Virtues of the relational account

Given the above presentation of the relational account, one may wonder why the relational account of gender should gain attraction over other accounts that I have discussed in Chapter Two, the

fluidity and complementary account. That is, how different it is from the other accounts discussed before and what advantage it has over those other accounts.

Under the complementary account, I argued that gender may be understood in terms of the roles that men and women perform in a community (Momoh, 2000; Nzegwu, 2004; Oelofsen, 2018). I stated that this account does not deal directly with identity, but rather it does answer the identity question through an understanding of equal value assigned roles of men and women. For instance, one may argue that men and women complement each other in the sense that whatever it is that they do, whether gender-specific roles or not, their effort and product ought to be assigned equal value. This is different from the traditional Western account of gender as seen in patriarchy where women are subordinate women to men and mostly confined to certain roles such as the domestic (Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005; Sultana, 2010/2011). The idea is that because women are undervalued compared to men, the roles that are assigned to them are also regarded as having less value. However, the complementary account is different in the sense that it regards men and women are equal, and by extension, the value of what they do. For instance, when a woman does farm work, she is as equally valued as a man who hunts. As a woman, in an African cultural worldview, she does not occupy a subordinate position (Sesanti, 2016). A woman as a farmer does not mean that farming is undervalued. Farming is equally valued as hunting.

With the fluidity account, it is not so much about the equal value of social roles, I argued that I take the fluidity account better captures identities, the fluidity of identities. It does account for social roles, but by understanding how the role is performed by adopting a particular identity (at least in ways that I presented it in the chapter). Thus, with the identities of male daughters and female husbands, I argued that the fluidity account focuses on how individuals who identify as women do not have a fixed identity, they can take on identities ascribed to men (Amadiume, 1987,

2005; Nzegwu, 2004; Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). As a caveat, I argued that upon reflection the fluidity of identities may be interpreted as a preservation of the patriarchal structure of society, but one that presents a distinct version of patriarchy, a social order that is juxtaposed with matriarchy (Nwoko, 2012, 72; Amadiume, 2005). Thus, I argued that the patriarchal understanding comes from the sense that women must take on identities of men which allows them to carry out certain social roles but not vice versa. The point made was that this change in the identity of a woman to become a man assumes some kind of difference in power relations that exist between men and women. Indeed, if there was no such difference, then it would be absurd to talk about a change in identity. Fluidity resolves the differing power relations defined through inheritance and marriage. Again, this is merely a brief view of a lengthy discussion in Chapter Two.

Relating this discussion to the present concerns, I mentioned at the end of Chapter Two and the beginning of this Chapter that there is a question that the fluidity and complementary account fail to answer. A question that I believe is at the heart of any gender debate, is a question about how the nature of gender identities, "man" and "woman" should be understood. If one looks at a presentation of the complementary account, this question is not answered. In presenting her account, Nzegwu asks "Are there women in Igbo society? She unequivocally responds to the question in the affirmative but does not state how "woman" as a gender identity ought to be understood (Nzegwu, 2004, 562). On the other hand, the fluidity account also makes a similar assumption. It states that daughters can become male, and females can become husbands. I mentioned that while the terms used here are sex terms the identities in question are social and not biological. An easier way to interpret them, for the sake of argument, is to state that women can become men. The problem with the account is that it does not engage with these concepts. With the relational account presented so far, I have attempted to offer an account of how gender identity,

whatever it is, can be understood from an African cultural worldview. But this is intuitive given the lengthy discussion offered in the chapter. There is another way of understanding the virtue of the relational account.

Another way of understanding an advantage a relational account has over those other accounts is to show the sense in which the relational account would address the concerns of complementary and fluidity accounts of gender. Thus, a defender of a relational account ought to show the sense in which the account allows for genders to be fluid and complementary. To start with the fluidity account, one automatic response is to state that the relational account allows for gender fluidity. I have stated that to have a gendered identity is to identify with a set of relevant norms that define that gender (Jenkins, 2018). I argued that norms change, and this may lead to changes in identities that spring from them. Consider the following case of inheritance, suppose there is a person who identifies as a woman but lives in a patriarchal society where only men inherit their father's property. Suppose in this society there is a proviso that a woman can inherit if she becomes a man. This means that to fulfil the requirements of inheritance, the woman ought to start complying with the relevant norms that define the gendered identity of the man. Thus, under the relational account, fluidity comes through the capacity to identify with relevant norms. I have argued that norms do change and get modified, which means that gendered identities can be variegated and fluid. This is the sense in which a relational account allows for gender fluidity.

Furthermore, the relational account also accounts for gender complementarity. Under gender complementarity, it does not matter what role a person performs with respect to one's gender in a community, instead what matters is that they are equally valued. A relational account that subsumes gender complementarity ought to show how gender identities defined by norms would be equal. One would argue that under a relational account, identities are equal in so far as there are

no hierarchical undertones attached to the norms that define such identities. Thus, if the norms of society do not carry any notions of subordination and privilege then one would argue that the identities that are formed from such norms are heterarchical. This supports the sense in which gender has been represented in the African cultural worldview (Momoh, 2000; Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005). But one should not be too quick to make this statement because it is possible to have a relational account that does not subsume gender complementarity. This would be a case of Western forms of patriarchy where norms that define women, are those that subordinate them or see them as having less value compared to men (Haslanger, 2012; Oyowe & Yurkivksa, 2014). But as shown before, this view of gender does not correspond to what is known about traditional African communities (Momoh, 2000; Nzegwu, 2004; Oelofsen, 2018). Given the above presentation, there are good reasons to hold a relational account as an account of gender identity in the African context.

3.8. Conclusion

In conclusion, in this Chapter, I have argued for a way of understanding gender from conceptions of identity already present in African cultures. The aim is to show that there are resources in the African context that are a valuable contribution to understanding gender identity. I started by presenting the motivation for the chapter, then presented a conception of personhood as personal identity, at least interpreted in ways I understand it while staying as close as possible to the conception put forward by Molefe. I then used this conception to argue for a conception of gendered identities. The argument is that the community is an essential part of identity and by extension confers identity upon individuals. I argued that individuals are products of the community. I adopted Jenkins' norm relevancy account which appeals to norms in the conceptualization of gender identity. The frameworks were chosen to discuss a standard form

argument if gendered identities are defined by norms, and norms are defined by the community, then gendered identities are defined by the community. I have argued for a moderate position that the community defines identities and individuals adopt them, but even in adopting them, the community is also involved. Individuals adopt gendered identities as they learn and identify with relevant norms. I showed that individuals come to learn the norms of society by appealing to the process of maturation as provided by Menkiti.

CHAPTER FOUR

PERSONHOOD AND GENDER IN AN AFRICAN CULTURAL WORLD VIEW

4.1. Introduction

In thinking about the relationship between personhood and gender, one way of framing this view is to pose the obvious question, the extent to which personhood and gender are related. But this question is general and leaves a lot to be desired. Perhaps, a more specific question can be framed by asking "whether personhood is gendered." Part of the meaning of the question is to draw attention to conceptions of personhood, such as the ones discussed in Chapter One and show if there is a relationship between personhood and gender. In Chapter One I demonstrated that there are many conceptions of personhood as given by scholars such as Menkiti (1984, 2004), Wiredu (1996), Gyekye (1995), Kaphagawani (2004), Behrens (2013), Etieyibo (2020) and Molefe (2017), just to mention a few. What was established from the discussion is that there are distinct approaches to understanding what it means to be a person. The distinction can be made in terms of others being metaphysical and others being normative, but this is a general view. Specific claims made under each conception highlight how distinct one conception is from another conception and how they or each can relate to gender.

In African philosophical literature, some scholars have attempted to discuss the relationship between personhood and gender and part of their approach picking out a specific conception and showing its relationship to gender, whether positive or negative. However, not every conception has found itself on the side of controversy, as such I will work with what I consider to be the most controversial conception in African Philosophical literature. This is a conception of personhood which I discussed as the social notion of personhood or personhood as moral virtue, traditionally

attributed to Menkiti. At the center of the controversy (as per the current state of scholarship on gender) are scholars such as Oyowe and Yurkivska, Manzini, Oelofsen and to some extent Molefe (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Manzini, 2018; Oelofsen, 2018; Molefe, 2020). These scholars can be categorized into two camps. The first camp includes like Oyowe, Yukivska, and Manzini who argue that personhood is gendered and present their argument as a critique of the social notion of personhood. The second camp includes scholars like Oelofsen and Molefe who defend personhood from such critiques by arguing that personhood is not gendered. This chapter is an additional response to the responses given by both Oelofsen and Molefe.[14]

In this paper, I join the debate by aligning myself with views that show that personhood is not gendered. that the claim that *personhood is not gendered* does not have a single meaning. It could mean that personhood recognizes gender but does not get influenced or it could simply mean personhood has nothing to do with gender, namely, that there is no relationship between the two. Alternatively, one may adopt the terms "gender inclusivity" or "gender exclusivity" to describe these permutations. By "gender inclusivity", I have in mind the view that there is a relationship between personhood and gender such that an evaluation of personhood would require an analysis of gender. On the other hand, by "gender exclusivity" I have in mind the separation of the two. Thus, one would simply state that the analysis of personhood does not require a discussion about gender. This is a more radical view as it reflects a blatant denial of gender identity in any talk of personhood. Oyewumi's (2005) view that there is no gender among the Yoruba, would mean that if the Yoruba had a conception of personhood, that concern would be mutually exclusive from gender. A third possible account is where one would argue for a moderate position, where one

[14] However, these scholars may not be the only ones in the African Philosophical literature who might have said something about gender and personhood. There could be other scholars whom I have not mentioned in the chapter. I only engage with these scholars because of my familiarity with their views.

would state that the relationship between personhood and gender is contextual. The moderate position is functional, that is, it depends on what the discussant wishes to do with these concepts. My dissertation endorses this moderate position, but it is founded on ideas about gender inclusivity as opposed to gender exclusivity. My adoption of personhood as being gender inclusive comes with a distinct conception of gender. That is, part of being a person means that the individual could be gendered but the evaluation and analysis of personhood does not require an evaluation of one's gender. I consider gender to be a mere contingent expression of personhood, and I consider personhood to be more about the acquisition of virtue and not about an affirmation of one's gender role or identity. Gender is not a problem for personhood because the conception of gender I consider to be dominant in most traditional African societies is complementary unlike a conception associated with Western traditional societies that is hierarchical as defined by patriarchy. As discussed in the previous chapters, African traditional societies are historically known to have been largely matriarchal. However, for those African societies that are known to be patriarchal, so the argument goes, the version of patriarchy dominant in such societies is different from Western forms of patriarchy, it is patriarchy that can be juxtaposed with matriarchy without an inherent contradiction (Amadiume, 2005). This form of juxtaposition forms the reason for my endorsement of gender inclusivity in the African cultural worldview.

One would argue that my moderate view and its presupposition of gender inclusivity can be cashed out by another closely related term, gender neutrality. In this part of the dissertation, I will not use this term. I reject this terminology because, in feminist and more broadly political theory, it is well known that gender neutrality might not be a good thing. This is because something might be gender neutral on the face of it, even intended to be universal respecting human dignity, but on closer inspection it is partial towards men in practice, hence falsely universalizing the masculine social

position. While this critique may seem more practical than conceptual, it is valuable in assessing whether the concept of gender neutrality accurately reflects lived realities rather than remaining an abstract ideal. Gender issues are deeply embedded in lived experiences, and the emphasis on avoiding gender-based role assignments raises questions about the applicability of gender neutrality in today's societies. Gender is deeply ingrained in societal structures, influencing how individuals define themselves and how social policies are formulated to ensure equal treatment of men and women. Implementing gender neutrality could inadvertently erase the unique experiences and identities of those who strongly identify with a particular gender. This erasure risks overlooking gender-specific experiences, particularly those related to discrimination or cultural traditions, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of social policies aimed at addressing inequality. The basic point is that gender cannot simply be ignored. Recognizing gender differences does not necessarily imply endorsing hierarchical ordering. Instead, it acknowledges the complex ways in which gender influences individual lives and societal relations, allowing for effective approaches to achieving equality.

The adoption of the term “gender inclusivity” as part of the gender conversation aligns with the goal of the chapter. Inclusivity is a phrase borrowed from Anthony Appiah’s (1996) logical move in the choice of the term “colour consciousness” over “colour blindness” concerning race theory. Colour blindness is rejected because it undermines experiences or racial groups and, in a way, perpetuates racism through its demand to treat people equally by ignoring race as something that exists. The disadvantage of this approach is that it shuts down a conversation about race much as people continue to experience discrimination based on race (Appiah, 1996; Fryberg, 2010; Williams, 2011). Following the same logic an individual could be gender-conscious alongside gender inclusivity rather than gender blindness or gender neutrality. “Gender consciousness” in a

way affirms women's full humanity as expressed through sexual differences. This allows for a conversation on gender without subtly or implicitly endorsing the dominance of the masculine position.

The chapter is structured as follows; in the first section, I present the relationship between personhood and gender. I look at some conceptions of personhood and how they can respond to the gender question. I then discuss an African conception of personhood as a moral virtue. Since it is one conception that has found itself at the side of controversy, I discuss this view in detail and then offer my intervention to highlight what I consider to be problematic with the critiques.

4.2. Some considered conceptions of personhood and gender

In chapter one, I have discussed several conceptions of personhood. Broadly, I looked at two categories, metaphysical and normative views of personhood. As with metaphysics, which is about the nature of reality, I argued that metaphysical accounts of personhood question the nature of beings that persons are. Several accounts answer this question differently, it could be beings with a spirit, soul, or body (the transcendental notions of personhood), beings of a certain kind, that is, emotive, rational, embodied and situated (capacity notion of personhood, metaphysical notion of personhood and embodied-situated view of personhood). On the other hand, normative accounts of personhood deal with the question of moral status. That is, in virtue of what beings called persons have moral status. Again, several accounts have been presented, and some of the answers suggest beings with certain capacities such as sympathy, rationality or autonomy (the capacity notion of personhood), and some argue for beings that have virtue (personhood as moral status). But when it comes to gender, the general question is whether personhood (whatever the conception) is gendered. There are two important questions with respect to the claim *personhood is gendered*:

(i) What does the proposition "personhood is gendered" mean?

(ii) How does personhood become gendered?

I will not discuss all the conceptions of personhood found in the African philosophical literature as presented in Chapter One. Instead, I only adopt what I consider to be the dominant views in the African philosophical literature, and these include, the transcendental notion of personhood, the capacity-based notion of personhood and the social notion of personhood. The point is to show how these different conceptions answer the gender questions (i) and (ii) above. However, as I have pointed out, this chapter pays special attention to the social notion of personhood because of the debate that has come up in the African philosophical literature. This means that the discussion on the transcendental and capacity-based view of personhood lays a background to the main concerns discussed under the social notion of personhood.

4.2.1. Gender and the transcendental notion of personhood

The first notion of personhood I discussed in chapter one is the transcendental notion of personhood. Also known as the inherent notion of personhood (Etieyibo, 2020). It is a metaphysical notion of personhood and focuses on the nature of persons as beings with features that are spiritual, physical, and quasi-physical. These features are definitive of human beings and distinguish human beings from non-human animals. The main principle of this view of personhood is that to be a person is to be a human being and to be a human being is to be a person (Molefe, 2021; Kaphagawani, 2004; Wiredu, 1992). With respect to gender, one question that I keep asking in this dissertation is the sense in which personhood is gendered. Considering the present concerns, the question is about whether the transcendental nature of personhood is gendered. Given that this notion of personhood is about human beings as persons, the question would be about the sense in which human beings are gendered. Note that this way of posing the questions seems to imply that

gender is part and parcel of human nature, as an ontological feature of the makeup of human beings. However, framing the question in this way has some obvious problems. The first problem is about gender as something located in the constitutive makeup of human beings - as highlighted under the transcendental notion of personhood. Secondly, and by extension, for societies with a hierarchy of genders, it should be shown that subordination and privilege are part of human nature (Nussbaum, 1995, 360; Beauvoir, 1973, 301). The latter is not a problem for societies that endorse the fluidity and complementarity of genders (Nzegwu, 2004; Amadiume, 1987, 2005), but must deal with the former problem. In the foregoing, I will attempt to frame this notion of personhood in ways it could be gendered as implied in the questions but also show how this framing fails.

In the first chapter, I presented several versions of this view by appealing to Wiredu, Gyekye and Gbadegesin's views about the Akan and Yoruba (Wiredu, 1996; Wiredu & Gyekye, 1992; Kaphagawani, 2004). Briefly, according to the Akan, the word for "person" is *"onipa"* as described under the transcendental notion of personhood refers to the biological human animal or being. The distinguishing features of *onipa* include *mogya, sunsum, okra* and *nipadua* (Wiredu, 1987, 160-161). While Gyekye agrees with Wiredu on *onipa* as having a *nipadua*, translated as the biological human body, they disagree over the nature of other entities (Kaphagawani, 2004). I showed that, for Wiredu, *okra* is a life-giving entity, the innermost self, the essence of the individual person and it is quasi-physical in nature, meaning that it is neither a completely spiritual nor a completely physical substance (Wiredu, 1987; Kaphagawani, 2004). For Gyekye, *okra* is a divine or spiritual entity, and it is purely spiritual in nature as it explains Akan's belief in the afterlife (Gyekye, 1995, 85). The other important feature is the *sunsum*, which Wiredu understands as symbolic of someone's personality. It is believed to originate from the father and dies when the possessor dies, therefore it is not spiritual (Wiredu, 1987; Kaphagawani, 2004). For Gyekye, the

sunsum is a spirit (spiritual) and immortal and comes from the supreme being. The *sunsum* is spiritual because as something responsible for personality, traits such as courage, gentleness, etc., these traits "are psychological, not sensible, or physical" (Gyekye, 1995; Kaphagawani, 2004, 333).

The other feature of *onipa* is the *mogya*. This is translated as blood and according to Wiredu, *mogya* enters a human being at conception. It is believed to originate from the mother; therefore, it is not just any blood but one that is the same as the individual's mother. For Wiredu, it is partially material. On the other hand, Gyekye is not explicit about this feature of *onipa*. Nonetheless, given that relations are usually defined as blood ties, the view that *mogya* can be traced to the mother nicely features with the broader view that the Akan are a matrilineal group. Lastly, the two scholars share one uncontroversial part of a person, the human (corporeal) body, which is generally distinguished by the sex categories of male, female and intersex although a minority. It constitutes the physical or biological body and all there is to it (Gyekye, 1995; Kaphagawani, 2004).

A similar but slightly different view I also discussed is about the Yoruba, adopted from Gbadegesin's presentation. The Yoruba word for "person" as a biological human being is *eniyani* although it also has a normative meaning. Among the Yoruba, *eniyani* is made up of four major ontological features, *"ara", "okani", "emi"* and *"ori"* (Gbagedesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004, 333). *Ara* translates to the English word "body", and it represents the human biological body with all the external and internal organs. Like the Akan, this is another non-controversial feature of human beings. However, one other feature that does not seem to have a specific translation and meaning is the *okan*. Gbadegesin provides two conceptions of the "*okan"*. In one sense the "*okan"* is interpreted as the "heart" in English. A biological organ responsible for pumping (or circulating) blood in the human body. In another sense, it is associated with "consciousness", as the center for

"psychic and emotional states" (Gbadegesin, 1998; Kaphagawani, 2004, 334). Similarly, another feature is "*ori".* According to Gbadegisin, it has two natures. On the one hand, it refers to the physical human head, and on the other hand, it is a spiritual head responsible for human destiny (Gbadegesin, 1998) Nonetheless, as Kaphagawani observes, the disagreements do not matter to an outsider like me except the revelation that there is more to a human being than a biological body. Another important feature is "*emi,"* which is a life-giving entity. It is that which gives life to a "lifeless" physical body (Kaphagawani, 2004; Gbadegesin, 1998). Again, what is important is that the Yoruba believe that a human being has a nature that constitutes physical and spiritual dimensions (Gbadegesin, 1998).

In the presentations of the Akan and Yoruba above, one can be that there is nothing about gender mentioned, whether as a form of identity human beings have or a role they perform. Perhaps there is a way of framing the above discussion in ways that capture gender. As Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) state, this could be a deliberate neglect of scholars to tackle gender issues. But one wonders whether it is the lack of interest in dealing with gender issues in the analysis of personhood or whether gender has nothing to do with this conception of personhood. The reason for this submission is that gender has been framed as a social kind and this conception of personhood seems to be dealing with a natural kind. Thus, regardless of whether one is concerned with gender identity or gender role, one underlying assumption that unites these two is the view that one is concerned with something social in nature. This already separates this conception of personhood from gender. But if there is a thread of doubt to this argument, then one would be presenting an account of gender that is tied to the spiritual and physical features that make up a human being, again, it would not be clear to me whether, at this level of analysis, the concern is about gender or sex. For instance, when Oyowe and Yurkivska try to frame this view of personhood in terms of

gender by pointing to the Akan's blood *(mogya)* and personality *(sunsum)* principles, point to maternal and paternal contributions to the make-up of a person (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Wiredu, 1992, 197). That is, how these principles situate a person in a network of paternal and maternal relations. This would in a way be appealing to the body and its place in social relations. It is not clear to me how merely being a member of a social group is an account of gender. It can indeed amount to some kind of social identity but one that is not gendered.

Another way a person may attempt to frame the above presentation of the notion of personhood in terms of gender would be a move away from the body by locating gender as a constituent spiritual feature of persons. For instance, if persons are said to be human beings with a soul or spirit, it is possible that these spirits could be gendered. Views by Stella Nyanzi about gendered spirits seem like a plausible response. According to Nyanzi, some individuals claim that they are possessed by the spirits of ancestors who claim homosexual relations (Nyanzi, 2013). According to Mbiti (1970), ancestors are the souls of those who had lived a moral and exemplary life and died, they are venerated by the living members of the community. Ancestors have a moral function in their communities and can help and destroy individuals and communities (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 2010). To Nyanzi (2013), ancestors have a gender-confirming function. One would wonder whether an ancestral spirit can be identified as either an ontological feature of a human being or a mere disembodied and external/independent being.

Nyanzi's (2013) submission suggests two kinds of beings, first, ancestors as an external influence of an individual's gender identity, and second, as a matter of possession such that the spirit of an ancestor is that which confirms a person's gender, I will treat this latter view as something akin to reincarnation. The former is not problematic because it has nothing to do with what a person is, other than a person being influenced by departed relatives. However, the latter is problematic as it

shows the inherent nature of gender. It indicates a spirit that had lived before, with a gendered identity. But whether these (reincarnated) spirits are ancestors as Nyanzi calls them requires special attention. Scholars tend to present ancestors as individuals who lived morally exemplary lives, lived until full age and died of natural causes (Menkiti, 1984; Mbiti, 1960). Ancestors are on this view beings that continue to live independent lives in the afterlife (Menkiti, 1984). Those who reincarnate are spirits of those whose lives were cut short and so reincarnate with the character and identity of a former life (I would include a gendered identity) (Stevenson, 2000). Nonetheless, even if they are not ancestors and are called by a different name, it raises questions about whether one's gendered identity would in this case be an inherent feature of a human being. An intuition most scholars would not take on board given that they see gender as a social kind (Oyewumi, 2005). Furthermore, it raises interesting questions on the place of autonomy in the construction of one's gendered identity (see my discussion in chapter three).

A more plausible rendition of the transcendental notion of personhood in its relationship to gender takes gender as a social kind. When one appeals to features that are definitive of human beings, one remains at the metaphysical level. What matters to this kind of personhood in the case of the Akan, for example, is just having a *nipadua* (body), *sunsum* (personality principle), *mogya* (blood principle), and the *okra* (life principle). This means that while remaining at this level of analysis, where the features that make up human beings *vis-a-vis* persons are conceived more broadly, the gender question is a non-starter. But the same view presented at the level of detail, one would see that it establishes a distinct relationship to gender. In its specificity, one would be considering not just merely having the body, but the kind of body one has male or female and the connection this has to roles in a social setting, or how the blood/personality principle connects a person to a lineage system, whether matrilineal or patrilineal; or having a spirit or soul and whether the spirit/soul is

gendered. But if one maintains gender to be a social kind, then it is important to note that one is here making a logical move from what a human being is or has in terms of nature, to what a human being does in a social setting. This is a valid concern and a logical error unless one establishes a necessary connection between one's nature and social identity, which (by definition) is contingent (Wiredu, 1992; Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014).

Furthermore, if gender is also conceived as an identity that (particular) sex-ed bodies acquire or a role they perform, I do not think Wiredu and Gyekye in presenting an account of the Akan view of personhood, are concerned with the social identity these bodies have nor roles they play. Thus, they conceive males and females as full human beings, and therefore, possess moral equality as persons. There is no distinction made between what makes a male and female human being unless one is establishing social function as a point of making the distinction, but this does invoke a different question. The point is that whether one is a man or woman, these are mere social identities, what is fundamental is that one is a human being. As a human being, it means one has the features that are definitive of human beings and by extension persons. Nzegwu is clear in her submission that the Igbo words that come close to man and woman as gendered terms tend to be biological terms that represent male and female offspring (Nzegwu, 2004). From Nzegwu's presentation, one can extend the view by stating that the terms "male" and "female" only distinguish what is fundamentally known as an offspring of a human being. What makes one either "male human" or "female human" is a biological distinction, but they all belong to one species, human animals, as opposed to non-human animals.

Another important point would be the moral implication of this view of personhood. That is, normatively speaking, whether this view of personhood can be used to explain the differential treatment of various genders. If personhood is about human nature but different humans are treated

as if they have different natures, then there should be a way of establishing equal treatment from this view of personhood. One response that comes to mind is to cash out the equality of genders in terms of human rights and dignity from the conception of human nature presented above. Wiredu makes this argument in his conception of human rights from the traditional African cultural worldview of the Akan. He argues that rights can be accorded to a human being by possessing *okra* which comes directly from the Supreme Being. This makes okra of a sacred nature; hence it has intrinsic value, a value conferred onto human beings. For Wiredu, to have Okra is to have dignity or moral status, and therefore, to have rights (Wiredu, 1996).

Similarly, a similar argument can be drawn about the other elements such as *mogya* (which comes from the mother's side) and the *sunsum* (which comes indirectly from the father as a result of the father's *ntolo*, sperm, uniting with the mother's blood).[23] These two features place an individual in a network of relationships where the individual becomes the center of rights and obligations (Wiredu, 2009). Regarding one of the basic premises of the complementary account, one would see that any member of a relationship ought to be treated as an equal and valuable member of that relationship for it to be productive (Oelofsen, 2018; Sanni & Ofana, 2021). It makes no difference whether one is born male or female, or man or woman, but if one is a human being with ontological features or in a network of egalitarian human relationships, one deserves equal treatment as anyone else.

What I have shown from the above presentation is the sense in which the transcendental notion of personhood relates to gender in terms of the framing question, of whether personhood is gendered. The main intuition I adopt from the above presentation and discussion is that the transcendental notion of personhood is not gendered in ways that take gender as one of the properties that are definitive of human beings. I tried to establish a relationship between features that define a human

being *vis-a-vis* persons and gender with the hope of investigating whether gender can be cashed out from the metaphysical nature of human beings, but gender as a social kind, I showed that this argument seems to fail. It fails in so far as one is making a move from a statement about the nature of human beings with respect to features definitive of human beings, to a statement about gender by appealing to the social function of the features without justification of why this ought to be the case. I stated that these two are separable, invoke different questions and can be treated differently. In my view, gender is a mere contingent expression of personhood. One is first a human being *vis-a-vis* a person before one takes on a gender role or identity. Expressed normatively, even if human beings operate in social settings, the respect they have for others should be based on the view that they are human beings not as gendered persons.

4.2.2. Gender and the capacity-based notion of personhood

Another dominant notion of personhood in African philosophical literature is the capacity-based notion of personhood. A general thesis of this view is that a human being is a person if and only if the being in question has certain capacities, whatever these may be (Behrens, 2013; Molefe, 2019). Just like the transcendental view of personhood, this notion of personhood takes on distinct variations. In other words, scholars appeal to various distinct capacities such as rationality, sympathy, etc. I argued that some views of this notion of personhood can be traced to scholars such as Aristotle, Kant, Gyekye, Metz, etc. In the African philosophical literature, dominant versions of the capacity-based view of personhood point to capacities such as *rationality, sympathy, and relationships*. Since my concern is about gender in the African context, I discuss the gender question (as framed above) by appealing to these capacities. Furthermore, even if the capacity talk is metaphysical, the main claims end with normative conclusions. Thus, the capacity-based notion of personhood seeks to establish a foundation for understanding moral status or

dignity. Underlying this view of personhood with respect to the gender question is the idea that it seeks to establish moral foundations for how gendered individuals ought to be treated.

I will not get into details of this notion of personhood given the lengthy discussion in the first chapter. Nonetheless, what is important from this view of personhood is the idea that moral status implies that this view of personhood tends to treat human beings who can be recognized as possessors of the capacities as beings that have some kind of value (Darwal, 1977). However, as shown in Chapter One, there are various distinctions of value. One kind of value involved here is intrinsic value because these capacities are located within human beings. At the same time, since human beings are born with these capacities, they also have inherent value (Korsgaard, 1983). The view that human beings have value implies that their interests ought to be considered in making decisions, and this also means that the being with the capacity in question is morally considerable. Having to consider the interests of others underlies some kind of obligation. The obligation can be expressed as positive, meaning that it is something agents ought to do for others, or expressed as negative meaning as a constraint on the part of agents (Molefe, 2021; Donnelly, 2009; McNaughton & Rawling, 2006). But whether such obligations cannot be trumped is a different question. The basic view is that to have a capacity is to have value. Concerning the gender question, one would argue that no capacity is gendered, as such, any gendered individual ought to enjoy equal moral respect as everyone else (Molefe, 2021). However, the practical problems of gender inequality of gender-based violence show that there is something wrong with the way societies value these capacities. Societies are made up of human beings full of errors and who are not omniscient, they make mistakes concerning misrecognition, and this can hurt those who are deemed to lack the said capacities (Leeb, 2009; Walby, 1988).

4.2.2.1. The capacity for rationality

One view of personhood dominant in the African philosophical literature about capacities can be traced to Gyekye. I pointed out that Gyekye's view rose as a reactionary view to Menkiti's idea of personhood which I discuss below. Gyekye argues that personhood is based on capacities, and he takes these capacities as inherent in individuals. Gyekye was appealing to the possession of capacities for rationality (Gyekye, 1997; Molefe, 2016). Thus, like the Kantian view, to have the capacity for rationality is to have dignity or moral status (Korsgaard, 1986). For Behrens, having dignity makes an individual a moral patient, that is, one who is owed obligations from other moral agents (Behrens, 2013). The idea of being a moral patient implies constraints on what others can do to a person. Implicit under this idea of personhood is that one who lacks the capacity could be a subject of immoral treatment due to lack of the obligation in question. Given the gender question, this means that those individuals who are thought to lack capacities based on their gender would not enjoy moral equality as every other person in the community.

In gender studies and feminist literature, there have been discussions on whether women have the capacity for rationality (Oyewumi, 2005). Similarly, writing on the lack of female figures in philosophy, a discipline associated with systematic thinking, scholars have pointed out the general perception of society casting doubts on women's ability to philosophize, let alone produce knowledge (Fricker, 2007). In line with this thought, in chapter one, I alluded to the view that women in the history of Western thought have been considered as walking bodies and men considered as walking minds. Thus, in this tradition, there are categories of a "man of reason" and a "woman of the body". For du Toit and Coetzee (2017) "men transcend the logic in terms of which their bodies determine their place and worth in the society". The idea of a woman as a walking body has had a negative impact on women given that the body was given meaning and

place in society. For instance, women's bodies were considered rapeable and were limited to domestic roles, as well as presumed to be deserving of subordinate positions in society (Gqola, 2015; Haslanger, 2012). However, given that human beings are born with this capacity, and women are as human as men are, all such claims about women are a product of misrecognition or lack of acceptance of the truth about women (Fraser, 2007). Such claims about women are an empty rhetoric to justify men's privilege at the expense of women's humanity. Underlying such privilege is an oppressive patriarchal social system (Sultana, 2010).

4.2.2.2. The capacity for community (relationship)

Apart from any appeal to rationality, another notion of personhood based on capacities in the African philosophical literature discussed in chapter one comes from Metz. Metz's views are important because he discusses how an individual's capacity for relationships grounds dignity *vis-a-vis* human rights (Metz, 2012). Dignity here is understood as the highest moral status or respect (Molefe, 2021). Given that gender issues relate to the respect men and women have for each other and cashed out in terms of dignity and rights, perhaps Metz's ideas are helpful in flaming gender relations. To understand Metz's argument on the capacity for relationship as the basis for moral status, one needs to understand his idea on Ubuntu (Metz, 2017). According to Metz, Ubuntu as an African relational theory is grounded in harmony or relationship. A relationship of harmony constitutes two other distinct relationships, namely, shared identity, and goodwill. Shared identity in simple terms is a matter of belonging, having common goals with others and working with them to achieve them. Goodwill speaks to an attitude and actions that seek to promote the interests of others. He describes goodwill as involving the ability to be aware of the presence of others, feel for them, wish them well or see them as deserving of help, and act in ways that benefit them (Metz, 2013, 2017). Nonetheless, the relationship for Metz (2013) has intrinsic value, hence something

that ought to be promoted and respected (honoured). For Metz (2012), human beings have the capacity to commune with others, that is, they have this value within them. The question now is about the implication of this view on gender.

As individuals relate with each other, they take on various gendered identities and roles. The problem is when a hierarchy is placed on these identities or roles such that some are seen as deserving of less respect than others. But by appealing to Metz's (2012) idea of capacity to flame how each person is deserving of respect, one would simply state that having the capacity for a relationship or to commune with others gives the individual in question value or moral status, thus, deserving of moral consideration regardless of one's gender identity or role. Some scholars like John Sanni and Diana Ofana (2021) arguing within the African cultural worldview have stated that even in a harmonious relationship like that of Ubuntu, some individuals tend to occupy a privileged position while making others subordinate. They argue that statements such as "I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am," imply a relationship that sees every "I" as an important part of the relationship yet part of what the "I" represents are women who do not enjoy the same privilege as men (Sanni & Ofana, 2021). There is a sense in which one would argue that the objection makes sense for modern societies where gender is a central social problem. From Nzegwu's (2004) view, one would argue that the problem of subordination and privilege Sanni and Ofana (2021) appeal to reflects the imposition of Western metaphysical categories of gender. Nzegwu (2004) conceptualizes the relationship between men and women in a pre-colonial traditional community as complementary, that is, the equal valuing of every member of the community regardless of biological differences (see Chapter Two on Gender Complementarity). As Oyewumi (2005) puts it, biological differences need not imply differences in moral equality. Furthermore, one can adopt Oelofsen's (2018) view that Ubuntu cannot disrespect women. A

relationship like that of Ubuntu values the humanity of everyone which makes the individual in that relationship an integral part of the whole. Disrespecting the humanity of one group which would undermine their welfare would undermine the welfare of the whole group. This is the reciprocal nature of welfare in relational theories (Wiredu, 2008; Etieyibo, 2017).

4.2.2.3. The capacity for sympathy

Another scholar, Molefe, developed an account of the capacity-based notion of personhood. According to him, individuals have dignity by having the capacity for sympathy. To be sympathetic is to have the ability to hear and listen to others. Thus, it means to feel for others, recognize their presence and be moved by their presence. This is like what Metz describes as a caring relationship or solidarity. For Molefe (2020), sympathy is the basic virtue that leads to all other-regarding virtues such as compassion, love, friendship etc. The basic idea is that having personhood means being sympathetic to others or possessing all those virtues listed above (Molefe, 2020, 55; Wiredu, 1996). Furthermore, Molefe distinguishes between beings as objects and subjects of sympathy. Those that do not have capacity are objects and those with the capacity are both objects and subjects of sympathy. As objects of sympathy, they have lower moral status (Molefe, 2020). On the other hand, to be both an object and subject of sympathy is to have a higher moral status or dignity (Molefe, 2020). But the question now is about how this view of personhood relates to gender. One way of answering the question is to simply state that if an individual has the capacity for sympathy, one deserves dignity or ought to enjoy equal moral status regardless of one's gender.

To address what I have in mind, it is important to look at some of the folk psychological beliefs that are common in our communities, the main one being that women are more sympathetic than men. If this is true, then one must conclude that women have higher moral status than men. Since

sympathy is a natural feature of human beings just like pleasure or happiness, it is important to appeal to scientific literature. Research on this folk belief revealed that there are actual differences between men and women with respect to how they empathetically (or sympathetically) react to seeing others in suffering (Preis & Kroener-Herwig, 2012; Baez et al., 2017). Much of the research was done using methodologies such as self-reporting questionnaires, or electroencephalography which is used to assess empathy by examining neural responses to seeing others in pain, and/or functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) which also shows how men's and women's brains react and differ in seeing others in pain (Fan & Han, 2008). In these studies, it was found that women tend to respond more empathetically than men. Does this imply that men and women are naturally different?

However, it was also found that the major variable was the difference in societal expectations of both men and women (Pang, et al., 2023). In the studies, this was proven by introducing new expectations for men who had earlier scored lower than women, and this correlated with a rise in empathetic ability in such men such that there were no significant differences with women (Pang, et al., 2023). What this shows is that the folk psychological beliefs have something to do with how men and women respond socially given societal expectations and not a difference in natural capacities. It is societal norms that distinguish men and women, and they have an impact on how they function in society, including sympathetic responses to others. Therefore, if men and women are equal in their capacity for sympathy, and as Molefe (2021) puts it, the capacity for sympathy determines one's moral status of dignity, then men and women deserve equal status.

4.2.3. Gender and the social notion of personhood

Another notion of personhood that is dominant in the African cultural worldview is the social notion of personhood (Etieyibo, 2020; Menkiti, 1984). This conception of personhood emphasizes

the development of character or virtue as the moral goal of every individual in the community (Molefe, 2019). In other words, the development of moral wisdom or excellence is what determines one's moral standing in a community (Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Eze, 2018). Given that it falls under Afro-communitarianism, relations are of utmost value, and as such development of other-regarding virtues or relational virtues is prized (Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Gyekye, 1995; Molefe, 2019). Thus, the right virtues are those that promote the relationship, and the relationship has intrinsic value (Oyowe, 2013; Etieyibo, 2016). There are three underlying themes definitive of this view of personhood, namely, the primacy of the community, rituals of transformation and obligations, and lastly, seniority (Menkiti, 1984).

To start with the first, the social notion of personhood places emphasis on the centrality and primacy of the community in the attainment of virtue (Menkiti, 1984, Gyekye, 1992; Metz, 2012). The community is that which confers personhood onto the individual, that is, it plays a crucial role in an individual's acquisition of virtue. The basic idea expressed here is that a human being cannot become a person with the necessary virtues outside without the community. The process of social transformation through which individuals attain virtue is set by one's community. Menkiti (1984) affirms this when he states that the community is the prescriber and catalyst of norms. Therefore, appropriate judgment of whether one is a personhood can only come from the community.

Furthermore, the acquisition of virtue within the context of one's community is a process in which individuals can succeed or fail. Thus, personhood is an achievement in the acquisition of virtue (Menkiti, 1984; Eze, 2018). For instance, success is expressed as a moral judgement through statements such as "you are a person" in English or Zulu *"yo, u nobuntu"* (Tutu, 1995, 35). These moral judgements express the possession of good moral character or other-regarding virtues. It means the individual is compassionate, generous, hospitable, friendly, and caring (Tutu, 1999;

Molefe, 2021). In general, they express that one's character is in accordance with the norms and values of the community (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 2009; Gyekye, 2010). Nonetheless, as a process, it starts from childhood until adulthood, and it involves going through various rituals of transformation (rites of passage) and carrying out obligations set by one's community.

Time is important for Menkiti, he states that personhood is attained in time or as one grows older. This suggests the importance of seniority (1984, 2004). He cites an Igbo proverb "What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up" which illustrates the presumption of possession of moral wisdom by senior members of the community (Menkiti, 1984, 173). Similarly, in other cultures such as the Chewa, the proverb *"akulu akulu ndi mdambo mozimira moto"* means "elders are wise", portrays the incremental growth of wisdom and knowledge that elders possess which makes them trustworthy and dependable in times of crisis as problem solvers than the young (Rodgers, 2016). Elders have proven experience as such qualify for positions of authority, they possess both moral and practical wisdom (Wiredu, 2001; Chimakonam, 2021; Kayange, 2020). Upon this construal then, personhood admits of degrees, that is, some are less of persons than those who are full persons. The moral goal of everyone is to attain full personhood, or full excellence associated with the idea of personhood (Menkiti, 1984; Molefe, 2019).

The above is a scant view of Menkiti's (1984, 2004) view of personhood (for an in-depth discussion, refer to Chapter One). The basic idea is about personhood as an achievement, and it is achieved as initials participate in rituals of transformation set by one's community. When it comes to gender, the same gender question is posed, is the social notion of personhood gendered? Some scholars such as Oyowe, Yurkivska and Manzini have answered this question in the affirmative (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Manzini, 2018). On the other hand, some scholars such as Oelofsen and Molefe have responded to such views by showing that the social notion of personhood is not

gendered (Oelofsen, 2018; Molefe, 2019). In the foregoing, I will engage with this gender debate, but I also add my intervention, the general view being that personhood is not gendered.

4.2.3.1. Personhood as gendered

The first part of the debate is about views that consider personhood to be gendered, and these views can be attributed to scholars such as Oyowe, Yurkivska and Manzini (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Manzini, 2018). Oyowe and Yurkivska are the main scholars in presenting this critique because much of what Manzini discusses can be attributed to Oyowe's and Yurkivska's views. Nonetheless, I discuss their views separately because of the minor differences among them.

4.2.3.1.1. Anthony Oyowe and Olga Yurkivska

I consider Oyowe and Yurkivska to be the first scholars to raise a gender-based critique of this notion of personhood. According to them, African communities are essentially gendered and a conception of personhood that develops from such a community is also gendered. In line with the above two questions (i) what does personhood as gendered mean? (ii) how does personhood become gendered?

To start with the first question, (i) means that one is not just a full person who has achieved virtue but that the degree of respect depends not only on seniority but also one's gendered identity, for instance, as a "man", the respect an individual earns upon achieving personhood is different to the respect another individual who has achieved the same personhood earns as a "woman" (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). Thus, two senior members who are considered full persons have different degrees of moral status because of their gender differences. But again, it is important to keep in mind that there is an assumption of a distinct conception of gender, one that comes with a hierarchy. That is, men are the privileged class and women are the subordinated class (Oyewumi, 2005; Haslanger, 2012; Jenkins, 2018). This is the conception I have associated with the traditional

Western conception of gender (under the veil of patriarchy) (Amadiume, 1987; Sultan, 2012); for a discussion on this conception refer to Chapters Two and Three). But whether this Is the right conception of gender to associate with the African cultural worldview is part of the discussion in this section.

With respect to the second question (ii), they argue that personhood becomes gendered through the same process of socialization that transforms individuals from being mere biological animals into social persons. The background assumption to this claim is that African societies are essentially gendered. That is, the social organization of traditional African communities is one that takes gender as the organizing principle. Norms, values, obligations, and rites of passage are structured along gender lines. This means that the socialization process which requires that individuals participate in rituals or rites of passage and carry out certain obligations to become persons is also a gendering process (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). One can reconstruct their argument as follows:

1. Personhood is a characteristic of a corporate entity with a status and position within social relations.
2. Personhood is neither intelligible without relations, duties, and obligations nor social roles and statuses.
3. Part of duties are rituals and social rules that transform individuals from mere biological animals to persons and these are organized along gender lines.
4. Personhood is equally incomprehensible without appraisal of conduct in terms of social norms, values, and expectations, which cannot be separated from gender.

C. Therefore, personhood and identity are necessarily gendered.

The first two premises (1 and 2) are self-explanatory and uncontroversial given the presentation of the social notion of personhood above. However, of interest are the last two premises (3 and 4). The basic view in these premises is that rites of passage and social rules that transform individuals from mere biological animals to persons are organized along gender lines. Given the view that these are necessary conditions for personhood, personhood is impossible without them. Every individual who wants to become a person must fulfil this condition, but given that they are necessarily gendered, the resulting personal identity that the individual acquires would essentially be gendered (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, 92). The rites of passage and obligations include what was stated above as naming, adolescent rites of passage, marriage, procreation, death, etc. As individuals participate in these gendered rituals, they acquire a status or quality of being a person that is gendered. Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) argue that African communities are gendered in the sense that they have separate social roles for men and women. They argue that as individuals carry out obligations to become persons, they also acquire a gendered identity.

They add that the evaluation of one's personhood cannot be made separate from the evaluation of one's social roles, and the latter is gendered. That is if one argues that *"uyu ndi munthu"* or "this is a person", one is appealing to how the individual conducts oneself according to the norms of the society, but the norms themselves are essentially gendered (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). To illustrate the above claim, Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) adopt Amadiume's views on the socialization process of a woman. This is the socialization process that shows how a woman goes through different stages of development. It is about how a woman as a baby, grows up to be an adolescent daughter, gets married and becomes a wife, has a child as a mother, up until old age as a matron (Amadiume, 1987, 70; Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, 92). From this view, Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) argue that if a woman in question is to become a person, such as a woman would

not just become a person in the abstract but one who is simultaneously recognized as a daughter, wife, a mother, matron, etc. what they point to are the various rites of passage a woman goes through, and per Menkiti's (1984) argument, they are necessary conditions for attainment of personhood. The evaluation of the woman's personhood would require the evaluation of her position as a daughter, mother, etc. (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, 92). I discuss the responses below, for now, I consider another related critique from Manzini.

4.2.3.1.2. Zinhle Manzini

Another scholar, Manzini develops the above critique against the social notion of personhood (Manzini, 2018). The critique's main thesis is that Menkiti's notion of personhood is gendered, sexist and exclusionary. Like Oyowe's and Yurkivska's (2014) claim above, Manzini's (2018) critique is also concerned with the rituals that define the ontological progression of individuals in their attainment of moral standing. However, Manzini points to the binary nature of rites of passage and argues that personhood is exclusionary of non-binary gendered individuals. Thus, the social notion of personhood fails to account for all identities, and it is exclusionary of people who (not by choice of their own) do not fit the binary sex and gender categories. An example Manzini (2018) provides is that of intersex individuals and specifically mentions Caster Semenya, a well-known South African athlete. For Manzini, intersex individuals such as Semenya cannot take part in puberty rites given that they do not fit binary sex categories set by society. This means that Semenya cannot become a person under the social notion of personhood. In short, Manzini adds to premise 3 of the above-reconstructed argument. I have reconstructed Manzini's argument as follows:

1. Puberty rites in African communities are divided into binary categories of male and female.

2. Some individuals, such as intersex individuals, cannot fit into these strict binary sexual categories.
3. Intersex individuals cannot participate in puberty rites.
4. (Additional premise) Intersex individuals cannot become persons.

C. Therefore, personhood is gendered (in an exclusionary way).

In the above argument, Premise 1 comes from Oyowe's and Yurkivska's (2014) claim that rites of passage are organized along gender lines. Premise 2 comes as a limitation from Premise 1 given the strict binary categories set by society. My interest in this section lies with the claim made in Premise 3. A discussion of this premise should highlight what Manzini has in mind in presenting the critique, that is, understanding the motivation behind this critique.

From the above argument, Manzini questions the nature of initiation rites. In most African cultures, when children grow to an adolescent stage, they are required to attend puberty rites which mark a transition from childhood to adulthood. This transition is with respect to sexual life, civic responsibility, morality, values, etc. (Eze, 2018; Momoh, 2000; Turner, 1969). The problem Manzini identifies is that rites of passage, such as puberty rites, tend to have two groups, one for males and another for females (Munthali & Zulu, 2007; Langeveld, 2004). For Manzini this kind of division is exclusionary. Manzini questions whether this division would allow for those intersex individuals, as well as the impact it has on their quest for the personhood of the individuals in question (Manzini, 2018). In the case of Semenya, Manzini is convinced that Semenya cannot fit into such categories and so cannot become a "person" given the apparent failure to fulfil all the requirements of personhood (Manzini, 2018).

The motivation for the critique is that intersex individuals are human beings, and being intersex is not a condition that warrants distinct treatment, as such they deserve equal moral consideration just like other human beings. This means that it is morally wrong for them to be excluded from moral consideration (personhoods) by the very factors beyond their control. Thus, one cannot assign appropriate moral praise and blame (moral judgment) if this assignment is based on factors that are morally arbitrary or out of luck (I will come back to this view later).

Nonetheless, one would imagine that excluded individuals, such as Semenya, have two choices; on the one hand, Semenya would have to act against her will by "forcing" herself to participate in the various rites of passage just to become a person. But this would have to be done at the expense of disrespecting her autonomy and rationality, where the latter means that one's actions are not reflected in one's own will. At the same time, it is forcing oneself to act in ways that do not correspond to one's conception of the self. On the other hand, there is the obvious problem of identifying with a sex category. Thus, Semenya would willingly choose to participate in the rites of passage but must decide to participate either in male or female rituals.[15] In my intervention, I show the sense in which the latter seems to be plausible without comprising one's conception of the self.

4.2.3.2. Some considered responses to the critiques

Given the above critiques, some scholars have responded to the claims. In this section of the paper, I consider some responses in the African philosophical literature. At the time of writing, I am aware of a few scholars who have contributed to the debate. I focus on Oelofsen's (2018) and Molefe's (2019) responses to the above objections. These two scholars have provided significant

[15] see Ngqangweni (2016) who discusses a similar problem for transgender identities.

responses as far as conceptual clarity on the idea of personhood is concerned. The underlying claim to their arguments is that personhood is not gendered.

4.2.3.2.1. Oelofsen's response to Oyowe and Yurkviska

As mentioned above, one of the scholars to respond to the objections on the question of the gender neutrality of personhood is Oelofsen. Oelofsen's (2018) response is two-fold, on the one hand, she discusses Ubuntu's egalitarianism, and she argues that Ubuntu's humanistic principle and egalitarianism do not allow oppression and subordination of women; on the other hand, she argues that Oyowe's and Yurkivska appeal to Amadiume's socialization process to disprove gender complementarity fails because Amadiume's account is not an example of gender complementarity (Oyowe & Yurkivska 2014; Amadiume, 1987). She makes a distinction between Amadiume's account of fluidity and Nzegwu's complementarity (Oelofsen, 2018). Nonetheless, the underlying argument for the two-fold response is that personhood is not gendered. In what follows, I discuss this two-fold response by Oelofsen.

4.2.3.2.1.1. Ubuntu's egalitarianism

Egalitarianism is about equality or sameness of some sort. Under Ubuntu, it is expressed through ideas about relationality, that is, how Ubuntu as a relational theory promotes egalitarian principles. This is akin to what Arneson describes as relational egalitarianism. Relational egalitarianism is about how individuals relate as equals or enjoy the same fundamental status (Arneson, 2002). With respect to the gender question, it is about how men and women relate as equals.

For Oelofsen (2018), Ubuntu is about relationships and how these relationships have value over individual human beings. I have presented Ubuntu's idea of relationality at length in the previous chapters, but in this section, the basic idea is that the value placed on the relationship is a value that each individual shares if the individual is constituted by the relationship. Expressed

differently, there is a reciprocal relationship between the well-being of the community as a whole and the well-being of individual persons such that the good of the community is the good of the individual, the suffering of the community is the suffering of the individuals (Eze, 2008; Oelofsen, 2018). Phrases such as "your pain is my pain, or your gain is my gain point to the idea that the suffering of one gender is the suffering of all (Etieyibo, 2017). Given this reasoning, it follows that the relationship ought to respect the value of every individual who forms part of the relationship. Part of respecting this value is to take an individual's projects, values and interests seriously. This would demand that individuals be treated equally. The argument that Oelofsen advances hinges on this idea of egalitarianism in terms of its necessity for the development and progression of a relationship such as that of Ubuntu (Oelofsen, 2018). A relationship becomes progressive if it values individuals within the relationship. One other way of grasping this point is that Ubuntu commonly expressed under the saying "a person is a person through other persons," to describe "humanization" or "acquisition of full humanity" through others, requires that all individual persons are treated equally. The "human" or "person" is not male, and so need not discriminate between genders, instead, it includes both men and women. In other words, the word "person" or "human" under Ubuntu is not one that implicitly endorses male dominance but recognizes the equal value of everyone. Thus, Ubuntu is not oppressive to women (Oelofsen, 2018, 48-49).

One question implicit here is how to account for various inequalities as well as the unequal valuing of social roles performed by men and women in a community, even when assuming a community guided by the principles of Ubuntu. In other words, if African communities are said to have been guided by the values of Ubuntu, then the presence of inequalities that Oyowe and Yurkivska discuss creates a problem for Ubuntu's presumed egalitarianism (Oelofsen, 2018). For Oelofsen, such inequalities are inequalities in practice, but it does not mean that Ubuntu is inegalitarian in

theory (Oelofsen, 2018). Thus, while there is a failure in practice in implementing the principles of Ubuntu by some of its practitioners, Ubuntu, in principle, is essentially egalitarian. For Oelofsen, inequalities one finds in an African community do not undermine the principles of equality advanced by Ubuntu (Oelofsen, 2018; Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). One can appeal to Ubuntu to criticize such inequalities. Central to this response is a distinction between theory and practice. Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) should have shown that Ubuntu is problematic in theory, instead, they have managed to highlight that there are gender inequalities in practice.

A similar view is shared by Molefe (2019) who questions whether the criticisms directed at the concept of personhood are a conflation of the practical application of the concept in a traditional African community and the theoretical insights it has. He argues that there is nothing male-centered about personhood, rather, it is "academics and scholars that are prejudiced by their male-centered societies" (Molefe, 2019, 9). While Molefe does not explain what he means by this statement, I believe that part of what he has in mind is the problem of reading and writing about personhood by failing to acknowledge one's own cultural biases. That is, scholars read gender into a conception of personhood because of their cultural influences. Failure to distance oneself leads to seeing genders in a conception of personhood, a move that Momoh (2000) and Oyewumi (2005) have cautioned at length. For Momoh and Oyewumi, if one is looking for gender in a culture that does not have one, one is likely to find it (Momoh, 2000; Oyewumi, 2005).[24] A good example comes from Amadiume and Diop who argue that Euro-centric scholars failed to understand African cultures outside their own patriarchal cultural biases such that they were looking for the man as the central figure in a matriarchal African culture. Hence, they ended up misrepresenting African cultural history in their writing (Amadiume, 2005; Diop, 1987). It seems Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) are guilty in this regard such that Molefe calls them into question for reading

gender into personhood. Molefe (2019) does not explicate how Oyowe and Yurkivska have made this error, but in my intervention below, I show how one can understand this claim.

4.2.3.2.1.2. Gender complementarity vis-à-vis gender fluidity

As discussed above it is clear then that scholars such as Oelofsen and Molefe do not disagree with Oyowe and Yurkivska that there are inequalities in practice. There are indeed some forms of inequality present in Africa even in both precolonial and post-colonial communities. But whether the inequalities in question represent a culturally instituted ideology or are merely isolated cases of individuals who go against a cultural practice is a question that requires attention. Commonly cited instances of inequalities tend to pick the institutions of inheritance and marriage, and how these institutions have been used to subordinate women. Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) appeal to Amadiume's institutions of male daughters and female husbands and how these institutions assume that men are an advantage over women. Thus, it is seen as a norm that men are the rightful heirs and, in a position, to be husbands. It is only in isolated cases that women enjoy the same privilege as men, but even so, they must assume the masculine position through the institutions in question (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). Furthermore, even the terminology itself implicitly endorses male dominance. Thus, on the one hand, there is a female who is a husband with the assumption that husbands tend to be male. On the other hand, there is a daughter who must become a man.

In Chapter Two, I discussed gender fluidity among the Igbo through the institutions of male daughters and female husbands, and I showed that these institutions do not necessarily perpetuate patriarchy, but rather only show that women are never in a permanent subordinate position and at the same time these institutions are checks and balances against excessive patriarchy (Nwoko, 2012; Magadla, Magoqwana & Motsemme, 2021). An implication to draw from this view is that

a version of patriarchy among the Igbos is different from one associated with the traditional Western communities where women are fated to be in a subordinate position (Haslanger, 2012; Sultana, 2010). Furthermore, Oyowe and Yurkivska (2014) appeal to Amadiume's (1987) institutions of male daughters and female husbands to show that gender complementarity in traditional African communities fails, with the assumption that these institutions assume a patriarchal social order.[16] However, Oelofsen argues that such an argument shows a lack of conceptual clarity and ignores that gender complementarity is different from gender fluidity, the latter is that which assumes those institutions (Oelofsen, 2018; Nzegwu, 2005; Amadiume, 1987). Oelofsen argues that Oyowe and Yurkivska lack conceptual clarity on whether they are after gender fluidity or gender complementarity in supplementing their critique. To make the distinction, Oelofsen appeals to Nzegwu's gender complementarity to show the distinction between gender complementarity and gender fluidity (Nzegwu, 2005). For Oelofsen (2018), the fact that women can do men's work or take up men's social roles or identity does not reflect complementarity, but that gender is fluid. The basic idea is that complementarity does not involve women doing men's work, but the equal valuing of each role even when women have their specific roles. The underlying assumption is that the difference in roles does not imply the difference in the value of each role (Oelofsen, 2018). Complementarity is also different from conceptions of gender where differences in biological makeup translate to differences in value, something that leads to hierarchical ordering and othering (Oyewumi, 2005). Under gender complementarity, each role is valued just like any other role such that it does not matter who does "what".[25] The difference is not a difference in value but function, what matters is the contribution to the common good (Oelofsen, 2018). Thus, an account of complementarity presented by Nzegwu (2004) is different

[16] see Chapter Two for a discussion on gender complementarity.

from Amadiume's (1987) gender fluidity. In the next section, I will offer my considered response to the objections.

4.2.3.3. My version of the response

The above responses are important in providing conceptual clarity to the idea of personhood, especially with respect to the gender question. Thus, relationality should be understood in relation to how different genders relate in a society. However, I believe more can be said about the critiques and more especially, in responding to some objections that have not been responded to, such as Manzini's (2018) objection. Like Oelofsen, I believe the critique misses the point about relationality and the implication of personhood. The thesis I discuss is that gender does not have the relevance it is claimed to have in relational theory and personhood. I argue that gender is not the organizing principle, instead, it is seniority which is the organizing principle. Scholars who see gender as the organizing principle in personhood are reading this view of personhood with Western lenses and this is also reflected in the underlying conception of gender they present. My response to the critique is twofold. The first part of the critique advances the view that seniority is the organizing principle of a traditional African community. The second part provides clarity on the distinction between sex and gender. This distinction clarifies how rites of passage should be understood.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that a view that is implicit in my two-fold response is the need for contextual clarity. I argue that any theory of personhood should be read as a response to the demands or goals of the society that bears its claims. A theory of personhood should not be read as timeless and contextless. I believe the critiques ignore contextual requirements of personhood such that they interpret personhood by citing values that are less relevant to a traditional African

context. It is a failure to take into consideration the role context plays in a theoretical exposition that I believe led to the conceptualization of personhood as gendered.

4.2.3.3.1. Seniority as the organizing principle

It has been shown throughout the critiques that the conception of the social notion of personhood is interpreted by some scholars to be gendered (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Manzini, 2018). That is, persons who attain virtue are treated as gendered persons and not mere persons. But there are doubts that personhood is gendered as seen from the discussion by Oelofsen and Molefe (Oelofsen, 2018; Molefe, 2019) above. Following this trajectory, I seek to argue for a plausible approach to the idea of personhood. The basic view of this understanding is that one ought to focus on the primary feature that defines individuals. I argue that eldership or seniority is the primary feature of understanding personhood. This comes from the view that seniority is the organizing principle of an Afro-communitarian society, a principle that also underlies a conception of personhood that evolves from such a society. A focus on seniority is meant to show that gender has less to no relevance to the conceptualization of personhood. Without seniority, this conception of personhood is a non-starter.

In showing that seniority is the organizing principle of a traditional African community and plays a huge role in the conceptualization of personhood, I do not intend to dismiss gender as entirely irrelevant. I believe to some extent gender becomes crucial to social interaction, although its significance in traditional African life is minimal. Gender is a separate feature that forms part of how persons express themselves in a society. Gender is not inimical to how people relate in a community, and I have in mind a complementary account of gender, whose fundamental premise is the equal valuing of all genders. Persons can express themselves by taking on various gendered identities, but gender does not determine their personhood. Therefore, I only dismiss claims that

have to do with gendered personhood. I dismiss such claims because the conception of gender I have in mind does not account for how individuals become persons nor affect their moral status. Persons have moral status in virtue of possessing certain virtues and living according to moral norms of society and not because they have a particular gender, nor that gender makes some full persons and others less. Personhood is determined by seniority. To argue for this view, I argue for the claim that the social organization of a traditional African society revolves around "seniority" and not gender. The social arrangement in such a society follows the logic of seniority, and this includes rituals of transformation through which individuals become persons. Therefore, personhood is based on seniority and not gender.

What the claim above specifically responds to is one of the central premises under Oyowe's argument; and concerning the reconstructed argument above, it is about the truth assumed in premise 3. According to this premise:

> 3. Rituals, obligations and social rules that transform an individual from a mere biological animal to a person are organized along gender lines.

Premise 3 is central to the argument because it shows the point at which persons become gendered. It is the assumed truth of the premise which I believe anchors the fourth premise and the conclusion that personhood is essentially gendered (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014, 92). The claim about seniority highlighted above will show that premise 3 is not true. The denial of gender by appealing to seniority shows that personhood is not gendered, rather it is based on seniority. What I mean by truth or falsity of the premises is just the contextual realities of traditional African communities where seniority is the organizing principle, a context that I believe forms the basis for Menkiti's (and Wiredu) notion of personhood (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 1992). Thus, context is important in understanding normative theories, as it provides meaning to the claims made. It is not surprising

that some scholars such as Chimakonam in making claims about African logic and how it should influence philosophizing on the continent have argued context is an important factor (Chimakonam, 2016). This implies that Oyowe and Yurkivska's arguments have no merit for a traditional African society where gender is not the organizing principle. Their arguments would have merit in modern African societies where gender discussions have taken center stage in how society is organized (Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005).

One place to start in cashing out the claim made above is to show the importance and place of seniority in the African context. Thus, the sense in which seniority can be understood as central to the organization of a traditional African society. Many scholars such as Wiredu, Momoh, Menkiti, Cobbah and Oyewumi have argued that seniority plays an important role in social organization (Cobbah, 1987; Wiredu, 1995; Momo, 2000; Oyewumi, 2005). For Wiredu, seniority played an important role, not only in morality when respect for elders is demanded but also in the election of members who form the council of elders. It is the most senior but not senile members of the community who are elected as clan representatives to be part of the council of elders headed by the chief among the Akan (Wiredu, 1995). The logic of seniority permeates all sectors of society, from family to the community at large. According to Momoh, some scholars have been blind to this logic such that they fail to separate seniority from gender. He argues that seniority determines who receives respect in the private sphere such as family as well as in public spaces (Momoh, 2000). According to Cobbah (1987), anyone who is older in the family commands respect from junior or younger members regardless of one's wealth. This respect is manifested or demonstrated through curtsies, bows, greetings, etc. Furthermore, senior or older members of the family tend to have a greater sense of responsibility such that when something wrong happens, they are the first to answer for the trouble. African marriages tend to be composed of an older husband (males) and

a younger wife (females). For Momoh (2000), an outsider would interpret this as gender given that this setup would mean a male demanding respect from a woman. When it comes to occupying positions of influence, the value of seniority is associated with practical wisdom and experience. Elders are more likely to have moral and practical wisdom as well as experience than the young *(all things considered)* (Mbiti, 1970; Kalumba, 2005; Menkiti, 1984; Kayange, 2020).

If one looks at the relationship between seniority and gender, one will notice that seniority takes precedence over gender (Momoh, 2000; Oyewumi, 2005). One way to unpack this relationship is to consider relationships in the family between husband and wife as shown above (Momoh, 2000). Even among "woman-to-woman" marriages, it was older women who were in the role of (female) husbands, and the young ones were in the role of a wife (Nwoke, 2012; Nzegwu, 2004). Therefore, this means that anyone older may command respect from the younger regardless of one's gender (Momoh, 2000). It is this view that is consistent with a fundamental principle of respect in personhood. If older members are more likely to be full persons than the younger ones, then under this principle they ought to be respected by the younger ones. But if gender is to be considered as important as Oyowe and other critics take it to be, it would mean, as Momoh (2000) argues, that in all instances, regardless of age, women ought to respect men. But as Momoh (2000) puts it, a young man regardless of his gender ought to respect a senior even when the senior individual is a woman.

Furthermore, to dispel claims about gender, Momoh shows that women share the same important positions of influence in society as men (Momoh, 2000). This view is a response to Oyowe and Yurkivska who had argued that men tend to enjoy more privileged positions than women. For them, gendered division of labour which assumes a gender hierarchy tends to undermine any form of equality a society is presumed to have (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). While most scholars do not

deny gender division of labour, they argue that this division of labour does not necessarily mean gender hierarchy (Nzegwu, 2005). This is what Oelofsen has described as the notion that "difference does not imply hierarchy" (Oelofsen, 2018). Gendered division of labour when interpreted to be hierarchical assumes a conception of gender that endorses such a hierarchy (Amadiume, 2005; Oyewumi, 2005). Nonetheless, as Momoh (2000) shows, in some societies, there was no strict gender division of labour as women would take up any position in the society. He provides examples of the Nyoro, Kikuyu, Iregwe, and Dahomey, just to mention a few. In these cultures, women could serve as queens, soldiers, initiation rite leaders, diviners, healers, etc. Thus, women were in influential positions that would be under the preserve of men especially under a gendered society presented by Oyowe and Yurkivska (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014). For Momoh, the division of labour in most traditional African communities was based on sex, age and circumstance (Momoh, 2000; Murry & Roscoe, 1998). What I have shown so far is that seniority is central, and gender does not have the same place as seniority.

Taking gender as central reflects a failure to consider the context. It comes from a failure to get rid of what scholars such as Molefe, Momoh, Amadiume and Diop had called "cultural bias and prejudices" when analyzing other cultures (Diop, 1987; Amadiume, 1987, 2005; Momoh, 2000; Molefe, 2019). In a traditional Western society, gender seems to be the organizing principle and it is this view that was imposed onto African cultures. Scholars who fail to separate this imposition in understanding their own culture end up taking gender to be central in their own traditional cultures even when this might not have been the case. In other words, when scholars wear foreign lenses in discussing the traditional conception of personhood, gender discussions cannot be avoided. Scholars such as Nzegwu, Oyewumi and Amadiume have argued that the centrality of gender and a conception that privileges men while subordinating women can be traced to the

colonial imposition of values that are foreign to the African context or cultural worldview (Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005; Amadiume, 2005). A better claim that the critiques should have advanced would have been whether the *traditional* conception of personhood as moral virtue would account for *modern* concerns about gender, where gender is taken to be central; and not whether the traditional conception of gender is *gendered*. The former question would perhaps lead to a new conception of personhood, a task undertaken in the next chapter. The latter is what I have taken the time to address. Nonetheless, there is another way of understanding the contextual problem by looking at how gender and sex and conflated. This leads to the second part of my two-fold response.

4.2.3.3.2. The conflation of sex and gender

Another response I address is the need to separate the biological sex and social gender when it comes to understanding personhood. Oyowe, Yurkivska and Manzini seem to conflate social gender and the role biological sex plays given societal values. This conflation is one symptomatic of ignoring the contextual requirement. I believe the separation of gender and sex is necessary if conceptual precision is to be achieved in the conceptualization of personhood. The clarification I offer here forms part of the response to Manzini's critique. Manzini's (2018) view is that personhood is exclusionary of intersex individuals, those who are in same-sex marriages and the impotent. Her basic view is that rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies or puberty rites, marriage, and procreation are structured in ways that make it impossible for some individuals within the community to achieve personhood, even when circumstances are beyond their control (Manzini, 2018). Overall, Manzini develops an argument made by Oyowe and Yurkivska that personhood is gendered. Manzini's (2018) view of personhood as exclusionary seeks to show that personhood is exclusionary of people with gender identities other than the binary men and women.

Again, my position is to merely show that personhood is not gendered and does not prima facie exclude any individuals. In the above section, I have appealed to seniority as the primary feature in the discourse on personhood, in this section, I highlight that the institution of personhood apart from seniority, also takes sex as important. This response appeals to the importance of the biological body and the role it plays in the acquisition of personhood. I argue that what matters is the biological body and not its social identity in terms of gender when it comes to the acquisition of personhood. In making the argument, I limit myself to a version of the argument that focuses on rites of passage and how sex comes into the picture.

One place to start discussing the conflation is to reconsider Manzini's (2018) reconstructed argument above. I stated that Manzini develops premise 3 of Oyowe and Yurkivska's argument. In the reconstructed argument. Manzini argues that (premise 1) puberty rites are structured according to the binary sexual categories of male and female, and (premise 2) this excludes intersex individuals (including those with disabilities and queer), which means that (premise 3) they cannot become persons, and because of this (premise 1-3) personhood is not inclusive or it is exclusionary. Firstly, intersex individuals can fit into either of the binary categories and so the use of the phrase "personhood is exclusionary" (24, 25, 28) seems to be questionable. It would be exclusionary for those who cannot give birth and by implication same-sex marriages. Even then, the idea of same-sex marriages is questionable given the institution of female husbands which was widely accepted among the Igbos, for example (see a discussion of this in Chapter Two). Nonetheless, it would be interesting to investigate whether female husbands could become persons, or in general, the necessity or stringent requirement of procreation in the acquisition of personhood and whether the institution of female husbands is leeway for those who would not have children and so could still become persons.

Secondly, if one ignores the problematic use of terms such as "exclusion" or "inclusion" and so assumes that the idea that rites of passage are structured along binary lines means that they are indeed exclusionary of intersex individuals; then one ought to wonder why this claim has to do with gender and not sex. Manzini (2018) gives an example of Semenya and argues that Semenya as an intersex individual cannot become a person given that she would fail to meet one of the requirements of personhood, participating in rites of passage (26). Again, one would wonder whether the use of Semenya as an example is valid for the claim that personhood is gender biased given that Semenya already identifies as a woman and participates in women's sports. However, a good response to the objection requires that I should assume that Manzini (2018) is dealing with intersex individuals who cannot identify with the binary sex categories. But even with this assumption, I wonder why a discussion about sex identity leads to the conclusion about gender identity unless one is conflating the two. Furthermore, since the crux of the matter is about rites of passage, one question to ask is whether rites of passage are primarily about gender and not sex. It is not clear to me whether Manzini can distinguish between gender and sex, even questioning why they are categorized as such. Underlying this critique is a conflation of gender and sex, a view I believe to be rooted in the traditional Western bio-logic view of gender which defines gender based on sex (Oyewumi, 2005; Haslanger, 2012; Jenkins, 2018). I argue that rites of passage in traditional African communities tend to be composed of sex categories and not gender categories. But the important point is about the goal of categorizing them as such.[26]

In trying to understand the categorization of rites of passage, one way of explaining such a categorization is to simply state that this reflects the goal of a community. According to Olufemi Taiwo (2004), questions about how a society is organized for governance and social living and how this underlies questions about human nature. What this means is that how a society creates

certain arrangements for governance and social living has to do with how it understands human nature. Thus, the ultimate goal is the promotion of human nature. However, it should be noted that a society's knowledge and understanding of human nature is what would be reflected in the arrangements it makes. In the traditional African community, knowledge about sex categories, male and female, relates to the centrality of procreation, something that is instrumental to the continued existence of the community (Bujo, 2001; Davis, 2011). It is a basic knowledge that procreation requires the union of male and female gametes (Wright, 2021). Therefore, the sex categories under puberty rites of passage and other rites of passage are not meant to show or celebrate individuals' sexual identity but vehicles through which the community would teach the young about sexuality in relation to procreation (Munthali & Zulu, 2007). It has less to do with merely being a male, female or intersex, but more to do with one's role in biological reproduction. In other words, they are mere social arrangements in which society organizes the relationship between males and females according to how they understand human nature with respect to procreation. The problem arises when one sees the biological role as implying gender identity and bias.[17]

What is important in relation to the submission I make is that a traditional community may not possess deep knowledge about sex-ed bodies compared to the current body of knowledge informed by advancement in science (Kaneko, 2016). One ought to be charitable to traditional communities in understanding their social arrangements. One would argue that the knowledge such communities possess is based on firsthand experience (Hallen, 2004). Therefore, one would infer that knowledge about intersex individuals would be based purely on observation and how they believe such bodies align with the values of procreation. This is not to argue that the treatment of intersex

[17] See Haslanger (2012) and Jenkins (2018) for a discussion conflation of sex and gender based on reproductive role.

individuals in most communities is morally right but to merely explain the link between a social arrangement and the values of the community. For most African societies, sex was not primarily for pleasure but a means to procreation (Momoh, 2000). If one accepts that procreation has value in a traditional African community, then the assignment of an individual's sex identity is not just for identity's sake but how it aligns with the value of procreation, such that, the sex category in rites of passage has to do with one's function in procreation. Procreation being essentially binary, explains the reason puberty rites are bifurcated. Puberty rites are merely vehicles for teaching the younger generation about sexuality as it relates to procreation. It is to this extent that in some communities, puberty rites are regarded as a mark of transition in the sexual world or are called "sexual rites" (Munthali & Zulu, 2007, 151). Therefore, with respect to Manzini's example of Semenya, the right question is not what category Semenya would belong to, but rather what function Semenya would perform in reproduction, whether as male or female.

This means that even if the individual is intersex, if it can be determined what role one would play in reproduction, then the question of exclusion dissipates (Wright, 2021). This is a very minimal view when it comes to understanding intersex individuals, but it is also one that is consistent with the limited knowledge about intersex in traditional African communities. Even current scientific research is inconclusive on intersex individuals, for example, whether they can give birth without the involvement of any other medical procedures or technological help (Felton, 2022). Another major problem is that intersex individuals tend to constitute less than one per cent of the population, so widespread knowledge about their condition in traditional African communities is limited (Wright, 2021). It would then be unfortunate to expect traditional (precolonial) African communities to have in-depth knowledge about intersex individuals for them to have a separate category under rites of passage, but even then, there must be a reason for having the category and

how that reason relates to a community's goal or values. Perhaps given the knowledge communities possess about intersex individuals in modern communities and changes in values, one would call for a reevaluation of rites of passage (Grimes, 2000).

While my focus has been on intersex individuals, I mentioned that the claims I make could equally apply to those who cannot give birth as well such as same-sex marriage. Again, the question is about value, any condition that is set as definitive of personhood will speak to what is valuable in a particular community. In times when having children was valued when the population was still low, it makes sense that such societies will reward individuals who contribute to this value (Bujo, 2001; Davis, 2011). It would make sense that communities would reward those who contribute to this value. If personhood is viewed as an achievement and interpreted as a reward of respect for an individual's contribution to the norms and values of one's community, then those who are persons are those who can contribute to what the community deems valuable. Manzini's (2018) critique seems to ignore this point and arbitrarily critiques traditional communities for holding certain values. Manzini (2018) ought to explain why procreation as a value under personhood is wrong. While the argument appeals to the dangers of exclusion, it has not successfully shown the link between exclusion and value. For instance, under Ubuntu, relationships are valued, and individuals ought to promote this value. It is not clear to me why one would then argue that this value is wrong because it excludes those who value their autonomy and would want to act against this value. Such an argument can only be made while assuming what is valuable in other communities. I am not arguing that values cannot be questioned but merely pointing out that in questioning the values of one community one should pay attention to the justificatory reasons for questioning them. Furthermore, I am not justifying exclusion based on values because some of the community's values can be harmful to individuals to the point that they fail to relate positively

with others. The point is that there should be strong reasons why certain widely accepted values are wrong in themselves without assuming what would be valuable in another community. In modern communities, procreation may not be as valuable given the rising population and concerns about human footprint on the environment, but this may not apply to communities seeking to increase their numbers (Etieyibo, 2016). Therefore, the requirements of personhood that speak to modern society would be different.

The above point shows that Manzini's (2018) critique may be valid but made out of context. The basic argument here is that personhood is only seen as gendered, ableist and antiqueer if one ignores how certain arrangements for the attainment of personhood relate to the goal of society expressed in terms of values and norms. Nonetheless, the problem of gender and general problems affecting the modern world such as population increase, call for one to rethink how personhood is to be conceptualized. A proper critique of personhood ought to speak to the values that a conception under consideration is addressing, as well as the context that informs it. Menkiti's (1984, 2004) conception of personhood is informed by traditional African societies whose values are different from modern (postcolonial) complex African communities. This is part of the reason I have argued for respecting context in understanding a theory or conception. Manzini's (2018) critique is based on the current structure of society where gender is the organizing principle and other social arrangements such as procreation carry little relevance. It uses values known to the modern context to critique a conception of personhood informed by traditional context. For Manzini's critique to stand one has to show that personhood is timeless and not bound by theoretical presuppositions of a context. As argued above, perhaps Manzini's critique (just as Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014) would best be addressed to another version of personhood, one that would be concerned with what is valuable today. This is the task set for the next chapter.

4.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, I have responded to a critique of the social conception of personhood, a view that personhood is gendered or not gender-neutral. While ignoring the problematic term of "gender neutrality," I have argued that personhood is "gender inclusive," and inclusive in the formal sense that it allows for equal moral consideration of both men and women. However, I have made it clear that personhood does not rest on gender, rather it rests on seniority. I have argued that seniority is the principal feature of social organization in most traditional African communities. To support my view, I have adopted arguments from various Oelofsen and Molefe who have argued against criticisms made by Oyowe and Yurkivska as well as Manzini. I highlighted that the major problem with the critiques has been an attribution of the Western biologic view of gender which is a conception that endorses gender hierarchies and conflates social gender with biological sex. The main point in my response has been that personhood is based on seniority with the assumption that the most senior members are assumed to be full persons such that the right judgement on whether one is a person or not, is about whether the individual is an adult human being who has the right virtues and acts according to values and norms of the community, but not about having a particular gender identity or role. Furthermore, since gender is not the organizing principle of society it cannot be the central feature of personhood. What Oyowe, Yurkivska, and Manzini identify as gender identities in personhood, are merely biological sex identities. I further argued that these sex identities are best understood in terms of their role in biological reproduction, which is a value in traditional African society.

I argued that the underlying problem with the critiques has been the mischaracterization of the African context. They mischaracterize it in two ways, firstly, by attributing Western values to the African context, and secondly, by conflating what is valuable in the modern context characterized by imposed Western values, with what is valuable in a traditional African community. Given that

a conception of personhood is contextual and not timeless, and the African context is a good example of a continent that has faced significant cultural shifts (and shocks), values cannot remain the same and a conception of personhood ought to respect these changes. What I learned from the critiques, which address some current societal values, is that there is a need for a reconceptualization of personhood. A proper question the critiques should have asked is whether Menkiti's version of personhood is relevant today given changes in values.

CHAPTER FIVE

PERSONHOOD AND CHANGING VALUES: RECONSTRUCTING THE SOCIAL NOTION OF PERSONHOOD

5.1. Introduction

In the conclusion of the last chapter, I stated that the contextual requirement implies that the objections to the social notion of personhood are a strawman. They are objections that have been raised against a wrong conception of personhood, a traditional one, and yet they raise social problems that are dominant in modern-day African cultural worldviews. I stated that the social notion of personhood, especially a version of personhood presented by Menkiti (1984) avoids the problems of gender if such a view of personhood is seen to apply to a traditional African community. The objections would be more applicable to a conception of personhood that responds to modern values. The question then is about what this conception of personhood would look like and why Menkiti's version of personhood is not plausible in the modern African context. in this chapter, I seek to discuss this question.

Underlying a discussion of the plausibility of the social notion of personhood is the relationship between tradition and modernity. In the African philosophical literature, there is an underlying debate with some scholars questioning how traditional (precolonial) values are articulated in modern post-colonial or independent African states. Among the many approaches, is an approach adopted by those who argue for decolonisation (Wiredu, 1998; Etieyibo, 2016; Balogun, 2018; Carman, 2019) One of the claims for decolonisation is the belief in revamping traditional African values as a way of dealing with some of the problems facing African people today. Among this group are political elites who call for a recovery of an (authentic) African identity. They see a post-

colonial era as characterised by the destruction of traditional values and the African way of life due to colonialism (Nyerere, 1987; Kaunda, 1987; Senghor, 1964; Matolino, 2011). Another claim put forward is the belief that traditional African societies are long gone, and that African people should embrace modernity and its values. Among this group of scholars are those who see decolonisation as an unfruitful and wrong-headed project. The underlying belief is that modernity is not anti-African (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013; Matolino, 2020; Taiwo, 2022).

Note that these views or positions are not necessarily extreme ends of the decolonisation debate, that is, they are not necessarily antithetical to each other. But not limited to these positions is another position. This is the belief that traditional African values are not completely lost but could be reconstructed to suit new ways of life. The basic view is that African life can benefit from embracing beautiful aspects of both modernity and pre-colonial tradition (Carman, 2019; Chimakonam, 2016; Kayange, 2020; Etieyibo, 2016; Musemwa, 2021). Again, these positions may not necessarily have strict distinctions as there might be nuances between them. For instance, this third position is very much consistent with the first and second positions. Nonetheless, the aim of the chapter is not to discuss decolonisation, but to highlight an intuition in one of the positions and use it to discuss the social notion of personhood concerning tradition and modernity.

As mentioned above, there is an important intuition in one of the positions highlighted above, especially a position under moderate decolonisation. This is the view that traditional values can be adopted together with certain modern values in ways that allow for the reconstruction and theorisation of modern African life. Since I aim to engage with views on the discourse of personhood, particularly the social notion of personhood. my discussion is centred around the question, “What does it mean to be a person in the *modern* African cultural worldview?” In the first chapter, I discussed several accounts of personhood, and the question raised here might

suggest that the accounts are implausible to capture the modern African person. But it should be noted that the question is related to the problems highlighted in the previous chapter, as such it only affects one of the accounts discussed and reiterated in the previous chapter (not all the other accounts). My focus is on the social notion of personhood as discussed under communitarianism. I am specifically looking at the view that given the problems of modern African life, and to refer to the previous chapter, the problem of gender, there is a need for the reconstruction of the social notion of personhood. The background to the discussion is the change in values on the African continent, especially, the growth (and presence of) individualist values on the African continent. Thus, given individualist values that constantly challenge communitarian values, it is paramount to rethink the important virtues that would not lead to discrimination. The reconceptualization or rethinking of virtues means that the important virtues for modern societies would probably be more than the virtues that could have been considered cardinal (whatever these may be) in traditional African communities. For instance, if one takes the traditional African community to be without any challenges of individualism, then one has in mind a community that has overly other-regarding virtues. Similarly, if one thinks of a communitarian community that is constantly facing the threat of individualism (to the point of embracing some of its aspects), it would be intuitive that such a community would have among its other important virtues, some individualistic virtues.

In discussing the problems of the social notion of personhood, I focus on central themes definitive of this view of personhood. These include the primacy of the community, rituals of transformation and obligations, and seniority. I discuss the relevance and plausibility of claims made under these themes in the modern African cultural worldview. The chapter is structured in the following way. In the next section, I present a brief account of the social notion of personhood by pointing out the important themes while problematizing them. In discussing the themes, I show that people's

perceptions and attitudes to rituals have changed and the rituals themselves have been transformed by incorporating values that align with modernity (Synder, 2002). Following this section, I attempt a reconstruction of an idea of personhood, a view of personhood that maintains the themes and I show how this reconstruction fails. In the last but one section, I reconstruct a view of personhood in a way that avoids some of the themes. Lastly, I offer my conclusion to the discussion.

5.2. The social notion of personhood

I have exhaustively discussed the social notion of personhood in the previous chapters. To avoid redundancy, I will simply state the underlying views that define this view of personhood. As stated above, three underlying themes define this view of personhood and these include, the primacy of the community, the necessity of rites of passage and obligations, and the role of seniority (I have italicised them in my presentation below).

The social notion of personhood is about achievement and acquisition or simply expressed as moral excellence (Menkiti, 1984, 2004). Individuals who acquire the necessary communal virtues (other-regarding) virtues and practice them by acting in ways a virtuous person would act (according to the norms and values) of their community are called "persons", and those who fail to achieve personhood are judged as "non-person" regardless of their biological status as human beings (Menkiti, 1984; Etieyibo, 2020; Molefe, 2021). Personhood is an achievement and individuals must go through a process of social transformation or ontological progression. In this process, the *community plays a central role* as the catalyst and prescriber of norms. The community is that which confers personhood onto individuals (Menkiti, 1984; Tshivhase, 2013; Masaka 2019; Nyirenda, 2019). Part of this progression is *rites of passage that individuals must attend, as well as carry out obligations* set by their community. For Menkiti (1984), these rites of passage and obligations may include name-giving ceremonies, initiation rites, marriage, procreation, death,

earning titles, etc. Achieving personhood happens in time, often expressed in terms of *seniority*. The order or more senior an individual is, so is the expectation by the community for that individual to be a full person. There are no shortcuts to this view of personhood. Participation in rites of passage and carrying out obligations set by one's community respects time. For instance, initiation ceremonies are for adolescent boys and girls whereas procreation is for adults. The differences between adults and young imply that Personhood admits of degrees, those who are less persons and those who are full persons (Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Kayange, 2020; Etieyibo, 2020).

5.3. The problematic necessary conditions

The above is just a brief view of the social notion of personhood, but of importance are the three themes definitive of this view of personhood and these include, the primacy of the community, the importance of the rites of passage, and seniority. Since the aim of the chapter is to challenge the plausibility of this traditional view of personhood in modern African communities for a more modern and secular notion, in the next section, I discuss and problematize them. The basic idea is that the way the primacy of the community, rites of passage/obligations and seniority have been framed, is problematic to fully capture the reality of the lived experience of individuals in modern African communities. I use the word "problematic" here in more general terms, but I furnish the details of what I find to be the problem in the discussion below. The basic assumption that underlies my worries is that Menkiti's (1984) theorization is plausible in a traditional African community and not a modern one. I assume that in his earlier 1984 article, titled *"Person and Community in African Traditional Thought*", the word "tradition" is meant to indicate the context within which he is theorizing about personhood. However, this does not mean that the social notion of personhood has no merit in the modern African context, it can still provide some valuable insights.

In this chapter, I seek to appreciate some of the concerns scholars are making with this notion of personhood (Gyekye, 1992; Gbadegesin, 2002; Tshivhase, 2013; Oyowe, 2015; Matolino, 2014; Molefe, 2021). I draw attention to the dominant values in a modern context, values that may not nicely fit with a traditional conception of personhood. In line with the above assumption, I argue that if people in modern African communities are living by values that have been transformed, then it is logical that a conception of personhood informed by those values ought to be different. I submit that culture is dynamic, and the theorisation of cultural concepts ought to pay attention to this dynamism.

5.3.1. The primacy of the community

My starting point in discussing personhood in the modern context is to look at the most basic view of the social notion of personhood, and this is the individual-community relationship. Several theories have discussed the individual-community relationship, and these include Ukama, Ubuntu, and Complementarity (Murove, 2007; Chemhuru, 2022; Metz, 2017; Asouzu, 2005). Under all these theories that are based on African cultural values, one thing is clear, that is, the community is given a primary status. Thus, under Ukama, human beings are in a relationship with other non-human beings but also with those in the past, present and future generations. Actions of human beings and values ought to pay attention to how they affect other beings and their impact across generations (Chemhuru, 2022). Under Ubuntu, the basic idea is that humanity is realized in the context of others, and human beings ought to act in ways that promote relationships (Metz, 2017). Under complementarity, emphasis is placed on the joy of being and considers human beings to be linked to other beings such that their actions have an impact on the joy and peaceful co-existence among and between humans and other beings in the world (Asouzu, 2005). My aim is not to discuss

the theories, but to show why the primacy of the community is not a mere conjecture for African cultural worldview.

The underlying idea under these theories is that the existence of human beings is understood in relational terms. More importantly, this relationship has some kind of primacy over the individual. This primacy may be expressed as a value that ought to be promoted, such that human actions or activities are directed towards the promotion of this value. But note that this way of expressing relationality seems to draw normative implications. There are a variety of approaches, and the common ones include the metaphysical and ethical.[18] The metaphysical approach expresses the nature of reality as something relational, and the ethical one expresses a theory of right action based on the ultimate value ascribed to a relationship (Etieyibo, 2017). Thus, a metaphysical view would show that one is concerned with the nature of beings in relation to other beings (Behrens, 2013; Asouzu, 2011, 2015; Chimakonam, 2016) and the ethical view would present the relationship itself as a good that determines the rightness and wrongness of an action (Tutu, 1999; Metz, 2017). My focus here is on the ethical implications, but I am also aware that ethical claims tend to have underlying metaphysical commitments. Therefore, I start by laying down some metaphysical claims.

I have already highlighted some of these claims in my previous chapters, therefore, I will not dive into minor details, unless it is necessary to do so. Metaphysically speaking, the African cultural worldview is presented as holistic, where all beings are interconnected, as if they are individual parts of the same system (Sindima, 1990; Etieyibo, 2017). This interconnectedness has been expressed by others as the peaceful co-existence of beings in the world (Tangwa, 2004). Some have argued that even existence seen from this cultural worldview is relational (Onyewuenyi,

[18] Nonetheless, there can be other additional interpretations of relationality that focus on political, economic and legal implications.

1991). As shown from the above chapters, the well-being of an individual being, say a human being, is considered to be dependent on the well-being of other beings (Murove, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that reality is viewed as a closed system where everything hangs together in a balance such that any single change (imbalance) would impact beings who make up this system (Etieyibo, 2017). From this understanding, comes ethical implications of the actions of individuals in the maintenance of this balance or what Tutu (1999) describes as harmony, the ultimate good. The latter ethical approach is what forms claims about relationality under the social notion of personhood.

As shown above, ethical claims focus on how human actions affect others who are part of the moral community. One basic implication drawn from the above is the recognition of the relationship to one's existence. This relationship is considered as having the highest value of being the greatest good (Tutu, 1999). Therefore, as Metz (2017) argues in his Ubuntu theory of right action, right actions are those that promote harmony and wrong actions are those that promote discord. But one may wonder how this relates to the social notion of personhood. One of the claims laid in the brief presentation of this view of personhood is that an individual's goal is to develop virtues or attain moral wisdom (Menkiti, 1984, 2004). These virtues are other-regarding virtues as opposed to self-regarding virtues (Gyekye, 1997; Molefe, 2021). This is not to say that human beings cannot promote their own interests, but that the interests of the social group are primary for one's embeddedness in a moral community. A deeper sense of morality guiding this understanding is that at its core, as Wiredu (1997) argues, the interests of individuals are identical regardless of *prima facie* differences. If the interests are identical, then there is a reciprocal relationship where in promoting the well-being of others, the individual also stands to benefit (Edwin, 2016). Individuals are self-insufficient and need others to pursue a morally valuable life. It is to this extent

that one's orientation ought to be to the "other" as opposed to the "self". This is the reason, the promotion of other-regarding virtues, which include friendliness, generosity, kindness, compassion, benevolence, respect, and concern for others, etc., carries more moral weight than egoistic tendencies (Gyekye, 1992). The development and promotion of other-regarding virtues assume that the interests of the community are considered to have more weight than those of the individuals. Menkiti (1984) makes the same assessment when he argues that the community has both ontological and epistemic primacy over the individual. Hence, duties to the community come first than any individual rights. The acquisition of personhood, which is the acquisition of other-regarding virtues is about living by the norms and values of the community. The community is not just a contingent factor of one's self-identity or well-being, but necessary given that it is the community which confers personhood onto individuals (Menkiti, 1984, 2004; Ikuenobe, 2018; Molefe, 2019; Etieyibo, 2020).[19]

Some scholars have expressed concern about the primacy of the community. For instance, Tshivhase (2013) argues that this view of personhood is overly other-regarding. She argues that this conception undermines other important aspects of human beings such as autonomy and authenticity. Thus, the uncritical endorsement of the primacy of the community as well as over-emphasizing its role in personhood ignores the individuality of human beings. Gyekye (1992) makes a similar assertion by arguing that the primacy of the community undermines individual autonomy, and by extension, human rights. For Oyowe (2021), this kind of community makes individuals powerless to express their freedom and incapable of questioning or re-evaluating the

[19] The necessity of the community can also be understood in light of Bitek's claim that human beings cannot be separated from the community, even upon death their spirits become ancestors that have connections with the living community (Bitek, 1998; Menkiti 1984; Etieyibo, 2020). It is in line with such view that Oelofsen (2018) states that a proper understanding of the individual-community relationship in the African cultural worldview is like that of Hegel's being and the world, where one cannot conceive the existence of one without the other (Oelofsen, 2018)

shared values of the community. The individual becomes wholly dependent on the activities, values, projects, practices and ends of the community. For Oyowe (2021), this makes communities to be oppressive to individuals.

Nonetheless, attempts to rescue the social notion view of personhood from some of its critics have been made. Van Niekerk (2007) argues that it is only rational for an agent to pursue the good of others because this ultimately benefits the agent. Pursuing the interests of others is only a priority but this does not mean that agents cannot pursue their interests. Along the same trend of thought is Asouzu (2005) who states that individual may pursue their interests as long as they recognize that doing so would benefit others. For Wiredu (2008) the African cultural worldview is a system of reciprocities where the promotion of the good of others is also the promotion of one's good. The basic idea is that the primacy of the community does not mean the tyranny of the community. The primacy of the community is very consistent with the respect accorded to certain individual values such as autonomy, authenticity, and individuality. The distinction is in the way these values are conceptualised. Molefe (2021) and Ikuenobe (2015) argue that one need not conceive autonomy and authenticity in ways they are conceived under individualism. Rather one ought to conceive them as being relational (see Chapter 3 for a discussion of the relational self). The idea of the atomic (autonomous and authentic) self is rejected here. Social relationships are necessary, and these relationships penetrate one's identity (Neal & Paris, 1990; also see a discussion in Chapter 3 on essentially shared relations).

It would then seem that the debate is about the individual and community relationship under the social notion of personhood. However, there is an underlying distinction about values, and I consider this distinction to be one that is rooted in the distinction between pre-colonial and post-colonial communities. Thus, one may wonder why scholars seem to be concerned about autonomy,

dignity, rights and freedoms. For instance, why is it that Tshivhase (2013) is concerned about autonomy, Gyekye (1992) is concerned about rights and Oyowe (2021) is concerned about the tyranny of the community? What do all these critics have in common? One would notice that all these objections assume the valuable place of the individual within a community. They challenge the primacy of the community. Nonetheless, while I do not subscribe to a rejection of the primacy of the community, I believe their claims highlight an important intuition about the state of modern African communities which is different from traditional African communities.

There is something to be said about the distinction between modern African communities and traditional African communities. Modern African communities have grown in complexity coupled with the adoption of Western values. Colonialism, technological advancement, industrialization, and a growing capitalist market have continued to have a great impact on the already evolving African communities by introducing their values. For instance, Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) recognize this in their response to Metz's (2007) relationality under Ubuntu. According to Matolino and Kwindingwi,

> The success of Ubuntu largely depends on undifferentiated, small and tight-knit communities that are relatively undeveloped. Through mutual recognition and interdependence members of these communities foster the necessary feelings of solidarity that enable the spirit of ubuntu to flourish… Ubuntu…can only be fully realised in a naturalistic and traditionalistic context of those people. However, such a natural habitat that would favour the chances of ubuntu has largely disappeared because of the irreversible effects of factors such as industrialisation and modernity. The disappearance of such natural and favourable conditions

> renders Ubuntu obsolete…the context…is now extinct (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013, 202-203).

Matolino and Kwindingwi (2023) in the above argue state that modern societies do not embody foundational values that would support Ubuntu or a deeper sense of community. They argue that industrialization and modernity embody values that may not be favourable for relationality in ways that can be obtained in a pre-colonial (traditional) community. Modern life is characterised by capitalism which is in turn associated with the accumulation of profits and the promotion of competition. Under a capitalist drive, life becomes transactional, and the idea of competition underlies the pursuit of self-interests at the expense of others. In this regard, the well-being of others can no longer be a priority or an the "end", rather, it becomes instrumental to the generation of wealth or maximisation of profits. Modern economic structures, like capitalism, are largely individualistic given an individualist ontology that underlies them (Lebow, 1999; Etieyibo, 2016). Hence the worry from Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) that there is a tension between valuing the relationship as assumed under Ubuntu, and valuing the self as assumed under individualism which is manifested in modern African communities. What they point to is the fundamental change in the value system, in other words, there is a clash of values between what is traditionally known to promote community and what is modern, that which promotes individual interests (Etieyibo, 2016; Chimakonam, 2016). The basic assumption of the primacy of the community where the relationship has the highest value is that it is an "end" in itself, and the individual becomes instrumental to this end. However, under individualism, the community becomes instrumental, and the individual is the end (Korsgaard, 1996; Tutu, 1999; Metz, 2007, 2012; Oyowe, 2013).

The above discussion highlights the fundamental change in value. When it comes to this change, on the one hand, one may appeal to the imposition and assimilation of these values, and on the

other hand, one may see the change as part of the natural growth of communities as they become modernised and advanced. To give an example by appealing to the former, modern African communities have been affected by colonialism and religion. With colonialism, one can point out to the forceful nature and imposition of colonial values with the aim of subjugation. As a result, some African cultural values were replaced with colonial values. One would imagine that when a Western cultural worldview characterized by liberalism (individual rights) forces itself onto the African cultural worldview characterized by communalism (duties to others), and the former is assumed to be powerful, the result would either be a juxtaposition of communalism and liberalism or liberal values replacing communal values (Idang, 2015). One can think of "mutual aid" in a traditional communitarian setting where this value is rooted in one's duty to others through the identification of one's interests with those of others. In modern urban and commercialised communities, coupled with individualism, mutual aid as a value is losing its hold (Wiredu, 1992, 202). Thus, there is a transformation in values in ways that individualism has slowly been taking hold. But again, given that colonialism is a lived reality for most African states and its forceful nature, change in values is inevitable.

Concerning the latter, one would appeal to the natural phenomena where change is an inevitable process of the growth of a society. Change is part of intra- and intercultural interaction where people share ideas and values. As people invent new ways of living and learn from others, changes may occur to their existing values. This can be said about communities that no longer grapple with the apparent forceful nature of colonialism, given a presupposition of independence (economic and political). One would argue that such communities are experiencing changes as new developments are being made to improve life conditions (Dzobo, 1992). For example, consider those who adopt Christianity to find meaning on how they pursue their lives. There is a change

that happens to how they identify themselves and the things they value. There is a widened and flexible sense of identity. If the same people were not Christians and lived in small homogenous communities, they would define themselves through membership in a family, clan, lineage, village and town. One feature of this identity is that it creates problems for those outside because of the impermeability of these systems. But as Christians, the church becomes a basis of membership. Since religion tends to transcend borders, identity based on membership in a religion enables one to share an identity with others in the whole world. I believe the same can be said about other forms of identity in modern communities. Membership has been widened from the lineage level which was the basis of political representation for precolonial communities to include national borders, now constituencies and citizenship to one's country seem to be the basis for political presentation (Wiredu, 1992, 1997; Masolo, 2004). Nonetheless, while there is an observable distinction in terms of the structure and values associated with pre-colonial and post-colonial communities, the change that has occurred in the community is not one that has completely erased African values. As Wiredu (1992) notes, there is a relatively large part of Africa (and Africans) who are still practising their customary values.

What the above shows is the change in values, a change that shows the presence of individualism in a communitarian world. Individuals must keep negotiating between the pursuit of their own interests against those of the community. I believe it is the context that determines what should take priority. In an individualist world it is largely individual interests that are prioritised, whereas, in a communal world, it is one's duties to the social group that takes priority, so in a world where the two are juxtaposed, one must constantly shift positions and decide what would take priority. Negotiating with others in the community seems to be the best way to pursue the interests of the self and the other. Notice that I am not arguing whether individualism or communitarian is bad or

not, but rather merely recognize that there is a change in values and this change ought to be recognized in the claims made about individual-community relationships, specifically, in the claim about the primacy of the community. The social notion of personhood with a strong emphasis on the primacy of the community would require redefining the sense in which the community would have primacy in a world where individualism has impacted a certain orientation and attitude to communal values. In the reconstructed version of personhood, I consider the sense in which one would still endorse the primacy of the community. For now, let me discuss the necessity of rituals of transformation, which have also been considered as definitive of the social notion of personhood.

5.3.2. Rituals of transformation

Under the social notion of personhood, achieving personhood requires that an individual participate in the life of the community, that is, carry out one's obligations to the social group which includes attending rites of passage, earning titles, etc. (Menkiti, 1984; Wiredu, 1992; Etieyibo, 2020). I will focus on rites of passage and the implicit obligations that come with them. But like my approach above, I seek to show the sense in which rites of passage have changed and whether they can still be considered necessary for personhood. To do that, I respond to questions about what I consider to be rites of passage, some of the changes and whether these changes can be attributed to modernity, and overall, the implication on personhood.

One of the earliest anthropologists to write on rites of passage, Arnold Van Gennep, defines rites of passage as rites or ceremonial events which accompany every change among individuals, and this change could be of place, state, social position, age, etc., (Van Gennep, 1960). Thus, they are activities that mark an individual's transition from one state or stage of life into another (Munthali & Zulu, 2007). For instance, it could be a girl transitioning into womanhood and this process would

be marked by certain activities set by one's community. The transition tends to be marked by new or expanded obligations to the self and community (Richards & La Fontaine, 2013; Amadiume, 1987). But one may wonder about the nature of this transition. According to Van Gennep (1960), rites of passage constitute three stages; the separation stage, the liminal (passenger) stage and the aggregation (consummated) stage (Van Gennep, 1960). The separation stage constitutes behaviours that symbolize an individual's detachment from an earlier state (Turner, 1964). For instance, one would think of a "name-giving ceremony" and how it separates an individual from a state of an "it", as an object or a human being that is not a member of the community (disincorporated), into becoming a member to start the personhood journey. The liminal or passenger stage is more of an ambiguous state, where the individual has nothing of the old phase nor has gotten into the new phase (Turner, 1964). A good example is initiation rites. During this stage, adolescent girls and boys are excluded from the community which shows separation from their childhood but at the same time, have not yet become adults (Turner, 1964). The aggregation or consummated state is about an individual who has clearly defined rights and obligations. The individual has now entered a new phase and is expected to behave in ways that reflect communal norms and standards definitive of the new phase. One would think of an initiate who has come out of the initiation ceremonies and incorporated back into the community and is now considered an adult.

There are many rites of passage, and for the sake of argument it is important to make some distinctions and delineations between various kinds of rites of passage depending on their function, that is, depending on the kind of change they presumably portray in the development of persons. Rites of passage can mark change in status where that change could be one's life cycle, social status, or religious status. That is, one can have rites of passage that mark a transition from one

biological state to another. For instance, in some communities, people celebrate pregnancy, childbirth, puberty, and all the other stages of life until death (Noberk & Alexander, 2023). Even death is celebrated as a marker from one state to another. Communities that believe in the afterlife believe ancestors have a social function such that the transition into becoming an ancestor is celebrated (Mbiti, 1970; Menkiti, 1984). The ceremonies that relate to biological changes as listed above can be described as life-cycle rites of passage. Apart from biological rites of passage are social rites of passage, and most of these rites have nothing to do with biological changes, they simply mark a change in social status. For instance, being appointed into a position (office, or becoming a warrior) or retiring from one, graduating or becoming a new member of a group such as a fraternity or sororities, etc. Another classification includes religious rites of passage, and these may mark changes in religious status. For instance, baptism, confirmation, ordination, and circumcision are some common religious rites of passage (Noberk & Alexander, 2023, Frazer, 2002; Durkheim, 2016). There is no reason to believe that these are the only rites of passage, as there could be more classifications as well as overlaps between them. I only draw attention to these rites of passage to highlight the kind of changes they might mark and how the distinctions could be drawn. In this chapter, I will not be following this classification, instead, I will appeal to some examples given by Menkiti. Menkiti (1984, 2004) mentions several rites of passage which include naming, puberty rites, marriage, procreation, death, etc. From the list, one can see that they are largely about life cycle rites of passage because of the link he draws between biological maturation and moral progression.

I have stated that under the social notion of personhood, rites of passage are necessary for the attainment of personhood. According to Menkiti (1984), personhood involves an ontological progression where the individual moves from being a child with no personhood to becoming an

adult with full personhood. While the movement from childhood to adulthood marks biological development or maturation, there is a simultaneous moral development. The latter involves taking part in rites of passage and carrying out obligations defined by one's community. It is through the latter that one transforms from being a mere biological human being into a human being who is a person. My discussion of rites of passage, on the one hand, appeals to the intuition I adopted from the problems or critiques raised in the last chapter about the problem of gender, and on the other hand, appeals to the problem of individualism and how the orientation to participating in rites of passage is not considered a duty but an individual's choice with room for refusal to participate. The refusal attributed to freedom not to be coerced into participating as well as the availability of alternatives to moral education such as formal education and technological platforms.

As pointed out above, one way of problematizing rites of passage is to refer to the discussion from the last chapter. The chapter discussed some objections to the social notion of personhood. One thing that scholars have mentioned is the exclusionary or discriminatory (based on gender) nature of rites of passage. This was part of the discussion in the last (fourth) chapter (see Chapter 4 for details). The major question raised was whether personhood is gendered. Underlying the question is the organisational structure of rites of passage. According to the critiques, rites of passage are organised along gender lines which exclude other genders and subordinate women as persons (Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2014; Manzini, 2018). In responding to the objection, I argued that the organising principle of a traditional African community is seniority, and it is seniority that is reflected in the conception of personhood (Momoh, 2000; Oyewumi, 2005). But the same cannot be said about a modern African community because seniority does not have any centrality.[20] It seems that for a modern society and given the concerns of scholars against this notion of

[20] This forms part of the discussion under seniority below

personhood, gender is assumed to be the organizing principle (Nzegwu, 2004; Oyewumi, 2005; Oyowe & Yurkivska, 2013; Manzini, 2018; Molefe, 2019). This view comes from the idea that Western cultures take gender expressed in patriarchal social organization seriously, and this ideology was imposed onto the African continent through colonialism and religion (Amadiume, 1987, 2005; Oyewumi, 2005). However, note that if gender is the organizing principle of a modern African community, and personhood is considered to be applicable in the same way as it is in the traditional African community, then the objections about gender that address rites of passage as problematic remain unsolved. It means personhood would have to be reconstructed by reconceptualising rites of passage to avoid the problems of exclusion and discrimination. This is part of the call to reconstruct personhood based on a discussion from the last chapter (*see* Chapter 4).

Another approach in problematizing rites of passage is to consider the problems that may come with modernity, such as the centrality of human rights and alternatives to accessing moral information such as formal schools and the internet. To start with access to moral information, what makes rites of passage necessary for personhood is that they are the only way to achieve personhood. But whether this holds for modern African individuals is a question worth discussing. The assumption is that if personhood is about morality and the acquisition of virtues, then rites of passage ought to be understood as vehicles necessary for the acquisition of virtue (Menkiti, 1984). In other words, if rites of passage are vital to moral transformation, then rites of passage are the only way through which individuals acquire knowledge about the morals and values of their community (Eze, 2018; Kangwa, 2011; Mutale, 2017). Individuals must participate in the rites of passage such that failure to do so risks facing serious social consequences, whatever these may be (Johnson, 2018). Regardless of the importance of rites of passage to the acquisition of personhood,

current societies have had to grapple with the availability of alternatives to accessing moral information such as formal schools and the Internet. One can go to school or access the internet and learn about moral respect, duties to one's community, sex education, etc. If such a person is to participate in rites of passage such as initiation ceremonies, they would seem redundant or of no value. The question then is on the reason someone should attend rites of passage if they can access the same information at school or the internet.

Several reasons could be cited for attending to rites of passage. These include but are not limited to respect for tradition, fear of social consequences and that rites of passage offer something special that formal schools or the internet cannot offer. The first has to do with one's duty to the community, the second is an irrational fear, and the third option shows that rites of passage could be valuable. I ignore the second option because it has no merit. Instead, I focus on the first option, that is, one's obligation *vis-a-vis* human rights; and the second option, the value of rites of passage for a specific cultural community *vis-a-vis* the complexity of modern communities. In pre-colonial traditional communities, attendance was more of a duty than a right. Snyder (2002), who studied the Iraqw of Tanzania on rites of passage, states that the African traditional life is oriented towards the community and its presence is felt in all the different rites. However, with the influence of Western values on the African cultures, and the centrality of rights, Snyder observes that the Iraqw's orientation to these rituals is individualistic. It is not about individual duty to the community but an individual choice. For instance, when it comes to initiation ceremonies and circumcision, in traditional African communities, the community is responsible for performing the procedure, and it is an individual's obligation to partake and share in the life of the community. In the modern context, it is the clinics that perform these procedures, and given the backing of the

law and rights, they have been interpreted as an individual choice such that the orientation is no longer about one's obligation to the community but to oneself (Snyder, 2002).

Even if participation in rites of passage is an individual's obligation to one's community and is enforceable, the variegated nature of rites of passage among different communities and the composition of modern African communities creates a problem for the implementation and enforcement of the rites. In most urban centres, the composition of people coming from different cultures has disrupted the social organisation that was present in traditional communities. Consider the South African city of Johannesburg, for example, there is no specific cultural practice one can identify with it (as a true reflection of the rainbow nation). Johannesburg is composed of people who may not share a culture or have a common background. Therefore, it would be absurd for one cultural group to enforce its practice on the others. This cannot happen without facing pushback. This explains Turner's (1964) conviction that rites of passage find their full expression in "small-scale, relatively stable and cyclical societies" (90). For Modern complex communities, it is not surprising that traditional rites of passage have been pushed to the peripheral (rural areas) where the societal composition includes people of the same village or town. One would argue that modern communities have modern rites of passage such as finishing school, finding a job, and raising a family. They are seen as major landmarks for adulthood, and they appeal to the concerns of modernity. However, as I show below, these rites of passage, especially framed in this way cannot be necessary for personhood. Even the idea that rites of passage have taken a new form justifies my suspicion about the place of traditional rites of passage in modern African communities. Furthermore, the suspicion is also reflected in the fact that most rites of passage have been transformed to suit either the school calendar or respect human rights.[21] There has been a ban on

[21] One may wonder whether seeing rites of passage are not a mere supplement to the various choices that individuals have to pursue their lives rather than a communal obligation that has actual value to the individual and the community.

certain activities associated with rites of passage, such as circumcision, sex education, etc., either by the government or the church (Kamlongera, 2007; Banwari, 2015). The government sees some of these activities as a violation of individual human rights and the church sees them as devilish. This may not be a full account of rites of passage and the problems one can cite in relation to modern communities. The point was to show that there are problems with traditional rites of passage. The problematization of rites of passage with respect to modern African communities shows that they cannot be a necessary condition for personhood if the social notion of personhood is to be applicable in the community in question. The implication is that one needs to reconstruct the social notion of personhood so that it does not attract problems with respect to one of its necessary conditions, rites of passage. I will now consider the last theme under the social notion of personhood.

5.3.3. Seniority

I stated that another necessary condition for personhood is seniority. For Menkiti (1984), senior members are more likely to be full persons than the young. He expresses seniority in terms of eldership or age-based seniority. He associates senior members with the possession of moral wisdom or excellence. He backs up this statement by citing an Igbo proverb, "What an old man sees sitting down, a young man cannot see standing up" (173). It is this excellence that is definitive of personhood. The idea of seniority has also been associated with the possession of practical wisdom (Kayange, 2020). Practical wisdom refers to practical judgement or practical decision-making, the ability to judge a context and determine how one ought to act in a particular context. It enables individuals to balance the good of the self and that of the community. In this sense, it allows for the cultivation of both self-regarding and other-regarding virtues. Through the exercise of practical wisdom, individuals can apply the right virtues in situations. That is, one is not just a

person with moral wisdom but also practical wisdom. Just like Menkiti, Kayange backs this up by citing a Chewa proverb, "a*kulu akulu ndi mdambo mozimira moto"* which means "elders are proverb solvers" and it illustrates the idea that elders possess knowledge and wisdom and so can be called upon to solve some problems (Kayange, 2020, 9). Like moral excellence, the development of practical wisdom is a lifelong process. One needs to subject oneself to learning. This means that coming of age alone is not enough, one needs to continue to learn. experience does not foreclose the development of one's practical wisdom. Kayange cites proverbs such as *tsabola wakale sawawa* (old pepper is not hot). *Kuwona fisi sikubadwa kale* (Seeing a hyena is not being born a long time ago) (Kayange, 2020, 10). The proverbs mean that one might be senior, but also lack knowledge (Kayange, 2020). For Menkiti (1984), when an elder fails to have moral wisdom, such an individual fails at personhood.

My interest in this section is on whether seniority is the organizing principle of a modern African community. I have shown in the previous chapters the importance of seniority or eldership. Among the Shona, elders are seen as intermediaries between the living and ancestors (Iyare, Imafidon & Abudu, 2021). An elderly person in most African cultures holds honour and respect. Since they possess moral and practical wisdom, elders offer guidance and advice to the community (Kayange, 2020; Kenyata, 1965). In most African families, the most senior members command respect and have more responsibilities than the junior members and are first to be blamed when things for wrong (Momoh, 2000; Cobbah 1987). Even when it comes to holding political positions, such as lineage representatives, it is the most senior but not senile member of the community that gets elected (Wiredu, 1995). In general, being senior is associated with knowledge, wisdom, and experience (Wiredu, 1992; Chimakonam, 2016; Kayange, 2020). But whether the same attitude holds in most modern African communities is doubtful. I cast doubt because of the changes in

societal attitudes and treatment of the elderly, as well as in describing or showing the actual harm done. Thus, elderly persons are victims of discrimination and are seen as weak, useless, vulnerable to sickness, etc. (Butler, 1965; Iyare, Imafidon & Abudu, 2021). Most elderly persons accused of witchcraft tend to be exiled from the community, beaten, stoned, and killed. It seems there is a tension between the value of seniority in traditional African communities and the societal attitudes and actions towards seniors. In this section, I theorize about this apparent tension and why I believe the latter is a common phenomenon in modern societies.

Thus, in modern African societies, seniority has lost its central place. This is not to argue that one will not find elders being respected to a higher degree than junior members. To state that seniority has lost its central place means that it is no longer the organising principle of an African society. Two questions must be answered, thus, what it means to lose centrality and how it has been lost. To start with the first question, the answer appeals to the fact that senior members have been discriminated against and part of the discrimination is also characterised by change in societal attitudes toward the elderly. In many countries such as South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, etc, elders have been victims of witchcraft accusations (Help Age International, 2010; Eboiyehi, 2017; Harrop, 2012). Those who have been accused of witchcraft have been burned alive, beaten, and tortured. To make matters worse, this discrimination has also been manifested in the form of sexism and gender. The majority of those accused of Witchcraft tend to be women and this can be linked to the coming of patriarchal values that tend to subordinate women (Iyare, Imafidon & Abudu, 2021). Nonetheless, one way of understanding discrimination is to appeal to changes in the attitude that members of the community have toward seniors. In the above, I have shown that being senior is to be in a position of respect and honour from the community and that one can be dependable. However, the change points to the fact that being senior is associated with

weakness, dependency, and a lack of practical value (Butler, 1969; Iyare, Imafidon & Abudu, 2021). To understand how discrimination and change in attitude come about, let me respond to the second question.

With respect to the second question, that is, how seniority as a value has been lost, one can appeal to several explanatory factors. According to Iyare, Imafidon and Abudu (2021), the changes in attitude and treatment of the elderly can be attributed to indigenous beliefs about witchcraft and modern religious practices associated with Pentecostalism. Regarding indigenous beliefs on causality, one conception of causality found in African thought is that for any event, there is a prior cause, and the cause could be natural or supernatural. Among the supernatural causes is witchcraft. Thus, sometimes sickness, famine, death, and diseases are believed to be caused by witches and wizards. It is not clear how age comes into the picture but given that elderly persons are more knowledgeable about the world, communities believe they are using this knowledge to cause problems so they can extend their lives. More so, most of them who get accused are those who have mental health issues and other physical weaknesses that make them unable to defend themselves. Furthermore, the belief in Witchcraft of the elderly is also spread by Pentecostal churches. Iyare, Imafidon and Abudu (2021) argue that most modern pastors and prophets tend to point fingers at the elderly as the cause of misfortune in people's families. They do not state why this is the case, but I believe this is an assimilation of indigenous beliefs on causes discussed above and the practices in modern religion.

As pointed out above, discrimination comes with a certain perception of the elderly. That is, it is accompanied by a certain attitude that stands in contrast with the value of seniority. The elderly may generally be perceived as mentally and biologically weak, but seeing this weakness as

something problematic can be explained by appealing to a transactional culture.[22] This is a culture that believes that what is valuable is that which can contribute something tangible. One way of understanding a transactional culture is to appeal to what I discussed above about capitalism. I stated that a capitalist ideology comes with individualism, and since it focuses on profits, relationships tend to be understood in an individualistic transactional manner. A relationship becomes valuable if individual members of the relationship can contribute something tangible. Iyare, Imafidon and Abudu (2021) argue that the elderly have grown weak, and their contribution is less or close to none such that they are seen as having no value. An elderly person who cannot manage to travel to do something for the community or has mental health problems that she cannot offer any tangible advice to the community may be seen as non-dependable. Instead, it is the community that is taken to help the elderly. The problem now is that the elder person is likened to the child – who equally depends on the community. But underlying this lack of (or decline in) value is a shift from seeing an elder as a member of the community who forms part of the relationship such that value in the relationship, to seeing the elder as an individual *qua* individual and evaluating one's value based on contribution to society. It is worth pointing out that this is different from how traditional African societies perceived senile members who could not contribute something. For instance, under the socialist ideology of Ujamaa, in Tanzania, where labour was a value, elders were not expected to work as much as the young do. Instead, the community believed that elders had already worked during their younger days (Nyerere, 1987). The basic idea is that there seems to be a shift in societal attitude towards the elderly, and this attitude has come with discrimination against them.

[22] This is similar to what Oyewumi (2005) pointed out under the Western Bio-Logic account of gender, where bodily difference is social difference. That is, females are biologically different from men, but this difference is understood to imply social hierarchy (see previous Chapters for a discussion).

Furthermore, one interesting point is that there seems to be a twist in the evaluation of actual harm done to senior members. I imagine that in a duty-based society, and one that values and respects its tradition, it seems intuitive that when someone is wronged, the wrongness can be understood in terms of duties that a wrongdoer has failed to fulfil as well as the broken harmony the action has caused (Tutu, 1999; Ntlapo & White, 2022). Following the same logic, if a senior person is wronged by a junior person, it is intuitive that in the said community, the harm would be flamed as a failure to recognize a person's status or capacity as a senior person, that is, a junior has failed her duty to respect a senior member. This would be a case of a violation of a norm that demands junior members to respect elders. Alternatively, in a right-based society, it seems that wrongness would be interpreted in terms of rights violated. Thus, the harm done would track the underlying human rights rather than duty. For instance, in the above examples about the treatment of elders accused of witchcraft, there were several similar cases in Malawi, but interest is that the Malawi Network of Older Persons Organisations (MANEPO), and the Malawi Law Society (MLS), bemoaned not the loss of the traditional value of respect for the elderly (or Umunthu in general)[23], but the violation of a right stating that "no person shall be subject to torture of any kind or to cruelty, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" (Malawi Constitution- Chapter IV, 19 (3); Mpaka, 2023). What this shows is that the attitude to seniority tends to be captured in terms of rights which are presumed to take primacy. One is a senior member, but primarily a human being with rights like any other human being. This is not to say that there might not be a proviso in a constitution that demands respect for the elderly (or framed as respect for customary law), but the human rights flamed under common law are usually taken as a basis for the legal system in most post-colonial African states (Doucet and Vanderlinden, 1994; Woodman, 1995). But seeing rights

[23] Umunthu is cognate with Ubuntu.

as primacy is something associated with modernity. Along this line of thought is Pollis and Schwab (1979) who argue that the idea of rights is relatively new in most states. For Menkiti (1984), in traditional communities, rights occupied a secondary status to duties.

What I have shown in this section is that seniority is no longer the organizing principle of a modern African community. That is, it does not occupy a central place in the organisation of a modern African community. Problematizing seniority in this way is meant to show that it cannot be a necessary condition for personhood. The attitude to seniority and the discrimination that most senior members face are inconsistent with the idea that senior members have so much value to the community. The basic idea is that the metaphysical conditions for modern society do not support the idea that seniority can be an inspiration for the theorization of personhood. It cannot be valued as it was in the traditional African community where it was central to defining the social notion of personhood.

5.4. In search of new frontiers

I believe philosophical discussions come from a particular place, regardless of whether the inquirer is discussing subjective experiences or objective ones. That is, ideas discussed tend to speak to people's experience of the world, whether their own experience or expressed in more general (detached) terms. It is doubtful that ideas originate from nowhere, rather they tend to come from a particular point of view (Nagel, 1989). Morality or ethics is about issues grounded in a (historical) social and political context. Therefore, a context should inform theorization or should be the basis for morality. Philosophers have bemoaned the historical development of philosophy and how Africa was left out of the picture (Etieyibo, 2014; Matolino, 2015; Graness, 2015). The same can be said about how African philosophers have focused on pre-colonial traditional values and how they inform the development of African ethics, but leaving out modern African experiences which

are alive and true (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013; Chimakonam, 2016). One would wonder how systematic theorization of pre-colonial ideas speaks to the experiences of African people today especially if there is no attempt to speak to modern experiences (Agada, 2019). Importantly, one would wonder how modern philosophers concerned with precolonial traditions would be read or interpreted by scholars in the next century reading about today's scholarly material. What would those philosophers learn about modern experience? Unless there is something grounded in modern experiences, it is doubtful that one will have a picture of modern experiences. Modern life would end up being interpreted as a continuation of the pre-colonial past even when there are significant differences due to colonialism, religion, technological development, trade, etc.

When it comes to the social notion of personhood, I advocate a theorisation that is informed by modern experiences without uncritical appeal to precolonial traditions. I have argued that the social notion of personhood as it is framed in the literature does not support the current context. I have looked at three themes that I consider to be definitive of this view of personhood. From the discussion, I have problematized them to show that modern African communities present new contextual realities in such a way that the primacy of the community, rituals of transformation and obligations, and seniority cannot be necessary for personhood defined in ways that they have been defined. It is safe to say that the way these themes are presented in the literature, it presupposes a precolonial African cultural world view. Given that African has gone through significant changes, the way seniority, rituals of transformation and primacy of the community would be understood would be different. This was part of the task in the above section, given what I have shown to support my claim, if the social notion of personhood is to have merit in modern African communities, this version of personhood would have to be reconstructed.

Reconstruction of personhood can take several approaches. Firstly, one would argue for an approach adopted by radical decolonizers, that we do away with modernity and its values and adopt traditional ways of living. Secondly, one would ignore any attempt to refer to the past and traditional values, instead, we should have a new conception of personhood that is purely based on modern values. Another option is supported by moderate decolonisation, the view that one can reconstruct the social notion of personhood in ways that adopt aspects of pre-colonial and post-colonial Africa. This requires that one adopts values in both traditional and modern African communities that are beneficial, and then use these values to reconstruct a social notion of personhood. As mentioned above, I have adopted this third approach.

The basic idea is that one needs to acknowledge the changes in social and historical context, regardless of whether one appeals to colonialism, religion, intercultural changes, or intracultural changes. What matters is the acknowledgement of change and the development of theories that respond to that change. As Chimakonam (2016) puts it, questioning certain values and acknowledging changes has something to offer to the development of concepts and the discipline of African philosophy. This doubt tends to present itself as thesis and antithesis in theories, but instead of seeing them as opposites, one can use this opposition to develop a theory that acknowledges both sides of the debate. He argues that doubting certain concepts in African philosophy (such as personhood or Ubuntu) allows different voices to be heard, and it is by acknowledging such voices that the discipline can develop (Chimakonam, 2016). An example is the debate on Ubuntu with reference to scholars such as Metz, Matolino and Kwindingwi (see Metz, 2007, 2014; Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013). What comes out of this debate is an attempt to reconstruct Ubuntu, and Kayange's (2020) virtue phronesis theory is a good example of that. On personhood, one can appeal to the critiques in the literature (See the discussion above). But

what comes out of it is a conversational account of personhood by Chimakonam, 2021). I am not going to discuss Chimakonam's (2021) attempt because it does not remain sympathetic to themes under the social notion of personhood. It appears to me as an entirely new conception of personhood. As such, I will simply present what I consider to be a reconstructed version of personhood.

5.5. Reconstructing personhood

Given the problems cited above, it is in this section, I will attempt to reconstruct the social notion of personhood. I consider the reconstructed version to be better at capturing changes in values, especially in modern African communities. The difference between the reconstructed version and the social notion of personhood discussed above is in the features that define them. For instance, the above version has three necessary conditions namely, the primacy of the community, rituals of transformation and seniority; on the other hand, the reconstructed version only considers the primacy of the community. Nonetheless, both versions maintain the view that what defines a person is the cultivation of a "virtuous" or excellent "moral character". The basic idea is that personhood involves the cultivation of certain necessary virtues that define persons in the context in question (Gyekye, 2010; Menkiti, 1984; Etieyibo, 2020; Molefe, 2021).

Remember that what distinguishes this version of personhood from other versions is the focus or emphasis on virtue. This means that in discussing the reconstructed version of personhood, the pursuit of virtue is central. Note that this way of discussing virtue is not to propose an African virtue ethical theory, a task that some scholars such as Molefe, have attempted in African Philosophy (Molefe, 2017, 2019). Rather, I seek to present an account of personhood that sees virtues to be instrumental to the promotion of the community. Therefore, in line with the above claim, a virtuous agent possesses the necessary virtues such that having them enables the agent to

live in community with others. From the philosophical literature, especially work on ethics or morality, one would understand that discussions about virtue have wider applications reaching both African and non-African contexts. However, what underlies African discussions about virtue is the underlying communitarian approach. By communitarian approach, I mean the value of the relationship or the primacy of the relationship. Hence appealing to this approach means that virtues are instruments for the promotion of this value. Moral agents do not have an unquestioned or unrestricted liberty to pursue what they want, rather they live for the community. Failure to do so attracts moral judgment. Furthermore, since the priority is on the relationship, the focus is placed on the pursuit or cultivation of other-regarding virtues (Gyekye, 1997; Molefe, 2021). The pursuit of other-regarding virtues is then the best rational way to promote a relationship an individual has with others. The attitude or orientation to morality moves from the self to the other. This is the sense I discuss virtues under the reconstructed version of personhood.

In trying to understand "virtue", several questions can be asked. That is, one could be asking questions about the best reasons individuals ought to be virtuous, questions regarding the nature of virtue, questions about the formation of virtue (character formation), that is, the best actions that bring about virtue, or ethical principles that bring about the right virtues. At the same time, one can ask questions about whether virtue is inherent in individuals or is acquired by participating in the moral life of the community. Importantly, underlying all these questions is a question about moral agency and such a question comes with a question about moral praise and blame. What I am trying to show is that there are many questions one can ask, and the questions can steer the direction of the research in one or another. In this section, I will only answer a few, and most questions I have selected appeal to how the social notion of personhood is framed. Thus, from the list above, I focus on the centrality of virtue, the acquisition of virtue and the assignment of praise and blame

as a marker of personhood. Nonetheless, the claims I put forward, in responding to these questions answer other questions by proxy.

5.5.1. Virtue as definitive of personhood

An important point worth discussing and a first question to respond to is about the centrality of virtue. That is, I seek to show why virtue is central to defining personhood instead of appealing to rationality, the body, etc. In other words, I show why a reconstructed version maintains virtue as an important part of personhood. I have presented the way I understand virtue in the above discussion. I have adopted the African traditional account of virtue; this is the account of virtue supported by the African cultural world view which emphasizes not only the pursuit of other-regarding virtues but also sees these virtues as instruments for communal flourishing. This is different from the traditional Aristotelian account of virtue as a dispositional quality of character instrumental to an individual human flourishing. However, this does not state why virtue is the central element and not rationality or any other feature.

At the moment, what is important is to state the reasons I choose virtue to be central. In asking the question "Why virtue is central?" one is not asking in virtue of what actions are right, which is a normative question, instead, one is asking a question about the nature of morality itself. One is asking a meta-ethical question, and a helpful response to the question follows this meta-ethical route. Furthermore, one may not necessarily agree with the answers I discuss, nonetheless, I attempt to respond by appealing to answers found in the African philosophical literature, answers consistent with the African cultural worldview. The answers I discuss appeal to language and human nature.

To start with the language argument, I adopt a view discussed by Gyekye (2010) who discusses why African ethics takes virtue as central. Gyekye's (2010) discussion appeals to the meaning of ethics and morality in African indigenous languages. He argues that in most Sub-Saharan African languages, there is no direct translation for ethics or morality. He states that what most of these languages have in common is that a translation for "ethics" or "morality" captures the relevance of virtue or character. Gyekye (2010) cites several African languages such as the Akan, Yoruba, Igbo and Sotho. In most African languages such as the ones cited above, the word for ethics or morality is the same word that means character or behaviour. So, the statement "he has no morals" or "his behaviour is unethical", in English the statement captures "character" on the one hand, and "behaviour" or "action" on the other, But in African languages it would mean the same thing, "he has no character". Regardless of the emphasis on "being" and "doing", the two imply the same thing. Thus, think of a biconditional statement with being and doing variables, if you are X, you ought to do Y, and doing Y means you are X. A concrete example that Gyekye (2010) cites is "Sotho", a language spoken widely in Lesotho and some parts of Zimbabwe, one finds no direct translation of the word "ethics" or "morality". What this means is that statements about the moral or ethical life of a person as stated above use an indigenous word that could capture both behaviour and character. Moral statements "he has no morals" or "his action is unethical" use words such as "*maemo"*—which means character or behaviour. Thus, "*maemo a mabe"* means "he has a bad character" or "his behaviour is unethical". The implication here is that an African ethical theory that would focus on action (such as "deontology" in the Western sense) would not necessarily be different from one that focuses on character (a virtue ethical theory"). It is not surprising that discussions about Ubuntu tend to overlap between action and character, where Ubuntu is presented

with deontological underpinnings (Metz, 2007) or about virtue (Van Niekerk 2013; Kayange, 2020; Futter, 2016).

There is another approach to discussing the relevance of virtue and here one can appeal to human nature. This brings me to my second point. An example would be those who believe that certain facts about human nature inform the truth of moral propositions, as well as those who hold theistic arguments about morality (morality hails from God). The former points to the relevance of virtue as a reflection of some fact about human nature, and the latter appeals to the divine command to be virtuous persons (Mbiti; 1970; Gamwell, 2005; Joyce, 2012). Under this view, one is likely going to draw conclusions that see virtue as something universal. Hence consistent with the view that virtues are universal, as have been traditionally presented. For the sake of space, I will ignore the latter and focus on the former (For a discussion on this see Molefe, 2015; Adaga, 2023; Gyekye, 1995; Dzobo, 1992; Wiredu, 1992). Thus, if virtue is a value to African communities, one way of understanding this value is to simply appeal to some fundamental moral principle (or principles) guiding such communities. I believe that the presumed principles help flesh out what could or could not be considered virtuous in a particular community. Given the ethical principle highlighted above -the promotion of a relationship- one would argue, by way of example, that the pursuit of virtue is probably the best way for people to relate with each other. Thus, being a particular kind of person is (probably) the best way one can relate with others. For instance, an unfriendly person is unlikely to relate with others compared to one who is friendly. What underlies this view about conduct or one's beingness (friendliness), would among other things be a certain conception of human nature expressed metaphysically. In the previous chapters, I have shown that one conception of human nature associated with the African cultural worldview is that human beings are social. If they are social, then it is rational that one acts in ways that promote or honour this

nature (McNaughton & Rawling, 1992). Social arrangements (I believe including ethical ones) would have to align with one's nature (Taiwo, 2004; Oluwole, 1981). The best reasons for acting are those that respect one's nature as a human being. Therefore, the relevance of virtue, where one of the fundamental questions is about "how to be," can be answered by appealing to a conception of human nature.

These are some of the ways one would flesh out reasons why virtue is important and why it ought to be maintained in thinking about morality in general, and personhood in particular. Therefore, in the reconstruction of personhood. The discussion of reasons for appealing to language use which tends to see virtue as linked to morality as well as pointing to human nature should help shed light on why virtue is important. Now that I have shown why virtue occupies some important place in morality in African ethics, I will consider some questions on how virtue is acquired (if it is) as well as achieved.

5.5.2. Acquisition of virtue and assignment of praise and blame

In the above discussion on Menkiti, one observation made is that virtue is acquired within the context of one's community (1984). An important view is that the acquisition of virtue takes rites of passage as necessary, but not sufficient. The basic idea is that they are vehicles for maintaining and passing tradition and moral knowledge to the younger generation or candidates for personhood (Eze, 2018). Thus, rites of passage or rituals of transformation allow the individual to *attain the right virtues*. But as a necessary condition for the achievement of personhood, individuals who choose voluntarily not to participate in rites of passage must be ready to face moral judgement. This is because rituals of transformation can be used as a standard by the community for the assignment of moral praise and blame. The argument is that if an individual fails at personhood by either choosing not to attend rites of passage or failing to act in morally desirable ways

(characteristic of full personhood), then the community is justified in its moral judgement as an expression of moral blame.

However, there is an immediate challenge when it comes to moral judgement in the assignment of moral praise and blame under Menkit's view. Thus, one of the challenges is that it is not clear *when* the community can be justified in assigning moral praise and blame. I take inspiration from Eze who argues that "Menkiti does not make it clear as to what full humanity entails. When does one attain ethical maturity?" (5). For Eze (2018), ethical maturity is the standard, the moral arrival. It is the state which determines the quality of achieving personhood, but "when" ethical maturity is attained (or not attained to be blamed for failure) is unclear. Note that this question seems to be limited to adults and not children because a child is in the process of attaining personhood. Personhood in a child is like a seed "or something that is becoming" that continues to grow, or something comparable to Ramose's being and becoming, where being is constantly developing (Menkiti, 2004; Ramose, 2003; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 106). In other words, for a child, moral praise and blame are irrelevant. So, if Eze is right about the missing information (about adults and their moral arrival) in Menkiti's (1984) conception of personhood, then the question of "when" appropriate praise and blame can be offered to a person becomes difficult even when one appeals to one's participation in rites of passage or rituals of transformation.

Another reason for casting doubt at the assignment of moral praise and blame is the complication with rites of passage for modern African communities. I argued that in modern African communities, modernization offers different ways of attaining moral knowledge given the presence of alternatives such as formal schooling and the Internet. At the same time, the emphasis on individuality is a challenge to the communal nature of rites of passage (Snyder, 2002; Chimakonam, 2021). The complexity of modern communities defined by the different

backgrounds of individuals who form part of the population of these communities makes it a challenge to have standards when it comes to rites of passage. They cannot be the basis for the community to blame those who did not attend rites of passage for their failure to acquire and achieve virtue. Given all these problems, I concluded that rites of passage cannot be necessary for the achievement of personhood.

In the reconstructed version, I maintain this stance but only with minor changes on the acquisition process and the assignment of praise and blame. What I maintain is that individuals who are born and raised in a particular community, learn the virtues of that community. As part of their learning, especially in the reconstructed version, I do not consider a community's standard rites of passage as necessary. Whatever rites there are, they may have a function (whatever that is), but not as necessary conditions for personhood or acquisition of virtue (Chimakonam, 2021). Therefore, learning virtues by participating in the moral life of the community can happen in so many ways, individuals can learn from their early childhood caregivers (parents, guardians, etc.) as well as the community in a more general sense.[24] I have in mind different forms of learning, and I do not prescribe anything (in particular). Psychological theories do provide empirical support for different forms of learning but perhaps one form that comes close to the social setting I have in mind is the one discussed in chapter three, social learning theories (Bandura, 1999; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Nonetheless, the point here is about virtues, and it is the community that defines the virtues while at the same time offering the space for individuals to practice these virtues. It is the community that moves individuals from a state of emptiness or *tabula lasa* to full personhood, as virtuous agents (Eze, 2018, 6; Turner, 1969; Menkiti, 1984). Thus, no one is born with developed virtues, the development of virtue happens within one's community. I believe individuals are born with the

[24] Nonetheless, the virtues individuals choose to learn for personhood are not just any virtues, but the ones the community seems to be central.

capacity to acquire these virtues through learning. It is by learning and embodying the necessary virtues that one becomes a person (Menkiti, 1984; Eze, 2018). Note that this way of cashing out conception is different from Gyekye (2010) whose emphasis is not so much on learning and embodying virtues but on having the capacity for virtue.

Furthermore, given that I have cast doubt on rites of passage, one ought to offer an alternative account for the assignment of appropriate praise and blame (moral responsibility). In the above section, I have argued that regardless of the rejection of rites of passage, virtue remains central to personhood for modern complex African communities. Again, as shown above, the cultivation of virtue may be affected by several factors such as education, the complexity of society, friends, and family. This to some extent implies that the cultivation of the right virtues is out of luck, and if it is out of luck, it leaves no space for appropriate moral praise and blame.[25] Possibly an attempt can be made to ground the assignment of moral praise and blame to the individual. This attempt comes from other conditions for personhood. Following Menkiti's (1984, 2004, 2018) assertion that the community is that which confers personhood, one would then argue that an individual's embeddedness in the moral community legitimizes the community to assign praise and blame to the individual in question. This is the fact that the community is that which makes the individual. It remains primary over the affairs of individuals. Furthermore, by looking at individuals themselves, an individual is not a passive agent, but an active one who constantly acts (participates) in the moral community by exercising one's powers and capacities. In doing this, the actions of the individual are bound to affect others in the community, and those others can have legitimate claims to make against the individual through the assignment of praise and blame (Strawson, 1962). Two related points have been raised here, one is the view that the community as the primary

[25] See Andree (1983) and Statman (1993) for my inspiration on a discussion of moral luck.

figure has legitimate claims to make in the assignment of praise and blame. Secondly, as that which offers the space for individuals to act onto the world, the actions of individuals through the powers and capacities they exercise are bound to affect others and can receive praise or blame for exercising such powers. The phrase "blamed or praised for exercising powers" specifies the conditions under which "praise and blame" should be assigned.[26] This means that those who lack the said capacities or powers (individuals living with cognitive disabilities, non-human animals, babies, etc.) cannot be assigned appropriate praise and blame.[27]

Importantly, I have argued that for Menkiti (1984), praise and blame come as a result of reflecting on someone's success and failure to act in ways that a full person would act. A full person has carried out obligations and attended rites of passage. However, given that I do not subscribe to traditional rites of passage through which personhood is attained, a full person would be defined differently. In general, just like Menkiti (1984), I also consider a full person to be a virtuous person, that is, one who acts under the virtues of one's community. But as said above, Menkiti (1984) endorses rites of passage as vehicles for learning virtues, and I do not. One obvious question a person would have at this stage is about what I consider to be a vehicle for inculcating moral instruction, an alternative to rites of passage.

One obvious response to the above question is to state that individuals acquire virtues as they participate in the moral life of the community, that is, as they commune with others through the fulfilment of obligations and acting on the norms of their community. But a more helpful response is to state that in modern African communities, where the law is central, one can imagine a

[26] See Strawson (1962) for a discussion on powers and capacities.

[27] This includes those who on account of their actions may appear to be virtuous just because their actions correspond to the norms, values, and virtues of the community, but on close inspection are devoid of power or capacity. An example would be what Chimakonam (2022) has as individuals who blindly follow communal norms out of manipulation or radical fear such that individuals cannot act out of free choice, nor have their will reflected in their actions. I believe these are extreme circumstances that warrant special treatment. For me, this is outside the scope of this chapter.

community that does not have standardized rites of passage that every individual must fulfil but has enacted laws to guide action. What I have in mind is a certain sense in which the law (instead of rites of passage) can be a facilitator for the development of virtue. Note that there are so many functions of the law, but I only consider its relationship to the development and promotion of virtues, both intellectual (theoretical and practical wisdom) and moral (such as courage, temperance, etc.) virtues.[28] As shown above, virtues are important for human flourishing, specifically, communal flourishing. When it comes to the relationship with the law, I have here a certain conception of law, the Aretaic conception of legislation. This conception has it that the promotion of virtue is the central objective of the law. In other words, the law is aimed at the promotion of human flourishing. Human flourishing requires peace and prosperity, and legislation is there to promote these conditions. According to Solum (2017), without the conditions above, or when there is violence and poverty, it is difficult to imagine humans flourishing as a community or see them develop necessary virtues they need for communal living.

However, as Solum (2017) notes, this way of positing the function of legislation is not direct. That is, the law is only seen as instrumental in safeguarding certain conditions that in turn allow individuals in a community to develop virtues. A more direct way would be a case where the law commands parents to engage in certain parenting certain that promote healthy intellectual and emotional development. That is, where individuals would act on direct commands to develop certain virtues. Nonetheless, the submission here is not to argue for the link between the law and virtue, the point is only to show that without rites of passage, there can still be the development of virtue. For modern communities where rites of passage are not a standard through which

[28] According to Sulom (2017), theoretical virtues are about people's ability to think well about complex and abstract matters. Practical virtues are about a person's ability to perceive morally salient aspect of a choice situation and to identify workable responses.

individuals learn virtues, the law can be the indirect facilitator through the creation of conditions that allow the development of virtue. What is important is the recognition of the necessary conditions for individuals to develop virtue, and these are the powers and capacities that individuals possess. In the next section, I look at the role or state of the community.

5.5.3. The primacy of community

One important aspect under this reconstructed view is the recognition of the primacy of the community. This idea underpins a reconstructed view of personhood as something social in nature and consistent with the African cultural worldview. The emphasis on primacy of the community contrasts my conception with Gyekye's (2010) view, which places emphasis on having the capacity for virtue, and as shown in the previous chapters, accounts of personhood that tend to fall of capacities have a tendency of being individualistic. But in the view that I put forward, I still find the community as holding a primary status, such that the virtues individuals develop are not solely for their own flourishing but ultimately for the flourishing of the community. Human flourishing, therefore, is seen through the lens of community well-being.

Another way of understanding the primacy of the community is to consider the view that no human being is born on a lone island. An individual is born into a moral community, a setting with established norms, values, and virtues (Bitek, 1998; Ikuenobe, 2018). Like Menkiti (2004), I view the community as the catalyst and prescriber of the norms (or laws) in question. It is these norms, or what I regard as laws (given the dominant nature of legislation in the current democratic societies) which I believe are set to create and safeguard conditions that facilitate the development of virtues. One interesting critique here is whether modern communities, muddled with aspects of individualism given the influence of western values would be consistent with the primacy of the community. One response to offer here is that even in modern African communities, there is no

full-fledged individualism. Perhaps such critiques are pointing to a related concept, individuality. So, the critique would be whether the primacy of community does not rob individuals of their individuality, a value that is held in high esteem in current societies.

This critique is not entirely new in the literature. It was one that was ascribed to Menkiti and defended by other scholars. For instance, Chimakonam (2021) states that under the primacy of the community, as in Menkiti's view, the individual loses individuality, sacrificing one's autonomy and freedom at the altar of the community. Chimakonam (2021) sees Menkiti's community as one where individuals cannot object to communal values (96-98). However, according to Eze (2018), Menkiti does endorse individuality (and not individualism), the individual does not blindly follow communal values, but is part and parcel of reshaping them. Eze also adds Wiredu's concession that taking Menkiti's theorisation as lacking individuality is wrong (Eze & Metz, 2015/2016; Gyekye, 1992; Chimakonam, 2021; Eze, 2018), and as Molefe (2021) also points out, Menkiti's view leaves room for individuality. Cashing out individuality is Ikuenobe (2018) who adds that Menkiti recognizes an individual's capacity for autonomy and rationality which Gyekye (1992) thinks are compromised, but for Ikuenobe (2018) these capacities are mere necessary conditions for the attainment of virtue. The basic idea here is that the primacy of the community is consistent with an individual's exercise of autonomy and rationality. This is the intuition on which my argument is based.

In my reconstructed view, it is the capacity for rationality and the condition of autonomy that have been described as "powers" and "capacities" above (Strawson, 1962). Furthermore, in my submission of the indirect function of the law above, these are part of the conditions the law safeguards in line with peace and prosperity. Hence, the acquisition of virtue in the modern society would require that autonomy and rationality are preserved and safeguarded by law. Nonetheless,

when it comes to a conception of autonomy *vis-à-vis* individuality, autonomy ought to be understood in relational terms (Menkiti, 1984; Ikuenobe, 2018; Molefe, 2021). I believe the same would work for rationality in the sense that the best use of rationality (in relational ways) is the sense in which the best reasons for acting are those that put the interests of the community first. That is, the will to see the community flourish manifested or reflected in one's actions and reasons for acting- as they form part of one's obligation for acting (Aronsson & Hundeide, 2002).

Furthermore, the preservation of individuality and the respect for autonomy and rationality means that there is room for an individual to be part of the process of reshaping the norms of their society, not by reinforcing individualism but through deliberation with others in the community. Even when one is born in a community that has established norms, these norms change, and individuals are part and parcel of that change. As Chimakonam (2021) puts it, no tradition remains permanent. A progressive community is one where individuals negotiate with each other to reshape the norms, rather than blindly following the norms. This is the sense I conceptualise the individual-community relationship for modern societies. The difference between precolonial and modern industrial societies is in the degree of freedom and autonomy through which individuals express themselves and this comes with the influence of individualism. Individualistic societies have a higher degree of freedom than communitarian ones. Individuals have the freedom to pursue and cultivate certain virtues for their own flourishing and do so without force or coercion. In communitarian societies, there is an element of limited freedom. The individual must cultivate certain virtues for the good of the community.

Nonetheless, even when one argues that modernity is characterised by strong emphasis on individual freedoms and liberties, no society has unbridled freedom for individuals. To see societies in this way is to remain blind to one's contextual realities. African societies have indeed

been industrialised but not to the level of being reducible to Western societies, African cultural values remain in force (Wiredu, 1992). What can be said about modern African communities is that the degree to which individual interests can be weighed against communal interests is much higher than in pre-colonial traditional communities, nonetheless, the community remains primary. The community still holds power over the interests of individuals. If individuals must come together in shared projects, co-existing and depending on others through the recognition of their self-insufficiency, then individuals must surrender some of their interests to the group, that is, give the community power over them. This is the sense that captures the primacy of the community.

5.5.4. Loss and restoration of personhood

Under the traditional account of personhood, personhood is something that can be acquired and lost. Individuals can either excel at it or fail. Achievement is characterized by moral excellence, whereas failure is characterized by moral degeneracy. To fail at personhood implies a temporary loss of personhood. According to Menkiti (1984), this failure differs from a permanent loss of personhood, which occurs at the stage of collective immortality after death (Menkiti, 1984; Mbiti, 1970). A temporary loss of personhood implies that it can be regained, embodying the concept of restoration. However, Eze (2018) critiques Menkiti for not specifying the degree of restoration required to regain personhood. Eze argues that while Menkiti effectively shows that individuals can fail at personhood, he is unclear about when the status is lost, and the extent of restoration needed. I consider Eze's demand too strict, as one could argue that restoration requires an individual to seek moral excellence by acquiring the necessary virtues and undergoing the required rites of passage.

Since my account does not endorse rites of passage as part of the process of acquiring personhood, my idea of restoration differs. In my view, individuals are not required to undergo rites of passage

again. Instead, the acquisition of virtues necessary for the flourishing of the community is central to my account. This emphasis on virtue differs slightly from the traditional account, where virtues are inherent to one's being, making the concept of moral failure difficult to understand and negating the need for restoration. Under my account, a temporary loss of personhood occurs when an individual fails to behave morally, indicating moral degeneration. However, it is not only about moral degeneration (cultivating vices) but also about cultivating virtues that do not lead to community flourishing. The ultimate goal is community harmony, making personhood a means to becoming a harmonious community member. A temporary loss of personhood means failing to cultivate this harmony through either vices or unwarranted virtues. I emphasize unwarranted virtues because each community prioritizes different virtues. What is considered a top virtue in one community may not be in another. In African communities, virtues that promote harmonious living and communal flourishing are prioritized over those that promote individual flourishing (Metz, 2007; Tutu, 1999). Therefore, restoration involves recognizing the primacy of the community and positioning oneself in a state of learning to cultivate the right virtues. This means using one's capacities to cultivate the necessary virtues for the community in question.

5.6. Implication on gender?

Since the dissertation is on gender, it would be helpful to consider the implication of this view of personhood on gender. I will draw on insights discussed in the chapter. One question that ought to be asked is whether the reconstructed view of personhood would avoid the critiques raised in the previous chapters. This comes from one of the views I raised that the objections on gender are made out of context, that they are more applicable to a version of personhood that is compatible with modern values.[29] In this chapter, I never appealed to a discussion on gender because the task

[29] See chapter 4 for a discussion of this argument.

was to reconstruct the social notion of personhood in ways that can capture the concerns of modernity or avoid the critiques that appeal to modernity. But the question can still come about the extent to which my account avoids discrimination. That is, one who objects to my account would state that there is nothing in my account that shows that discrimination is avoidable. The objection would be that it is possible for communities not to have rites of passage but still allow discrimination against women. In this regard, the discussion only manages to avoid objects against rites of passage, but the monster remains, that is the issue of discrimination. Under this view, a community can (within possibility) develop or form virtues that are discriminatory. Perhaps a response to the question (objection) would help clarify the position (implication) of this account in relation to gender.

Note that in avoiding mentioning anything about gender in this account, I was in a sense pre-empting my argument that personhood ought to be considered as different from gender. The analysis of one's personhood, that is, as a person deserving of moral respect should be separate from one's embodiment of gender identity. I consider gender to be a mere contingent expression of personhood. Even if the individual chooses not to identify with any gendered identities, the individual would still be a person. I believe that personhood is about the possession of virtue and virtue is not gendered. Following Forde (1997), virtue is a human trait and not a gendered trait. For instance, the virtue of honesty, has nothing to do with gender. Being honest is a character trait any person or human being would possess regardless of one's gender. But even this way of responding to the argument begs another question. It would be true that virtue is non-gendered, but among the list of non-gendered virtues, certain communities would use them to discriminate based on gender. This now brings me to my next response.

Part of the second response is to state that the question raised above suggests that the virtues communities develop would lead to discrimination against other genders. But does this mean that some virtues are gendered? The question implies that there are some virtues that communities form that are only cultivated by specific genders, and so, among the list of important virtues for a certain community, it could be that they are discriminatory against the other gender. But as argued, under the kind of community I have in mind, every individual is important regardless of one's gender. Discriminating against the other gender would be inimical to the spirit of communal belonging. As Oelofsen (2018) argues, a relationship that discriminates against the other gender is not likely going to last especially if the well-being of the relationship itself depends on the well-being of each person. Therefore, it is for the good of the community itself that it, firstly, creates conditions for the development of virtue, and secondly, among the virtues it considers to be necessary, they are virtues that are not discriminatory, whatever these may be. The community I have in mind would have among its virtues, those that promote togetherness or social belongingness of every individual regardless of gender.

5.7. Conclusion

It is undeniable that African societies have gone through fundamental changes. Some of these changes could be understood as internally and externally induced. Thus, on the one hand, there are changes attributed to the development of human nature with respect to changing preferences, interests as well as new ways of pursuing one's life; and on the other hand, there are changes attributed to an external agent or actor with significant impact on culture, and for African societies, religion and colonialism are good examples. In this chapter, I have discussed these changes, both externally and internally, and their implication on the conceptualisation of personhood. That is, the main aim of the chapter was to look at how changes in values affect what it means to be a person.

I stated that this task comes from some of the questions and concerns raised in the last chapter based on the critiques on personhood. I argued that the conceptualisation of personhood, the social notion of personhood, as it has been presented in the literature requires modification for it to align with dominant values in modern African societies.

I have argued for a version of personhood based on the possession of virtue. I have reconstructed it by maintaining the primacy of the community in the attainment of virtue but rejecting rites of passage and seniority as necessary conditions for personhood. Instead, I flagged the possession of powers and capacities as necessary to learning the virtues of one's community.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this final section of the dissertation, I offer my conclusion. Firstly, I make a gender conclusion to the dissertation and specific conclusions based on what I have achieved in the chapters. I provide clarity to the overall argument of the dissertation, which is the relationship between personhood and gender, under specific chapters, I discuss the virtues I consider to be important for modern African societies while maintaining the spirit of communitarianism as well as showing the sense in which the conceptions presented in the dissertation are communitarian and not individualistic. Later on, under recommendations, I discuss what I consider to be further areas of research.

a. Conclusion

The major claim I have been presenting in this dissertation is that personhood is presented in non-gendered ways. I have responded to claims that personhood is presented as gendered. I have argued that while personhood can relate to gender in that it is the foundation for the respect individuals earn as a result of their gender identity, personhood and gender can also be considered to be distinct concepts. Thus, I have argued that gender is the contingent expression of personhood while at the same time, it remains distinct from personhood. As a contingent expression of personhood, I am referring to claims where the individual would demand respect for social identity and yet the basis of that respect is one's personhood. Let us imagine John's demand to be respected as a man. John demands that people respect his choice of social identity and yet the true nature of respect, which would spring from the actions of others, is John's moral position as a person. The view that others would have to check their actions against John begs moral questions. This does not mean that the identity serves no purpose; on the contrary, it is an identity that allows John to navigate social spaces in terms of identity and roles. But note that sometimes it is possible for individuals to have conversations about gender identity without invoking personhood. Thus, one's moral status can be

called into question without saying anything about one's gender and vice-versa. Again, what is important is that the kind of relationship one considers to be important between personhood and gender depends on the conception of either personhood or gender under consideration.

The bulk of this research was to clarify the conceptions of gender and personhood I consider to be dominant in the African cultural worldview. Some chapters were dedicated to highlighting this view and some were dedicated to discussing the relationship between the two. In chapter one, I discussed several selected accounts of personhood found in the literature, especially African Philosophy. I looked at several accounts of personhood to show the sense in which personhood can be understood. I discussed the transcendental notion of personhood where the basic premise of this account is that one is a person by virtue of being human. That is, to be a human being is to be a person and to be a person is to be human. Another notion of personhood discussed is the capacity-based notion of personhood. According to this notion, one is a person by virtue of having certain capacities. I considered several conceptions that point to different capacities such as rationality, capacity for community and capacity for sympathy. Furthermore, I also discussed another conception of personhood, personhood as personal identity. Here I discussed how the community is considered as an ontological part of the self or personal identity. Another notion of personhood is the social notion of personhood. According to this notion, personhood is about the achievement of virtue or moral excellence. Lastly, I looked at the situated-embodied agent notion of personhood. I argued that to be a person requires that one be situated, embodied, and has agency. That is, a person is an individual who has a body and is embedded in a particular historical context. Having discussed conceptions of personhood, I then moved on to discuss the conception of gender from an African cultural worldview. I have looked at the complementary account of gender and the fluidity account. With the complementary account, I argued that gender can be understood in

terms of the division of labour among men and women and the equal valuing of such labour. In the African cultural worldview, the social roles of men and women are considered to be complementary. I appealed to Plato's idea of specialization and the modern economic idea of the division of labour to show the connection between social roles or division of labour and the obligation to fulfil certain human needs. I argued that the needs of the community demand the division of labour such that everyone who contributes to this goal is valued regardless of one's gender. Therefore, men and women are equal under a complementary account. The allocation of roles is not based on the fact that one group is considered weak, subordinate or privileged. The roles are equally valuable, and so are individuals carrying them out. Another way of understanding gender I discussed was a focus on gender identity and implications on the status of persons in a community. I argued that gender fluidity can be understood in terms of an individual's ability to take on a distinct gender identity to allow an individual to carry out specific social roles ascribed to the identity in question. I discussed two examples of identities, namely, male daughter and female husband. I showed how women change their identities to become men as either female husbands or male daughters for procreation and inheritance. Nonetheless, I argued that the two conceptions are not mutually exclusive; they can both be obtained within the same culture. I discussed them separately to show the distinct ways of understanding gender.

In the third chapter, I have argued for a way of understanding gender from a view of relationality dominant in the African cultural worldview. The aim was to show that there are resources in the African context that are a valuable contribution to understanding gender identity. I appealed to the general understanding of identity, where the community is that which defines an individual's identity. Said differently, where the community is an ontological part of a person's identity. I applied this view to how gendered identities are defined. The argument was that not only does the

community define gendered identities, but it is also necessary for such identities. I argued that individuals acquire these identities as they interact with others in their community. The standard argument that informed the above claims was that gender identity is defined by norms, and the community essentially defines the norms, therefore, the community essentially defines gendered identities. This chapter concluded a task from chapter two where I was discussing conceptions of gender.

In the fourth chapter, I looked at some selected conceptions of personhood from the first chapter and discussed them in relation to the accounts of gender I have been discussing. In other words, I did not discuss all the dominant conceptions of personhood and how they inform gender. The chapter aimed to discuss the fundamental question that informed this research, "is personhood gendered?" To answer the question, I reflected on the view that the term "personhood" in the question accounts for various conceptions. I then briefly looked at the transcendental notion of personhood, the capacity-based view of personhood, and most importantly the social notion of personhood. I spent considerable space discussing the social notion of personhood because of the arguments in the literature that this specific view of personhood has been presented in gendered ways. So, a specific question is "Is the social notion of personhood gendered?" This is probably the most specific question that informed the research, but I then took the time to consider other conceptions of personhood. I offered my interpretation of personhood that is separate from gender. Even then, I argued that one needs to be specific about the account of gender assumed in the question. Nonetheless, I assumed that those who argue for personhood as gendered do so with the assumption of the traditional Western conception of gender. In responding to the question, I then showed that this conception of gender came with colonialism as such it does not make to ask such a question against a traditional (precolonial) conception of gender. Importantly, I argued that

gender is not central to the (traditional) social notion of personhood because gender is not the organizing principle of a traditional African community but the organizing principle for such communities is seniority. Furthermore, I argued that the underlying problem with the critiques has been the mischaracterization of the African context. They mischaracterize it by attributing Western values (problems) that make more sense for a colonial/post-colonial African context; as such one ought to ask the question to a different version of personhood, one that would apply to the modern context, a cultural worldview that has faced problems inherited from the West.

In chapter five, given the argument about an account of personhood applicable to the modern context, I proposed a reconstructed version of the traditional account of personhood. I started by looking at changes attributed to the development of human nature with respect to changing preferences, interests as well as new ways of pursuing one's life, as well as changes attributed to an external agent or actor that have a significant impact on African cultural communities. These are changes that have come with religion, and colonialism. I discussed how these changes mean that the traditional social notion of personhood needs to be reconstructed to suit the modern context. Having problematized all the themes I consider to be definitive of personhood and problematized them with respect to these changes, I proposed a reconstructed version of personhood that avoids these problems. I have argued for a version of personhood based on the possession of virtue. I argued for the centrality of virtues as part of moral life because of the way the moral statements are articulated as well as the importance of virtues as they relate to human nature. I showed that what matters most is the possession of certain virtues so that individuals can relate positively with others. Unlike Menkiti whose version of personhood requires that individuals attend rites of passage and those who attain personhood tend to be adults or seniors, in the version of personhood I have presented, I have ignored rites of passage and seniority as necessary

conditions for personhood. Instead, I have appealed to powers or capacities in the acquisition of virtue. For the sake of clarity, it is important to state that this does not mean Menkiti does not see the individual's possession of certain powers (abilities) and capacities as important, rather, even though they may serve a function in the acquisition of virtues, he saw rites of passage and seniority to be of paramount importance, as definitive of personhood. However, in the reconstructed version, I problematised these conditions and nonetheless maintained the primacy of the community and the centrality of the acquisition of virtues as definitive of personhood.

The above discussion is a summary of the claims I have made in this dissertation. However, I believe there could be looming questions regarding the submission I have made towards the end of the discussion. That is, one could be asking two questions; the first question is about the virtues I have in mind to be important for modern societies, and the second question is on whether my account can be considered communitarian and not individualistic given that in an individualistic worldview, individuals can also attain virtues through the possession of the said powers and capacities. These two questions are slightly different but not mutually exclusive. To start with the first question, one would simply state self-regarding virtues or other regarding virtues, to mean virtues that ultimately promote the interests of the individual or virtues that ultimately promote the interests of others in the community. However, this is not necessarily a helpful answer given that some virtues, such as courage, remain neutral. In other words, it is *prima facie* unknown whether it is self-regarding or other-regarding. It can be other regarding if the other person benefits from my acting on this virtue or it can be self-regarding if it ultimately benefits myself. Other virtues such as friendliness and compassion are slightly other-regarding given that they require the other person to be around for me to act on them, but they can ultimately be egoistic. It is for this reason that the list of virtues I have in mind is not exhaustive for it might depend on the community in

question. To say that it depends on the community does not mean that I consider virtues to be subjective, rather, it only means that (for example) if there are forty virtues, community C1 might prioritize ten virtues while community C2 might prioritize five. Furthermore, the important virtues are those that respond to the needs of the community. For example, while courage can be an important virtue in one community where there is war, one might not see it as important in a community where there is complete peace.[30] Nonetheless, one would argue that virtues that tend to be other-regarding are more likely to be consistent with a communitarian cultural worldview. These virtues are important because of the orientation to benefit others which contributes to the maintenance of harmony in the community and examples include respect, obedience, generosity, veracity, friendliness, compassion, etc. Again, there is no exhaustive list, but it depends on what the community chooses to prioritize.

Regarding the second question, I managed to respond to this concern in the discussion in the chapter, but I can help to reiterate some of the claims I made. What distinguishes the account as a communitarian account from an individualist account is the view that the attainment of virtues is for the benefit of the community. Ultimately individuals are to attain or cultivate virtues so that they can relate positively with others and make the community as a whole flourish. Individuals have less freedom to choose not to cultivate the virtues. This is what I consider to be the communitarian ethos in the account. On the other hand, in an individualistic community individuals may have the freedom to choose to cultivate or not. Since the virtues are for the flourishing of the individual, it is the individual who must decide what virtues to cultivate.

[30] I am not claiming that this is the only context courage as a virtue is needed. The example is there to illustrate the view that what is important for one community may not necessarily obtain in another community.

b. Recommendation(s)

The discussion in this dissertation only forms part of the many arguments that can be made on personhood and gender. There are great avenues for research in African philosophy given the novelty of the topic of gender. Even the recommendations I make are just a few examples of the many ideas that scholars can work on.

The discussion in this dissertation represents just a fraction of the many arguments that can be made about personhood and gender. There are significant opportunities for research in African philosophy, particularly given the novelty of the topic of gender. The recommendations I offer are merely a few examples of the numerous ideas that scholars can explore.

It is crucial to conduct further research in African philosophy, especially by engaging with various cultures to understand their perspectives on gender identity and gender roles. Discussions can be approached in two ways: broadly, to represent a variety of cultures across the African continent, or specifically, to examine how particular cultures understand gender and how they differ from others. This research would not only enrich the discipline but also enhance our understanding of African cultures. Currently, there is limited published material on African cultures, as much of the knowledge remains oral. Research that engages with oral traditions to uncover gender relations would be invaluable, tapping into the knowledge available in communities that are still largely oral. While similar work may be done in literature, it is essential to see this approach applied in philosophy using philosophical tools and methods.

Additionally, this research has implications for how African feminism defines gendered relations in communities. It is imperative to develop feminist accounts that address the complementary, fluid, and relational aspects of gender. This approach would not only foster the growth of African feminism but also promote dialogue between African feminism and other feminist traditions. A

rich conversation can occur when each tradition has substantial resources to draw from. Currently, African feminism is still underexplored, making it challenging to engage in meaningful conversations with other feminist traditions. Research on gender can provide valuable resources for the development of discipline.

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