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The Concept of Person in African
Political Philosophy: an Analytical and
Evaluative Study

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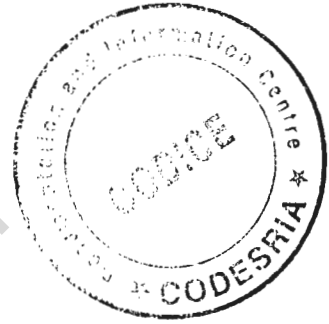
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**THE CONCEPT OF PERSON IN AFRICAN POLITICAL
PHILOSOPHY: AN ANALYTICAL AND EVALUATIVE
STUDY**

By

BERNARD MATOLINO

Supervisor: Professor Simon Beck



**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Philosophy
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DECLARATION

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, this whole thesis is my own original work.

Bernard Matolino

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DEDICATION

To all the Matolino women who matter so much to me; Adofe (grandmother), Violet (mother), Batha (wife), Nomsa, Matilda, Paula and Pauline (sisters) and the fairest of them all Ropafadzo Thandiwe (dearest daughter).

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ABSTRACT

The communitarian conception of person is the dominant view of personhood in African philosophy. This view centrally holds that personhood is something that is attained in direct proportion to one's moral worth and one's relations with her surrounding community. This view understands personhood as something that is acquired as one's moral responsibility grows. Essentially personhood is constituted by the community and expressed in relations that one has with her community. Thus the individual and the community are both tied in the same fate. The individual is seen as constituted by the community and as one with the community. Whatever happens to her happens to the whole community.

Some leaders of newly independent Africa used this communitarian view of personhood to argue for a socialist order. Such an order would have been faithful to the traditional communitarian conception of person and the social as well as the economic order that proceeds from that conception. In order to develop an authentically African socialist programme these leaders strived to show that the communitarian conception of personhood naturally leads to African socialism. They took African socialism to be a panacea to economic and social ills that had been brought on by colonialism.

This thesis seeks to interrogate both the communitarian conception of personhood and the alleged resultant political ideology of African socialism. Thus the main problem that this thesis seeks to interrogate is whether the communitarian conception of personhood is philosophically defensible, secondly whether there is a justifiable link between this concept and African socialism and whether African socialism is essentially of an African origin. It is argued that the major driving factor behind the development of the communitarian view and African socialism is the belief that Africans are essentially different from their Western counterparts. The problem started with Placide Tempels' futile search for an African ontology and has been perpetuated by all communitarians and African socialists. Thus this project is conceived as a philosophical critique of African communitarianism and the alleged resultant socialism. The three main criticisms that are attempted in thesis are the philosophical plausibility of communitarianism itself, the alleged entailment of

African socialism by communitarianism and the plausibility of African socialism itself.

The merit of this thesis lies in its sustained philosophical critique of communitarianism in itself and as an alleged basis of African socialism. The novelty of the project lies in the manner the thesis challenges the accepted dominance of communitarianism in the conception of person. The thesis also makes a useful distinction between the communitarian and metaphysical distinctions of the conception of personhood in African thinking. The novel contribution that this research makes to ongoing research in this field is its sustained critique of communitarianism in itself and its alleged link to African socialism.

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Introduction

The central problem that this thesis investigates is the concept of person in African philosophy and how this concept is used in the construction of African socialism. In this study I present some philosophical difficulties for the dominant communitarian concept of person in African philosophy. These difficulties pose a grave challenge for the basis on which African leaders had built African socialism. I also argue against the substantive formulas of African socialism as presented by Nyerere, Nkrumah and Senghor.

The first chapter is an investigation of issues in African philosophy itself as philosophy by its very nature is an area of contestation. In that chapter I seek to clear certain methodological issues before I take on the two central issues that dominate the thesis. My investigation follows Oruka's classification of African philosophy into six trends.

Chapter two investigates the dominant concept of person in African philosophy. The third chapter discusses the political theory of African socialism—linking it with the concept of person. The fourth and fifth chapters offer a critique of the concept of person and African socialism respectively.

The first chapter critically evaluates the six trends of African philosophy as suggested by Oruka. Oruka sees African philosophy as essentially divided into ethnophilosophy, sagacity, professional philosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy, hermeneutics and the literary/artistic trend. I argue that ethnophilosophy cannot be taken as philosophy in the serious sense of the word. It is a by-product of some other activity that its practitioners were engaged in. I claim that sages were not philosophers in the true sense as they simply sought to perpetuate shared communal beliefs. My criticism of hermeneutics and the professional trend is that they represent a philosophy of apemanship. Both trends essentially copy western methods and insist on passing them on as methods that apply to whatever they consider to be African philosophy. I argue that the nationalists never sought to develop any political philosophy but were more worried about developing party slogans and methods of governing their newly independent

countries that would be faithful to their own views of the African tradition. My objection to the literary trend is that although there might be some reflection going on in these works or practitioners that reflection ought not to count as philosophy. The contributors to this trend have a definite identity as either authors of fictitious works practitioners in various universities' departments of the English language or literature. My project does not closely follow any of these trends.

The second chapter outlines the concept of person in African philosophy. It starts by attempting a common definition of the word person and proceeds to show that the concept of person in African thinking is taken to be in contradistinction to the Western concept. This view is held by Placide Tempels (1959) who explicitly argues that the African ontology is to be understood in terms of force. He argues that vital force, increase of force as well as vital influence is at the core of Bantu psychology and he proposes to pursue his study of the Bantu along that theme of force. This pervasiveness of force is what differentiates the Bantu from her Western counterpart.

Tempels argues that the Bantu conceive life as essentially constituted and categorised by different forces. In his view the Bantu conceive of force in hierarchical terms. God is placed as the possessor of ultimate force and beneath him are the ancestors who are followed by living human beings and then animals and all inanimate objects. Human beings occupy the third position in the hierarchy of forces after God and the ancestors. They possess great force and have dominion over all other created things. Tempels also argues that human beings have different levels of force and the effect of their force on each other and on objects differs from individual to individual. Each individual seeks to achieve and possess great force at every turn and all her actions are aimed at that achievement. The force that individuals possess can be increased or reduced and the ultimate destruction of force happens at the death of that individual. But this does not spell the end of the individual's existence. The individual goes on to join, after the performance of the right rituals; she joins the world of ancestors (Mbiti, 1995; Boon, 1996). In real terms, Tempels argues, a person is more than an assemblage of forces. Her force comes to fruition when she is in relation with other forces; the gods, her ancestors,

her fellow human beings and other forces below her such as animals and inanimate objects.

The individual is essentially a relational being. She always stands in relation to something or someone. Tempels argues that the possession of force is not enough, in order for one to be recognised as a person she must stand worthy when judged by her community and that judgement is based on the quality of her relationships and her ability to observe the communal moral dictates of her community. He makes a distinction between those who matter and those who do not matter. Those who matter are said to be people of real importance who have a real role to play in their respective societies whereas those who are not that important are described as non-persons. Thus personhood is attained in the arena of communal relations and is determined in direct proportion to the quality of one's relations.

Mbiti (1970) takes this point further by attempting to find the place of the individual within the kinship system in traditional African societies. He argues that the kinship system ties the tribal group together. The tribe has a single common ancestor and members are related by blood ties. Tribal membership is closed and not open to other people except by marriage and betrothal. Mbiti argues that the kinship system is like a vast network of relations that spreads itself across large horizons to touch everybody. This network extends to include the living, the dead and those who are yet to be born. That tribal membership and kinship system gives an individual her identity.

Mbiti argues that within the African system this network of relationship binds everyone together such that they conceive their relations as familial. The family in the African scheme is not limited to the immediate relations of what he describes as a household. The household is constituted by parents and their children. According to Mbiti in African thinking the family is not conceived in such narrow terms but is taken to include one's grandparents, aunts, cousins, uncles, nephews and other distant relatives who belong to the same kinship system.

Mbiti then moves to establish the position of the individual within such a system. He argues that the individual cannot exist alone but corporately. "He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group" (Mbiti: 1970; 141). Mbiti argues that physical birth is not sufficient for one to count as a person. What is required is the observance of social rituals throughout the individual's life and these rituals are performed on her by the community as she goes through each stage of her life. Thus the community gives the individual the status of person through these rituals of incorporation at every stage of her life. The individual does not make herself. She finds herself standing in essential relationship to her community her fellow beings. It is that standing in relationship that gives her the status of person.

Mbiti concludes by arguing that the individual is essentially in a corporate existence with others. That relationship is constitutive of who she is. She derives her identity from her shared fate with her other fellow human beings. The links between the individual and the community are of such an enduring nature. She cannot think of her existence apart from the existence of her community. Hence he coined his now famous phrase; "I am because we are; and since we are therefore I am".

Menkiti (1984) takes the argument further by explicitly arguing that the African conception of person is radically different from the Western conception, in his view, the Western conception goes for what he calls the minimal definition of person by identifying a sole characteristic such as rationality, memory or will. On the other hand the African conception of person goes for what he calls a maximal definition of person. Menkiti says the conception of person in African thinking cannot be reduced to a slogan such as the Cartesian *cogito* but is determined by the enviroing community.

He argues that the reality of the community takes precedence over that of the individual. Hence it is the community that is best suited to decide what counts as persons. Menkiti

argues that it is the community that gives the individual her identity and for that reason the community must take both epistemic and ontological precedence over the individual.

Further, Menkiti argues that personhood is something that is attained in direct proportion to one's discharge of her moral obligations. Personhood is something that is acquired as one gets along in society and he holds that personhood is the sort of thing that one could fail at. The proper discharge of one's moral obligations makes that individual more of a person. Failure to observe the moral dictates of one's community may lead to failure at personhood. He ties the observance of the rites of incorporation to moral achievement and argues that older people who have gone through these rites of incorporation and are in good standing with their communities in respect of their moral conduct have become more of persons or have attained full personhood. Thus on Menkiti's scheme personhood is determined by the individual's community.

Gyekye (1997) has identified the above characterisation of the function of the community in determining personhood as radical communitarianism. He argues that this position is erroneous as it confuses the cultural structure and the person who is supposed to function within that structure. Hence he proposes his own version of moderate communitarianism. He argues that while it is true that an individual is a social being, she is other things as well as well. The community may nurture the individual but she possesses mental attributes at birth which are not handed to her by the community. These mental features are responsible for the individuality of the person and the exercise of certain capacities such as rationality and free will. He argues that his own version of moderate communitarianism retains the attraction that it takes the rights of the individual seriously. Although, by his own admission, a communitarian society will not be overly obsessed with rights; his version will recognise the individuality of every person. He goes on to argue that within the traditional Akan society there exists a number of proverbs that show recognition of individuality of the person that is not wholly subsumed by the community.

Gyekye bitterly criticises Menkiti's argument that personhood is determined by one's moral achievement and that one becomes more of a person as she gets along in society.

Firstly Gyekye argues that it is not entirely clear how rituals are supposed to add any moral worth to a person. Secondly, he notes that Menkiti's assertion that one becomes more of a person or a fuller person as she gets along in society is beset with incoherences and confusions as it fails to articulate what those excellencies could possibly be. Further, Gyekye argues that Menkiti's position runs into difficulty because it necessarily conceives of old people as having the disposition or ability to practice moral virtues. Gyekye notes that there are a lot of elderly people who are known to be immoral yet we would not rush to identify them as non-persons. Gyekye's conception of persons is communitarian but only the moderate kind, according to him.

Another strand that seeks to articulate the nature of persons in African thinking is metaphysical. This strand seeks to ground the nature of persons by articulating the nature of their physical attributes; how they function and how they interact with non-physical entities (Wiredu: 1995, Gyekye: 1987, Gbadegesin: 1991, Onwuanibe: 1984). However it suffices to note that while these philosophers attempt a metaphysical conception of person in African thinking most of them are agreed that personhood only finds fulfilment in the social arena. Thus essentially the second chapter of this thesis concludes that this conception of personhood is essentially communitarian.

In the third chapter I discuss Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor's ideas of the basis of African socialism. Nkrumah (1964) is of the view that the traditional view of man imposes socialist obligations on society. He emphasises egalitarianism and the inherent dignity of man that was found in African traditional societies as the sources of his doctrine of consciencism. His socialism rides on that traditional model of communality and egalitarianism which influenced the communitarian view of persons in chapter two.

On the other hand Nyerere argues that there is a need to return to the traditional way of life which he expresses as ujamaa or familyhood. The traditional way of life will in turn animate modern African socialism. That traditional way of life retains certain fundamental principles such as the non-ownership of property. Nyerere (1968) is of the view that there is need to re-educate ourselves on what really constituted traditional

African values. He argues that in traditional Africa the individual was part of the whole community and the community also constituted the individual. From this he argues for a classless system where individual needs are taken care of by the community.

Senghor (1964) not only emphasises the social differences between the West and Africa but also points out to the crucial difference between how Westerners and Africans come to gain knowledge. He is of the view that while Westerners are discursive and distant from the objects they seek to know; Africans abandon themselves into the object and they become one with the object. He claims that the Negro-African has inherited this characteristic from his ancestors. Thus there is a certain African personality that essentially differentiates him from his Western counterparts. He develops his African humanism which he calls Negritude. This Negritude takes cognisance of the traditional communal way of life and it informs how society is to be organised. Senghor is of the view that Africa's encounters with the West should be incorporated into his Negro-humanism to create African socialism.

Although the fathers of independence did not offer an explicit or detailed account of the concept of person, however, their discussions on the nature of persons and resultant communities in Africa clearly show a reliance on the communitarian view that was discussed in the second chapter. The basis of such a view of persons informs their versions of African socialism or political theory.

For Nyerere this communitarian view of person wherein everyone shares the same fate leads him to advocate a system where private ownership is abolished. He is of the view that just as everybody shared in everybody's fate in the communitarian sense, in African traditional societies, including non-ownership of land and property – this must also be extended to modern African societies. Land and other valuable assets will be held in common and on behalf of the people by the state. To him this state of affairs would represent an animation of the African reality.

Nkrumah's consciencism also seeks to give full effect to the African reality by diluting western and Islamic influences. Thus he argues for egalitarianism which is informed by what he calls the African personality. This African personality is essentially an embodiment of the traditional way of life including the communitarian concept of person. It is this view that leads Nkrumah to argue that socialism gives full expression to traditional African values. He is riled by capitalism which he sees as an ideology that is alien to African values. The basis of his socialism is informed by the African traditional society that includes its conception of the person and how such societies were organised socially and economically.

Senghor starts by rejecting Marx and Engels' theory. He argues that Marxist socialism must be tempered with African humanism which he calls Negro-Berber humanism or negritude. He sees Negro-African societies as communitarian societies that value the communion of persons as opposed to individual autonomy. These societies take care of the individual needs of its members. They are not divided into any class distinctions. He suggests that practical socialist programmes should be developed from this understanding of Negro-African humanism.

In the fourth chapter I offer a critique of the communitarian conception of person. This concept is one that is relied on by Nkrumah, Senghor and Nyerere. This view is discussed in greater detail in the second chapter. My critique follows the distinction made by Gyekye by first arguing against radical communitarians followed by a critique of moderate communitarianism. The main aim of the chapter is to mount criticism against the metaphysical construal of the relation between person and community in the conception of persons.

I contest Tempels' understanding and use of force. I argue that his project merely seeks to mystify the Bantu ontology and is merely intent on finding the difference between Africans and Europeans. His notion of force is essentially a distortion of that which he describes as Bantu ontology. I argue that Tempels fails to explicitly account for what the nature of this force could be and what role it plays in the construal of persons.

My critique of Mbiti is that he erroneously follows Tempels in insisting on the African difference in the conception of personhood. I also attempt to show that Mbiti's assertion that the community takes precedence over the individual is not accompanied by premises that lead to such a conclusion and that he fails to take sufficient cognisance of the separateness of individuals. I also present an exception to the communitarian view by pointing to an exception among the Shona people of Zimbabwe which shows the existence of individual self-concern as opposed to group solidarity.

Against Menkiti I contend that his account fails to clearly spell out the criteria for the attainment of personhood. His position does not make clear what excellences are required in order for one to be recognised as a full person. I argue that his collapsing together of the ontological questions of the status of personhood with moral achievement, ageing and observance of rituals is at the very least bizarre.

I argue that Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is not really different from Menkiti's account which he has characterised as radical communitarianism. Gyekye commits himself to the same values as radical communitarianism. He fails to take the question of human rights seriously. Instead he argues that communitarianism is not to be obsessed with individual rights as any communitarian society will abridge these rights if it feels that its interests are threatened.

In conclusion I argue against the inevitability of the communitarian view. I suggest that the search for the African difference has led to an exaggeration of the prominence of the African communitarian view. Traditional African societies have as much in common with other non-African but traditional societies. I seek to show that traditional practices and customs do not constitute metaphysics and should not be presented as authoritative, beyond question and for all time for Africa.

In the fifth chapter I argue against all these versions of African socialism. I start by noting that many of the leaders failed their countries and themselves with their ideas on

African socialism. I argue that these leaders/thinkers were also caught up in the project of finding the African difference. Erroneously they believed that there is a certain essence of the African personality and society. What is taken as the key characteristics of the African reality expressed as communitarianism and the resultant African socialism is essentially characteristic of most traditional societies. Instead of seeing communitarianism and the concept of person espoused in this thinking as essentially constitutive of African thinking it should be seen as constitutive of African folk-philosophy. I argue that all traditional societies everywhere have certain features which are folk philosophies, Africa included.

I argue that Nyerere's assertion that socialism is essentially about the attitude of the mind does not succeed. He fails to show what it is that makes the mind of the African so oriented towards socialism. Nyerere's problem is that he is an ideologue who erroneously anchors his ideology in African communitarianism. I contest the veracity of Nyerere's claim that traditional African societies did not allow private ownership and control of property. I find his argument that modern African governments ought to hold property on behalf of citizens to be without basis.

I argue that Nkrumah's consciencism holds two contradictory positions. On the one hand he holds that consciencism is informed by a fixed communitarian ethic of traditional African societies while on the other hand he holds that consciencism is not governed by any fixed ethical rule. Another problem with Nkrumah is that he sees philosophy as an instrument of ideology which truncates the role of philosophy. He also oversimplifies the western tradition and the Islamic tradition by suggesting that they simply have to be incorporated into the African tradition.

I argue that Senghor's claims that there are certain key characteristics that make up the African personality are problematic. I argue that Senghor's claim that Africans have a different way of acquiring knowledge invokes a racist tone. Further, I argue, negritude avoids dealing with serious political problems afflicting the continent having reduced all them to cultural problems.

Chapter One: The Nature of African Philosophy

1. Introduction

This chapter attempts to offer an evaluative and critical analysis of the nature of African philosophy. I think it is worthwhile, in this first chapter, to investigate the nature of African philosophy as a forerunner to the problems that this thesis seeks to address. It is important that I do this investigation in the first chapter since my thesis is an investigation of issues in African philosophy and philosophy is in itself an area of contestation. There have been arguments that certain practices and issues are either required or disallowed of any exercise in African philosophy. This has the implication that I would have to do things in a certain way or that I may not do them in another way; that I must or must not raise certain issues; that I must or must not argue in a certain way; that I must or must not adhere to certain beliefs or respect others. There are thus methodological issues that need to be cleared up before I can take on the central task of the thesis. While I cannot hope to provide any definitive set of answers as to what constitutes African philosophy, I can at least begin by clearing the ground to such an extent that I can continue.

The rest of the thesis attempts to deal with two important issues in African philosophy. The first issue is the philosophical conception of personhood and the second issue is the political organisation that is based on the concept of person. Chapters two and three narrate these two conceptions and chapters four and five are essentially a critique of these concepts while chapter six concludes this study and offers recommendations for further study.

This chapter will consider what constitutes a philosophical discourse in Africa in the light of what has been discussed in the literature of African philosophy. The importance of this discussion is that it sheds light on what may count as philosophy and the sense in which we describe that activity on this continent. I seek to argue that certain ways of doing philosophy are more beneficial to the continent than others. I also seek to argue against a dogmatic approach to the enterprise of philosophy on the continent. This in turn

informs and guides the manner in which I seek to deal with the central issues that this thesis seeks to address.

Henry Odera Oruka has suggested that there are six trends in African philosophy. I will use those trends as a guideline to investigate the nature of African philosophy. There is no gainsaying that Africa is faced with numerous problems and some of them are beyond the reach and expertise of the philosopher. However, the African philosopher, being aware of the philosophy of the West and the thoughts of the Western tradition, as well as other traditions-and also aware of her own philosophy and tradition - may be well placed to assist in the mission towards improving the lot of Africans on the continent.

She is well placed to take into consideration all the valuable theories and practices of all traditions and to adumbrate their importance as well as how they apply in the real world. The most important call on today's African philosopher, as suggested by Wiredu (1980), is to answer to Africa's peculiar problems and situate Africa within the larger context. She is called to embrace those aspects of her culture which represent progress and discard the anachronistic elements of her culture. I will now move to evaluate the trends that are said to be extant within African philosophy.

1.1 Oruka's Six Trends of African Philosophy

Oruka famously identified what he initially described as four trends of African philosophy. Later on he was to add two more trends to make six trends of African philosophy. Oruka writes: "A number of years ago I described four trends in the development of African philosophy: ethnophilosophy, professional philosophy, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and philosophic sagacity. To this list, we probably need to add two more: the hermeneutic trend and the artistic trend" (Oruka: 1998; 101). P.O. Bodunrin has chosen to describe these trends "perhaps more appropriately [as] approaches" (1984; 1). However one chooses to describe these trends/approaches it seems fair to opine that the trends or approaches in African philosophy are still emerging and they cannot be limited to any specific number. Thus Didier Kaphagawani observes that "...African philosophy is, as accepted by philosophers in Africa, still in its

embryonic stage. As such it has yet to establish not only *a* tradition, as some scholars in Africa as well as elsewhere would have us believe, but seemingly *several* such traditions” (1998; 86).

Thus while the approaches that have been developed so far may be counted as six it is quite possible if not altogether inevitable that more traditions in African philosophy will emerge with time. As Kaphagawani argues, paraphrasing Wiredu (1980; 1-5), these traditions will emerge as a result of debate and critical and constructive analysis that will seek to deal with problems such as “*authoritarianism*, a permanent control of all aspects of life politics included, that ensues in people doing things against their will; *anachronism*, systems or principles outliving their suitability and utility; *supernaturalism*, the tendency to establish supernatural foundations for a natural code of conduct” (Kaphagawani: 1998; 86). For Kaphagawani, the emergence of different traditions in African philosophy will not proceed from idle speculation but a critical analysis of the problems that besiege Africa and these traditions would strive to challenge concepts and beliefs that no longer work in modern-day Africa. Further he argues that it is essential that an African philosophy be developed because it serves two crucial functions. In the first it challenges the racist views of people such as Levy-Bruhl who held that Sub-Saharan Africans lack the capacity for ratiocination. Second, it seeks to address the colonial factor by initiating a search for a post colonial identity.

I will now look at each of the six approaches to African philosophy. I will start with ethnophilosophy, move on to look at philosophic sagacity, followed by professional philosophy and then nationalist philosophy and end with the last two approaches which are hermeneutics and the literary trend.

My motivation for following this order is partly to present the development of African philosophy in a historically unfolding account. I will argue that ethnophilosophy marked the beginning of African philosophy and sagacity as well as professional philosophy were a response to that beginning. Nationalist-ideological philosophy, on the other hand, with its ideological slant was consistent with the times and context in which it developed. I

will conclude by discussing the implications for the growth of African philosophy by adding the other two trends—the hermeneutic and the literary trend. I seek to argue that although the growth of the approaches to African philosophy is welcome the addition of literary philosophy as a philosophical approach does more harm than good in the sense that it invites the age old question that professional philosophy has tried to settle. Adding literary philosophy as yet another approach of African philosophy does not help the quest for an African philosophy.

1.2 Ethnophilosophy

“The word ethnophilosophy is a coinage from ethnology and philosophy. It was first used by Paulin Hountondji in the context of contemporary African philosophical discussions. It refers to the trend in contemporary African philosophy which originated from Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* published in 1948” (Oguejiofor: 2005; 71). In essence Tempels believed that the Bantu had a philosophy of their own through which they came to interact and interpret reality. This philosophy was a world-view of the Bantus. His primary concern was to find and articulate that philosophy of the Bantu. “It is this attempt to find philosophy in what would be regarded as ethnological work that was designated ethnophilosophy” (*ibid*). Thus the primary concern of the people who have come to be known as ethnophilosophers was to embark on ethnological investigations that were to yield an African philosophy.

P.O. Bodunrin characterises ethnophilosophy as the product of the works of anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers and some philosophers “who present the collective world views of African peoples, their myths and folk-lore and folk-wisdom, as philosophy” (1984; 1). Their work is primarily restricted to giving descriptions of a thought system or world outlook of a single community or the whole of the African continent. According to Bodunrin, philosophy is conceived as communal thought and the ethnophilosophers emphasise the emotional appeal of their type of philosophy. Bodunrin identifies the chief representatives of this philosophy to be Tempels, Senghor, Mbiti and Kagame.

Kaphagawani concurs with Bodunrin on who the inventors of ethnophilosophy are but also sheds more light on the term ethnophilosophy. He states that the “term ethnophilosophy, for etymological interests, was coined by francophone African philosophers. It is an approach which has a large following, for it is heavily subscribed to by anthropologists, sociologists, ethnologists, and some philosophers” (Kaphagawani: 1998; 89). Kaphagawani argues that this method essentially sees African philosophy as communal thought which seeks to find a certain cultural identity and turn it into a philosophy.

Paulin Hountondji renders the project of ethnophilosophers more clear when he states that their major concern is to locate under the numerous manifestations of African civilisation a

solid bedrock which might provide a foundation of certitudes: in other words, a system of beliefs. In this quest, we find the same preoccupation as in the negritude movement—a passionate search for the identity that was denied by the coloniser—but now there is the underlying idea that one of the elements of the cultural identity is precisely ‘philosophy’, the idea that every culture rests on a specific, permanent, metaphysical substratum (1996; 60).

Orika also sees ethnophilosophy as the product of certain efforts that seek to replace reason and individuality with emotion and communalism. The result is that “idiosyncrasies of the traditional or communal African customs, poems, taboos, religious, songs, dances, etc easily come up as undeniable candidates for what is required. These actually form a radical contrast with the rationalistic elements in a reflective, critical, and dialectical philosophy” (Oruka: 2003; 121).

Thus it becomes evident that the major task of ethnophilosophy is to search for African philosophy through the collective thought of a people which is found in their cultures.

Oruka argues that since ethnophilosophy seeks to present group or communal thought it should be taken as folk-philosophy.

Hountondji has sharp criticism for Tempels, the very first ethnophilosopher, whose work is an attempt to describe a certain worldview based on data about the lives of African people. For Hountondji, Tempels' work appears to seek to reverse Levy-Bruhl's racism by according African people a philosophy. But in actual fact Tempels has written his book for the colonisers and the missionaries. Hountondji argues that a chapter in the book entitled 'Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilise' clearly shows that the black person is not a participant in that conversation but is under some private investigation (2003; 126). Hountondji argues that ethnophilosophy is not an African product and is not meant for Africans. He argues that it is necessary to free African philosophy from the shackles of ethnophilosophy. For Hountondji, the origins of ethnophilosophy are not African and its ideology represents a myth. I concur with Hountondji's view that the origins of ethnophilosophy are not from Africa since, as Hountondji has observed, starting with Tempels, the whole discourse of ethnophilosophy is aimed at articulating a certain worldview of Africans not for the benefit of Africans but outsiders, as it seeks to inform outsiders what Africans really are. The Africans already have this worldview hence they do not stand to benefit from ethnophilosophy. The major purpose of ethnophilosophy is to parade the African difference. This is what drives the whole project-to find that difference and show it to the whole world.

Although raising differences between Western culture and African culture can be valuable in itself or for other purposes, ethnophilosophers must be criticised for trying to make the African difference appear like African philosophy. Hountondji rightly condemns black African ethnophilosophers for engaging in that project.

Theirs is clearly a rearguard action. The quest for originality is always bound up with a desire to show off. It has meaning only in relation to the Other, from whom one wishes to distinguish oneself at all costs. This is an ambiguous relationship, in as much as the assertion of one's difference

goes hand in hand with a passionate urge to have it recognised by the Other. As this recognition is usually long in coming, the desire of the subject, caught in his/her own trap, grows increasingly hollow until it is completely alienated in a restless craving for the slightest gesture, the most cursory glance from the Other (Hountondji: 2003; 132).

This is a serious but correct indictment. The black African ethnophilosophers seem to be engaged in an unusual relationship with their intended audience. Their work is definitely not aimed at the African audience but at the European audience. It is not exaggeration at all to say that the black African who is not a philosopher may find the work of ethnophilosophers far too obvious to excite their attention. It is not entirely clear to my mind what that parade of the African difference is meant to achieve. Hountondji opines that the whole enterprise of ethnophilosophy aids the “Other” who is the European. Having created a colossal gap between herself and the African she now celebrates the difference as a gesture of repentance or to deal with her own spiritual crisis in order to start a dialogue. That dialogue, for Hountondji, comes in the form of the ethnophilosopher speaking on behalf of the whole continent to all of Europe.

Theophilus Okere has an enlightening and serious accusation for Tempels. He accuses Tempels of not being original in his presentation of Bantu philosophy. Instead, in Okere’s view, Tempels replaces the theory of primitive magic as used by ethnologists and evolutionists with the theory of force. I think it would do Okere justice to quote him at length:

In short, *La Philosophie Bantoue* is the theory of magic promoted to ontological status. What the author has called a philosophy is hardly even a *Weltanschauung*: no customs, rites, myths, or theologies are presented in a coordinated fashion or even described individually at length. *La Philosophie Bantoue* is Bantu only insofar as the author takes the scattered examples he invokes to prop his theory from the Bantu among whom he lived. The theory could well have been formulated on Oceania or

Melanesia and the author freely generalises about Bantu or all primitives, that is magical societies without discrimination. The essence of Tempels' revolution is thus the systematic substitution of the word "force" wherever one formerly read "magic" or indeed wherever one formerly read "mana" in the theories of religion and magic formulated by the rationalist-evolutionist schools of ethnology (Okere: 1983; 5).

Tempels' notion of force and his excessive use of the word also invites Okere's perceptive wrath. "There is force all over. The term explains so many things that one has the right to suspect that perhaps it really explains nothing. When a word becomes so overworked it is probable that it has lost all its force" (*ibid*). It is easy to see Tempels' motives; he was interested in finding that single aspect that made Africans so radically different from their Western counterparts so much that he hangs to the word at the cost of reason.

The futility of ethnophilosophy as a philosophical project is not too difficult to discern. The shallow insistence on finding and articulating African differences followed by celebrating those differences, either by the European or the African, does not advance the project of finding an authentic African philosophy. Ethnophilosophy confines itself to the less interesting exercise of discussing cultural differences and whatever philosophy is conceived to be it is not just discussing cultural differences.

As the ethnophilosopher speaks on behalf of Africa her attempts to present Africa as a unified single voiced continent with a monolithic culture, worldview and philosophy must be rejected. Oruka is correct that the claim that Africa is a place of philosophical unanimity where individual thought does/did not thrive is false. "This claim is both false and absurd: it is false because traditional African thinkers are as diverse in their views as it is possible for any system of thinkers to be, and it is absurd because its application makes African politics totalitarian and African philosophy static" (Oruka: 1998; 99). The ethnophilosopher's presentation of African thinking as one dimensional does not do Africa any good. It defies common-sense knowledge that is hardly contentious that

people have different thoughts in any given situation. The ethnophilosopher can only insist on his views on unanimity but only in sharp defiance of what is common knowledge-both about human nature and human societies. Human nature is consistently characterized by differences and differences did exist in traditional African societies and they continue to do so in modern day Africa and that alone undermines the ethnophilosopher's unanimity claims.

Hountondji takes the issue further by questioning how the word philosophy is used by ethnophilosophers and what it is supposed to mean. He observes that the word changes its meaning when it is no longer applied to America and Europe but applied to Africa. He says the meaning of the word philosophy changes to both the European and American writers as well as the African who has been invited to participate in the whole programme.

This is what happens to the word 'philosophy': applied to Africa, it is supposed to designate no longer the specific discipline it evokes in the Western context but merely a collective world-view, an implicit, spontaneous, perhaps even unconscious system of beliefs to which all Africans are supposed to adhere. This is a vulgar usage of the word, justified presumably by the supposed vulgarity of the geographical context to which it is applied (Hountondji: 1996; 60).

Hountondji argues that behind this particular usage of the word philosophy is a myth that is at work. He calls this "the myth of primitive unanimity" (*ibid*). The myth that is at work is that primitive societies, particularly non-Western societies are characterised by a situation where everyone is in agreement with everyone. "It follows that in such societies there can never be individual beliefs or philosophies but only collective systems of belief. The word 'philosophy' is then used to designate each belief-system of this kind, and it is tacitly agreed among well-bred people that in this context this could not mean anything else" (*ibid*). But more seriously it denies the people on the African continent the ability to develop individual philosophies that share the same characteristics as Western

philosophy. Ethnophilosophy robs people of their philosophical skill and deprives them of recognition of an authentic philosophy reducing it to a unanimous communal philosophy that is essentially uncritical. As Oruka notes the greatest “shortcoming of ethno-philosophy is that it is derived not from the critical but from the uncritical part of African tradition” (2003; 121). I am convinced that ethnophilosophy suffers this shortcoming because it is primarily interested in finding and showing the African difference when it comes to philosophical matters. That difference, which essentially leads to the development of culture philosophy, is consistently paraded as a unique African feature. When the question of the definition of philosophy arises for the ethnophilosopher she will insist that African philosophy is radically different from Western philosophy. “To the extent that European philosophy is known to manifest critical and rigorous analysis, and logical explanation and synthesis, African philosophy is considered to be innocent of such characteristics. It is considered to be basically intuitive, mystical” (Oruka: 2003; 120). To view African philosophy in this way does not help the cause of philosophy in Africa. It may make African philosophy appear unique and different to the ethnophilosopher but by the same measure it robs African philosophy of almost all things that might count as philosophical qualities leaving it bereft of any serious claim to philosophical activity. It hangs on to the word philosophy in a demeaned manner admitting all sorts of things into a pseudo philosophy-which yields no significant philosophical result.

In essence ethnophilosophy “has been criticised for conflating two senses of the word “philosophy” when used in the phrase “African philosophy”. These two senses are the ideological sense, used when making reference to a group or a people’s slogan; and, secondly, the technical sense in which philosophy is conceived as a product of systematic and ratiocinative methods” (Kaphagawani: 1998; 91). Kaphagawani argues that the word philosophy has been used carelessly in the African context.

The most biting and insightful criticism comes from Kwame Anthony Appiah who notes that:

Though much ethnophilosophical material is indeed very interesting-at least where it is not, as it too often is, woefully inaccurate-we should go carefully in discussing how to put it to philosophical use. For though anthropology (like travel) may broaden the mind, the kind of analytical work that needs to be done on these is not something that is easily done second-hand, and most anthropological reports-though not, perhaps, the best ones-are pretty philosophically naïve. This would be mere carping (there is, after all, too little written about Africa that is philosophically serious) were it not for the fact that the view that African philosophy is just ethnophilosophy has been largely assumed by those who have thought about what African philosophers should study (1998; 118).

Appiah's observation is accurate. The philosophical naivety of the anthropological reports should prompt us to treat any philosophical claims gleaned from these reports with a great deal of caution. We should not assume, alongside those who have already done so, that the African philosopher's primary occupation must be limited to ethnophilosophy. Ethnophilosophy as a folk philosophy that lacks critical analysis will engender condescending attitudes. This is precisely what ethnophilosophy will ultimately achieve. It will cause curious excitement to its intended audience and when that excitement eventually dies down the audience will have been made aware of how Africans are different from them.

Whatever the claims of ethnophilosophy may be-they cannot be serious philosophical claims in any interesting sense. They are philosophical claims in the weakest sense of the word. In fact some ethnophilosophers are not mainly interested in working out a comprehensive philosophical system. Their philosophical positions are a by-product of some other important activity they are engaged in.

This is particularly the case with John Mbiti as Barry Hallen has observed. Hallen accuses Mbiti of seeing African philosophy as subordinate to African religion. Mbiti is

seen to be adopting an essentialist rendering of African philosophy wherein it consists of beliefs and values that all Africans share.

This makes his approach to philosophy much less technical both in character and content, more in line with the popular expression that every culture must have some sort of “philosophy of life” or “worldview”. The greater proportion of his book is devoted to discussions of conventional African views about God, creation, and the afterlife rather than of technical philosophical problems or topics (Hallen: 2002; 16).

This renders Mbiti’s work, and indeed the work of all other ethnophilosophers excessively weak when confronted with technical philosophical objections. For that reason ethnophilosophy should not be accepted either as a representative of African philosophy or even as a trend of African philosophy. If we are to confront its tenets and way of proceeding as philosophers we shall find it woefully lacking the technical arguments that accompany most of philosophical products.

Marcien Towa correctly characterises Mbiti’s work as primarily non-philosophical when he argues that: “The methodological weaknesses of ethnophilosophy from a philosophical point of view derives from the fact that its real purpose is not philosophical but theological. Seen from the methodological angle, the principal characteristic of ethnophilosophy resides in its dilation of the concept of philosophy to such a point that this concept becomes coextensive with the concept of culture” (Towa: 1991; 189).

Although it can be said that ethnophilosophy has made an immense contribution to the development of present day African philosophy that admission must be tempered with the objections I have made above. In particular the objectives of the ethnophilosophers themselves and who their intended audience really was. Of Tempels, Tsenay Serequeberhan notes that, the “basic intent of Tempels’s work was to explore and appropriate by subversion the lived world outlook of the Bantu in the service of Belgian colonialism, that is, the European “civilising mission” in the Congo. In fact, Tempels’s

work, is an exemplary effort aimed at the expropriation of the interiority of the subjugated in the service of colonialism” (1991; 10-11). Coupled with its lack of philosophical rectitude ethnophilosophy is just but a development that we can afford to ignore forever.

For the purposes of my project my discussion of ethnophilosophy will be limited to its articulation of the concept of person in African thinking. I will seek to interrogate both the method of philosophising as well as the substantive philosophical claims that are made by ethnophilosophers on the subject of personhood in African thinking. I will contest the claims made by ethnophilosophers on what personhood is on the African continent.

1.3 Philosophic Sagacity

The second trend that Oruka identified is philosophic sagacity. Kaphagawani notes that this trend “is still quite new and known in few intellectual circles. One feature characteristic of this approach is that it makes an assumption which is logically opposite to that of ethnophilosophy. Ethnophilosophy is holistic; it lays emphasis on the dimension of communal thought, but philosophic sagacity is non-holistic, it underscores the thoughts of individuals in a community” (1998; 93). Philosophic sagacity rejects ethnophilosophy’s central assumption of philosophic unanimity through its search for and recognition of the existence of individual thoughts in traditional communities.

The point of departure for philosophic sagacity is the belief that Africans are capable of individual and independent thought that may at times be at variance with the generally prevalent beliefs held by the community. Bodunrin characterises philosophic sagacity as an anti-thesis of ethnophilosophy through its attempts at identifying particular individuals who are reputed for their wisdom. These individuals do not have to be literate but are known to have a certain in-born insight which enables them to engage in philosophical activities. It is this in-born insight that enables these individuals to develop independent views that may be in contrast with unanimous communal beliefs. According to Bodunrin these individuals are capable of both dialectical and critical inquiry within the bounds of

their social structures (1984; 2). They do not have to seek external recourse in order to mount successful social or cultural philosophical reflections.

Orika rejects the idea that traditional Africa is essentially characterised by consensus. On the contrary, in his view, traditional Africa goes beyond consensus and it is not “innocent of logical and dialectical critical inquiry” (2003; 121). Further he argues that of

...the various African peoples one is likely to find rigorous indigenous thinkers. These are men and women (sages) who have not had the benefit of modern education. But they are none the less critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgements by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of the communal consensus (*ibid*).

Orika can be seen as the greatest advocate of sage philosophy among African philosophers. He sincerely believes that it is possible to find men and women of exceptional reason among African traditional communities and these people count as philosophers in their own right. He is against any insistence that for anything to count as philosophy it ought to be written down. He observes that some Greek philosophers such as Thales and Socrates did not write anything down but their thoughts and words count as philosophical activity. He argues: “We should not make great issue about writing. Writing is a good way to store thought and to store philosophy. But writing is not thinking, and philosophy is thinking, and one can think even if one is incapable of, or has no facilities, for writing” (Oruka: 1998; 102).

Orika also rejects the idea that the sayings of traditional African philosophers should not count as philosophy. He notes that the sayings of what he calls Greek sages such as Thales, Anaximander, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Socrates are treated as constitutive of philosophical activity. In this regard Oruka argues that:

Some of the Greek sages are known and regarded as philosophers for having made only one or two utterances. Thales, for example, is known to have said that everything is made of water, while Heraclitus stated that strife is the truth of all life. Such sayings have been repeated and commented upon in numerous books, giving their utterers the prestigious status of philosophers. Now what reasonable proof do we have to believe that traditional Africa lacked any such sayings? (1998; 99-100).

In his opinion Africans have made utterances that are equal to the utterances that were made by Greek sages. Since the utterances of Greek sages count as philosophy - Oruka argues that the utterances of African sages must also count as philosophy.

Oruka is of the view that sage philosophy is very important for the development of philosophy in Africa for two reasons. Firstly, he says, the thoughts and opinions proceeding from sages offer philosophical counselling on a number of issues on the nature and issues that affect human life. Secondly, he believes that the thoughts of sages form unrefined data on which professional philosophers can undertake technical professional reflections.

On who should count as a sage and what she ought to do Oruka is very lucid: "A person is a sage in the philosophic sense only to the extent that he/she is consistently concerned with the fundamental ethical and empirical issues and questions relevant to the society, and has the ability to offer insightful solutions to some of those issues. An instant and one-time only visionary may be a prophet but not a sage" (Oruka: 1998; 100).

For Oruka a sage is a person who uses her critical or rational faculties to offer insight into social issues. She does not have to abide with the communal dictates like the ethnophilosopher. She follows her own critical reflection and whatever insights she offers are out of the efforts and workings of rational mental processes. Oruka insists on that single quality as a key characteristic that qualifies one to be a sage philosopher. He argues that other qualities such as being a visionary or a prophet do not necessarily make

one a sage. In his opinion although a sage may have these qualities as well what makes one a sage is her ability to arrive at opinions that impact on society through the process of rigorously thinking things through. Oruka also points that every human society, be it literate or non-literate, has its own sages and these sages are consistently concerned about reflecting on the welfare of humanity and their reflections inform them of what is best for humanity. Thus, in his opinion, just as there were Greek sages there were also African sages. All these sages had one thing in common-they are critical and independent thinkers.

Oruka's dedication as an advocate of philosophic sagacity is admirable but its shortcomings and its lack of relevance to my methodological questions cannot be overlooked or easily avoided. For a start philosophic sagacity mirrors so much of ethnophilosophy. Sagacity, it appears, seeks to give insight and solutions to problems that any given society has. The sage is a person who has an inborn talent or ability to access aspects of her society that her fellows may not be able to. This is why she is able to concern herself with what Oruka calls empirical and ethical issues. The rest of society or non-sages cannot do this precisely because they cannot understand how their society is organised. The job is best left to the sage. The sage arrogates to herself the same role that Tempels gave himself when he took it upon himself to be the authoritative interpreter of the Baluba's philosophy.

Such a philosophy, just like ethnophilosophy, will lack the rigour and technicality that attends to philosophy. It will be a quasi-philosophy, a folk-philosophy whose sole claim to difference from ethnophilosophy will be that it is done by an individual who is not bound by the dictates of her community. That difference is insignificant; folk-philosophy remains so whether it is communal or individual. It can be concluded, without any exaggeration, that sage philosophy is not very different from ethnophilosophy and does not achieve anything spectacularly different from what ethnophilosophy achieves. Oruka responds to this serious charge by putting sages at the same pedestal as Socrates, he argues: "Nevertheless, the claim in sage philosophy is this: that sage philosophy is a kind of philosophy which is as noble and significant as the philosophy of Socrates in ancient

Greece. There are persons in it who think as deeply and are as noble as Socrates was” (1997; 183).

This response is not satisfactory. We cannot accept this assertion without any accompanying evidence that would show that African sages were concerned about the questions of the depth that Socrates was concerned with. What noble and deep questions did the ‘sages’ from Greece and our sages from Africa address? Oruka does not tell us what these philosophical questions were and what philosophical similarities exist between these groups. Sage philosophers cannot claim that they are sages merely because they are noble and deep thinkers; even ethnophilosophers can be as deep and noble as Socrates.

It must also be noted that most pre-Socratic philosophers were given to making statements that may be remembered forever but are no longer taken seriously as astounding philosophical endeavours. Claims that everything is made of water are not only false but if they were to be treated as philosophical one would conclude that they are a rudimentary beginning of a philosophy that has become much more technical, truth-oriented, rigorous and complex.

Lansana Keita makes an interesting point when he observes that the problem facing African thought is that the term philosophy “though debated, has not been much examined as a term deriving its meaning from the historical context in which it is used. It is instructive to note that the term “philosophy” itself has witnessed important shifts in meaning throughout its existence. Consider that “philosophy” in the sense of Aristotle is not “philosophy” in the sense of Quine” (Keita: 1991; 133). Oruka pretends that sage philosophy, be it Greek or African, is so influential that its impact is everlasting and that wherever it is presented it will be immediately recognised and accepted as philosophy. This, as Keita points out, is not true. The word may lend itself to different meanings depending on its historical context and a multiple other factors.

Despite all this Oruka fervently reserves a prominent place for sagacity in the future of African philosophy. He writes: “The future of sage philosophy is very promising, I think. Though future philosophers may not think highly of it, it at least gives a starting base. It will help to produce other forms of philosophy which we cannot think of now. But to have a base is very important; our problem in Africa has been that we start from no base” (1997; 184). It is not entirely clear to me what base Oruka is talking about. It appears as if he is referring to a base that is supposed to be a foundation or mark that represents the historical and recorded beginning of African philosophy. Probably, in Oruka’s mind, sage philosophy will become the bedrock on which African philosophy is built just like pre-Socratics and Socrates himself have done for Western philosophy.

This appears to be the promising future that awaits sage philosophy. But Oruka does well by cautioning himself against the importance of sage philosophy by at least considering the possibility that future philosophers may not think much about sage philosophy. Of course future philosophers will not think much about sage philosophy because it does what ethnophilosophy precisely does. They are both the same. However, ethnophilosophy edges sage philosophy in that if we were ever to consider what to count as a base of African philosophy - ethnophilosophy ought to rightly claim that position. Despite the notoriety and philosophical bankruptcy that ethnophilosophy has come to be known for over the years; no-one can deny that ethnophilosophy has led in the stirring of much interesting debate about what African philosophy is and what it ought to be. The trend that has been identified as professional philosophy grew out of reactions against the claims made by ethnophilosophy. In so doing ethnophilosophy, though successfully debunked, has succeeded in carving a place for itself in the history of African philosophy and initiating a genuine inquiry into what really constitutes African philosophy. That honour whether dubious or glorious rightly belongs to ethnophilosophers such as Tempels and Mbiti. Oruka cannot give that honour to philosophic sagacity.

Oruka urges philosophers to find sages in traditional communities and make their philosophy known. This is what Marcel Griaule did and he found an old man called

Ogotemmel. The result of the meeting and conversations¹ which lasted 33 days was the book *Conversations with Ogotemmel: An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*.

On the first page of the book, Griaule like Tempels, explains his mission clearly when he states that: “The Dogon, in short, were thought to present one of the best examples of primitive savagery, and this view has been shared by some Muslim Africans, who are no better equipped intellectually than Europeans to understand those of their brothers who cling to the traditions of their ancestors. Only those officials who have undertaken the hard task of governing these people have learnt to love them” (Griaule: 1965; 1).

The purpose of the whole exercise is to report the findings of white colonial officials who have taken it upon themselves to understand and love the Africans who appear to be castigated by everyone including their close brothers. The only difference between Tempels and Griaule is that whereas Tempels talked of the Baluba ontology from a communal perspective Griaule simply finds an individual who will speak for the whole community. But both writers picture and present Africans as a pitiable misunderstood people who are essentially at the mercy and kindness of the colonising officials who have a noble mission to civilise.

Ogotemmel is taken as a sage who expounds the Dogon metaphysics and what the Dogon believe in and the basis of that belief. However, the subtitle of the book suggests that this is a religious sage as opposed to being a philosophical sage. Ogotemmel seeks to expound the religious ideas of the Dogon people. For example, when Ogotemmel talks about how the world was created he says God known as Amma “took a lump of clay, squeezed it in his hand and flung it from him, as he had done with the stars” (Griaule: 1965; 17). This according to Ogotemmel, as written by Griaule, is how the world was created. Ogotemmel gives a systematic exposition of how the world was created and what happened after that.

¹ It is said that Ogotemmel led the discussion and he talked freely and systematically about the Dogon scheme of things.

But that exposition is a mixture of different elements which may not necessarily constitute a philosophy as Dismas Masolo observes. He argues that the system Ogotemmelé conveys, as a sage, “belongs to a preserved and higher degree of knowledge and wisdom—a detailed knowledge of the general principles that chain all things together as a single but complex phenomenon. It entails a cosmogony, a metaphysics, and a religion. That the teachings comprise all these is clear from the general character with which the old sage treats the subject, often reserving the specific details to the relevant specialist concerned” (Masolo: 1994; 68-69). In my view Ogotemmelé’s sage philosophy, as Masolo attests, conflates other areas of African life so as to arrive at a single complex phenomenon. This is reminiscent of Tempels’ ethnophilosophy of force. Both ethnophilosophy and sagacity seek to arrive at one unanimous complex reality for the African.

Later on, in Ogotemmelé’s systematic exposition, the creation story gets a little bizarre when he tells us more about what happened between God and the earth he had created. “This body, lying flat, face upwards in a line from north to south is feminine. Its sexual organ is an anthill and its clitoris a termite hill. Amma, being lonely and desirous of intercourse with this creature, approached it. That was the occasion of the first breach of the order of the universe” (Griaule: 1965; 17). This does not count as individual philosophising but a rehash of the Dogon beliefs that every member of the community held or at least was supposed to hold. If Ogotemmelé was a serious sage able to reflect on a culture as opposed to perpetuating communal beliefs he should have questioned the veracity of this creation story. That would have made him a sage. On the contrary he perpetuates the myth of his people on how the world was created. He is not different from the ethnophilosopher.

Samuel Oluoch Imbo captures this objection succinctly when he makes an insightful objection. He argues:

A common criticism of ethnophilosophy is that it heralds a philosophy without philosophers. The sage Ogotemmelé of the Dogon people of

southern Mali presents an exposition of Dogon mythological thinking that puts this criticism in a new light. In a sense Ogotemmelé may be considered an absent philosopher because he died long before he became aware of his notoriety as a philosopher. If he was a philosopher, he was not aware of it. In another sense, however, there are those who doubt that Ogotemmelé's exposition, however systematic, amounts to philosophy. On this view it can, at best, be read as an expression of collective, unconscious myths and a knowledge of Dogon social and cultural features. Even if one admits that Ogotemmelé is a philosopher, his exposition of Dogon culture still does not qualify as philosophy (Imbo: 1998; 64).

The point that is strikingly important here is that sagacity is not a lone endeavour as Oruka would like us to believe. It depends on the community and is generated from communal beliefs. It is communal beliefs told systematically by one person. Another important point is whatever expositions the sage makes about her culture, those systematic expositions do not count as philosophy. The simple reason is that they lack the insights and offer society nothing in form of their own intellectual engagement with social issues other than a systematic repetition of what is already well known in the public domain. What they offer does not count as philosophy as Imbo rightly observes. It is primarily ethnographic in nature and may have resonance with what ethnophilosophers and ethnographers have as the core of their business.

My project does not refer to any sages as, to the best of my knowledge, there is no literature that reflects what the sages said on the concept of person. If there were recordings of what sages have said on the concept of a person I would treat their pronouncements as representing their philosophy and I would look for philosophical value from their statements.

1.4 Professional Philosophy

Professional philosophy has been identified as another trend of African philosophy. "This trend consists of works and debates of the professionally trained students and teachers of

philosophy in Africa. Most of it rejects the assumptions of ethno-philosophy. Philosophy is conceived as a discipline or an activity whose meaning cannot depend just on racial or regional make-up” (Oruka: 2003; 123). Professional philosophers are philosophers who have gone to university and have earned degrees in philosophy. They are aware of the tradition of philosophy in the West hence their outright rejection of ethnophilosophy as a philosophical trend.

According to Bodunrin professional philosophers take a universalistic view of philosophy arguing that philosophy “must have the same meaning in all cultures although the subjects that receive priority, and perhaps the method of dealing with them, may be dictated by cultural biases and the existential situation in the society within which the philosophers operate” (1984; 2). Thus this school looks for certain universalistic characteristics that constitute philosophy. “According to this school, criticism and argument are essential characteristics of anything which is to pass as philosophy” (*ibid*; 3). This trend, in African philosophy, has been traditionally identified with its first leading proponents, who were all agreed on the need for a technical philosophy and these are Paulin Hountondji, Kwasi Wiredu, Henry Odera Oruka and P.O. Bodunrin².

Hountondji argues that African philosophy is not to be found in ethnophilosophical accounts. Instead what counts as African philosophy, in his view, are the numerous works that are generated by Africans that specifically deal with philosophical problems. These works may be in any area of philosophy. What makes them African philosophy is that they have been produced by Africans. He denies Tempels’ work the status of the title African philosophy arguing that Tempels’ work belongs to Western literature. However, he is willing to count the work of African ethnophilosophers like Alexis Kagame as African philosophy. This also extends to include work done by Africans on non-African philosophy. So if an African was to do work on Kant or Rawls that would count as African philosophy for Hountondji. In his own words he argues:

² It is important to note that these philosophers are not from the same country or the same culture. They were not interested in advancing a certain cultural knowledge or philosophy. Wiredu is from Ghana, Bodunrin from Nigeria, Oruka from Kenya and Hountondji from Benin. What brought them together into one school was their position that philosophy ought to be technical and universal.

The essential point here is that we have produced a radically new definition of African philosophy, the criterion now being the geographical origin of the authors rather than an alleged specificity of content. The effect of this is to broaden the narrow horizon which has hitherto been imposed on African philosophy and to treat it, as now conceived, as a methodical inquiry with the same universal aims as those of any other philosophy in the world (Hountondji: 1996; 66).

I do not think Hountondji's position innocent of serious incoherencies. Firstly, the attempt to identify philosophers by their geographical origin, African philosophers for that, is a swift return to ethnophilosophy. It amounts to either a chauvinistic or an exotic diversionary celebration of "something out of Africa". If some African philosophers are interested in Kant, for example, but consistently make contributions to Kantian philosophy that are excessively weak and are not taken seriously in the Kantian tradition, they may be excused for being African. If those Africans, on Hountondji's account, were to make sterling contributions to Kantian philosophy their Western counterparts may think that they are just as good as them and that may produce a "Whoa!" feeling that is impressed with the ability of that African philosopher. At the end, the African philosopher smuggles the end product back to Africa and we extol it as constitutive of African philosophy and African literature. Of course it is not African philosophy and it is not African literature. Its right place is among the best or worst collections of Kantian philosophy and not alongside ethnophilosophical accounts of Mbiti and Kagame. In the same vein Tempels' work, though not produced by an African and admittedly seriously faulty, easily finds home among other faulty productions and views from ethnophilosophers and ethnographers on the continent. Hountondji's distinction between the work of African ethnophilosophers and European ethnophilosophers who seek to address the same subject is at the very least arbitrary and is consistent with what is normally read to be a racist attitude. It would be far more appropriate to treat philosophical issues peculiarly pertinent to Africa as African philosophy. Oruka accedes to the same opinion when he repeats a criterion he says he stated in 1975.

It is the position that our criterion for an African philosopher should be based on the nature of philosophical interest plus the cultural experience of the thinker or author to be judged. Therefore, even a non-African thinker whose philosophical interest and study have been on topics of special concern or historic importance to Africa, and whose life experience has been dominated by cultural praxis in Africa, would, by his/her contribution, qualify as an African philosopher (Oruka: 1997; 168-169).

Oruka prefers not to dismiss non-Africans completely as Hountondji does. He admits that non-Africans who have immersed themselves in the cultural and philosophical experiences of Africans do qualify as African philosophers. But those who have not immersed themselves in that experience but have an interest in the philosophical scholarship of Africans and make contributions to that scholarship can be counted as experts on African philosophy.

Wiredu also concedes that although philosophy can be universal it has always been culture-relative in many, albeit subtle, ways. He notes that there are two important respects in which philosophy can be culture relative. The first refers to the issues that cause concern or germinate inquiry and the second refers to the contents of the philosophical discussions that will emerge. Thus, he argues, in the attempt to understand what African philosophy is:

There is the need to record, reconstruct, and interpret, and above all to correct false interpretations. But it should be clear also that there is a need, possibly more urgent, to fashion philosophies based upon contemporary African experience with its many sided-ness. From this point of view, one might suggest without being whimsical that the term 'African philosophy' should be reserved for the results of that experience. African philosophy, as distinct from African *traditional world-views*, that is being produced by

contemporary African philosophers. It is still in the making (Wiredu: 1980; 36)

With this move, Wiredu takes African philosophy to another stage by effectively dismissing traditional world-views and in their place advocating a philosophy that will be sensitive to Africa's station in the here and now. Such a philosophy will be a conscious discussion of the many facets or realities that confront modern Africa. For Wiredu African philosophy is not to be found in the oft repeated African world-views but will be found in current discussions and is to be treated as an unfinished project but one that is emerging.

The most important criticism of professional philosophy, to my mind, is that it is a philosophy of apemanship. It seeks to ape and apply the methods of doing philosophy that are essentially Western to African ethnophilosophy. Professional philosophers formulate their objections to ethnophilosophy without acknowledging that they are using a certain method of philosophising from a certain context. Though justified in many instances, that attack seeks to replace ethnophilosophy with yet another method, this time Anglo-American, of philosophising which is itself a contested method.

That the professional philosophers fail to mention that they have been trained in the Anglo-American tradition is no fault of their own. They are victims as much as they are beneficiaries of colonialism and post-colonialism on the continent. As Keita notes: "On the question concerning African philosophical thought, it seems that the structure of this thought has been determined to a great extent by the ideological systems of belief imposed on Africa by European scholarship of the precolonial and postcolonial eras" (1991; 134). Thus colonialism and post-colonialism imposed a European scholarship on the continent without regard for any African scholarship. The professional philosophers having benefited from that scholarship and seeing themselves as enlightened take it upon themselves to lead the continent in the right kind of way of going about engaging in the philosophical enterprise. "Professional philosophy as practised in African universities is generally based on the Euro-American model" (Keita: 1991; 141). Although this may

appear as advancement for that African philosopher in that it sensitises her to other traditions of philosophising; the problem lies in the fact that the Euro-American model is but one philosophical model which is also open to serious criticism from other quarters. In other words the Euro-American model has its own weaknesses which may truncate Africa's growth and development in philosophy. Hallen makes an incisive observation on the problems relating to the origins of African philosophy when he writes:

Academic philosophy in Anglophone Africa arose in a conservative yet turbulent intellectual climate. Conservative because philosophical paradigms in the English-language academy derived principally from the analytic tradition, which provided for a comparatively more narrow conception of the discipline than its European Continental counterparts. Turbulent because of the competing claims about what could constitute the sources of African philosophy as advocated by Africanists and African intellectuals from a diverse variety of disciplinary and vocational backgrounds-social anthropology, missionary and religious scholarship, and academic philosophy (Hallen: 2002; 13)

Professional philosophers, who in essence were analytic philosophers by their training, were immediately faced with the task of establishing, authoritatively as trained philosophers, what could count as African philosophy. The so-called professional philosopher could only offer a narrow conception of philosophy as conceived by his trend-analytic philosophy. Imbo correctly diagnoses the difficulty of professional philosophers which is just as serious as the ethnophilosophical problem when he states: "Ethnophilosophy unduly exalts the African past and confuses culture with philosophy. A universalist orientation valorises rigour for rigour's sake and uncritically accepts European frameworks" (Imbo: 1998; 28). Thus the major weakness of what Imbo calls the universalist, otherwise known as the professional philosopher is her acceptance of the Euro-American model as the only authoritative philosophical method.

Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests that the difficulty facing African philosophy is that there has been an external intervention on our own folk-philosophies on the continent and they have not been allowed to develop in their own way. The second problem is that there are African philosophers on the continent who have been trained in the Western paradigms and are aware of the difficulties that are attendant to those Western paradigms. The real difficulty for those philosophers, according to Appiah, is that:

They are bound also to have to make choices within Western traditions. Not only is there a considerable difference in the styles of philosophy in France and in Germany, on the one hand, and in the Anglophone world, on the other, but there is in Britain and in North America a wide divergence between the practice and the metaphilosophical theory of the dominant Anglo-American tradition, and the theory and practice of those whose work is conceived as closer to the traditions that remain strong in France and Germany (Appiah: 1998; 111).

Thus the philosopher on the African continent has to be sensitive to and be aware of all the different styles of philosophy in the Western traditions. From these different styles, the African philosopher is expected to choose one or more of these traditions. Needless to say the trend she will choose is one she is acquainted with—probably one she has spent many years reading on and training in at university. When she makes that choice or when she finds that choice already made for her it would be extremely disingenuous for her to pretend that this the only universal trend which African philosophy must also live up to as so-called professional philosophers have sought to do.

African philosophy, however it is conceived, is not necessarily in need of improvement through copying the methods of any other philosophy from any part of the world. As Okot p' Bitek observes: "Africa must re-examine herself critically. She must discover her true self, and rid herself of all 'apemanship'. For only then can she begin to develop a culture of her own" (1973; vii). Although Africans are perfectly capable of living up to the rigours of Anglophone philosophy it is not immediately obvious that their lot and

abilities as philosophers is in need of some awakening from Anglophone trained philosophers operating under the guise of professional philosophers on the African continent. All other African philosophers such as those trained in the French, Germanic or Italian traditions are also professional philosophers in the same vein that African Anglo-American trained philosophers lay claim to professionalism. The so-called professional trend is no more professional than any other trend which originates from the West. If anything it is just another kind of foreign imposition on the continent. I think Africans should be sensitive to many of the values of Anglo-American as well as continental philosophy.

My project is sensitive to the value that the professional trend brings to philosophy in general without necessarily excluding the values that all other trends also bring. My philosophical training is broadly the analytic tradition, hence my project relies on the related technique of professional philosophy. However I will remain aware of this, and will seek not to negate valuable techniques from other methods.

1.5 Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy

In the third chapter of this thesis I will give an account of African socialism in general and the three distinct philosophies that Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor advocate. In the fifth chapter I will attempt a critique of Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor who are all taken to belong to the nationalist/ideological trend. I will not go into a detailed discussion of the nationalist trend here, but certain comments are relevant at this stage.

I wish to highlight a single point in as far as nationalist philosophy relates to the enterprise of philosophy. Philosophy admits of many branches; political philosophy is just but one of these branches. It may, at the first instance, appear to be correct to characterise nationalist philosophy as political philosophy. But this should not be the case. Nationalist philosophy is a pseudo philosophy just like ethnophilosophy.

The proponents of nationalist philosophy mainly want to retrieve certain admirable aspects of a traditional culture and propose that these attributes are essentially

constitutive of a certain people. In this case the Africans. These values are derived from ethnophilosophical accounts of what it means for an African to be an African and what the metaphysical construal of the African is taken to be. The nationalist then proceeds to promote the conclusions of the ethnophilosopher and affirms them as authentically African and a panacea to all the political ills that afflict the continent. It is just another form of ethnophilosophy-interested in narrating yet another cultural philosophical perspective of the African people.

It is not a political philosophy in the sense that it does not seek to work out a conceptual political philosophical outlook but it affirms what has always been in existence and extols it as the best representative of the traditional organisation of society that ought to be preserved and perpetuated in the future.

Further, it will emerge that the nationalists are not primarily engaged in producing a conscious philosophical project. They were mainly interested in producing philosophy in the weak sense of slogans and political party theories. Thus nationalist philosophy does not live up to being philosophical activity but political activism. Although I present the thoughts of the proponents of this trend in chapter three and critique those ideas in chapter five my thesis will not be following this method. On the contrary I argue that there is no justification in doing it as philosophy.

1.6 Hermeneutics

Okere identifies hermeneutics as another trend of African philosophy. He argues that the main concern of hermeneutics is an analysis of concepts given in African languages and arriving at logical implications derived from such concepts.

Hallen notes that the tradition that has received great attention in Africa is that of analysis or analytic philosophy. "Another approach that deserves consideration is that derived from the phenomenological tradition and is conventionally, at least as far as its African manifestations are concerned, referred to as hermeneutics" (Hallen: 2002; 56). There is

no disguising that the emergence of what has come to be known as the hermeneutic tradition is derived from a non-African tradition.

Serequeberhan describes the project in this way:

The hermeneuticity of contemporary African philosophy-as is the case with the hermeneuticity of philosophical discourse as such-consists of the interplay of horizon and discourse. This interplay is grounded on the concrete and lived historicalness of a specific horizon. The terms "horizon" and "discourse," are here used in a rather specialised sense. Horizon designates the historico-hermeneutical and politico-cultural milieu within and out of which specific discourses (philosophic, artistic, scientific, etc) are articulated (Serequeberhan: 1994; 17-18).

Okere, in his *African Philosophy: A Historico-Hermeneutical Investigation of the Conditions of its Possibility*, argues that at the heart of the project of hermeneutics is an attempt at understanding the relationship that exists between philosophy and culture. For him the study of hermeneutics is the study of the meaning we give to life and how we create philosophy out of a culture. He sees hermeneutics as the epistemological tool that mediates between culture as lived experience and culture as a reflective exercise (Okere: 11-15). At the beginning of his book he sets out what he wants to study and he cannot hide his great admiration for some Western philosophers in his proposed study. He states:

We shall especially study its ontological roots and anthropological implications-the role of Hermeneutics in the manifestation and interpretation of Being and who or what is essentially the hermeneutical being. We shall see how this hermeneutical being lends its essential characteristic of historicity to the hermeneutical enterprise which is philosophy itself. All this will entail making prolonged stops at the great masters of the Philosophy of Hermeneutics-Paul Ricouer, Martin

Heidegger, and Hans Georg Gadamer, who have reflected extensively on hermeneutics (*ibid*).

Thus for Okere hermeneutics is a tradition that has much to teach and instruct African philosophy. Hermeneutics is, for Okere, philosophy. In order for African philosophy to succeed it has to follow the hermeneutical route. This hermeneutical route, it appears, has already been well established by his great masters Ricoeur, Heidegger and Gadamer.

I think the problem with this line of argument is that it is rather a form of aping a Western trend. The hermeneutic trend is well-established in the West and taking it as it is, by making stops at the great masters, is nothing short of paying blind admiration to those masters. Further it is an attempt to impose a system of philosophy that has been developed in response to a set of circumstances that may just as well not be extant on the African continent. If this is a problem with “professional philosophy” then this approach is no better off.

Another problem is that phenomenology as a philosophic enterprise is different from the trend practised by so-called professional philosophers on the continent. The development of hermeneutics with a different language and terminology leads to the creation of a chasm among African philosophers on the continent. African philosophers of a hermeneutic persuasion will find that their technique and way of philosophising, being radically different from professional philosophers, occludes the participation of their fellows on the continent. By so doing the division of philosophy into different traditions is perpetuated. As Hallen observes in African philosophy “it would be unfortunate if analytic and hermeneutic philosophers begin to congregate in increasingly segregated intellectual circles (as has been the case in the Western academy)” (2002; 56-57).

Both the hermeneutic philosopher and the professional philosopher who are university graduates are perfectly capable of producing a philosophy that is grounded in Africa’s socio-economic, political and cultural experience. But as Olusegun Oladipo succinctly observes what the African philosopher is “busy doing is to promote an order of

knowledge which is largely informed by a socio-economic experience that is, at least in its fundamental aspects, anything but African” (2000; 20). The African philosopher is firstly preoccupied with living up to the tradition of hermeneutics and how it may fit or solve the problems of Africa. African philosophy can and must stand on its own without reference to the traditions of hermeneutics or any other Western model. Appiah picks up this peculiar problem confronting the African philosopher when he notes:

... the fact is that philosophers in Africa are bound, by their position as intellectuals educated in the shadows of the West, to adopt an essentially comparative perspective. Even if it is their own traditions they are analysing, they are bound to see them in the context of European (and often Islamic) as well as other African cultures. No one can be happy celebrating her own tradition in the knowledge that it makes claims inconsistent with other systems, without beginning to wonder which system is right about which issues. A cosy celebration of one’s own conceptual and theoretical resources is a simple impossibility (Appiah: 1992; 151).

It is true that the African philosopher, because of her training, is aware of other philosophical traditions and because of her awareness will inevitably compare those traditions to her own. If she finds that these traditions make claims that are not consistent with the claims that her own system makes; Appiah suggests that the African philosopher may find celebrating her system difficult or embarrassing. However, this should not be taken to mean a wholesale importation of alien systems such as hermeneutics and professional philosophy just for the sake of it. The hermeneutic philosopher as well as the professional philosopher would be well advised to look carefully within their own systems of professional training with a full understanding that it has its own history and developed from a certain social context different from her own. She must therefore strive to reach a balanced relationship between her system of training and her own specific cultural context to which she seeks to apply her training.

Hallen observes that the most important starting point shared by “most hermeneutical in and of Africa generally is the conviction that European imperialism and colonialism violently and profoundly disrupted Africa’s social, cultural, and political continuity and integrity” (2002:61). He says the benefit of this approach is that hermeneutics is able to interpret the fabric of African societies which sometimes mix both the European and the African ways of life with little success. Hermeneutics is then able to offer what is valuable and what is not through its interpretation and that forms the basis for a progressive African social, political and cultural heritage (*ibid*). Thus Serequeberhan sees the role of philosophy in this way:

It is in and out of this overall historical-political-existential horizon that the discourse of African philosophy carves out and secures a space in which, and out of which, it can articulate itself as a viable and pertinent undertaking. African philosophy is thus a reflective supplement to the concrete efforts under way on the continent...the concerns of African philosophy and the efforts of African philosophers hover around this central point: the historico-political existential crisis of an African saddled with a broken and ambiguous tradition (Serequeberhan: 1991; 9)

Okonda Okela observes that in Germany hermeneutics was born out of a crisis of self-identity. In Africa, he holds:

The interest in hermeneutics also arises out of the reality of crisis: a generalised identity crisis due to the presence of a culture-a foreign and dominating tradition-and the necessity for a self-affirmation in the construction of an authentic culture and tradition. This crisis, on the strictly philosophical plane is the expression of a problematic that oscillates between a naïve ethnophilosophy and an unproductive criticism. To the imperious need for an authentic and African philosophy, hermeneutics seems to give a positive response (Okela: 1991; 201)

African philosophy then, according to this view, must be concerned with the realities that confront Africa which are born from her experience of colonialism. The philosopher must endeavour to deal with the crisis born out of the history of Africa. Keita, probably after reflecting on the African political and economic situation, gives philosophy a new role when he writes: “Thus it is evident that the political and economic realities of contemporary Africa make it incumbent on professional philosophy to confront these realities, thereby assuming a direction different from that of orthodox professional philosophy” (Keita: 1991; 144).

I do not seek to deny the importance of addressing both economic and political issues in Africa. However, to truncate the role of the philosopher on the continent to that of dealing with economic and social issues tends to rather limit the role of the philosopher. I believe that a philosopher should be allowed to pursue all matters that she deems worthy of the attention of a philosopher or those particular issues that excite her intellectual passions. She must not be forced to consider certain issues just because they are believed to be the most pertinent of issues. In other words this trend admits of a weakness that it seeks to compel and restrict philosophers to a single dimensional occupation. That in a way impoverishes philosophy.

Although the thinkers within the hermeneutic trend attempt to attend to what they think are the important issues that the African philosopher ought to deal with based on the experiences of Africa; they would do well by not aping the method and language of this trend as it was coined in the West. In that respect hermeneutics shares the same weakness as “professional philosophy” since philosophers who belong to both trends are simply presenting different kinds of Western philosophy as answers to what constitutes African philosophy.

My project acknowledges that hermeneutics seeks to address some of the important questions on the continent. However, this project is not premised on the same belief as hermeneutics that the most important project for the African philosopher is to interpret

the continent's crisis brought about as a result of colonialism. As a result my project will not be redolent with the language of hermeneutical philosophers on the continent.

1.7 Artistic/ Literary Philosophy

Oruka identifies the sixth trend in African philosophy as the artistic or literary trend. He argues that this refers to the narrative element in Africa and it is parallel to the nationalist project. The literary trend is derived from the works of such people as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (Oruka: 1998; 101). Unfortunately Oruka does not explicate what aspect of their work is philosophical, or what makes their work philosophical. Without that qualification one can only speculate as to what Oruka had in mind when he referred to these literary authors as philosophers. It could be possible that their work demonstrates some qualitative reflection which counts as philosophy.

I am not convinced that the literary trend ought to be accepted in the strict sense as philosophy. Although it may be admitted that some kind of reflection is to be found in the works of these African authors it must be strictly remembered that these authors do have their own primary identity that they are aware of and that everybody else affirms and agrees with. Wole Soyinka, for example, is the first Sub Saharan African to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. We all know that in the contemporary academic world literature primarily belongs to whatever academics in language departments do. The work for example, of Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are works that are studied and indeed are a product of efforts undertaken in what we all know to be English language departments. These are modern day professional story tellers on the continent who tell their stories through the written word. They are authors who are famous for works of fiction and poetry. Soyinka, for example, has written a number of essays such as *The Burden of Memory The Muse of Forgiveness*. However, I am not convinced that this work should count as any kind of philosophical work. It ought to be treated as a literary essay, for that is what it is. An objection I raised earlier on against culture philosophies as non-philosophical was that the producers of such a philosophy are not aware of the fact that they are producing a philosophy. An important requirement for any work to count as philosophical is that the producers of such work must be aware of the fact that they are

producing philosophy or at least are aiming at doing so. I doubt it very much if the three authors cited by Oruka ever thought they were producing philosophical texts in any sense, unless they conceive of philosophy in the weakest of all possible senses.

It appears bizarre that Oruka identifies professional philosophy and hermeneutics as trends of African philosophy and then adds authors of fiction and authors of poems as philosophers as well. It is a kind of identity theft. The true identity of African literary giants is stolen by African philosophers who are eager to see their numbers swell. The irony lies in that both philosophers of the hermeneutic and professional trend are university trained professional philosophers. Both groups know what the different traditions and even origins of philosophy are. They are aware of central debates that have always characterised philosophical discourses. In short, we may say, they know their 'trade'. This 'trade', the 'trade' of Wiredu, Hountondji, Bodunrin, Okere and Serequeberhan is radically different from the 'trade' of Achebe, Soyinka and wa Thiong'o.

The only thing their work has in common is that it is produced by university graduates. African philosophy cannot be African English literary studies and vice-versa. Any attempt to force literature into philosophy is vulgarising philosophy once again. "If we understand "philosophy" as the tradition to which Plato and Aristotle, Descartes and Hume, Kant and Hegel belong, then at least the following concepts are bound to be regarded as central to that canon: beauty, being, causation, evil, God, gods, good, illusion, justice, knowledge, life, meaning, mind, person, reality, reason, right, truth, understanding and wrong" (Appiah: 1998; 110). Appiah's observations on the nature of philosophy can be cited to disqualify the literary trend from being admitted as a trend of African philosophy. He correctly observes that although not all cultures will have the same concepts as listed above, at least they all have a close resemblance. Further, all these canons are dealt with in an argumentative method. If Appiah is correct in his characterisation of philosophy one can notice that the literary trend does not live up to the philosophical tradition by seeking to address the concepts identified by Appiah as

constitutive of philosophy. But even more woeful is the fact that the literary trend is not committed to the argumentative method as philosophy is known to be.

Perhaps it would be very wise to leave the last word to Okere. “The position taken here, however, is that philosophy, strictly speaking, is a special form of the march of reason in its age-old dialectics with reality, distinct from all other intellectual forms that ape or resemble it” (Okere: 1983; ix). I suggest that the so-called literary trend apes the real philosophic tradition.

For my project this trend has no impact at all as I see it as not constituting the core issues of my thesis. My thesis seeks to enunciate on the concept of person in Africa and its link to African socialism. The artistic or literary trend does not shed any further light or help in this matter as it lacks the technical and logical inquiry that is necessary for this task. Hence my thesis does not use this method.

1.8 Conclusion

From the foregoing it may be inferred that the question of whether an African philosophy exists is not a legitimate question. That such a body of activity really exists is evident. The questioning of the existence of an African philosophy must be questioned itself. Lucius Outlaw is correct in querying the questioning. “While these might appear to be benign queries which initiate and frame legitimate intellectual inquiry and discourse, for me they convey the putrid stench of a wretchedness that fertilises the soil from which they grow” (Outlaw: 2003; 137). Outlaw questions why such questions have been asked in the first place instead of seeing African philosophy as a mere truism.

In my opinion and from the foregoing it appears undeniable that the question has been asked as a result of the history that Africa has gone through. Because of the negative effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism and faced with the need to re-affirm their own identity Africans ranging from ethnophilosophers, nationalists to supporters of sagacity—they all sought to affirm the African identity. But the motive of questioning the existence of African philosophy is correctly characterised by Serequeberhan when he notes that:

“The bewildered and incredulous hilarity that one encounters behind the question “African philosophy?!” is, then, at best nothing more than a myopic view and at worst a studied bigotry, a residue of bygone days, the “golden age” of the Enlightenment, when Europe confidently saw itself as the measure of humanity and/or civilisation” (2000; 52). That kind of incredulity should not be tolerated as it is informed by chauvinism and arrogance.

A little caveat has to be sorted out and this relates to the relationship between philosophy and culture. For example, on culture and philosophy, Innocent Onyewuenyi holds that the main task of philosophy, in general, is to establish order among various phenomena founding the world. These phenomena, according to Onyewuenyi, are identical in all cultures and societies. “Different cultures will synthesise and deal with these phenomena differently depending on each culture’s concept of life, namely the interrelationship between objects and persons and between persons and persons themselves” (Onyewuenyi: 1991; 38). He argues that each group of people will establish their own order in relation to their conception of life and there is no culture that can have final say with a universal validity on any matter.

While this may be true, one is well advised to approach this argument with a great deal of caution. One outcome of this line of thought is that culture philosophy in its vulgar sense like ethnophilosophy is elevated to be a philosophy that is unanimously representative of all Africans. A distinction must be made between culture studies and philosophy. One of the most recognised African philosophers Kwame Gyekye, in the preface of his book *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, writes:

The book was not conceived as a philosophical work as such. For this reason, I have avoided the nuances and subtleties of philosophical language, arguments, and controversies. I use the term “culture” in a comprehensive sense, to encompass the entire life of a people: their morals, religious beliefs, social structures, political and educational

systems, forms of music and dance, and all other products of their creative spirit (Gyekye: 1996; xiii).

Thus Gyekye avoids the possible problems that Onywuenuyi and others of his persuasion may face. Though philosophy may be seen as a product of a culture and even discoverable in traditional African societies it is essentially marked by systematic critical thought (Gyekye: 1987; 11). For any philosophic endeavour on the continent to count as African philosophy, in my opinion, it ought to live up to a non-dogmatic search for truth informed by rational, discursive inquiry. At the same time such philosophic endeavour should always remain truthful and faithful to Africa's conditions.

Finally on Oruka's classification of philosophy into six trends is not entirely accurate and does not help things that much. Although it was quite novel and didactic to those who were not familiar with African philosophy the listing of African philosophy into the different trends is misleading. Serequeberhan notes that "Oruka's classificatory schema has pedagogic merit insofar as it presents a concise overview of the field at large. But this merit is offset by the fact that this ordering gives the false impression that these trends are somehow independent of each other" (1991; 16). Kaphagawani, on the other hand argues that the striking thing "about this categorisation of African philosophy into four schemata is that it is amenable to misconception in the sense that this classification might be misconceived as representing four independent types of African philosophy, as opposed to seeing them as four methods used in African philosophy" (1998; 88). I generally concur with these observations but I wish to add that this distinction also closes the possibility of genuine and fruitful dialogues between the so-called different trends. Herein lies the weakness of Oruka's schematisation; it opens the doors of admission to non-philosophical endeavours as philosophical. Three of these trends immediately spring to mind and they are sagacity, ethnophilosophy and the literary trend. As I have sought to argue above these trends fail into making the mark as philosophy.

Thus African philosophers who seek to advance a much more serious and genuine engagement with the philosophy of their continent have to spend time repudiating such

hopelessly non-philosophical trends presented authoritatively by Oruka as authentic trends of African philosophy. Thus the categorisation is not helpful as it sidesteps the real issues that the African philosopher has to face. The rest of this thesis seeks to address a philosophical problem in Africa without necessarily aligning itself to any of the six trends: the concept of person in African political philosophy. I avoid a dogmatic alliance to any of these trends as I engage the conceptual issues at the centre of my investigation. The next chapter will outline the concept of person in African philosophy. The third chapter outlines African socialism as advocated by some of the first leaders of independent Africa which they claimed to be based on the concept of person in African thinking. The fourth chapter is a critique of the concept of person in African philosophy and the fifth chapter is a critique of African socialism. The sixth chapter sums up the project and offers recommendations for further study.

Chapter Two: The Concept of Person in African Philosophy

2. Introduction

In this chapter I will be discussing the main schools of thought on the concept of personhood in African philosophy. The African concept of person is an intricately interwoven notion that involves issues such as destiny, ancestors, life and death, community and individuality. It is an issue that has to be approached with great care and patience. Generally, the nature of the discussion of the concept of person in African philosophy takes two forms. The first form expresses personhood in terms of communal relations. Personhood is presented as something that is to be measured in terms of how the individual conducts herself and how she relates to other people in her personal interactions and the community at large. There are certain obligations that are prescribed to every individual and each individual is expected to meet these obligations. This school of thought holds that personhood is attained in direct proportion to one's satisfactory discharge of her duties and obligations.

The second form of discussion on the nature of person in African thought attempts to find and ground an understanding of person that is not necessarily tied to communal encumbrances. It takes the position that there are certain key characteristics that constitute personhood. These characteristics are taken to be largely independent of communal relations. These characteristics can be generally stated as the soul, the spirit and the body. These characteristics are taken to be constitutive of personhood.

2.1 Definition of Person

The *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* (2002: 1052), defines the term person as 'man, woman or child.' It adds that this term is also used to describe someone's character, for example, whether one is kind generous, mean or cowardly. This brief definition is interesting particularly from the African point of view. The definition implies that a person can only be a man, woman or child. This means that entities that are not biologically human beings or lack the physical attributes that may make them either man, woman or child cannot be considered to be persons in any sense of the word.

Secondly, the definition also notes that the word may be used to denote someone's character disposition, which is crucial in African thought. Some thinkers in the African scheme of thought hold that character is very important in deciding whether an individual can actually make the mark of full personhood.

Appiah gives an interesting account of how different societies conceive the theory of person. He notes that each "society has at least one collection of ideas that I am going to call a theory of the person. A theory of the person is the collection of views about what makes human beings work" (Appiah: 2004; 25).

Appiah says in articulating their theory of person, Westerners do this by talking about minds and the brain. Appiah says for the Westerners, states such as fear, hope, etc are found in the brain. But, he argues, it is not all societies that think that these states could be found in the brain. He gives the example of Homeric epic and the Hebrew bible where "breath was for both these societies the name of the animating principle that explained why people's bodies sometimes acted under the guidance of inner states and sometimes (when dead) behave like other inanimate things" (*ibid*).

Appiah's point here is that when a people use the concept of person they do not merely engage in the discussion in a narrow manner that only restricts itself to person as an isolated entity that can be comprehended on its own. The approaches of different traditions, in discussing persons, represent various attempts to understand what it is that makes 'human beings work'. This proceeds from the uniqueness of human beings and the complicated manner in which they operate including the kinds of states that they sometimes go through such as fear, hope, despair, gratitude etc.

For Appiah, to understand the concept of a person is not something that is attempted in isolation and independent of views on many other issues. He opines that such an attempt will not yield a coherent and well organised view on what constitutes a person. People cannot afford to ignore other matters that they perceive to be of crucial importance to their existence in understanding what a person is.

For people interact, of course, not only with each other, but also with a world, both social and natural, around them; and are also widely believed to interact with the sorts of spirits, gods and the like that we are inclined to call “supernatural.” So, simply asking someone how they explain the things people do or what people need for survival is not generally guaranteed to produce a well-organized body of prepared doctrine (Appiah: 2004; 26).

In this brief discourse, Appiah points out the some of the difficulties that are attendant on the discussion of personhood. It seems there is no *prima facie* reason to believe that there is one word or phrase that can serve as a final definition of what a person is. These accounts will attempt in the first instance to explain what it is that makes human beings function the way they do. Secondly, this explanation will differ from culture to culture or from one people to another as exemplified by Appiah’s comparison of the Homeric epic and the Hebrew bible to current Western notions. And, finally having considered these two factors, there is still a further complication presented by the interactions that people have with each other and their surroundings and spirits, which all call for careful and cautious treatment of the subject of person.

I now proceed to look at the various ways in which the concept of person is articulated in African thinking. At this stage I only seek to present what various authors have written about the concept of person. Since these views show two distinct aspects, I also introduce a distinction between the communitarian view and what I call the metaphysical view of person. That distinction is substantive. I defer the critical analysis of the concept to chapter four.

2.2 The Communitarian View

The communitarian view generally holds that personhood is socially sanctioned through an individual’s participation in her respective community and depends largely on her ability to fulfil her social obligations. She must demonstrate a loyalty to the community

by placing its needs ahead of hers and be prepared to sacrifice her private needs for the sake of the common good.

In some cases, this belief holds that the individual should have a certain moral rectitude that puts her in good standing with the community at large which in turn guarantees the fullness and security of her status as a person. Someone who demonstrates immoral tendencies can only be viewed as either less of a person or non-person.

The communitarian view is quite unambiguous in asserting that the status of personhood is a derivative of communal standing. Those who have a reputable standing (according to communal dictates) are more authentic persons than those who are morally in error.

2.2.1 Tempels

Placide Tempels³'s widely read and debated book *Bantu⁴ Philosophy* is viewed by many as a genesis of written African philosophy. Tempels's thesis on the thinking of the people he called Bantu, was primarily couched in terms of what he called vital force. He thought that the greatest principle that governed all Bantu thought and action was that of force.

In the fourth chapter of his book, he states that his aim in that chapter is to examine the Bantu's "philosophical ideas on the subject of **man**"⁵ (Tempels: 1959; 63). He states that the study of the Bantu psychology that he is about to embark on is not an outcome of the observations by Europeans on the Bantu and how they conduct themselves, but rather it is situated in the minds of the Bantu themselves. He exhorts his readers to see things from the view-point of the Bantus so that they can better understand the psychology of the Bantu themselves.

³ Tempels (OFM), (1906-1977) was a Belgian Catholic Franciscan priest who worked among the Baluba people of then Belgian Congo, present day Democratic Republic of the Congo. He was neither a philosopher nor an African but invested a lot of his time in trying to understand the philosophy and thinking of the Baluba that he subsequently called Bantu philosophy.

⁴ In literature, this term is not taken as offensive, but it is dated and is a relic of Tempels's times.

⁵ Emphasis his.

He says there are no equivalents in Bantu thought and language to Western notions such as “soul, mind, will, sentiment” (*ibid*). He urges his readers⁶ to erase such concepts from their minds because the conclusion that he is going to lead them to is radically different from their own conception of the person.

Tempels takes force to be central to all Bantu’s scheme of things. “Vital force, increase of force, vital influence are the three great notions which we shall find necessary at the base of Bantu psychology. It is on this plan that we wish to pursue this part of our study” (Tempels: 1959; 64). Clearly for Tempels, the chief distinguishing element that makes the Bantu different from Europeans is their unusual reference to force.

For Tempels’ Bantu ‘man’ was a living force. He was supreme force that had dominion over all other created things and he had been called by God to share and participate in his creation through the exercise of this divinely granted force. ‘Man’, in this view, was not a mere living being, he was the ultimate expression of the fullness of life. “The Bantu see in man the living force; the force or the being that possesses life that is true, full and lofty. Man is the supreme force, the most powerful among created beings. He dominates plants, animals and minerals” (*ibid*).

Tempels said that Bantu saw ‘God as supreme, perfect and complete’. They held that God is the one who had caused life and continued to sustain it. Although ‘man’ was not the first cause of life, God had invited him to participate in his scheme. ‘Man’ could add or cause life to those things that were beneath him in the hierarchy of creation. This means that ‘man’s’ actions could just as well increase or diminish the lives of things under his care such as animals or the environment. God had left these to the care of man to use for his own purposes but also to give life.

⁶ At the time of writing this book, his readership was decidedly white, either those who were administrators in the colony or those who were at home, back in Belgium, and the aim of this writing was to enable these whites to develop a better understanding of the Bantu. It is not unreasonable to suspect that Tempels didn’t have in mind, as his audience, his subject of investigation.

Tempels argued that Bantu ontology admitted that one should be able to grow, increasing his force at every turn, becoming greater and stronger, or even more successful. But he recognised that this growth was not an endless process. He noted that Bantu thought also admitted that one's vital force could be completely lost, either gradually or suddenly. In his own words, 'man' can "come to an end in the complete annihilation of his very essence, the paralysis of his vital force, which takes from him the power to be an active force" (Tempels: 1959; 66). This is death. If a person dies, according to Tempels, he loses his vital force and he depends on the living to renew it. The living relatives of the deceased individual have a duty to renew his force through some ceremony that will induct that person into the ancestral world. The ancestral world cannot be entered automatically upon death. It requires that the living keep the force of the recently deceased functional. However it may so happen in certain instances that the relatives of the deceased do not keep the force of the deceased alive. Then these poor souls will lose their force completely in the spiritual world and will not be remembered. "This state of ultimate diminution of being is the fate of some of the dead" (*ibid*).

The South African author, Mike Boon, says the vital life-force identified as the shadow is what constitutes the identity of the individual. This vital force, is one that gives the individual life, in the here and after. It also gives the individual all the powers she needs in interacting with other forces. "A critical base to traditional African Philosophy is known as *seriti* (Sotho) *isithunzi* (Nguni). The origin of *seriti* in its form *moriti*, means shade or shadow, but it is seen as the vital life-force identifying an individual. It is part of all life, but it is also personal, intimately affected by and affecting other forces" (Boon: 1996; 35).

Thus Boon is in agreement with Tempels on the concept of vital-force being the essence of life in an individual in African thought. Without this force, one may not be viewed as a full person and won't be able to interact with other forces. On the subject of this shadow,

Boon quotes the authority on African Traditional matters in South Africa, Credo Mutwa⁷, who says:

Idlozi (the shade) and isithunzi/seriti are interchangeable. The seriti/isithunzi is sometimes called an aura. We Africans believe the isithunzi, which after death becomes an idlozi, is shaped by the appearance and the experiences of the person of the physical being. This isithunzi, the little soul, is not immortal. If you neglect it, it will slowly fade away (ibid).

Thus Mutwa is in agreement with Tempels on the importance of the *isithunzi*, or shadow. This *isithunzi*, which literally means shadow in the Zulu language, as Boon correctly points out, is the life force of the individual when he/she is alive. But most importantly, it transcends death as both Mutwa and Tempels opine. But the continued survival of this force depends on the care that it receives from the living. If not taken care of then it will disappear and die the ultimate death.

John S. Mbiti argues that although a real barrier exists between the dead and the living, the recently departed are kept alive in the memories and conversations of their living relatives. They are remembered by name and they are talked about all the time. Further, he argues, they are taken to make occasional returns to their families to have meals with them and listen to their worries. Although the recently departed have not become full ancestors they are able to intercede on behalf of their living relatives with other higher spirits. They are now a go between connecting the living and the long departed.

Mbiti argues that to show that the recently departed are still with us, careful attention is paid to the rituals that are observed when disposing of their bodies. Libations, offerings and taking care of the grave are very important to ensure that the soul of the recently departed does not become offended and seek revenge. The living treat the dead with

⁷ Credo Mutwa is a South African traditional healer, Zulu traditional authority, oral historian who has authored at least four books. He was born in KwaZulu-Natal in 1921.

respect because they believe that they have gone into another realm, a more powerful realm, hence they seek their favourable intervention.

However a distinction must be made between the recently departed and the long departed. The long departed have become ancestors, their memory is not retained on an individual basis but collectively. Those who are remembered individually are those who have just recently died. So, those who died many generations ago, while still alive as ancestors, are not remembered by name and libations are given to them collectively as opposed to the recently departed. Mbiti describes those who have been dead for more than five generations as the “living dead”. He says “they are in a state of personal immortality, and their process of dying is not yet complete” (Mbiti: 1995; 107).

Thus two distinctive things can be said about the nature of persons within the communitarian school of thought. The first is that personhood is accompanied by some vital force that comes from the creator. That vital force gives the person the capacity to be a person and to interact with others as well as more powerful forces that may have an influence on his/her life. Secondly, death does not necessarily mark the end of that force, or more boldly, physical death does not mark the termination of the existence of that individual. If the right rituals are followed the departed person continues to live as *seriti/isithunzi*, in Mutwa’s words.

Tempels goes further in explaining what this concept of person means in real terms. He is of the view that ‘man’ is more than a mere assemblage of powerful forces within and without that may drive his life in one way as opposed to another. Tempels argues that the vital force that is found in man, as an individual, comes more to life, fruition or realisation when that individual engages in relations with his surrounding environment. He relates to the supernatural world, to his fellow human beings, and to inanimate things. Tempels says; “The living ‘muntu’ is in a relation of being to being with God, with his clan brethren, with his family and with his descendants. He is in a similar ontological relationship with his patrimony, his land, with all that it contains or produces, with all that grows or lives on it” (Tempels: 1959; 66).

So, according to Tempels, the individual in African thought is one who always finds himself/herself standing in relation to someone or something. It is not possible for this individual to be indifferent to what surrounds her simply because relationships arouse passion and deep feeling. So the individual relates to a high being such as God, the fellow humans and then finds himself/herself equally obliged to relate to his/her surrounding environment like her fields and livestock.

But these relations are not just any kind of relation that the individual's fancy may have him/her do. These relationships are deeply rooted in observing communal dictates that are normally observed as sacrosanct rules that must not be violated. All individuals abide by these rules in relating to each other and everything that they have to relate with. They will follow what the community says about how they should relate depending on who they are to each other. But at the heart of all these relations is the observance of moral rules and indeed achievement of moral worth. Importance in stature arises as a result of the ability to abide by these moral dictates. Those who are seen as great in stature, in their respective communities, would no doubt have succeeded in exhibiting a virtuous ability to relate to others morally and in accord with social dictates. Thus Tempels says:

It is always to accord with this conception of forces that the Baluba speak of "muntu mutupu" to indicate a man of middling importance devoid of real force; while the "muntu mukulumpe" indicates the powerful man who has his part to take in the community. The word "muntu" inherently includes an idea of excellence or plenitude. And thus the Baluba will speak of "ke muntu po", "this is not a muntu", of a man who behaves unworthily. They will use the phrase of a newly-born who has been begotten outside the normal ontological, moral and juridical conditions of clan life (Tempels: 1959; 67).

These terms are used to describe the status and achievements of the individual in the community. One who commands less importance can not be described in the same way

as, for example, the chief. Thus it is clear that categorisation according to how one handled herself in her relationships did exist in certain traditional African communities. These differences in categorisation had nothing to do with wealth or class but everything to do with how one interacted with other people and things entrusted to her.

Tempels goes further to argue that Bantu ontology is very different from European ontology. He claims that the concept of individuated things existing apart of each other does not exist in African thought. Tempels says that, for the Africans, what they have in their communities is more than a benign social relationship. It is so close to them that it actually constitutes their identity.

The Bantu cannot be a lone being. It is not a good enough synonym to say that he is a social being. No; he feels and knows himself to be a vital force, at this very time to be in intimate and personal relationship with other forces acting above him and below him in the hierarchy of forces. He knows himself to be a vital force, even now influencing some forces and being influenced by others. The human being, apart from the ontological hierarchy and the interaction of forces has no existence in the conceptions of the Bantu (*ibid*).

Whatever one may take this force to be, what Tempels is driving at is that this force alone is not adequate to grant existence to the individual. The extra requirement that is needed is that the individual must be able to interact with other forces in the hierarchy of forces. Once that interaction is underway then, ontologically, the individual is thought of as a real person that exists. Existence is affirmed by the ability to interact, the ability to turn vital force into meaningful relationships that are respectful of other forces and that create life in lower forces.

This view is echoed by N.K Dzobo who argues that the whole of life in Africa is geared towards creativity. He says that 'man's' ultimate task is to multiply and increase, but this

power is not merely restricted to the ability to create children. It must extend to relations in community and good social standing, he says.

The creative process is not limited to bringing forth children, but it is seen as embracing the whole of man's life and his relationships. The individual therefore is to grow in the development of a creative personality and to develop the capacity to maintain creative relationships. He is to see his individual life and that of his society as fields that are sown with life's experiences and which should yield fruit (Dzobo: 1992; 131).

Dzobo's point is that relations and the goodness they produce are very important in enhancing the creative force in society. Although this creative force is found in each and every individual it must be communally shared so that the whole of society can benefit from it. This sentiment echoes Tempels's views on how vital force is shared in relationships by individuals. It is a requirement of African life and of being in Africa. Dzobo goes a step further and describes under what conditions one is considered to be a person in African thought. Like Tempels he points to some kind of achievement that comes through social relationships.

The person who has achieved a creative personality and productive life and is able to maintain a productive relationship with others is said to "have become a person." (*Ezu ame-Ewe; Oye onipa pa.-Akan*). The persons who are considered models of creative life are the chief, the elders and the ancestors. Such a life is counted as the greatest value in the indigenous culture (*ibid*).

Here, Dzobo agrees with Tempels on a very important point which is that persons of importance in the community represent a more full and successful version of personhood than those who are not that important. For example, above, Tempels argues that there is a difference between a person of little importance and a person of great importance who has a part to play in the community. Those with a great role to play are not only

hierarchically more important than deviants but are also seen as having attained the full status of personhood by virtue of their good standing in community.

But Dzobo does not end there; his final statement is to insist on the importance of the community in the individual's life. He actually endorses the view that the community is more important than the individual, that it takes precedence over the individual. This seems to stem from his observation that the individual comes out of a system that has been prior to her and exists to support the development and well being of that very individual. Just like Tempels, Dzobo does not see what can become of the individual without the community. He sees the individual as essentially a communal being, one who needs the community not merely for physical sustenance but also for becoming who she is. Once again the claim being made here is not a benign reference to the sociality of the self. Rather it is a strong ontological reference to the all-pervasive presence of the community in the defining make-up of the individual.

The individual's being emerges from a prior social whole which is truly other; it comes into being for the sake of him and exists for his development and growth. Hence, an individual who is cut off from the communal organism is nothing. By living creatively the individual is also contributing to the life and quality of his community and so can say 'we are, therefore I am, and since I am therefore we are' (Dzobo: 1992; 132).

The argument here, at least ideally, is that the individual's personal identity is inseparable from her community's own aspirations and goals. The individual is fused to the community such that she cannot separate her own goals from the broad aspirations of her community. The community in essence is her fellow clansmen and women who share the same kind of world outlook with her. The 'I' and the 'We' cannot exist independent of each other, they only make sense if used in reference to each other. Tempels's vital force and Dzobo's creativity, though individually owned are commanded to be brought into the community. A very clear claim made by these two thinkers is that apart from/out of the community and the relations exercised therein, the individual is nothing.

Tempels points that another important criterion in defining the individual in the African context is the name that is given to the newly born child. He says that the name is not merely given to the child for the sake of naming a baby, like John or Ben. The name has a lot of meaning. It tells the story of the parents, the clan, the family or the child itself that has been born. Sometimes the newly born child can be seen as a deceased relative who has returned to life. It is normal that a parent names his son after his deceased father or any other deceased relative. "The name expresses the individual character of the being. The name is not a simple external courtesy, it is the very reality of the individual." (Tempels: 1959; 70).

Tempels argues that the name indicates who the child is and if there was an outstanding or unique story behind the child's birth or if some event had happened to its family just before it was born that would be reflected in the name that she gets. Tempels identifies three sources of names amongst the Baluba. He says there is a name that is normally identified as the inner name; this name has lots of meaning and it is normally given at birth. Then there is another name that is given at what he calls 'an occasion of force such as initiation, investiture' etc. For example if someone was training to be a traditional healer, at her graduation she might assume a new name. Then, finally and least important, is a name that one gives to herself. Tempels says this was the case, especially, with black servants who worked for white people. Their masters being unable to pronounce their native names properly, these locals would then decide to give themselves a Western/Christian name or corrupted version of it.

These names showed that 'man' could never just appear alone and exist on his own. The names that were given to individuals showed the connectedness of the tribe, clan, and family or tried, at times, to show the ties between the living and the dead. Hence every African name has a meaning.

Dzobo echoes Tempels's views by arguing that the "African view of man is derived from the African view of reality which is found in the indigenous religion, creation myths,

personal names, symbols and proverbs” (Dzobo: 1992; 128). This shows that the Africans had a holistic approach to life. Everything that they did affected everything else in their society and their life cycles. As Dzobo argues the view of ‘man’, according to this school of thought is not derived from one single characteristic but involves almost all facets of the African’s life.

Peter J. Paris argues that names do not only express the family history and the story of the child’s birth. He argues that they actually determine someone’s future and shape that person’s destiny. Just by bringing one to understand the name, Paris says, one will know so much about that individual. “All African names are meaningful. They tell the story of the child’s birth and destiny. Much can be known about a person by understanding his or her name. While revealing the family’s understanding of the person’s value, the name eventually shapes the person’s own self-understanding” (Paris: 1995; 104).

Finally Tempels, on the subject of person, concludes by saying that another criterion of the individual, ‘of the concrete vital force is a man’s visible appearance.’ He says that the level of force in an individual can be expressed in different ways. “His vital force can be itself in a particular way in certain aspects or modes of external appearance of the man, which we may call moments or knots of high vital tension.” (Tempels: 1959; 74).

For Tempels, these expressions may come in the form of the speech or eye movement or any bodily expression that the individual may use. This would show his state of force, whether it’s very high, diminished or somehow exhausted. Tempels also notes that this vital force can exert itself on other individuals in a negative way. That for example, a person who curses another, and the cursed gets sick may as well be held responsible for that illness.

In conclusion, Tempels’s thesis is expressed in terms of vital force that is lived and shared out in creation of life through communal relations. Outside these communal relations, according to Tempels, ‘man’ cannot be.

2.2.2 Mbiti

Didier N. Kaphagawani has accused Mbiti of following, wrongly, in the footsteps of Tempels, trying to find an authentically African conception of the person that was to be radically different from the Western conception of personhood.

Kaphagawani has a very uncharitable description of Mbiti dismissing him as Tempels's enthusiastic disciple. Kaphagawani writes:

As is well known Mbiti excelled as one of Tempels's chief disciples. Like Tempels, Mbiti too was greatly driven by the zeal to reveal another way in which he believed African modes of thought to be characteristically distinct from Western counterparts (Kaphagawani: 2000; 72).

Mbiti's widely read book, 'African Religions and Philosophies', is taken as the authority to be consulted on issues pertaining to African communitarianism and understanding the concept of personhood. His tenth chapter, entitled 'Ethnic Groups, Kinship and the Individual', is the most widely quoted as representative of what that brand of African communitarianism essentially is. Mbiti starts this chapter with a claim that each and every different tribal group or people in Africa have a common ancestor and share a common language as well as common rituals. Where a tribal group shares the same history it, at least mythologically, will trace its ancestry to the first man created by god, or they will trace their ancestry to the first leaders of their tribe who established their group.

Mbiti also asserts that every tribal group in Africa has got its own political and social system. Each tribe will, at least, have its own chiefs and councillors but their importance, authority or influence will vary from tribe to tribe. Apart from the political system, equally important is that each tribe has got its own distinct religious system and membership of that tribe is not open to outsiders. This means that no-one can be converted from one tribe to another. One has to remain in the tribe that she was born in

and membership of a tribe is by birth only. On the permanence and fixed nature of tribal membership, Mbiti says:

These then are the main features of an African “tribe,” people, society or nation. A person has to be born a member of it, and he cannot change tribal membership. On rare occasions he can be adopted ritually into another tribal group, but this is seldom done and applies to both Africans and non-Africans. Tribal identity is still a powerful force even in modern African statehood, although that feeling of tribal identity varies like temperature, from time to time, depending on prevailing circumstances (Mbiti: 1970; 135).

Tribal identity, Mbiti argues, formed one of the strongest forms of identity among the tribal members. A tribe would not allow that identity to be diluted by admitting outsiders into their ranks. One way in which a person could be inducted into a new tribe was normally through marriage⁸; otherwise it was a very rare occurrence. Mbiti argues that kinship was made very strong through blood and betrothal. What this means is that kin relations were deemed genuine and strong if they could be grounded either in marriage or in blood relationships such as parent and children, brothers and sisters, cousins, uncles, grandparents etc.

This kinship system in turn, Mbiti says, governed the life of all the members of the tribe. The whole tribe was tied to this kinship system. Everyone knew where they stood in relation to everyone else.

The kinship system is like a vast network stretching laterally (horizontally) in every direction, to embrace everybody in any given local group. This means that each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother,

⁸ If a society was matrilineal, the children born by the couple would be said to have the blood of their mother and would belong to their mother's tribe, but if a society was patrilineal the children would belong to the father's tribe.

grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else to everybody else (Mbiti:1970; 136).

Simply, this means that everybody is related to everybody in that tribal group. No-one is a stranger and no-one is treated as such. To make his point more vivid, Mbiti claims that even when strangers meet, the first thing that they do is that they sort out how they may be related to each other and then conduct themselves as if they were really related in that manner.

Mbiti goes on to say that the kinship system is not merely restricted to the relations of the people who are the living but it also extends to include those who have passed on in life and those who are yet to be born. The living have a duty, as seen above towards the dead, to keep their 'isithunzi/little soul' alive and offer libations for it.

Appiah makes the same point when he observes that: "For, as we shall see, many ritual acts of a religious nature have components that appear to be modelled on other social acts and the conception of social relations among people informs the notions of relations with other sorts of beings" (Appiah: 2004; 26). Appiah's point is that all aspects of life are inseparably intertwined. Life is a long continuum that starts before birth, is lived and even continued after death. So, human beings who are alive now have to know that they do not limit their relations amongst themselves only but that those relationships extend beyond the life they know to interact with other beings.

Mbiti, then, moves to discuss the idea of a family in Africa. He suggests that the idea of a family in Africa is much wider than the one that is to be found in Europe. Not only does the family include what he calls the 'living dead' and the unborn, it is much bigger than the Western notion of limiting the term family to parents and children. It will definitely include other extended family members such as uncles, cousins, aunts, grandparents, etc. Mbiti says parents and children only constituted what he calls the household.

Having described the kind of life and relations found in the various facets of traditional African society, Mbiti then proposes to establish what the place of the individual could be in this whole system. It would do Mbiti better justice if I were to quote him at length to ensure that we don't miss the essence of what he is saying:

We have so far spoken about the life and existence of the community. What then is the individual and where is his place in the community? In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the entire society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person, during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another. The final stage is reached when he dies and even then he is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the dead and the living (Mbiti: 1970; 141).

Thus Mbiti thinks the individual's links to the community are of such an enduring nature that they can't be separated from her own existence. The community also has a role in ensuring that the individual is indeed transformed into a real person. For Mbiti, biological birth alone is not enough. There has to be some induction into all the stages that he calls 'corporate existence', and an individual cannot do that induction on her own, she requires the assistance of her fellow human beings in her community to attain that existence. "It is a deeply religious transaction. Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself and towards other people" (*ibid*). As Appiah suggested above, these religious ceremonies must be understood as encompassing the whole of life in traditional Africa including the existence and essence of the human being or the human person.

The emphasis that Mbiti frequently points out is that the individual is never alone. She is a communal being who finds herself in a community of people who share with her agonies and joys. Mbiti says when the individual suffers she will not be alone, and when she marries her kinsmen are there to celebrate with her, even the children that she bears are never just hers alone but belong to the whole community. The place of the individual in the community is a strong membership of that community which is constitutive of her identity and governs the way she leads her life. One cannot think of the individual without thinking of the community. The symbiotic relationship that exists between the individual and the community is inseparable and neither can do without the other. It appears as if it would actually become incoherent to speak of either without speaking of the other as this quote from Mbiti will show:

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

I will not evaluate Mbiti and his detractors' positions at this stage. The preliminary observations I have made about his arguments will be kept in abeyance until the fourth chapter where I will critique and evaluate them.

For now it suffices to summarise Mbiti's thesis as one that positions the individual as an essentially communal being who owes his existence, allegiance and whole being to the community. She is one with the community and without the community she cannot be. Her community constitutes who she is in the strong sense of this word.

2.2.3 Menkiti

In his article 'Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,' Ifeanyi Menkiti seeks to articulate what he views as a genuinely African position on the concept of personhood. Menkiti starts by citing what he sees as differences that exist between the

Western and the African concept of personhood. He claims that whereas most Western views

abstract this or that feature of the lone individual and then proceed to make it the defining or essential characteristic which entities aspiring to the description “man” must have, the African view of man denies that person can be defined by focussing on this or that physical or psychological characteristic of the lone individual. Rather man is defined by the enviroing community (Menkiti: 1984; 171).

For Menkiti the concept of personhood cannot be reduced to one slogan like the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*⁹. For Menkiti the African way of understanding what constitutes personhood does not attempt to find a certain character or certain isolated characteristics in all individuals or ideal individuals and then hold it up for all entities that want to be persons to emulate. Rather, Menkiti proposes that this is a matter that is best decided by the community since “the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories, whatever these maybe” (*ibid*).

Godwin Sogolo, like Mbiti, sets out to outline the African difference when he argues that the African conception of ‘man’ “refers to a set of beliefs or picture of man in the form of empirical generalisations” (1993; 190). Sogolo is firmly against any formulation of personhood that has an appeal to universal understanding. He says such a view is devoid of experience but only heavily laden with theory. I quote him at length;

There may be some intellectual satisfaction in formulating a general theory or theories of human nature but it appears that the manifestation by a community of any theoretically implied human characteristics stands more significant. The point of significance here does not lie in some abstract understanding of what man is capable of becoming but on the actualisation of his potentials and capabilities. In discussing the African

⁹ I think, therefore I am.

conception of man and society, the main objective is to provide a picture of man and society held by African communities and to establish how human conduct, institutions and thought patterns are governed by this conception (*ibid*).

Sogolo's emphasis on seeing to the actualisation of 'man' ultimately has a communitarian ring to it in that it seeks to find what kind of relations the individual has in her community and what effect those relations have on her respective community. Sogolo wants to establish how the individual relates to other people in her community and her specific role in that community. The questions that he would seek answers to would be questions around whether the individual is relating with others in a manner that enhances communal harmony and unity or in a manner that is disruptive. If it is the latter then that individual would, undoubtedly, be deemed to be a non-person. Both Menkiti and Sogolo seek to establish an understanding of the self that is based on the true African communal experiences.

Menkiti contends that the individual comes to be aware of herself through the community. She comes to be whatever she is because of the community. Menkiti comments that the individual realises "the community as a stubborn perduring fact of the psychophysical world that the individual also comes to know himself as a durable, more or less permanent, fact of this world (1984; 172).

Menkiti argues that the individual can only become 'man' because of the existence of the community and the community, in his view, must take epistemic and ontological precedence over the individual. Menkiti makes it quite clear that in Africa it is the community that defines and gives the status of personhood to individuals. In his own words; "in the African view it is the community which defines the person, and not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory" (*ibid*).

Menkiti's position is rather different from the other two positions stated above. The other two positions seem to recognise the importance of the individual in her community. She

is not just a passive recipient or obedient follower to the anonymous dictates of her community. Mbiti sees the individual 'I' as part of a greater 'We,' where one cannot do without the other. The individual and the community in Mbiti's terms are one, they cannot be separated and one cannot thrive without the other.

Tempels's position recognises each individual's unique force and the effect it can have on creation that is less than human on the hierarchy of creation. His position also gives sufficient room to an interaction of different forces by different people in the community in the hope that they will create something of beauty as they have been invited by the great creator God to participate in his creation. Tempels recognises that although the community is very important, the individual still has some role to play which can be uniquely his/hers in his/her respective community. For example a person of great vital force, to use Tempels's words, can and is able to make a change in his/her community in a time of turmoil.

Menkiti's claim on the nature of personhood in Africa is much stronger than Tempels and Mbiti's claims. He sees the community not only constitutive of the person but as taking precedence over the individual. He claims that whatever rights an individual claims to have-those rights come second to the reality of the community.

The second point that Menkiti makes as regards the African conception person is probably more controversial, and we will later see Gyekye taking him to task on it. Menkiti urges that a proper understanding of person or more precisely, the attainment of such a status is based on the belief that the concept of muntu in Africa "includes an idea of excellence, of plenitude of force at maturation" (*ibid*).

Menkiti argues that those who do not have the above mentioned attributes could just as well be referred to as non-persons. He uses the phrase 'ke muntu po', which literally means-'this is not a man' to refer to those who show a lack of that plenitude of force, as suggested by Tempels. Menkiti argues that it is not enough to understand 'man' as a biological organism with certain psychological traits. Instead, he proposes that for

personhood to be attained, an individual has to go “through a long process of social and ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive of man” (*ibid*).

Menkiti argues that in this whole process the community plays the role of prescribing norms to the individual. The individual then imbibes and retains these norms as definitive of him/her. Individuals may not question the prescriptions they get from their societies. They are simple and unquestioning recipients whose sole aim is to live out these norms to the best of their abilities so that they can become fully recognised persons in their respective communities. Menkiti states that the Western conception of personhood is minimal while the African conception is maximal:

As far as African societies are concerned, personhood is something at which individuals could fail, at which they could be incompetent or ineffective, better or worse. Hence the African emphasized the rituals of incorporation and the overarching necessity of learning the social rules by which the community lives, so that what was initially biologically given can come to attain social self-hood, i.e, become a person with all the inbuilt excellencies implied by the term (1984; 173).

Clearly, this maximal definition in Africa, which Menkiti alludes to, is not hesitant to treat certain human beings as non-persons if they fail to adhere to certain social rules that govern the society. Whereas the Western conception of personhood is fixed and indifferent to how a particular individual behaves or what her moral worth could be, the African view takes such issues seriously that it actually affects one’s status as a person.

Menkiti argues that in Africa personhood is not automatically granted at birth but is acquired as one gets along in society. And this getting along in society takes quite a lot of time, usually being attained by people who are of advanced age. These people, who are much older, according to Menkiti, have had the time to learn what it means to be a person through accumulation of knowledge of social values and norms that govern their

particular societies. By living up to, and adhering to these norms, they become successful in living up to the standard of personhood. Young people and children are lesser persons because they still have to learn all the moral requirements of their society and they still have to come to know how to behave as their elders do. So, for Menkiti, personhood is something that is gradually acquired as one gets older and more accustomed to the ways of her respective community. If one defies or fails to fully comprehend the requirements of her community then she cannot become a person in the maximal sense of the term.

Menkiti argues that for one to be considered a full person, that individual has to exhibit moral worth that is beyond question or rebuke. He claims that the English language supports this notion of personhood as a status that is gradually acquired, by noting that it is acceptable, grammatically, in English, to refer to a baby as an 'it' while the same reference cannot be used for an adult. The transition from an 'it,' as a baby to a him/her, as an adult depends largely on the moral conduct of the individual.

The various societies found in traditional Africa routinely accept this fact that personhood is the sort of thing which has to be attained, and is attained in direct proportion as one participates in communal life through the discharge of the various obligations defined by one's stations. It is the carrying out of these obligations that transforms one from the it-status of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the person-status of later years, marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense—an ethical maturity without which personhood is conceived as eluding one (Menkiti: 1984; 176).

An immoral and evil person is not a person at all, while a virtuous or generous person is a full person. As we saw above, a chief is a person who has great force and retains great importance in society. His status is representative of the ideal person and his contribution to society is one that is based on goodwill. Evil and self centred or immoral people contribute nothing to society hence Menkiti thinks they are not persons. Paris echoes Menkiti's view as his own words indicate:

The symbiotic functions of various societal practices contributed immensely to the ongoing task of moral formation, which was not complete until the end of the person's life. Hopefully, by the time the person became an elder he or she would have attained wisdom, viewed as the accumulated communal knowledge underlying all of life's experiences. This connoted the capacity to guide and judge others. In fact, old age implied not only the attainment of such wisdom but also the temporal proximity of elders to ancestorhood. These factors were the basis for the African reverence of elders whose words of blessing or curse were extremely powerful (Paris: 1995; 109).

The reasons why the elders were respected were twofold. In the first it was accepted that they were wise by virtue of having lived a long life which meant that they had become more of moral beings. It was also thought that the elders knew quite a lot of things and their word was to be treasured. Secondly, it was believed that because of their advanced age they were close to the ancestors since they didn't have that long to live. They were also tasked with the duties of communicating with the ancestors. But above all of this they were thought to be on the verge of becoming ancestors themselves.

In conclusion, Menkiti sees the community as taking precedence over the individual. Whatever rights the individual may have they only come second to the obligations that she owes her respective community. Secondly, Menkiti argues that full personhood is attained when one exhibits moral worth in her adult life.

2.2.4 Gyekye

Kwame Gyekye has argued against the above stated positions¹⁰. He generally brands them collectively as radical communitarianism/communalism. He is of the view that this concept of personhood is philosophically indefensible. He claims that his own moderate

¹⁰ Gyekye has developed his objections over the years but for his most comprehensive articulation of his objections refer to the second chapter of his *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*.

communitarianism triumphs over radical communitarianism. He mostly expresses his objection to radical communalism by evaluating Menkiti's position and attempting to show its philosophical incoherence. Gyekye accuses Mbiti and Menkiti of exaggerating the importance of community in the understanding of personhood in Africa.

Gyekye also takes issue with Menkiti's assertion that full personhood is attained when one is older and has been a member of the society for a long time. Gyekye claims that the terms 'more of a person' and 'full personhood' are incoherent and bizarre. Gyekye notes that Menkiti does not tell us what those excellencies are which enable the old to be more of persons than the young.

But Gyekye pushes the issue further. He argues that if it is correct that personhood comes with age and the attainment of moral rectitude, it then raises a special difficulty that Menkiti could just as well fail to solve.

The difficulty is in considering elderly people as necessarily moral, or as necessarily having the ability or disposition to practice moral virtues satisfactorily. For, surely there are many elderly people who are known to be wicked, ungenerous, unsympathetic: whose lives in short, generally do not reflect any moral maturity or excellence. In terms of a moral conception of personhood, such elderly people may not qualify as persons. (Gyekye: 1997; 49).

Gyekye accuses Menkiti of proposing an account that is fraught with 'confusions, unclarities, and incoherences.' In other words, according to Gyekye, Menkiti's concept of person is confused and philosophically indefensible. However, Gyekye concedes that Menkiti's account, based on moral conception, is interesting to the communitarian view of person. He turns his attention to the understanding of person that exists among the Akan. Gyekye notes that the Akan understanding of person, which is communalistic, would classify someone who chooses to lead an isolated lifestyle as a non-person. An individual who exhibits morally reprehensible conduct is also branded as a non-person.

He says for the communitarians personhood is earned in the moral arena and not just handed over to the individual at birth. Gyekye argues that the moral conception of personhood is given concrete expression by the Akans, especially when it comes to burying their dead. The grief shown in mourning the departed individual is dependent on her moral conduct. If a person conducted herself in a manner that was morally worthy, then she is properly mourned regardless of her class or wealth.

Gyekye argues that what he terms radical communitarianism, as supported by Mbiti and Menkiti, does not recognise individual freedom. He claims that although an individual is a social being he is also other things. The other things that he has in mind concern attributes such as virtue, the ability to make individual choice and rationality. He argues that if these attributes play any meaningful role in the individual's life like setting goals and making important decisions, then it cannot be said that an individual is completely defined by the social structures that she finds herself in. He concedes that although many of our goals are set by the communities we live in, it is still possible for individuals to make their own choices and decide on what goals to pursue and what to give up.

In the light of the autonomous (or near-autonomous) character of its activities, the communitarian self cannot be held as cramped or shackled self, responding robotically to the ways and demands of the communal structure. That structure is never to be conceived as reducing a person to intellectual or rational inactivity, servility, and docility. Even though the communitarian self is not detached from its communal features and the individual is fully embedded or implicated in the life of her community, the self nevertheless, by virtue of, or by exploiting, what I have referred to as its "mental feature" can from time to time take distanced view of its communal values and practices and reassess or revise them (Gyekye: 1997; 55-6).

Richard H. Bell holds a similar position arguing that although the community is seen as prior to the individual, that view does not absolve the individual of her responsibility and it does not deny the individual her own identity.

To uphold the value of the priority of community does not necessarily deny an individual of her own identity, her potential creative role in a community, nor does it absolve her of personal responsibility for her actions toward the whole community. It is also clear that that as multicultural factors increase, new values are placed on older ones – the African concept of community must be revalued in light of present realities (Bell: 2002; 64).

Bell actually suggests that the traditional view of community is becoming diluted with the increase of multicultural factors that are ever so present in modern and urban Africa. However, he concedes that there is still a place for community in understanding the individual in Africa. His point, like Gyekye, is that this understanding must not be at the cost of individual recognition and responsibility.

Gyekye argues for a concept of person that is different from Mbiti and Menkiti's. Drawing on his knowledge of the Akan language and traditions, Gyekye argues that there are certain proverbs¹¹ that exist in his language which clearly show that it is accurate to conceive the individual as an entity that exists on his own and who is responsible for what happens to him in his own life. The individual is not completely at the mercy of communal dictates but does have responsibility for her own fate and decisions. He terms his version moderate communitarianism and argues that it is the defensible version that should be preferred over Mbiti and Menkiti's radical versions.

Gyekye is echoed by Chukwudum B. Okolo who in his effort to understand the self found that the traditional African position tended to emphasise the communitarian aspect at the expense of the distinctness of the individual. He argues that while the self is social it is

¹¹ See on the next page where I quote those proverbs.

important to also note that it is an entity that exists apart of its fellow community members and claims that this fact is recognised in African philosophy:

The status of the self as an individual entity, then, is recognised in African philosophy, proof that self has somehow a double status-one as a being-in-relation-to-others, the other as unique and unduplicatable. One of the clearest ways the African establishes this fact of uniqueness, identity and discreteness is through names. African names are just not mere labels of distinction, to differentiate, for instance 'James' from John' (Okolo: 2003; 215).

Thus Okolo believes that there is a real distinctness that exists between individuals and that distinctness is expressed through the names that African people receive. Here he is referring to African names that may have a special meaning for each individual or her family or may be explanatory to the circumstances of her birth, as we saw above. Below are some translations of the proverbs quoted by Gyekye from his Akan language which, he claims, show the individuality of each member of the African community:

1. The clan is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand *individually* when closely approached.
2. Life is as you make it yourself.
3. It is by *individual* effort that we can struggle for our heads.
4. Life is war (Gyekye: 1997; 40).

Gyekye argues that his views as supported by these proverbs “represent a clear attempt to come to terms with the natural sociality as well as the individuality of the human person” (Gyekye: 1997; 41). Interestingly, Gyekye claims that Senghor was a supporter of moderate communitarianism. This issue will be deferred until the third chapter where political views will be discussed.

However, Okolo, like Gyekye, concedes that in the African mode community is inescapable and understanding of the self is always couched in the language that constantly refers to the community:

The cognisance of an individual, unique self notwithstanding, the truth remains that violence is done to its status as an individual, as an independent self consciousness. Self remains dominantly opaque, seen from the 'outside' so to speak, and in relationships with others. Consequently 'social' is the main category for understanding self, as indeed for all reality in African philosophy. It is the only authentic mode for the African to answer the all-important question in African philosophy, 'What or who is an African?' (Okolo: 2003; 215).

In conclusion Gyekye admits the importance of community in the individual's life and conception in African thought. He however, thinks that Mbiti and Menkiti overstate the importance of the community in arriving at the concept of self.

2.3 African Metaphysical Conception of Person

This view generally differs from the communitarian view in that it seeks to understand the person as an independent entity that has certain characteristics that distinguish it from other living things. This view largely ignores matters such as social relations, community rights and obligations and moral achievement.

2.3.1 Wiredu and Gyekye

The eminent Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, depicts the Akan conception of the self as "traditionally [believing] that a man is made up of *nipadua* (body), *okra* (a life giving entity), and *sunsum* (that which gives a person's personality its force)" (1995; 132).

These three attributes are the basic and most essential elements that are required for one to qualify as a person. Wiredu also adds that another important element which is

frequently mentioned is the *mogya*, which is the blood which is derived from one's mother¹² and is basis for clan identity. He also adds that there is something that is called *ntoro*, which is inherited from one's father and becomes basis for membership into that clan.

Wiredu cautions against attempts to draw similarities between these concepts and Western ones. He says the problem particularly arises when one considers the *okra* which is often translated as soul. He says in the West the soul is seen as an immaterial entity that occupies the body. This view is not necessarily true in the Akan conception. Wiredu argues that the Akans believe the soul to be a quasi-physical entity which is not necessarily visible to the naked eye but "in some ways it seems to be credited with para-physical properties" (1995; 132). He says this is particularly evidenced by some highly gifted medicine men that sometimes are able to enter into communication with the *okra*. Further, he claims that those medicine men with highly developed eyes are able to see the *okra*. He also holds that a certain *okra* may be said to have an allergy to certain foods while other *akra*¹³ may not have that kind of allergy to the same food.

He points to the practice that if the *okra* is offended offerings are made to it to pacify it. Wiredu says these offerings are not merely symbolical since the *okra* is conceived as a person's double, as an individual's double which exists separate from him. That it is distinct from the individual is evidenced by the fact that the Akan at times hold that the *okra* has failed to guide its individual.

It is of course, a nice problem, which we cannot stop here to ponder, how the *okra* can be both the 'principle' in a person which makes him a living being and a separate entity which can go its own way if so moved. The point is simply that it is evident from this account that *okra* and soul are two nonidentical concepts (Wiredu: 1995; 133).

¹² The Akans, according to Gyekye, Wiredu and Appiah are a matrilineal clan.

¹³ Plural for *okra*.

Whatever difficulties there are in considering the true nature of the okra, Wiredu argues that it should not be thought of as identical to the Western concept of the soul. He says the okra is categorically different from the mind while the soul is taken generally to be the same as the mind. He says “in English philosophical texts one frequently meets the expression ‘mind or soul’ where the ‘or’ means ‘in other words.’ The analogue of such usage in Akan would be the veriest babble” (*ibid*). He claims that the okra is a living entity while the mind is merely the capacity for thinking or just an outcome of that exercise.

He argues that the sunsum is “that which is responsible for the total effect communicated by an individual’s personality” (*ibid*). This means that a person’s character disposition proceeds from his sunsum. He states that the sunsum is not identical with the mind but actually is a possessor of the mind. To him, the Akans do not regard the mind as one of the constituent elements of personhood.

Gyekye agrees with Wiredu and argues that person is essentially constituted by three elements, the okra, sunsum and honam¹⁴.

He says okra refers to the soul and is taken to be that which constitutes the innermost self and is the essence of the individual, it is her life. This okra is referred to as the living soul because it is identical with life and is seen as a spark of the divine in ‘man’. Gyekye, in sharp contrast to his fellow clansman, Wiredu, states that the okra is equivalent to the soul. “So conceived the okra can be considered as the equivalent of the concept of the soul in other metaphysical systems. Hence it is correct to translate okra into English as soul” (Gyekye: 1987; 85).

Gyekye differs with Wiredu who sees the okra as quasi-physical. He argues that the operations of the okra do not occur in physical environments.

¹⁴ Honam is the same as nipadua, it refers to a person’s body.

It must be noted, however, that these phenomena do not take place in the ordinary spatial world; otherwise anyone would be able to see or communicate with the okra (soul). This must mean that what those with special abilities see or communicate with is something non-spatial. Thus, the fact that the okra can be seen by such people does not make it physical or quasi physical (whatever that expression means), since this act or mode of seeing is not at the physical or spatial level (Gyekye: 1987; 86).

Unfortunately for us non-Akans we are not able to enter this debate since we are not competent in the language at all. The point, however is that both authors characterise the okra as an essential constituent of the person. The manner in which they characterise it is different through their own interpretations but that is to be expected in philosophical matters.

Gyekye also adds that there is yet another element that is closely related to the okra and he calls this element the *honhom*, which means breath. He says the departure of breath is also the departure of the soul which means the end of life for the individual. He hastily adds that this idea is recent and alludes to the fact that it could have been brought by Christians.

Gyekye agrees with Wiredu that the *sunsum* is not identical with the soul. He holds that it is the basis of a person's personality. If we talk of a person as being courageous, kind, mean, evil etc, what we are essentially talking about is her *sunsum*. He says "I believe that whatever else that concept may mean it certainly involves the idea of a set of characteristics as evidenced in a person's behaviour-thoughts, feelings, actions, etc" (Gyekye: 1987; 90). He claims that the *sunsum* cannot be a physical thing since qualities such as jealousy, courage, dignity are psychological and not physical. The only physical thing is the body which is evident to everyone and that can be seen by all who have eyes. He states that the Akans "hold a dualistic conception of a person; a person is constituted by two principle substances, one spiritual (immaterial) and the other physical (material)" (Gyekye: 1984; 205).

Appiah concurs with Wiredu and Gyekye saying a person is essentially made of three elements. He concludes that “according to Asante traditions, a person consists of a body (nipadua) made from the blood of the mother (the mogya); an individual spirit, the sunsum, which is the main bearer of one’s personality; and a third entity the okra” (Appiah: 2004; 28).

This concept of person is silent on the sociality of the self or the social demands placed on an individual by the community. It points out three elements as pre-requisites for an individual to be recognised as a person.

2.3.2 Gbadegesin

Segun Gbadegesin¹⁵ says that the Yoruba word for person is *eniyan*. Gbadegesin argues that the word has a normative and an ordinary meaning. For the Yoruba people, he says, greater emphasis is placed on the normative dimension. He says the structural components of the person in the Yoruba culture are essentially four and he characterises them thus:

Among the terms that feature in discussions of the Yoruba concept of *eniyan*, the following are prominent: *ara*, *okan*, *emi*, *ori*, though there is a lot of confusion about what each of these means and what relationship exists among them. One way to avoid, or at least, minimise confusion is not to start with English equivalents of these terms, but rather to describe their usages among the Yoruba and to relate them to each other in terms of their functional interdependencies (Gbadegesin: 1991; 28).

He says that the *ara* is the physical component of the person and is described in physical terms such as heavy, strong or light. He says in his language selfish people can also be described as people who are only concerned for their bodies. However, he says, in the thinking of the Yoruba it is quite clear to them that there is more to a person than her mere

¹⁵ Gbadegesin is a Nigerian philosopher who reflects on the concept of person from a Yoruba perspective.

physical body. The body houses senses and it enables the person to get acquainted with the external world.

He says internal organs are also taken as having some importance in the functioning of the person. “For instance, the intestine plays a role in the physical strength of a person. A weak person is described as having only one *ifun* (intestine) or none at all” (Gbadegesin: 1991; 29). He also says the *opolo* (brain) is the lifewire of all logical reasoning. Those who misbehave are taken as having an *opolo* that malfunctions and the mad are taken as having a disrupted *opolo*.

The second attribute, *okan* (heart) is taken as having a dual character. It is taken, firstly, as responsible for the circulation of blood in the body and secondly it is taken as the source of psychic and emotional reactions. It is responsible for the emotional states of the person. One who gets upset easily is taken as having no *okan*. He suggests that the *okan* is also the source of thought, similar to Wiredu’s supposition of the mind. This is where the postulation of a double nature for the heart appears to make sense.

For it appears, from the examination of the language, that while *okan* [as physical heart] is recognised as responsible for blood circulation, it also has an invisible counterpart which is the seat of conscious activities. It would seem that this invisible counterpart is the equivalent of the mind in English (Gbadegesin: 1991; 32).

In essence the heart is responsible for physical activities of pumping blood and keeping it in circulation as well as serving as the seat of all conscious activity.

The third characteristic that he looks at is *emi* which is “construed as the active principle of life, the life-giving element put in place by the deity” (Gbadegesin: 1991; 33). He says sometimes the *emi* is also construed as the divine breath but is different from *eemi*-physical breath, which is just evidence of continued presence of *emi*.

When the *emi* is recalled by the deity the individual ceases to exist. It is the active component of life and without it one dies. Gbadegesin says that the *emi* is spiritual and has an independent existence. He argues that the *emi* is spiritual because its source, the deity, is spiritual. He also claims that it is independent because its source is also independent. Unlike mere breath it can exist on its own.

The fourth element that he considers is the *ori*, which he says has a dual character. He says it is seen as the physical head that is very vital in a physical character and is also the seat of the brain. Secondly it is also seen as a determinant of a person's personality and destiny. "It is thus *ori* so chosen, with the destiny wound up in it, that determines the personality of the individual. And though, the *ori* is symbolised by the physical head, it is not identical with it. For the *ori* is construed as the inner – or spiritual head [*ori-inu*]" (Gbadegesin: 1991; 38). Not only does it determine someone's destiny it also makes up the spiritual component of the person and also bears that person's divinity which can be traced back to the creator. Gbadegesin says that these two elements can be placed into two groups; the "physico-material and the mental-spiritual." *Ara* belongs to the physico-material while *emi* belongs to the mental-spiritual. The *ori* and the *okan* retain both features.

He then looks at the normative concept of person and concludes that the fullness of personhood is accomplished in the social arena. He holds that individual existence is linked to social existence. Any attempt to understand the person outside of his social status does not fully represent the concept of personhood. Linking his argument to individual destiny he concludes:

Persons are what they are in virtue of what they are destined to be, their character and the communal influence on them. It is a combination of these elements that constitute human personality. The "I" is just a "WE" from another perspective, and persons are therefore not construed as atomic individuals. A person whose existence and personality is dependent on the community is expected in turn to contribute to the continued

existence of the community. This is the normative dimension of the concept of Eniyan. The crown of personal life is to be useful to one's community. The meaning of one's life is therefore measured by one's commitment to social ideals and communal existence. The question "What is your existence for?" [*Kini o wa funi?*] is not always posed. It is posed when a person has been judged to be useless to his/her community (Gbadegesin: 1991; 58).

The height of personhood is expressed through selfless devotion in service and aid of others, Gbadegesin holds. Individualism and selfishness have no place in that scheme. Thus the metaphysical consideration is ultimately linked to the practical requirements of the society.

This position is passionately seconded by Richard C. Onwuanibe who states that:

The traditional African philosophy of the human person is more existential and practical than theoretical. It is based on the conviction that the metaphysical sphere is not abstractly divorced from concrete experience; for the physical and metaphysical are aspects of reality, and the transition from the one to the other is natural (Onwuanibe: 1984; 184).

He says the philosophical question that is of significance in Ibo thought is whether the soul and the spirit are identifiable with the body. He holds that in the Ibo tradition, these two are not identifiable with the body although they are related to it. He argues that physicalism does not work since there is more to a person than physical aspects. He says that physicalism cannot account for other things such as achievements, aspirations and values.

On the precise nature of person in Ibo thought he concludes:

In Ibo philosophical reflection, the self deriving from the soul and spirit indicates the personhood. To talk of human person makes sense only when to be human includes not only the physical aspects but also the transcendental aspect. Here the transcendental aspect includes the mental to a certain extent, the spiritual aspirations and values of man (Onwuanibe: 1984; 184).

In conclusion, both these philosophers hold that there are certain metaphysical characteristics that contribute to the essential make up of person. However they argue that without the social aspect the person so conceived cannot operate fully. Full personhood is attained through participation in the life of the community and upholding certain social values.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the two prominent views of person in African thought. The first view that is held by Tempels, Mbiti and Menkiti states that personhood in Africa is a social concept that is attained through communal relations that an individual involves herself in. If an individual maintains good communal relations with others and is in good standing with her community then she is a full person. If on the other hand she has poor relations with her fellow community members or is selfish she is seen as a non-person. Menkiti adds that for an individual to become a full person she has to exhibit moral worth and if she fails to exhibit minimal moral characteristics, she would have failed at being a person.

Gyekye has criticised this radical communitarianism and has proposed to replace it with his own version, that he calls moderate communitarianism. In that version he argues that the individual's independence is recognised by the community as the individual is partially constituted by the community and her own distinct identity is respected.

The second view of personhood in Africa is grounded in metaphysics. Generally this view as argued for by Appiah, Wiredu, Gyekye, Gbadegesin and Onwuanibe, holds that a

person is essentially made up of mainly three elements, which are the soul, the spirit and the body, with the head and blood being also added. However, these philosophers invariably return to the essence of the community in understanding the concept of personhood. They argue that a person can be fully understood and is animated through communal relations as well as attainment of moral worth. A person who operates outside her community, it is argued, is not a full person.

African philosophy presents the African view of a person in a way that is essentially communitarian.

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Chapter Three: African Socialism

3. Introduction

The previous chapter outlines the dominant views on the concept of person in African thinking. This chapter traces the political ideology that arises from the concept of person as discussed in chapter two. It outlines the political ideology that was developed by some of the founding presidents on the African continent based on their view of persons. These men had led their countries into freedom from colonial oppression. They were both theorists and politicians who had real power and sufficient influence in their respective countries to implement whatever political ideology they desired. I will confine my outline to the theoretical underpinnings that inform the political framework that was developed in newly independent Africa. I seek to present how the theory of person was used to justify African socialism.

These political theories were in the main informed by what a person is taken to be in African thinking and how she ought to live her life in relation to her community as a whole. Although none of them sets out an explicit account of what constitutes personhood in Africa, it will become quite clear that they had a communalistic understanding of the self as outlined in the previous chapter. Their view is that a self cannot be seen apart of her community and that she finds meaning and fulfilment in the way the community lives.

In essence, they argue a person's association with her community is intractable in that the well being of her community is also her own well being. If her community is not faring well, then she also fails to fare well. It is not possible to talk of a person who is doing well while other people around her are not doing well. Hence the contention that there was a need to develop a political theory that would understand this cardinal view of society in Africa thus coining the term African socialism.

I will look at Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and finally Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal. The first two are representative of former Anglophone colonies while Senghor represents former Francophone colonies in Africa. Although there were other colonial powers on the African continent these two were ultimately the most dominant and their effects still remain on the continent in many respects. Nyerere, Nkrumah and Senghor's writings present a response to the effects of colonialism and argue in favour of the implementation of a certain political system that they see as best suited to Africa. They denounce colonialism for bringing an alien political system, intrinsically linked to capitalism, which is in sharp contrast to the way that African traditional life was lived on the continent. Effects of colonialism, in their view, had polluted the traditional way of living and had introduced new values that were responsible for a variety of problems in the way that people lived. These problems mainly had to do with embracing capitalism and all other vices that were attendant to it.

Through their assessment of traditional African societies they argue that African socialism is the desired political theory that should guide and govern newly freed African countries. They allowed certain differences and variations to exist between different countries according to their own particular situation. This system, in their view, would ensure the return and protection of the all important African value of egalitarianism among people in any given society. All people were important and viewed as equal and there were no class distinctions or other arbitrary distinctions.

3.1 Kwame Nkrumah¹⁶

In his book, *Consciencism*, Nkrumah sets out his philosophy and its underlying principles. He starts out by arguing that philosophy is shaped by society. Each social milieu shapes the way people think and reflect on their society and surroundings. He says philosophy started by wondering about the existence of God and his nature. But with time it developed in response to evolving social epochs.

¹⁶ Nkrumah was the founding president of independent Ghana, he ruled from 1957 until he was deposed in a military coup in 1962 and was forced to live in Conakry in Guinea. He died in 1972.

With the European renaissance, he says, when people started appreciating and gaining an awareness of their own personal freedom and dignity “philosophy responded with disquisitions on the nature of natural rights and connected ideas” (Nkrumah: 1964; 30). He says philosophy then attempted to provide certain principles of a political philosophy that would be consistent with the renaissance’s view of people (*ibid*). Further, he states that all that philosophy has ever been concerned with since the times of Thales has been finding out what basic concerns of life were at that given time.

In the third chapter of his book he moves on to discuss the relationship between society and ideology. He argues that in every society there is an ideology that is dominant. “This dominant segment has its fundamental principles, its beliefs about the nature of man, and the type of society which must be created for man” (Nkrumah: 1964; 57). He says those principles aid in designing and controlling the kind of organisation that the dominant ideology employs. Certain principles, in his view, cannot be compromised or changed because they are what makes that ideology what it is. But more importantly the dominant ideology seeks to control the whole of society. Hence he argues that in socialist societies that “dominant segment coincides with the whole” (*ibid*).

Further, Nkrumah argues, it is not possible for two different ideologies to exist side by side in one society. One has to be defeated so that the other can rule the order of the day. He says it is quite possible to have different social systems in societies that exist alongside each other but if oppressive classes remain in existence, there would never be any possibility of different ideologies existing alongside each other.

He says although every society has one ideology, it is never possible to find that ideology fully articulated within that society. He draws an analogy with a situation whereby people know what the morally acceptable thing to do would be in a situation but cannot provide a reason to explain why they act in that way. He argues that this does not mean that there is no compelling reason to explain why people should or do behave in the way they do. It is there, it is just that people cannot articulate it.

An ideology, just like moral principles seeks to direct the actions of millions of people to one specific outcome. An ideology has a specific goal although in getting people to attain it, it can be largely implicit.

I have said an ideology seeks to bring a specific order into the total life of its society. To achieve this, it needs to employ a number of instruments. The ideology of a society displays itself in political theory, social theory and moral theory, and uses these as instruments. It establishes a particular range of political, social and moral behaviour such that unless behaviour of this sort fell within the established range, it would be incompatible with ideology (Nkrumah: 1964; 59).

He says, for example, if a society is socialist it would not permit any political behaviour that would promote the thriving of capitalism. Any conduct to such effect in that given society would fall out of what is politically permissible. A socialist ideology would have definite parameters of what is permissible behaviour in its political theory.

Ideology permeates all of life and it is reflected in the way in which the society tells of its history or its artworks. Most of ideology cannot be upheld through open cohesion or legislation that would govern how people conduct themselves. Nkrumah thinks that there is need for subtle social cohesion. This is because, he says, most of social conduct falls out of ranges that can be legislated or open cohesion. People are rather controlled by such subtle means as the approval of those who know them or the preacher at church.

Each and every society has different means of non-statutory social cohesion and this difference depends on each society's social and economic conditions. In Africa, Nkrumah says, emphasis will have to take account of colonialism and Africa's victory in gaining independence.

He contends that the African society is made up of three broad segments. "African society has one segment which comprises our traditional way of life; it has a second

segment which is filled by the presence of the Islamic tradition in Africa; it has a final segment which represents the infiltration of the Christian tradition and culture of Western Europe into Africa using colonialism and neo-colonialism as its primary vehicles” (Nkrumah: 1964; 68). In his view these three segments are ‘animated by competing ideologies’ which are at odds. He argues that there needs to emerge a single ideology that would take care of all other competing segments in society because there has to be unity in society to guarantee that it flourishes.

Nkrumah is of the view that the most important segment that should play a dominant role in determining economic and political organisation on the African continent is the traditional way of life. The other two segments must be incorporated into the African traditional way of life. Nkrumah describes the traditional African ‘face’ as having an approach or mind-set about persons that can only be described as socialist. A person is viewed as having an inherent dignity and as a spiritual being. She is, right from the beginning, endowed with dignity and value that resides in her.

He suggests that this traditional view of the person places certain political obligations in the African society. “This idea of the original value of man imposes duties of a socialist kind upon us. Herein lies the basis of African communalism. This theoretical basis expressed itself on the social level in terms of institutions such as the clan, underlining the initial equality of all and the responsibility of many for one” (Nkrumah: 1964; 69).

Thus it is quite clear that Nkrumah uses the communitarian conception of person as outlined in the previous chapter to justify the political order he seeks to develop. What he calls ‘the original value of man’ can be seen as an interpretation of the communitarian concept of person that sees all people as equal and sharing in the same fate as a collective. In Nkrumah’s view the theoretical view of persons, in the traditional setting, came to life by the way in which social institutions such as the clan operated. In his view the clan was organised in such a way that all individuals had a responsibility towards every individual. In essence this is reminiscent of the communitarian concept of person expressed by Tempels, Mbiti and Menkiti in the previous chapter. Nkrumah takes this

view further by arguing that this communitarian conception of person led to the development of a certain political and economic order in traditional African societies. It is this view of person that informs Nkrumah's political theory.

Nkrumah argues that in the traditional African societies, there were no classes in the Marxist understanding of class stratification whereby some classes are superior to others and some classes are subjected to oppression and dominion by other classes. "In the traditional African society, no sectional interest could be regarded as supreme; nor did legislative and executive power aid the interest of any particular group. The welfare of the people was supreme" (*ibid*).

Nkrumah says the arrival of colonialism changed the whole traditional setup; with the arrival of the colonial administrators who needed local assistance, a few African people received an education and became traders, professionals and unionists. He says the local people accepted the new European values as acceptable to African societies and started seeing themselves as something equivalent to the European middle class. In his view "neither economic nor political subjugation could be considered as being in tune with the traditional African egalitarian view of man" (Nkrumah: 1964; 70).

Nkrumah argues that with independence regained there needs to be a new ideology forged. This ideology has to take into account the values of traditional Africa, the presence of Islam on the continent as well as the presence of the Euro Christian beliefs. He says that the African society is not the old society but one that has been expanded by foreign influences that are now permanently on the continent. For this reason "[A] new emergent ideology is therefore required, an ideology which can solidify in a philosophical statement, but at the same time an ideology which will not abandon the original humanist principles of Africa" (*ibid*).

Thus Nkrumah rejects a class system on the grounds that it stands in contrast to the traditional egalitarian view of persons. On the contrary he seeks to develop political and economic system that would give full effect to that traditional view of persons. The

traditional egalitarian view of persons and the humanist principles that he refers to essentially represent a communitarian view of persons.

Nkrumah argues that socialism has nothing in common with capitalism. He says capitalism developed from slavery and feudalism and this dissociates socialism from capitalism. Further, he argues, were socialism to have developed from capitalism, it would have needed to share the fundamental characteristic of capitalism which is exploitation. On the contrary socialism is opposed to this principle that drives capitalism. He also argues that the political ancestor of socialism is communalism.

Socialism stands to communalism as capitalism stands to slavery. In socialism, the principles underlying communalism are given expression in modern circumstances. Thus, whereas communalism in an untechnical society can be *laissez faire*, in a technical society where sophisticated means of production are at hand, if the underlying principles of communalism are not given centralised and correlated expression, class cleavages will arise, with economic disparities, and thereby with political inequalities. Socialism, therefore, can be and is the defence of the principles of communalism in a modern setting. Socialism is a form of social organisation which, guided by the principles underlying communalism, adopts procedure and measures made necessary by demographic and technological developments (Nkrumah: 1964; 73).

It is quite clear that Nkrumah believes that the African traditional way of life could work in modern Africa. His socialism rides on that traditional model of communality and egalitarianism which was part of the communitarian view of persons in chapter two. Nkrumah further qualifies the process involved in bringing communalism to modern day realities. He argues that from the traditional practice of communalism to socialism that passage is carried through what he calls reform. This means that the transformation is a natural response to modernity. However, where colonialism has interfered with this natural reform, then the passage becomes revolutionary because there would be need to

transform a non-communalistic society into a socialist one which is informed by communalistic values.

Nkrumah not only believes that this passage, from communism to socialism in Africa, would have been natural but also that embracing capitalism is betraying fundamental principles of African societies. "In my autobiography, I said that capitalism might prove too complicated a system for a newly independent country. I wish to add to this the fact that the presuppositions and purposes of capitalism are contrary to those of African society. Capitalism would be a betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa" (Nkrumah: 1964; 74).

Nkrumah explains that this African personality is one that determines the African attitude in international politics. In reference to what informs what Africa stands for, he says: "We stand for international peace and security in conformity with the United Nations Charter. This will enable us to assert our own African personality and to develop according to our own ways of life, our own customs, traditions and cultures. In asserting our African personality we shall be free to act in our individual and collective interests at any particular time" (Nkrumah: 1961; 128).

It is clear that Nkrumah sees what he calls the African personality as the embodiment of all values that Africans stand for and must practice. It is not limited to the interaction between Africans only but extends to influence the way Africans behave when they interact with others who are not from the continent. This embodiment of the African personality must be pursued so that the African way of life can be given full expression and through its pursuit the Africans are able to genuinely display who they are and what they stand for.

Nkrumah riles against capitalism because its nature is structured in such a manner that it denies many people what he calls genuine happiness. He says if happiness is defined within a social context; it will depend on the economic, political and cultural aspects, and that the individual is able to pursue his interests. But capitalism by its nature is a system

whereby a few are pitted against the many who are oppressed, it is therefore impossible for many people in that society to find true happiness because their aspirations are limited. The few oligarchs in the capitalist system give new definitions to what is legitimately attainable and they always exclude the many from attaining these aspirations (Nkrumah: 1964; 76).

Nkrumah claims capitalism is unable to animate the values of the African traditional societies hence is not fitting for the newly independent countries of Africa. He sees its crucial problem as lying in the alienation of the labour of the workers. They cannot relate to what they produce and it is unjust, thus making it stand at odds with the traditional values of African societies (*ibid*).

He argues that modern and free African countries would fare much better without such alien philosophical and political theories. He proposes that the newly independent African societies would do well under socialism. He says socialism is different from capitalism which exploits natural resources/nature in pursuit of profit. On the other hand, socialism masters nature with the goal of increasing the spiritual and material needs of the greatest number of people in society (*ibid*). Nkrumah then discusses the philosophical underpinnings of his African socialism:

On the philosophical level, too, it is materialism, not idealism, that in one form or another will give the firmest conceptual basis to the restitution of Africa's egalitarian and humanist principles. Idealism breeds an oligarchy, and its social implication, as drawn out in my second chapter, is obnoxious to African society. It is materialism, with its monistic and naturalistic account of nature, which will balk arbitrariness, inequality and injustice (*ibid*).

Thus it is clear that Nkrumah sees egalitarianism and humanism as fundamentally important in modern and free African societies. The best way they can be restored, in his view, is by embracing socialism. He claims that his socialism seeks to eliminate problems

that arise with idealism such as inequality and injustice. This is allusion to the argument that in traditional African societies all were equal and injustice did not prevail. “In sum, the restitution of Africa’s humanist principles of society requires socialism. It is materialism that ensures the only effective transformation of nature, and socialism that derives the highest development from this transformation” (Nkrumah: 1964; 77).

3.1.1 Consciencism

Nkrumah describes consciencism as the philosophical standpoint that best describes African political philosophy. In reaching his position on what is imbued in consciencism he notes that the three segments that constitute African society are in tension and at variance. These segments as seen above are the Western Christian, the Islamic and the traditional African way of life. The tension is particularly raised by the fact that these other two segments, particularly the Christian Western, are animated by principles that are in stark contrast to the African traditional way of life.

For Nkrumah the solution to this tension lies in accommodating the other two segments into the experiences of the traditional African societies. He says a connected body of thought must be developed that integrates the new society that would have been developed. However that unification and indeed the thought that integrates it must always take into account “elevated ideals underlying the traditional African societies” (Nkrumah: 1964; 78). He says if this does not succeed it will lead to society being “racked by the most malignant schizophrenia” (*ibid*).

He argues that the social revolution must be backed by an intellectual revolution that is aimed at the redemption of society. This philosophy must be grounded in the actual environment and conditions under which people live in Africa. The basis of this philosophy is the actual experience of the people and with the emancipation of the continent the people must also be emancipated. From this, he says, two aims emerge: “first, the restitution of the egalitarianism of human society, and second, the logistic mobilisation of all our resources towards the attainment of that restitution” (*ibid*).

Nkrumah says the philosophy behind this revolution is consciencism. It will be tasked with digesting the elements of the West and Islam to give them a true African identity. This true African identity is informed by humanist principles which are the basis of African traditional society. He says consciencism is the philosophical standpoint that is responsible for taking Africa forward from where it is by indicating how progress is to be forged out of the conflict of different principles. Philosophical consciencism is primarily concerned with how each individual is treated. "The cardinal principle of philosophical consciencism is to treat each man as an end in himself and not merely as a means. This is fundamental to all socialist or humanist conceptions of man" (Nkrumah: 1964; 95). He argues that if ethical rules are founded on principles of egalitarianism they will aim to be objective. Further, if these principles arise from the egalitarian idea about people they must be generalizable. Philosophical consciencism is in accord with all such principles and is in harmony with the traditional African society. Philosophical consciencism, he says, outlines a political theory and a social practice which seeks to give effect to the greatest ethical principle, that of egalitarianism. Nkrumah then explains how this egalitarian principle would work in practice with regard to the relationship between the individual and the community.

By reason of its tenet, philosophical consciencism seeks to promote individual development, but in such a way that the conditions for the development of all become the conditions for the development of each; that is, in such a way that the individual development does not introduce such diversities as to destroy the egalitarian basis. The social political practice also seeks to co-ordinate social forces in such a way as to mobilise them logistically for the maximum development of society along true egalitarian lines (Nkrumah: 1964; 98).

It is clear that Nkrumah is not only concerned about constructing political theories but is also keen to see them put in practice. Philosophical consciencism is to be translated into something practical on the social and political field and both the theory and practice are informed by the traditional egalitarian tenet of the African society. Nkrumah argues that

his philosophical consciencism is faced with problems of alien ideologies that result from colonial imperialism which hinder development and true equality.

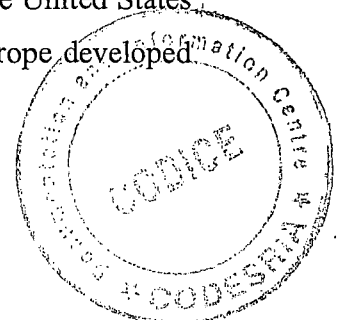
He therefore suggests a practical solution to all these challenges. He advocates the institution of a parliamentary democracy with a one-party state. He argues that such a system is positioned well to express the common national aspirations. He sees a multi party democracy as simply serving to perpetuate the struggle between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. He also argues that, since the primary motivation behind colonialism was economic, it is imperative for newly liberated territories to eschew the idea of binding their economies to those of the ousted colonisers.

Nkrumah concludes by arguing that when "socialism is true to its purpose, it seeks connection with the egalitarian and humanist past of the people before their social evolution was ravaged by colonialism" (Nkrumah: 1964; 106). He says what it has to do is simply adapt to the modern environment so that it can come up with new methods of industrial and economic development that will serve the people. It must shun all the methods that promote the interests of capital.

3.1.2 Socialism in Ghana

In his book *Africa Must Unite*, Nkrumah outlines the practical realities that his country faces and what he proposes to do in order to implement the programme of socialism. He sketches out the effects colonialism has had on Africa and concludes that it is largely negative. The peoples of Africa, he says, were left largely impoverished and illiterate, unable to compete on the global economic stage.

Nkrumah says the aim of his party in power is to eliminate all the social ills that his country faced. He sees meeting the challenges as a long term objective that could take a long time to be reached. To deal with these problems, there was need for a model of development or industrialisation. He argues that there can be no universal model of development or modernisation that suits all the countries in the world. The United States of America developed through use of vast tracts of land and slavery. Europe developed



its industries over a very long period of time and under different social conditions. He argues that the closest model for Ghana is China, India and Japan. However, he maintains that no pattern of industrialisation can ever serve as a perfect model for a country that is emerging from colonialism.

Thus he has to develop a model that best suits Ghana's history and where it is coming from. He says, in "Ghana we have embarked on the socialist path to progress. We want to see full employment, good housing and equal opportunity for education and cultural advancement for all the people up to the highest level possible" (Nkrumah: 1963; 119). This system would ensure that prices of basic goods would not be above what workers earn, rentals would be affordable, welfare services would be open to all and education will be made available to all.

He argues that socialism is best suited for Ghana because it does not allow the private ownership of means of production such as land and does not promote private pursuit of wealth. Such a system is best prepared to meet the needs of all members of society. He argued that Ghana had to be transformed to meet all the requirements of a true socialist state. The means of production had to be transferred to the people and there had to be large investments in agriculture, transforming subsistence farming into commodity producing entities that would provide food for the people but also create surplus that would be used for purposes of economic growth. He also reserved the right of his government to interfere in all economic activities in its quest to attain the socialist revolution he had envisaged. This view is informed by the traditional way of life which Nkrumah has styled as philosophical consciencism. To give effect to that traditional way of life in the modern setting means that there should be no private ownership of the means of production and the needs of all members of society should be met. Thus philosophical consciencism, informed by the traditional way of life, serves as the ideological basis of the political practice.

Nkrumah called for increased productivity which would see the growth of real wealth, but this required both a long time and sacrifices, hence he called for immediate personal

sacrifices. He argued that the “socialist objective implies the universal good of the nation, and in the interest of that socialist objective it will be necessary for all of us to forgo some immediate for a greater benefit a bit later on. Speedier development out of surpluses or social services in the interest of the community confer more advantages upon a greater number of people than would increased wages for certain groups of workers” (Nkrumah:1963; 122). He thought with the rise of surpluses the economy would also expand to the benefit of all members of the society. This is all in keeping with the traditional way of life where the community ensured that all its members were sufficiently provided for on an equal basis.

Nkrumah was firmly of the view that only socialists would be able and willing to build socialism, hence he implemented programmes that were meant to educate all the people from top government officials to ordinary workers as to what this programme was all about. His philosophical consciencism was both theoretical in its philosophical formulation as well as practical in its social implementation, so he believed.

3.2 Julius Nyerere¹⁷

Nyerere was of the firm opinion that socialism was an attitude of the mind which was not limited to mere observation of certain rules or requirements within a system. He thought that socialism was like democracy in that respect. The attitude of socialism was not about a person striving on his own to achieve whatever he wanted in isolation but it was about caring for each other and ensuring that each one’s welfare was well catered for.

He argues that this attitude of the mind is what distinguishes the socialist from the non-socialist. This distinction has nothing to do with possessions but one’s attitude towards fellow human beings. Nyerere believes that one can be a millionaire and still remain a socialist. He believes that the existence of wealthy people in a given society does not reflect on the amount and nature of resources that society has. He argues that the production of millionaires is dependent on the way in which wealth is distributed in the society.

¹⁷ Nyerere was the first president of independent Tanzania, he was in office from 1964 to 1984.

He argues that the attitude of the socialist mind in Africa is to be found in the way that traditional African societies were organised. The way in which the traditional society was organised sought to reflect a certain view about the nature of persons. This view was that a person does not exist alone but that she exists within a community. An individual is not an entity that stands alone but is part of the community. The community takes care of the individual and no-one seeks to exploit anyone within such a community. On the contrary the community takes care of all its members (Nyerere: 1968; 6). This is reminiscent of the communitarian view of person that was discussed by Tempels, Mbiti and Menkiti in chapter two. Nyerere seeks to develop a political and economic theory that would give full effect to the communitarian view of persons. In Nyerere's view the traditional economic structures did not make any room for exploitation. He argues that in order for us to fully understand socialism we need to look at how traditional societies were organised in African societies. He claims that we shall find that traditional African communities were classless societies.

Nyerere's view is that in capitalist societies those who belong to the privileged classes spend their time doing nothing except leisurely things. He believes that the worker has to do all the work for them while they concern themselves with things that hardly count as work. He equates these people to extremely lazy people hence he calls them parasites. He argues that African societies did not have privileged classes that produced these parasites who would shy away from work.

Nyerere is against one of the firm principles of capitalism which is pursuit and accumulation of wealth. He argues that this principle does not only violate socialist principles but is responsible for the growth and spread of corruption. Pursuit of wealth, he contended, is found only in capitalist societies.

Nyerere argues that in both traditional and modern societies, the production of wealth requires three crucial things. He says the first thing is land, which is given to us by God. The land is used for agriculture to produce the food that is required to feed people and it

also has many things contained in it like mineral wealth and all that exists on it. This, Nyerere says, is used and shaped by people as they see fit for their own benefits and to meet all their needs. The important point to note here which Nyerere states is that land was given as a gift to the people by God. This means that no-one could own the land because it was seen as a gift given to all and no one in particular.

The second important thing are tools that are used in either transforming natural resources or working the land to produce goods that ultimately become wealth. Nyerere says these tools belong to the worker who uses them. But he uses the word 'belong' in a very weak sense. It only means that the worker remains with the tools as long as he needs them. If he is done with them or is unable to work anymore the tools are passed on to someone else.

The third factor is labour, which is the activity that people who work engage in. Anyone who performs a task is contributing towards the creation of wealth. Nyerere argues that in the traditional African society no one was exempt from work except in special circumstances only covering the infirm, the old and the very young. He says:

In traditional African society *everybody* was a worker. There was no other way of earning a living for the community. Even the Elder, who appeared to be enjoying himself without doing any work and for whom everybody else appeared to be working, had, in fact, worked hard all his younger days. The wealth he now appeared to possess was not *his*, personally; it was only 'his' as the Elder of the group which had produced it. He was its guardian. The wealth itself gave him neither power nor prestige. The respect paid to him by the young was his because he was older than they, and had served his community longer; and the 'poor' Elder enjoyed as much respect in our society as the 'rich' Elder (Nyerere: 1968; 4).

In essence what this means is that no-one, in Nyerere's view, in the traditional African society ever worked for her own benefit. Everyone worked for the benefit of all who

lived in her community. Those who were deemed to be wealthy were not really wealthy in their own right. They only held the wealth on behalf of the rest of the community. Elders were respected by virtue of their age and not what they had managed to accumulate in their working life. Nyerere is also clearly stating that no-one ever worked for one person in particular. Thus, the relationship of worker and employer never existed in the traditional society. Everyone worked for the benefit of all. No-one was employed by a particular person to work for the benefit of that particular individual.

He says the most visible socialistic achievement of the traditional society was the security it gave to all its members. This means that all people who lived in a given community were sure to be safe and could depend on their communities in times of need or when they were faced with challenges. But, he argues, this was only possible because everybody in that society contributed towards the production of wealth in that society making everybody a worker. Nyerere points to the Swahili saying: “*Mgeni siku mbili; siku ya tatu mpe jembe* which means: ‘Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe’” (1968; 5). This is meant to reflect that everybody was a worker who contributed to the wealth of the society that he depended on when he needed security or when his personal circumstances had become abject. Nyerere puts it succinctly when he says: “Thus, working was part and parcel, the very basis and justification of this socialist achievement of which we are so justly proud” (*ibid*).

Nyerere argues that socialism can only be practical when there is work. If there is no work socialism is not possible. It is the task of socialism to provide the individual with the means to work. This work is not for the benefit of the individual but for all. Neither is the work to be done for someone else. The worker as in employee “reflects a capitalist attitude of mind which was introduced into Africa with the coming of colonialism and is totally foreign to our own way of thinking” (Nyerere: 1968; 6).

The notion of a labourer, Nyerere argues, did not exist in the traditional African society. It was brought in through colonialism which was responsible for ushering in capitalism. He says with the arrival of capitalism certain Africans developed desires to be wealthy

like the foreigners they were seeing who had brought capitalism. He opines that there is nothing wrong with the desire to be wealthy, but the problem starts when people desire to be wealthy so that they can dominate others. He has problems with those who have developed habits of exploitation so that they can accumulate prestige and power. These habits are foreign and at odds with the socialist society that he is advocating.

Nyerere says in order to return to the traditional values of African society something needs to be done: “Our first step, therefore, must be to re-educate ourselves; to regain our former attitude of mind. In our traditional African society we were individuals within a community. We took care of the community, and the community took care of us. We neither needed nor wished to exploit our fellow men” (*ibid*). This means that the individual was part of the community and participated in all it did and contributed to it with the expectation that the community will also look after her. This is a clear reference to the communitarian conception of the “I” being “We” or Mbiti’s idea that “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am”. Nyerere’s idea is fully informed by the communitarian conception of person.

Another crucial factor that Nyerere sees in his rejection of foreign imports is the idea of owning land. He says this must be rejected because it was brought in by the capitalists. He says the idea of making land marketable is completely foreign to African society. Landowners will determine the prices of their land and make huge profits without doing anything to deserve their earnings but spending time loitering. He says: “We must not allow the growth of parasites here in Tanganyika. The TANU¹⁸ Government must go back to the traditional African custom of land-holding” (Nyerere: 1968; 8). For him, this return to the traditional value would assist in seeing to the implementation of true socialism.

Nyerere argues that it is the responsibility of all his people to uphold the socialist attitude of mind to ensure that it works as a system. He calls on all the people to resist the

¹⁸ TANU stands for Tanganyika African National Union, which was the political party founded by Julius Nyerere in the then Tanganyika, modern day Tanzania, to fight for the liberation of that country.

temptations of personal gain which might detract them from pursuing true socialism. Nyerere is opposed to accumulation of personal wealth, preferring that wealth should be held communally. He explains certain apparent differences in wealth that can be seen among people by referring to the traditional society. He notes that certain positions of leadership may come with certain privileges in material wealth for certain people. However, this does not mean that these people are now wealthy as individuals but just like the elder, who appeared to be wealthy, in the traditional society, the people in position of leadership do not own that wealth. They merely hold it in the interests of the whole community and when the community needs to use it they would relinquish it. "It is a tool entrusted to them for the benefit of the people they serve" (*ibid*).

Wealth is not to be used by individuals as an insurance that will protect them in the future when they are not in positions of power. He argues that if people in leadership positions have been of service to the community, then the community will be able to take care of them when they leave office. He refers to the past to find justification for this position. "In tribal society, the individuals or the families within a tribe were 'rich' or 'poor' according to whether the whole tribe was rich or poor" (Nyerere: 1968; 9). Thus Nyerere firmly believes that there is no need for individuals to accumulate wealth but that it should be held communally and shared accordingly.

Nyerere believes that modern true socialists would not seek to exploit other people for their own benefit. Nyerere says while some workers, in the socialist society, will produce products that command a higher value in the market on one hand, and others will produce goods that have a very small value on the market, no worker is allowed to ask for a reward that reflects the value of the product that she has produced. On the contrary, he says, the true socialist will ask for a reward that is fair to his skill in relation to the wealth or poverty of her society. This means that the worker will take both her skill and the wealth or lack thereof of her society into account before she asks for her remuneration. This means that there are no market forces at work in such a society. No individual skill can be so highly priced and rewarded. Whilst all positions are not perfectly similar or equal, the difference in their reward should be kept at a minimum. This argument relies

on the communitarian view of individuals firstly being part of a whole and secondly sharing in the fate of that whole.

3.2.1 Differences with European Socialism

Nyerere contends that there is a fundamental difference between African Socialism and European socialism. This difference is essentially in how the latter came into existence which is in stark contrast to the former. "European socialism was born of the Agrarian Revolution and the Industrial Revolution which followed it. The former created the 'landed' and the 'landless' classes in society; the latter produced the modern capitalist and the industrial proletariat" (Nyerere: 1968; 11).

In his view European socialism was born out of certain social and economic forces that prevailed at a particular time in the development of European societies. There were several economic and social revolutions that occurred in Europe with each ushering a different epoch. These revolutions would invariably plant seeds of conflict in society and they would lead to bloodied conflicts that would usher in a new dispensation. Nyerere says European socialism developed out of this pattern of social conflict.

He argues that this wave of conflict and wars was not to be seen as bad but as actually good because they ushered in changes including the birth of socialism. Furthermore European socialism is deeply connected with capitalism because it traces its genesis from the failures and frustrations that capitalism brings about. "As prayer is to Christianity or to Islam, so civil war (which they call 'class war') is to the European version of socialism-a means inseparable from the end. Each becomes the basis of a whole way of life. The European socialist cannot think of his socialism without its father-capitalism" (*ibid*).

Nyerere says African socialism did not have the benefit of both the Agrarian and Industrial revolutions. These revolutions were fuelled by class conflict and instead of ending those class differences they resulted in new societies that had intensified class differences. African socialism did not begin with and was not expressed in class conflict.

Nyerere says the notion of caste/class and the differences between people that are attendant on such distinctions did not exist in African society. On the contrary African socialism is informed by the African concept of the person wherein the individual is seen as intimately connected and constituted by her fellow community members.

Nyerere sees African socialism as finding its basis in the social network of the society. "The foundation, and the objective, of African socialism is the extended family. The true African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies" (*ibid*). He says people in the traditional African society treat each other as if they were relations. Each individual in this society views all other people in that society as his relations who are part of a very wide family. This view is one that fits well with the communitarian views as we saw in the previous chapter. 'Ujamaa' is the name that identifies Nyerere's brand of African socialism. "Ujamaa, then, or 'Familyhood', describes our socialism. It is opposed to capitalism, which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build its happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man" (Nyerere:1968; 12).

Thus the traditional notion of family which is seen as extending beyond one's immediate relatives to include one's clan and other people who live in the society forms the foundations of socialism. Nyerere says there is no need for a conversion to either socialism or democracy because both systems were always present in African societies. The traditional outlook on life was always socialist whereby every individual looked out for the other and was more interested in the common good than pursuing personal aspiration, particularly at the cost of other people.

Modern African socialism can draw from its traditional heritage the recognition of 'society' as an extension of the basic family unit. But it can no longer confine the idea of the social family within the limits of the tribe, nor, indeed, of the nation. For no true African socialist can look at a line drawn on a map and say, 'The people on this side of that line are my

brothers, but those who happen to live on the other side of it have no claim on me'; every individual on this continent is his brother (*ibid*).

Thus Nyerere believes that African socialism is a political programme that will extend itself to create close relationships of relatedness on the African continent. Nyerere firmly believes that socialism is a belief system that can be attained if all people believe in it. He sees the possibility of socialism thriving in Africa as real since Africans have the privilege of the presence of socialism in the traditional setting. All that is needed is to adjust it to fit with modernity.

Nyerere also insists that socialism is there for the service of people. Its justification and purpose is to be of service to the people. It does not discriminate against one group of people in favour of another but treats all people as equal and is grounded in the African view of the person. "The basis of socialism is a belief in the oneness of man and the common historical destiny of mankind. Its basis, in other words, is human equality. Acceptance of this principle is absolutely fundamental to socialism. The justification of socialism is man; not the state, not the flag" (Nyerere: 1968; 257).

3.2.2 Socialism in Practice

Nyerere observes that there are many definitions that have been given as to what true socialism is. To him writings that exist on socialism help in developing one's understanding of the different facets of socialism or may discuss certain practical avenues from certain standpoints. Nyerere does not see socialism as a vague concept. He says it is possible to come up with a "useful definition of the basic assumption and purposes of socialism" (Nyerere: 1968; 302). And he says, from this definition and statement of purposes of socialism, practical principles will follow. These practical principles will then be applied in real situations that people live in.

"For socialism, the basic purpose is the well-being of the people, and the basic assumption is an acceptance of human equality. For socialism there must be a belief that every individual man and woman, whatever colour, shape, race, creed, religion, or sex is

an equal member of society with equal rights in the society and equal duties to it” (Nyerere: 1968; 303). He argues that anyone who does not accept this basic principle, even though accepting many socialist principles and policies, can never be a true socialist.

This, in his view, does not make socialism utopian. He says socialism is fully aware of the fact that people have different abilities and there are differences in society. He says this doctrine accepts people as they are and calls for their inequalities to be employed in the service of other people and towards equality. “Socialism is, in fact, the application of the principle of human equality to the social, economic, and political organisation of society” (Nyerere: 1968; 303).

He says socialism in this formulation recognises that people have different abilities and contribute differently to the society. Some people will have physical strength to do hard tasks while others will be weak. Some people might be foolish while others are intelligent. Some people might be clumsy with their hands while others may be very dexterous. But all will have at least some kind of contribution to make to the common good. There is no-one, within this political scheme, who can be dismissed as contributing absolutely nothing or retaining no worth. Socialism also realises that people are both selfish and social. It is for this reason that the “[s]ocialist doctrine then demands the deliberate organisation of society in such a manner that it is impossible-or at least very difficult-for individual desires to be pursued at the cost of other people, or for individual strength to be used for exploitation of others” (*ibid*). This is an allusion to the communitarian concept of person that requires that community members act in certain ways towards each other and in their relationships – in this case a non-exploitative manner.

He says society should be organised in such a way that people are prevented from exploiting one another and social institutions should be organised so that people’s needs and their progress can be collectively secured. One way of preventing exploitation is to ensure that the rule of law prevails and that all are treated as equal before the law. He

notes that injustice may prevail because of the fallibility of human beings. However, socialism offers the best possible scenario for the achievement of true justice. The second major way in which people are exploited is through ownership of private property. The problem, for Nyerere, arises when one person controls the means of production and another depends on those means for her own livelihood. He suggests that if a society is made up of equal citizens then each and every one of them must own her own means of production. If the whole society has an interest in what is eventually produced then the means of production must be held in common ownership by the whole group.

3.3 Leopold Sedar Senghor¹⁹

In his book *On African Socialism*, Senghor argues for a distinct African socialism and explicates its basis in contrast to Western socialism. He starts by justifying the struggle launched by Africans against colonialism. He says the justification lies in the fact that colonialism creates a political dependence of one people on another. The attainment of independence will lead to freedom. In the absence of freedom, the 'personality'²⁰ of the people will not flourish.

He says that the first mistake, in the struggle against colonialism, was that the methods that were used in the fight against domination had been borrowed from the European proletariat. The European proletariat had claimed that the struggle against colonialism and their own struggle were the same. However, Senghor argues that the struggle for independence in Africa and the European proletariat's struggle are not the same.

In fact, the European proletarians are held in dependent status as individuals grouped in a class, not as a race or a people. As for us, we have been colonised, to be sure as underdeveloped, defenceless individuals, but also as *Negroes* or Arab-Berbers-in other words, as people of a different race and different culture. This was the basic argument of the coloniser. We were "primitive" and ugly to boot; it was necessary to

¹⁹ Leopold Sedar Senghor was the first president of Senegal. He was in office from 1960 until 1980. He is widely regarded as a very influential intellectual, he died in 2001.

²⁰ Senghor uses this word to refer to the key characteristics that make up a people's culture.

expose us to progress, “to the light of civilisation.” Naturally, progress and civilisation could only be European (Senghor: 1964; 68).

For Senghor the proletariat in Europe are held as a class as opposed to being a racial group, which was the case for the Africans. Since the Africans were held as a different racial group they were supposed to be civilised as civilisation only belonged to the Europeans (Senghor: 1964; 68). The solidarity between the proletariat and the colonised people misrepresents the true nature and effects of colonialism. In his view, all Europeans benefited from colonialism.

Further, Senghor disputes the claim that it is only European civilisation that can lay claim to universal civilisation. He believes that all forms of civilisations are capable of developing into universal civilisations. He is of the view that no civilisation can claim to have any superiority over the other on the basis that it is universal. The only credit he grants to European civilisation is that it was able to diffuse its own civilisation throughout the world. Senghor is clearly convinced that colonialism stifles the cultural progress and expression of the colonised people. This is particularly achieved by the way in which the colonisers seek to impose their own culture on the colonised people in the name of civilising their newly found subjects. The justification for the struggle for freedom lay in the quest of the oppressed to be totally free of alienating and stifling oppression. In their struggle to gain freedom they must not employ foreign tools or associate with other foreign people who might claim that they are in solidarity with them because the fight against colonialism is much more than class struggles that are characteristic of European societies.

3.3.1 Rejection of Marx, Engels and Western Thinking

Senghor argues that Marx and Engels’ thought cannot be accepted in its current form in the African context. He argues that there are three reasons that compel him to refuse accepting their theory. “The first is that the knowledge of Marx and Engels was conditioned by their era, by rather limited progress of science and philosophy” (1964; 69). Secondly their method of dialectics, although not new, was given new life by Marx

yet still remains abstract. “Even with Marx and Engels, European dialectics remains abstract, fairly close to logic, for it retained the latter’s categories and concepts, inductions and deductions. It is still deterministic, and this is partly why twentieth century thinkers have developed a new method²¹” (Senghor: 1964; 70). He says the particular problem with European thinking in Marx and Engels’ time was that it tended to put a distance between the knower and the object of knowledge. This epoch had also developed many specialisations with the aim of developing objectivity. For Senghor this tendency impoverished the knowledge that was produced by distancing the knower from the object that is to be known. Hence, he says, the Europeans dropped the project and developed other systems such as phenomenology and existentialism.

The third reason why Marx and Engels cannot be accepted, in Senghor’s view, lies in the fact that there is ‘Negro-African’ knowledge that Africans have inherited from their ancestors. He says the African does not interact with an object at a distance, he does not analyse it without growing close to it. “Thus the Negro-African sympathises, abandons his personality to become identified with the Other, dies to be reborn in the other. He does not assimilate; he is assimilated. He lives a common life with the Other; he lives in a symbiosis” (Senghor: 1964; 73).

This surrender to the object, he claims, is guided by reason. Although this may appear contradictory it can be explained by the difference in the way Europeans and Africans reason. “European reasoning is analytical, discursive by utilisation; Negro-African reasoning is intuitive by participation” (Senghor: 1964; 74). Senghor further discusses the differences that he sees as existing between European reasoning and African reasoning:

The African, introversive, seems also to abandon himself to the object by the very fact of his emotion. In reality, he imposes himself on the object. For he seizes it intuitively: in an analogous image which, as Jacques Berque says of the symbol (quoting Gurvitch) cannot provide such exact

²¹ The new philosophical method(s) he mentions, based on scientific advances, are phenomenology, existentialism and Teilhardism.

information as logical speech, or rather, discursive analysis. In short, while a great many Europeans and Americans, especially the French and Anglo-Saxons, think with their head, by concepts and schemas, logically connected, Mediterraneans and Africans, or specifically, Arabs and Negroes, think with their soul-I would even say with their heart...(Senghor: 1971; 44).

Thus, for Senghor there is a difference in which Africans and Europeans come to gain knowledge. He says this is the 'Negro-African' way which has been passed on from the ancestors and it should not be discarded simply because the Europeans have requested that it be thrown away. Senghor holds that this does not mean that the Africans are not capable of discursive reasoning. It only means that they have chosen to emphasise the emotional part as opposed to the discursive part of rationality. Senghor argues that the traditional way of knowledge must be maintained and the Western European ways of knowledge such as logic and Marxian dialectics must be integrated into it. He argues that African knowledge is traditionally dialectic and does not concern itself with principles such as non-contradiction.

3.3.2 African Humanism

For true progress to be charted which goes beyond dialectical materialism Senghor is of the opinion that the present European method must be fused with the traditional African method. He says Marxian humanism had certain strengths that it brought to the fore. It elaborated, through the use of concrete social facts, the realities that people lived under in mid 19th century Europe. It demonstrated the priority of economic factors and the raging class struggle that was attendant to that period. Senghor also credits it for offering a detailed analysis of alienation.

However, Senghor says the weakness that is to be found in Marxian humanism is that it fails to carry the economic analysis any further. He accuses Marx of having put a great deal of emphasis on determinism and materialism at the expense of ethics. He says Marx's theory ought to have concerned itself with issues about people and their freedom.

Its weakness lies above all in the fact that, as Marx proceeded in his writing of *Capital*, he increasingly stressed materialism and determinism, praxis and means, to the detriment of dialectics and ethics-in a word, to the detriment of man and his freedom. I shall no longer say as I did in my Report, to the detriment of philosophical thought; for, rejecting the spirit of his Philosophical Works, Marx surreptitiously and paradoxically reintroduced metaphysics in the conclusion. But it is a terribly inhuman metaphysics, an atheistic metaphysics in which mind is sacrificed to matter, freedom to the determined, man to things” (Senghor: 1964; 76).

He then seeks to find an African response to this deterministic and dehumanised humanism that has been developed by Marx. Senghor is of the view that it would be a betrayal of Marxian dialectics if Africans were to use his ideas without changing them. He says that other countries such as Israel and China should serve as examples to African countries in that they have found their own version of socialism that fits their own Asian realities. He argues that the same must prevail in Africa. African countries must look at their realities and develop a socialist plan that is in accord with the realities that surround them.

West African realities are those of underdeveloped countries-peasant countries here, cattle countries there-once feudalistic, but traditionally classless and with no wage earning sector. They are community countries where the group holds priority over the individual; they are especially religious countries, unselfish countries, where money is not king. Though dialectical materialism can help in analysing our societies, it cannot fully interpret them (Senghor: 1964; 77).

Two things emerge from Senghor’s analysis of the Western African countries. Firstly, these countries are classless. The concept of class as found in the West does not exist in these countries. This means that Marxian dialectic with its emphasis on class struggle

would not apply. Secondly these countries do not have a sophisticated or advanced monetary economy that could be analysed using the terms that Marx employed in discussing 19th century Europe. On the contrary these countries are communal in their outlook. The group takes precedence over the individual; hence their social structures are communitarian by outlook. Although Senghor does not explicitly claim that this is the concept of person that is extant in African philosophy it is quite clear that his thinking about the nature of persons in Africa is on par with the communitarians as I outlined in chapter two. Firstly, just like the communitarians, he argues that former colonies in West Africa are 'community countries'. From this, just like Menkiti, Senghor argues that in these African countries the community takes precedence over the individual. It is precisely because of this communitarian outlook of African societies and the concept of person espoused in these societies that he seeks to develop a political theory that does not betray African humanism. He argues:

Therefore, we would betray Marx by applying his method like a veneer to West African realities We would betray him even more if we were to apply but not integrate European political, economic, social and cultural organisations here, whether that of West or East, of liberal parliamentarianism or "peoples' democracy." This would strangely betray Man, as well as *Negro-African* – I mean *Negro-Berber-* humanism (Senghor: 1964; 78).

This humanism is one he sees as comprising the essential characteristics of the life of Africans and how they live as well as the values that they espouse. Essentially this humanism is communitarian in nature as I outlined in the second chapter. It embraces the concept of persons that sees them as individuals who share in the same fate and their status as persons is essentially determined by their communities. At times he refers to this humanism as Negritude. He sees "Negritude as the sum total of the qualities possessed by all black men everywhere" (Vaillant: 1990; 244). Hence Senghor firmly believes that whatever material improvement there could be, it should be incorporated into the traditional values of the 'Negro African' humanism. He sees no point in raising the

people's standard of living without also raising the standard of their culture. He calls on his people to engage meaningfully in cultural activities that give them their identity. He is impressed with an example he finds with a certain people of the Sudan. He says these people had a single rain season and they worked only four months of the year. The remaining eight months they engaged in "cultural activities-living in communion, by and within the community with other men, their brothers, more precisely with the solidarity forces of the entire universe: the living and the dead, men and animals, plants and pebbles" (Senghor: 1964; 80). This view echoes Tempels, Mbiti and Menkiti's position that conceives the living as not only being in communion with each other but also with the dead.

Senghor says in returning to cultural roots, the new methods that have been brought by the West should not be ignored. He calls on the people to stop blaming all their ills on colonialism in cases where they could take responsibility. He urges that a new look at colonialism will yield a proper understanding of the dynamics involved in the birth of colonialism. He says colonialism is a fact of history, the conquerors may bring destruction but they ultimately bring seeds that will yield some new ideas and progress. He says the colonisation of the world by Europe was a product of the renaissance whereby the landed gentry's influence was usurped by the monarchy and the emergence of the bourgeoisie in the cities. He says the driving ideas behind the renaissance were atheistic, mercantile and destructive of the old order. He sees the renaissance as having done more than exported people and their trades. "But it exported not only merchants and soldiers; with professors, physicians, engineers, administrators, and missionaries, it also exported ideas and techniques. It not only destroyed, it built; it not only killed, it cured and educated; it gave birth to a new world, an entire world of our brothers, men of other races and continents" (*ibid*: 80).

Not only did colonialism connect people in different parts of the world, in Senghor's view, it also brought certain advances that African people on their own could not have produced. He argues that although it was a painful process it was a necessary evil.

However, he says, the task of Africans is now to 'Negrofy' all the values and religions that were brought by colonialism.

For us, socialism is a *method* to be tested in contact with African realities. It is basically a question, after choosing lucidly, of assimilating our choices. To assimilate is to transform foods that are foreign to us, to make them our flesh and blood-in a word, to *Negrofy* and *Berberize* them. This brings us back to Negro-Berber humanism; we must integrate the Negro Berber in his material determinations by transcending them in the name of certain spiritual values (Senghor: 1964; 84).

Thus Senghor embraces socialism but insists that this socialism must be informed by what he calls Negro-Berber humanism. That Negro-Berber humanism is essentially communitarian in nature. It has a specific view of the concept of person which is a communitarian view and in Senghor's view the communitarian concept of the person ought to shape the political theory.

3.3.3 Practical Socialism

Senghor says having outlined what cultural independence really entails, he would now turn to discuss what has to be done in order to realise West African humanism. He says what he is looking at now is the concrete predicament of constructing a new 'Negro-African' or 'Negro-Berber' nation.

He argues that a nation is different from a fatherland in that a fatherland is based on natural determinants such as race, culture etc. He sees his country as made up of very diverse races, different religions and languages and cultures. Hence the need to develop a nation that would embrace and accommodate all these differences. "What makes the Nation, is a common will for *a life in common*" (Senghor: 1964; 84). Thus the only requirement for the nation to come into being is simply that all must desire for a life that is common in that particular nation.

Senghor blames colonialism for creating artificial boundaries and separating people in ways that are anathema to how he sees the African person. He argues that establishing a federation would be a practical response to this problem. However, this should be done with self-determination as the guiding principle and states should be free to choose whether to join such a federation or not. He says some of the practical problems that would confront such an arrangement are to be found in the legacy of colonialism. Territorialism has developed because of prolonged periods of isolation and forced segregation. Language and cultural differences could also present problems of co-operation between different states.

But this does not deter him from suggesting a system that he sees as best suited and practical for the functioning of the federation. He conceives government organisation to be as follows:

The majority party will have the political conception and direction. The federal government and the federal assembly will direct foreign affairs. Whence the necessity for a strongly centralised party. The assemblies and governments of the federated states will control local affairs. The one is hardly less essential than the other, for reasons of principle and practice. Democracy requires us to start from the foundation, the masses; the popular will must first be expressed by the base, and the responsibilities, both economic and political, must be exercised there (Senghor: 1964; 86).

Senghor is of the firm view that this will bring all the people together and they will strive for the same goal. He argues that although there may be differences among the people, implementing such a system would alleviate those differences. He argues that the opposition within such a system must also pursue the same goal as the majority party. He is against the idea of the opposition developing and pursuing its own agenda that does not accord with the aspiration of the majority party. He says this would lead to undue groups that are antagonistic towards each other. He says the role of the opposition is to be the conscience of those in government and the party that has the majority rule.

His firm belief in the success of this project lies in the fact that he sees African societies as essentially community societies. He says they are different from other socialist countries in the West because those countries are collectivist societies that ultimately place emphasis on the individual. The individual and the satisfaction of her needs are what matters in those societies. That is not the situation in Africa. He makes the case for the communitarian view of person clear when he argues that:

Negro-African society puts more stress on the group than on the individual, more on solidarity than on the activity and needs of the individual, more on the communion of persons than on their autonomy. Ours is a community society. This does not mean that it ignores the individual, or that collectivist society ignores solidarity, but the latter bases this solidarity on the activities of individuals, whereas the community society bases it on the general activity of the group (Senghor: 1964; 93-94).

Senghor argues that the community society does not ignore the person but is capable of neglecting the individual. He says in the West the individual is the being who is independent and who is able to pursue whatever she desires freely. He says a member of a community society can also pursue what she desires but that will be in union with the community's aspirations.

He also believes that African societies do not have any social classes as found in the West. Instead, what exists in Africa are social groups and although it may appear as if there are differences of a class nature, it is easy to deal with them. In Senegal he sees three groups, the first being those who belong to the liberal professions such as doctors and lawyers, the second is of wage earners such as government workers and the third is made up of labourers such as peasants, shepherds and fishermen. He argues that although these groups appear like classes they really aren't because of two reasons. He says these groups are not highly differentiated as in Europe because of underdevelopment and it is easy for a person to move from the second or third group to the first. Secondly, those who

are in the liberal profession such as medical practitioners are mainly employed by the government. This makes it easy for government to control and determine what financial rewards they get. This would minimise the differences between the groups.

Senghor strongly advocates that the socialist programme must be workable in practice. He sees it as “essentially the transformation of economic relations between men, and the transformation of economic structures themselves” (Senghor: 1964; 102). He clearly sees economic relations among people as very important as they determine the station of people in their societies. He advocates that as they seek to implement this programme it would require that they be open about it and depart from dogmatism of Marxism but embrace new methods of learning and develop an investigative mind. To him this was the most feasible programme to adopt, thus he writes: “If, at the close of World War II, we chose socialism as a political doctrine it was because, to make our anticolonialist struggle effective, we needed a practical method that would be the application of a certain theory. For socialism is at the same time theory and practice” (Senghor: 1964; 107).

He says socialism goes beyond just governing the economic aspect of people’s lives but goes to the core of governing the total aspects of people’s lives and how they lead their lives both materially and spiritually. It is essentially about how people carry out their intimate relationships and how they interact as a society and with other societies.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter gave an outline of African socialism as a political philosophy that was advocated by some of independent Africa’s early leaders. They all relied on traditional African social and political structures to justify their desire to pursue socialism. Those social and political structures assumed a certain view of the person. Invariably they held that an individual was submerged in the community, the community was prior to the individual and whatever the individual did-it had to be in the interests of the community.

Nkrumah argued that the presence of two foreign traditions in Ghana, the Islamic and Western Christian, brought by colonialism, had to be dealt with through incorporating

them into the African traditional way of life. He argued that the traditional outlook on life in African societies had always been communalist and that the ancestor of socialism is communalism. The principle that animated the traditional communalist African society was egalitarianism. He argued that socialism had to find expression by looking at the living conditions of the African people and responding to them. He wanted the restitution of egalitarianism as well as mobilisation of all available resources to realise that goal. The traditional communal view of society and persons in that society informed his theory. He branded his African socialism consciencism and he rejected Marx and despised both colonialism and capitalism.

Nyerere argues that socialism is an attitude of the mind as opposed to strict adherence to a certain political order. He brands his socialism ujamaa-which means familyhood. He relies on the traditional set up of African society to justify his theory. He argues that Africans must return to the attitude of mind of true socialism by looking at the traditional society. In that society an individual existed within the community. She was not an entity that stood alone and apart from the community. She took care of the community and the community took care of her. When she suffered, she suffered with the community, when she rejoiced, she rejoiced with community. He rejects European socialism and argues that African socialism is deeply rooted in the ideals of the traditional extended family.

Senghor calls his brand of socialism Negritude. One key characteristic that he notes is that black people do not think by using logic but through the use of their hearts. He argues that socialism is the proper response to colonialism. He sees it as informed by the traditional societies that were found all over Africa before the arrival of colonialism. These societies, in his view, were essentially communalistic. The individual lived in a community and co-operated with the community. Senghor claimed that the individual could not claim her own independent being; she could only do so in union with her fellow beings in her community.

It is quite clear that these leaders and thinkers were adherents of one form or another of communitarianism. This views the traditional African community as embodying the

value of a person not only living in a community but finding her identity through other people and in union with her fellow community members.

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Chapter Four: Critique of Communitarian Concept of Person

4. Introduction

This chapter attempts to offer a critical and evaluative analysis of the communitarian conception of personhood in African thinking as discussed in chapter two. The early fathers of independence, as discussed in chapter three, used the idea of personhood as conceived by the communitarian doctrine as a justification for their versions of African socialism. The fathers of independence argued, as we saw in chapter three, that their version of African communalism was informed by the traditional African societies' view of life including the view of what persons were and how they lived their lives within their communal setting.

This chapter will look at two strands of communitarianism and which of their aspects provide the appeal and justification for African socialism that was advocated by the early leaders of independent Africa. Following Kwame Gyekye's distinction, I will critically examine the differences between moderate and radical communitarianism. The first objective is to establish whether the differences, as suggested by Gyekye, between these two forms of communitarianism are real. If the differences are real this chapter will also seek to establish which of these two forms of communitarianism genuinely represents African thought and way of life. Secondly, the chapter seeks to subject both forms of communitarianism to a critical analysis with an attempt to establish the philosophical justification of their respective positions.

The central appeal by Africa's early independence leaders was that African socialism was essentially African in its formulation because it embraced the notions of personhood and community that were dominant in African societies. They argued that the conception of person and the political and social organization of society that proceeded from such a view justified African socialism. This places the communitarian view at the centre of two important conceptual issues in African thinking. The first being the nature of persons in African thought and the second being the resultant political theory. These concepts were seen as uniquely African and their authenticity was justification for their defence and

pursuit. In defence of the communitarian view of personhood it sufficed to say that it was African, and in pursuance of socialism it also sufficed to say that the communitarian aspect of African life compelled its states and governments to adopt socialism as the guiding political and economic principle.

The early fathers of independence discussed in chapter three such as Nkrumah, Senghor and Nyerere were connected to the communitarian view of personhood in African philosophy. Didier Kaphagawani argues that this view is outlined in the writings of Tempels and finds ample support in Mbiti's writings. It seems uncontroversial to state that the communitarian version of personhood finds radical expression in Mbiti's unflinching view of the primacy of the community.

While Tempels' central concept was vital force, his thesis became explicitly communitarian through his observation that the increase and decrease of force is dependent on the social relation that each individual has with others, that is the society at large. Force can increase and diminish in direct proportion to the quality of that interaction. The Bantu are different from the westerners, according to Tempels, in the way they live. This way of life is communitarian in nature. Mbiti stresses the unity and indivisibility of the community. He locates the existence and welfare of the individual within a broader frame of the well-being of the community. The individual's being is dependent on and essentially tied to the community's being.

Menkiti takes the communitarian view further by claiming that for an individual in the traditional set-up to be recognized as a person she ought to have a certain moral worth exhibited through moral achievement by abiding with communal dictates. Failure to abide with those communal dictates will constitute failure to achieve personhood.

Gyekye argues that radical communitarianism as espoused by Mbiti and Menkiti is erroneous in respect of the fact that it fails to appreciate the individual in its unrestricted emphasis on the community. The failure to recognize the individual, according to Gyekye, is unrepresentative of African thinking and philosophically indefensible. He

proposes moderate communitarianism as representative of true African thinking by appealing to proverbs, as we saw in the second chapter, which are held to show that there was a place for the individual in the traditional Akan frame of thinking. Further he argues that his version is desirable because it will recognize and defend individual rights as opposed to Mbiti and Menkiti's versions of communitarianism which ride roughshod on individual rights. Gyekye singles out Menkiti's moral achievement and rites of social incorporation, as requirements for acquiring personhood, for sharp criticism. He argues that the moral requirement is beset with all sorts of confusions and incoherencies while the social incorporation requirement fails to shed any further light on the matter.

The best place to start the discussion will be to refer to the metaphysical underpinnings that inform communitarian philosophers. The metaphysical explanation of the communitarian view of person renders clear the philosophical basis of this concept. It moves a step further from the mere claim that communitarianism is the authentic African view of persons by articulating its philosophical outlook.

4.1 African Metaphysics and Persons

Teffo and Roux (1998), in their exposition of what constitutes African metaphysics, start by warning that there are dangers of generalizing when talking about an African metaphysics because of the vastness of the continent which engender differences between different ethnic groups. They note that what is true of certain parts of Africa need not necessarily be true in other parts. However, they hold that the views they deal with on African metaphysics are present in large parts of the continent and can serve as representative of metaphysical thinking in Africa.

Teffo and Roux hold that any discourse on metaphysics will generally be concerned about non-physical entities. The metaphysical discourse, in their opinion, goes beyond limitations of time and space. They also claim that "the bulk of the subject matter of African metaphysics falls under the category that is traditionally described in Western metaphysics as "supernatural" " (1998; 137). However, they argue that although African

metaphysics is concerned with what is understood as the supernatural, dualisms like matter and spirit or natural and unnatural do not feature in African thinking.

To render their point clear they discuss causality in African thinking. They state that causality's basic concern is with what they term primary causes. These primary causes are not found in the physical realm but can be manifested in the physical realm²². The point is that the spiritual world manifests itself in the physical and it is the primary cause, probably, of all significant events that happen therein. Even if an event can be explained in terms of physical causation, the actual cause, which is the primary cause, lies in the spiritual world. Further Teffo and Roux argue that metaphysics, in its theoretical formulation, is essentially expressed in social terms and practical ways of living as espoused by the communitarian ethic and politics. "The account of causality points at another picture of African metaphysical thinking: it is social in nature. In fact, as will become clear in the discussion, it is difficult to distinguish metaphysics, social theory, and morality in African thinking because all philosophizing is communitarian in nature" (Teffo and Roux: 1998; 139). The crucial mark of African philosophy, from the foregoing, is that all branches are anchored in communitarian thinking. Whatever its concerns may be, they have to find ultimate expression and articulation in communitarian thinking which is both a moral and political representation of the African people.

This view is supported by Godwin Sogolo who, in his analysis of conceptual issues in African thought, argues that the view of a person is influenced by communal considerations. This view, according to Sogolo, is distinctly African. "The African conception"---as distinct from the "universal concept of" exemplified by the Aristotelian use---refers to a set of beliefs or picture of man in the form of empirical generalizations. This is the sense in which we speak of a people's conception of man and such conceptions are as varied as there are human communities" (1993; 190).

²² In African thinking the spiritual realm, particularly the world of ancestors, is always in communication and interaction with the physical. Most things that go wrong on the physical plane find an explanation and solution in the spiritual realm. This point is made clear by Mogobe Ramose's discussion of mental illness (2002; 78-79).

Thus Sogolo is of the view that the conception of personhood will differ from one community to another and the one that Africans hold is different from an Aristotelian, universalised, concept. However, he argues that whatever that concept is, it must be close to the reality of the generalized view of what constitutes human nature. But in the African scheme of things he insists that this view of personhood must still be couched in the communitarian view. "Once the conception of man is understood, not in the sense of some universal characteristics (essences) which all men possess but as a way in which man is perceived by a given community, then our main emphasis will be on man's psychology, his relation to the other living beings and his role among other men" (*ibid*).

Sogolo does appear to acknowledge a non-derivative place for the individual but the ultimate expression of that individuality is seen from the perspective of the roles that an individual plays in her society and her relations to others. Sogolo holds that "[T]he conception of man in relation to role-playing in society is mainly about what man is as an individual. How is the African conceived as an individual and what is his place in the community" (1993; 191). The conception of the individual, then, is essentially a matter of the roles she plays in her society and what place she occupies in her community.

Rosalind Shaw (2000) also lends credence to this line of argument with her view that the conception of person is influenced by the general social atmosphere that happens to exist at that particular time. In her discussion of the Temne people of Sierra Leone, Shaw says that they have developed the notion of "tok af, lef af"²³ This notion of secrecy and refusal to divulge everything about oneself, Shaw claims, is essentially characteristic of people who are oppressed by authorities and have no recourse to any means to gain their freedom. She states that in order not to be entirely vulnerable the oppressed people begin to hide many things about themselves from others. This is born not out of a natural or psychological suspicion of fellow human beings, she says, but arises out of the ever shifting alliances that were present in the history of Sierra Leone's violent past. This violent history, according to Shaw, is traced to a 400 year slave trade and British colonialism. Thus the Temne, ever suspicious, place a high value on secrecy, in their

²³ This is a Kreole proverb which means take half, leave half which was also the title of her essay.

conception of personhood, even though they realize that they are communal beings. “As well as being a means of defence against others, secrecy is integral to the construction of selfhood and personhood” (Shaw: 2000; 40). Shaw’s point, just like Teffo and Roux as well as Sogolo, is that empirical generalisations that are lived out in real communities are definitive of personhood. My aim in this chapter is to offer a critique to the justifiability of these empirical generalisations.

4.2 A Critique of Tempels’ Force Thesis

Tempels, as discussed in the second chapter, is convinced that there is an ontological difference between the Bantu and Westerners. He granted the Bantu the ability to think and argues that they had systems that were logically coherent if closely examined. However, he held that the Bantu were not able to give a systematic exposition of their beliefs and needed help in systematically explaining their beliefs. He thought it to be the duty of Westerners to give that systematic exposition arguing: “It is our task to trace out the elements of this thought, classify them and to systematise them according to the ordered systems and intellectual disciplines of the Western world” (Tempels: 1959; 15-16).

Tempels set out to render what the Bantu ontological system was. He argues that force, within the Bantu scheme of thought, is vital. Force is essentially being. When the Bantu speak of force, they are speaking of being. Force is the all enduring and all defining aspect of Bantu life. In his own words he says; “I believe that we should most faithfully render the Bantu thought in European language by saying that Bantu speak, act, live as if, for them, beings were forces. Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: **Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force**²⁴” (Tempels: 1959; 35).

In his view increase and decrease of force affects one’s life positively or negatively respectively. Not all people retain the same kind and amount of force. Those who

²⁴ Emphasis his.

command little force are not real people whereas those with plenitude of force are seen as real persons who enjoy the respect of others.

Despite all his good intentions and attempts to render as perspicuous as possible Bantu ontology and the idea of force that he alleges to be so central in Bantu philosophy, Tempels' account of force is confusing at the very least and misleading at most. Tempels claims that for the Bantu being is force and force is being. On his account this can be taken to mean that these two concepts are inseparable. They are one and the same thing, force means being and any talk of being is necessarily talk of force. But, at the very least, in many African languages it is possible to talk exclusively about each of these concepts and it is even quite possible that they are not related at all.

Didier Kaphagawani finds Tempels' position objectionable and problematic because it confines the Bantu understanding and usage of the concept of force by correlating it to being. "But this position raises quick questions. First, if being is defined in terms of force-that is, if the Bantu think of the ordinary idea of force (as capacity for action) as substance-then we need an explanation of how the Bantu think and talk of action, of performance" (Kaphagawani: 2000; 69-70).

I concur with Kaphagawani's interpretation of the meaning of force and how it is used in African understanding. When people talk about force they are simply referring to something that has a capacity to bring about a certain change or a different state of affairs or that actually brings about such a change. Force is not essentially mysterious or an all determining concept that determines life and all living within the African scheme. Tempels' notions of 'vital force' and 'increase of force', which are crucial to his account of Bantu ontology, read too much into the actual usage of the term. Indeed Temples needs to show how the Bantu talk differently about simple performance of mundane activities.

Kaphagawani takes this issue further when he notes that African people talk about other people as having or lacking potential to execute various duties. These people are taken to

lack the necessary physical force to do something, which is normally a physical task. When people talk, they make reference to many things such as animals, timber and medicines as either weak or strong. In most cases, Kaphagawani says, this reference is about someone or something producing effect or resisting external forces that are being applied on the object or the person.

Force is seen

...as capacity of an agent rather than as substance itself. Tempels's thesis thus portrays the Bantu as extraordinary in their conceptual and linguistic representations of reality, and his thesis indicates that their concepts lie outside the normal and common sense, as defined by their corresponding Western examples. Using an old but controversial theory about the relationship between thought and language, Tempels aimed to show that Bantu thought in perverse ways, as, in his view, was evidenced by the perversity of their language (*ibid*).

This observation is true as Tempels makes an explicit acknowledgement at the beginning of his work that there is a difference between the Bantu ontology and Western ontology. He urges his readership, Belgian missionaries, colonial administrators and other Belgians interested in Bantu ontology, not to approach Bantu ontology as they would approach Western ontology. Kaphagawani accuses Tempels of harbouring an aim that intended to show that African thinking was radically different from Western thinking. For Kaphagawani this was not just a mere intention at that level of demonstrating the differences but Tempels's agenda was intended at showing the inferiority of Bantu thinking.

It is difficult to defend Tempels on this charge because he does not help matters himself when he states, in a footnote that explains being and force, that:

It can rightly be said that the Bantu regard being as exclusively or essentially a “principle of activity”. This term is borrowed from **our**²⁵ scientific and therefore more philosophical terminology. One must on that account be careful not to understand it in relation to our static concepts of being, but in accordance with Bantu thought wherein this same principle is regarded as realising itself more or less in itself (Tempels: 1959; 35).

It is quite clear that Tempels in his own words insists on the existence of the difference of the conceptual formulation of being between the Westerners and the Bantu. Being for the Bantu is about activity. It is not immediately clear what this activity is precisely supposed to be and what constitutes it. Tempels may respond that the activity he is referring to is to be found in communal relations where good communal relations result in the positive outcome of increase of force for the individual and the community at large. But the problem is that he has not established the scheme has to be seen in terms of force. He merely asserts that is the case. There are no philosophical grounds for Tempels to afford force such a special status in the Bantu ontology.

Secondly, Kaphagawani accuses Tempels of distorting an African language through his deployment of metaphysical references to simple statements. By using the force thesis to represent African ontology, Tempels gives force a special function in the language which is beyond ordinary use of the word. Evidence of this distortion, to my mind, is found where Tempels lends a metaphysical construal of force to simple statements that refer to a man’s importance in society (1959; 67). He argues that the force thesis is an ontological explanation for the use of such terms as ‘muntu mutupu’ to refer to a man of middling importance who is devoid of any real importance, ‘muntu mukulumpe’ to refer to a person of real importance who has a role to play in his society and ‘ke muntu po’ to refer to a person who behaves unworthily, or a person who is not regarded as a person

For Kaphagawani this is unacceptable as it makes the Bantu language quite peculiar and unusual in its general usage which defies any simplicity. “Cannot the Bantu talk like

²⁵ Emphasis his.

ordinary, everyday people who pass information between themselves in matters that use simple ways of setting aside the skepticism and surprise of their listeners?" (2000; 70).

The above point is linked to Tempels's commitment to finding a difference between the Bantu and Westerners both in their conceptual formulation as well as their language usage. It is not clear what could have motivated Tempels to find that difference but it appears as if the desire to establish that difference led him to some bizarre conclusions about the nature of force and its proper position in the African conceptual framework.

Tempels's use of force as the primary ontological determinant of personhood is not without controversy and for the reasons stated above it is hard to accept his position. Firstly it appears to distort the African scheme of things and secondly his thesis runs into difficulties as to exactly what this force is supposed to be and what function it plays in the African conception of personhood.

4.3 A Critique of Mbiti

Kaphagawani argues that the idea that there is a difference between African and Western modes of thought as expressed by Tempels is rooted in the thinking of what he calls "leading African ideologues" such as Nkrumah, Senghor, Nyerere, and Kaunda. "To these leaders, African communalism presented a desirable alternative to the Western framework of individualism, which, in their view, was the underlying premise of exploitative and conflictual Western capitalism. Communalism was thus not only a metaphysical principle of social existence but also a sort of critique of the social order, one derived from the European enlightenment" (Kaphagawani: 2000; 73).

This desire to find a difference informed all of communitarian thinking and activity. The metaphysical conception of person was not only restricted to abstract philosophical considerations but was immediately linked and related to practical communal ways of living. This provides the justification and popularisation of the political program. Kaphagawani argues that all communitarian scholars chose to emphasise the differences that existed between the African and Western conceptions of the self not as a matter of

mere difference but as a fulfilment of an explicit political goal. “The concepts of the self adopted by these scholars are chosen strictly with this goal in mind: they are not concerned with what concept best captures the manifold experiences of the self but with what concept best allows them to both promote difference and derive ontological values of the vital forces as well as communalism²⁶” (Kaphagawani: 2000; 74).

Kaphagawani is convinced that Mbiti was an enthusiastic disciple of Tempels who was eager to show that African modes of thought were different from their Western counterparts. “Mbiti’s defence of communalism thus traces its roots deep into both cultural and intellectual histories of the preceding times. Since the time of his own writing, several others have toed this line in search of an African difference and uniqueness” (*ibid*; 73).

So the charge here is that all African communitarianism, including that of Mbiti, is rooted in the desire to find a difference. It is fair to read Kaphagawani’s criticism as implying that the need to find and adumbrate this difference was deeply political rather than simply metaphysical. The agenda for Tempels was to show Africans as different but cast in a lowly light, whereas for the early independent African leaders it was meant to be an alternative to Western evils and the inhumanity of colonialism and capitalism.

On the philosophical level, Kaphagawani is skeptical of the way in which Mbiti explicates his position. Kaphagawani thinks Mbiti is fallaciously collecting support for the all enduring importance of the community in African thinking. Kaphagawani argues that “it should be conceded that in putting this thesis in a form reminiscent of the Cartesian *cogito* argument, namely that in Africa *we are* therefore *I am*, Mbiti aims at underscoring the extent to which communal life is esteemed in Africa” (Kaphagawani: 1999; 173).

²⁶ Kaphagawani argues that Tempels saw the African “I” as ineffable because of its lack of concrete location either in mental or physical which made it pathological. The communitarians on the other hand argue that the “I” is not strictly fixed but appears and disappears in different linguistic and ontological function of different participants. But its great aim is at the promotion of the general common good as opposed to a fixed defining quality.

The important point being made here is that Mbiti's thesis takes the Cartesian form in affirming a different requirement to not only emphasise the importance of the community but also to insist on the difference between the Western mode of thought and the African mode. The formula suggests a philosophical flaw in the Western mode. The formula also puts the African mode of thought on par with the Western mode through a similar expression. The contrasting requirement of personhood is expressed by insisting on the communal aspect as the all embracing notion that is definitive of what constitutes a person. The community is constitutive of each and every member and each individual's existence is affected by the fate of the rest.

This comparison with the cogito highlights an important issue. Mbiti's position appears to be merely stated and not argued for. It is not self-evident that the conclusion that Mbiti reaches above follows from his premises. He merely states that the community is of crucial importance in the conceptualization of persons. He does not show how it is conceptually necessary that different individuals are collapsed into a collective of identity through claiming that whatever happens to one individual happens to the rest of the community. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, whose language is my first language and whose culture is my cultural outlook, they have a proverb that says "Nhamo yemumwe hairambirwi sadza". This proverb literally means that when someone is faced with some problem there is no reason for other people to refuse eating their meals. This shows that there is a difference between individual and communal concerns. If an individual is faced with problems of her own, her fellows might not share in her fate or be as concerned as she is. Further, it is not clear what this claim that whatever happens to one individual happens to the rest of the group really entails. There appear to be no reasons behind Mbiti's conclusion about the primacy of the community and why it should be such an all determining fact of personhood and why everyone is to be taken as sharing in the fate of everyone else. Mbiti has not done that work to show that there is indeed that collective identity.

Kaphagawani makes this point neatly, and it is worth quoting him at length;

... to assert African communalism is not in any way to imply the denial of recognition of individual human beings *qua* individuals. African communalism in fact takes cognizance of ontological pluralism; and to assert, as Mbiti does, that *we are*, presumes prior recognition of the individuality of those making up the *we*. For although it is mathematically possible to imagine a set which happens to be empty, it seems impossible to imagine the existence of an empty human society. And to claim, “whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group”, and vice versa, is no doubt to forget the difference between individuals on the one hand, and sets of individuals on the other (*ibid*).

Thus Kaphagawani is critical of Mbiti’s assertion that the community takes precedence over the individual. In fact, he thinks within Mbiti’s scheme, the individual is recognised, presumably, by referring to the ‘we’ that makes up the group.

I think Kaphagawani is quite correct in pointing out that what makes up human societies are sets of human individuals. The individuals still retain their individual status although they are participants in a human society. That participation in and membership of a community does not deprive the individual of her individual make-up. The individual’s participation in communal activities may serve to meet or fulfil some or all of her social needs. Whatever these social needs may be, they do not have to be all-consuming. Her social side, fulfilled through communal collaboration with others, can be said to be just one of her many sides and need not necessarily be seen as constitutive of her personhood. Thus Mbiti’s assertion that whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group is overstated. Mbiti’s assertion can only be acceptable if it is taken to mean that people sympathise with each other, feel each other’s pain and generally are sensitive to what happens to their fellows. It cannot claim anything more than this²⁷.

²⁷ Kaphagawani offers some Chewa (one of the native languages of Malawi) proverbs that recognise the individual’s own fate, predicament and destiny.

Thus Mbiti's communitarian position is faced with three difficulties which it is difficult to rescue it from. In the first as Kaphagawani has noted, Mbiti, following Tempels, insists, without justification, on the difference that exists between Western conceptions of persons and the African communitarian version. The only apparent reasons are (irrelevant) political ones. Secondly, the assertion that the community takes precedence over the individual is not accompanied by premises that lead to such a conclusion. Thirdly, the communitarian project as defended by Mbiti fails to take sufficient cognisance of the separateness of individuals. Its attempt to hold them as an inseparable collective does not succeed.

4.4 A Critique of Menkiti

Gyekye argues for his version of moderate communitarianism through criticising Menkiti's radical insistence on the primacy of the community and the importance of moral worth in defining personhood. He argues that this version of communitarianism fails to take into account the distinct existence of each individual, her worth and talents as well as individual rights.

He concedes that an individual is a social being who is born into a society made up of people that she interacts with but this does not mean that she is stripped of all her individual attributes and capabilities. He says radical communitarianism fails to take the individual's rights and talents seriously. Gyekye finds Menkiti to be making only one philosophically interesting contribution on the matter of personhood in African thinking. Gyekye argues that "In his analysis, Menkiti²⁸ makes a least three characterisations of personhood. But, in my view, only one characterisation is of philosophical interest or relevance; it is also the one that does not seem to involve itself in a morass of confusions and incoherences. This characterisation adumbrates a moral conception of personhood, and I find it interesting" (Gyekye: 1997; 48).

Gyekye rejects Menkiti's assertion that one becomes more of a person through a process of socialisation where in order for one to become a member of a society she has to go

²⁸ Menkiti's position is fully discussed in the second chapter.

through various rites of incorporation. Gyekye does not see how going through rites of incorporation involve morality. Although, he concedes, young people are instructed about their moral roles in society and told about the importance of observing these moral dictates in society, it is not clear to Gyekye how morality as a determinant can be made real at the stage of rituals and incorporation.

His point is that there is a difference between morality as a lived-out determinant of whether one is a person or not and the mere process of going through rituals. Menkiti appears to have assumed that going through rituals directly results in the emergence or growth of moral responsibility in the individual who is being incorporated into the society but it is left unclear as to how this might occur. An individual's capacity does not arise as a result of certain rituals being performed on her.

Menkiti also claims that the attainment of personhood is of a processual nature. He says one becomes a full person with time and as she gets older. Gyekye finds this additional requirement problematic and argues that: "The notions of "full personhood" and "more of a person" are as bizarre as they are incoherent. How does one know exactly when a person becomes a "full" person, whatever this word means as applied to a person? And, when, and how does a person become "more of a person"?" (1997; 49). Gyekye says that Menkiti's response will be that full personhood is attained when a person is old and, at that stage, she would have attained excellencies that are considered essential in the definition of a person or acquisition of personhood.

Gyekye holds that if we were to assume that the attainment of these excellencies would represent the success of the individual in her moral life, showing that she had fully abided by moral virtues, tying this attainment to growing old would raise one major difficulty. The difficulty, according to Gyekye, lies in considering elderly people as necessarily moral or, at least, as having the natural outlook of practising moral virtues. "For, surely there are many elderly people who are known to be wicked, ungenerous, unsympathetic: whose lives, in short, generally do not reflect any moral maturity to excellence. In terms of a moral conception of personhood, such elderly people may not qualify as persons"

(*ibid*). Essentially Gyekye accuses Menkiti of holding a position that is internally incoherent.

I think a couple of criticisms can be developed against Menkiti here. The first has to deal with whether African societies do actually deny some people personhood. In other words, are individuals who consistently show themselves to be evil and stand no chance of moral achievement considered to be non-persons. Secondly, if these individuals were indeed considered as non-persons – would their being denied the status of personhood make any sense? Further, Menkiti does not discuss what these excellences are as does Paris who argues there are six fundamental virtues in African societies which are beneficence, forbearance, practical wisdom, improvisation, forgiveness and justice (Paris: 2004; 19-62). Virtues and moral conduct are issues that are not easily agreed on. Each society has its own views and code of what is moral and virtuous. These views may compete or be at odds with the views of other societies. But, even more interesting, is the fact that even within the same society one finds that there is likely to be more than one opinion of what is morally worthy in almost every situation.

There is yet another philosophical difficulty that Menkiti's position raises. He argues that moral worth comes with age which leads to the attainment of personhood. This raises a difficulty about the status of the young. Here the consideration is not about the young members of society who are still babies but the young ones such as teenagers and those who might not have gone through rituals of incorporation. What is their status, ontologically? I think Menkiti needs to carefully and clearly spell out what each criterion counts as in the attainment of personhood. Menkiti may respond by asserting either that they are not persons, or, they are not persons as yet.

The response that seeks to give the young personhood at a later stage is problematic in that it unjustifiably conflates issues that bear little relation to each other. Collapsing an ontological question into one that deals with moral achievement, ageing and rituals appears bizarre at the very least. There is no ontological difference between the young adults who have not performed all the rituals and young adults who have not. Menkiti

would want to hold that the adults who have fulfilled all ritual requirements have become more of persons than those who have not. I think this is an arbitrary distinction which should not be used on such weighty issues as determining personhood. The real challenge, for Menkiti, lies in his claim that personhood is something that is gradually attained. The problem lies in that he does not clearly spell out what that 'gradual attainment' really involves in its entirety. The two points that he relies on, moral achievement and carrying out all rites of incorporation, are problematic as I have attempted to outline above. Since these two points are not without controversy there is still need for Menkiti to outline what precisely is involved in the process of gradually attaining personhood. Further there is no reason to believe that attaining adulthood is to be equated with the attainment of personhood. The point is even supported by Kaphagawani who argues that although in communalist societies the elderly are given an esteemed position in terms of epistemology, this must not mean that the youth are not regarded as persons.

Rather, like in every orderly distribution of roles in a system of production, this privilege is given to individuals who show and sustain the ability to perform the roles apportioned to them by the social system. No one is held *a priori* to be an expert in any domain of knowledge merely on the ground of his age. Everyone must prove his worth by the measure of an established norm. And furthermore, the Chewa believe that old knowledge quickly loses its worth and validity²⁹ unless it is constantly renewed and rejuvenated (Kaphagawani: 2000; 75).

Thus Kaphagawani's point is that the elders occupy an epistemological position that appears to be privileged over the young because this is a mere distribution of roles. There is nothing inherent in being old that qualifies an individual to possess certain knowledge. She possesses that knowledge because she is playing a certain role in society and she is

²⁹ Kaphagawani offers two proverbs which contrast each other. The first one says: Mau wa akuluakulu akagonera which means that the elders's words are sweet after a year. The second one says: Tsobola wakale sawawa which means that old pepper is never hot forever (Kaphagawani: 2000; 75). This means that what used to be of importance in previous dispensations does not necessarily continue to be so.

expected to have certain attributes besides her age to play that role. The same also holds as regards moral excellencies, whatever they may be conceived to be. They represent a kind of role playing that the elders must occupy in society. One may think of them as keepers of morality who will pass it on to the younger generation but that should not make them ontologically superior by virtue of age. While it may be true that personhood is something that may be attained gradually; Menkiti's account has failed to clearly articulate what constitutes that gradual attainment. His reliance on moral achievement and rites of incorporation is not without problems.

Menkiti's account of personhood is unclear and perhaps even incoherent. He fails to outline what gradual attainment of personhood could be and he conflates issues of ontology with other matters that do not obviously bear on matters of identity.

4.5 A Critique of Gyekye

As we saw in chapter one, Gyekye argues for his moderate communitarianism through criticising what he calls radical communitarianism with particular reference to Menkiti. Building on what he sees as a failed account of personhood by Menkiti, Gyekye argues that there is a distinction between human beings as individuals and persons. He holds that an individual human being can fail at being a person. According to Gyekye although one may not be granted the status of personhood she still remains a human being because we do not call her a tree or a beast. Gyekye holds that "There is no implication, however, that an individual considered "not a person" loses her right as a human being or that she loses her citizenship or that she ceases to be an object of moral concern from the point of view of other people's treatment of her. Only that she is not a morally worthy individual" (1997; 50).

To make his point more lucid, on the distinction between an individual and person, he argues that a person who removes herself from her community and lives a life that is detached from her community, is taken to be an irresponsible moral agent (*ibid*). This moral agent, in Gyekye's terminology, would have failed at personhood altogether but still remains an individual who is a human being. Gyekye, while holding that children are

human beings and members of the community, just like Menkiti, argues that they are only persons potentially until they can exercise their moral capacity. It is perhaps more illuminating to quote Gyekye at length to ascertain his precise position on the nature of personhood. He argues:

Now, the moral significance of denying personhood to a human being on the grounds that his actions are known to be dissonant with certain fundamental norms or that he fails to exhibit certain virtues in his behaviour is extremely interesting for communitarians. Personhood, in this model of humanity, is not innate but is earned in the ethical arena: it is an individual's moral achievement that earns him the status of a person. Every individual is capable of becoming a person inasmuch as he is capable of doing good and should therefore be treated (potentially) as a morally responsible agent" (Gyekye: 1997; 51-52).

Gyekye's position is not really different from Menkiti's position. His claim that he is advocating a distinct version of communitarianism is not successful. For a start, Gyekye purports to establish a difference between an individual and a person. This difference is supposed to explain what happens to persons who fail in the moral arena thus, supposedly, rendering Gyekye's view preferable to that of Menkiti. Although Menkiti does not say what happens to those who fail at morality and consequently personhood, there is nothing in his account of persons that prevents him from also saying that there are individuals and persons. He can maintain the same distinction as Gyekye has made. On that score Gyekye's moderate communitarianism does not have a superior appeal to what he has called radical communitarianism.

Secondly, as seen in the quote above, Gyekye explicitly commits his definition of persons to moral achievement in the same way that Menkiti does. Menkiti claims that personhood is not a static quality that is acquired at birth but is acquired as one gets older and

becomes morally responsible. Gyekye concedes that in the communitarian³⁰ conception personhood is not innate but acquired in the moral arena. This puts him on par with Menkiti as both are claiming the criticality of moral achievement in the determination of personhood. Gyekye's claim that those who do not meet the moral requirement are not persons but still remain humans is not useful at all because the central question is dealing with the definition of persons and not humans. It is in ascribing that status of personhood that he aligns himself with Menkiti on the importance of moral worth. In his own words he opines:

Thus a moral conception of personhood is held in African thought; personhood is defined in terms of moral achievement. Personhood conceived in terms of moral achievement will be most relevant to the communitarian framework that holds the ethic of responsibility in high esteem: the ethic that stresses sensitivity to the interests and well-being of other members of the community, though not necessarily to the detriment of individual rights... (Gyekye: 1997; 52)

Gyekye is also of the opinion that his version of communitarianism will be sensitive to the talents and differences of individuals. Although he pays homage to moral worth in the determination of personhood, he believes that there is a room for the recognition of individual rights within his moderate version of communitarianism. Gyekye disagrees with Menkiti when he states that the community cannot be the sole determinant of personhood. He is of the view that if personhood is determined solely by relations to the community, individual rights will not be recognised within that community. He adds that his difference with Menkiti on this point is philosophical and not hermeneutical. Gyekye's view on humans is that although they are social by nature they are other things as well. He says; "I have in mind such essential attributes of the person as rationality, having a moral sense and capacity for virtue and, hence, for evaluating and making moral judgements: all this means that the individual is capable of choice. If we do not choose to

³⁰ He is not explicit on what type of communitarianism is he referring to. I take it that the communitarian model he is talking of also includes his own version of moderate communitarianism.

be social-because we are social by nature-neither do we choose to be intelligent or rational beings with a moral sense (or, capacity for virtue)” (1997; 53). Further he holds that an individual’s mental features are not a creation of the community although the community discovers and nurtures them. The community then, in Gyekye’s view, only plays a partial role in the formation of the individual as well as providing the forum for the individual to realise all her goals and dreams. To show that the community is only partially constitutive in the formation of the individual, Gyekye argues that the community cannot set unchangeable values for the individual because people can and do change their values. He also thinks that the capacity for self assertion shows that an individual has her own rational will and can follow her own goals and dreams. He argues that this is not the case with radical communitarianism.

Extreme or unrestricted communitarianism fails to give adequate recognition to the creativity, inventiveness, imagination, and idealistic proclivities of some human individuals in matters relating to the production of ideas and the experience of visions. The powers of inventiveness, imagination, and so on are not entirely a function of the communal structure; they are instead a function of natural talents or endowments, even though they can only be nurtured and exercised in a cultural community (Gyekye: 1997; 59).

I do not think that Gyekye’s argument succeeds. He merely assumes that what he terms unrestricted communitarianism will stifle individual talent and originality. He does not show what precise element in the radical communitarian scheme would be responsible for that. He also does not show what particular element in his moderate version will be responsible for promoting individual creativity and talent. He just states that this is going to be the case. It is difficult to see how his version of communitarianism would promote individual talent when he holds that personhood, in all communitarian thinking, is attained when one has shown herself to be a person of certain moral standing. If that is the key requirement then everything else must be harnessed in pursuit of the attainment of that requirement. A person who is talented in whatever way does not constitute a threat

to her communitarian community as long as she abides by moral dictates. The community has no reason to feel threatened by her unless her genius is directed at causing some disturbance in one way or the other. Gyekye is unwarrantedly suspicious of radical communitarianism and imputes to it structures of oppression which it otherwise does not inherently have. He does not show how his version would also avoid the same structures if they indeed were extant in the radical school.

It is not entirely clear what Gyekye means when he says radical communitarianism fails to give 'adequate recognition' to the individual's creativity and imagination. It is not clear what kind of recognition he has in mind and how the community is supposed to show its members that it is not giving them recognition for their creativity and imagination. The individual who has such creative powers which can be used to further the interests of the community is always recognised as outstanding and the community will turn to that individual whenever there is need for her inventiveness. Oruka in an interview with Akoko points out that the communalist set-up is one of co-operation as opposed to sharing property or wealth. Those who have more of any form of material goods would avail them for use by the poor. Oruka notes that people are born with different abilities; some people are more powerful than others and are able to work hard, produce more and acquire lots of possessions. But he holds that this ability must be used for the benefit of other members of the society when he argues: "However, it is my opinion that because a person is born with superior powers, [there] is all the more reason why that person ought to place his extra or superior powers at the service of his less well-off neighbour. Given his superior powers, he can produce more food to feed others so that all may live together in happiness" (Akoko: 1995; 39).

From the above it is clear that within any communitarian setting, those who have superior gifts ranging from the ability to produce food to any superior power any individual can possess are welcome to make their contribution in society. The only thing that Gyekye is correct about is that although all talents are individual endowments, they find their expression and fulfilment in a cultural community. There is no reason for him to hold that

his own version of communitarianism is better equipped to recognise individual inventiveness.

Gyekye believes that his moderate version is equipped to recognise individual rights. Gyekye notes that as rights primarily belong to the individual and since radical communitarianism has no regard for the individual it cannot have regard for rights. On the other hand he argues that there are several reasons to support the idea that there will be a regard for rights within moderate communitarianism. Firstly, he argues, rights will be discussed in the community forums because they represent self assertion and autonomy. Secondly, he thinks that in that communal setting the question of rights cannot be reduced to nought because the people in those communities would have reflected on the nature of persons or would have derived respect for humans from some theistic doctrine. Thirdly, he holds that it is impossible for communitarian societies to ignore rights both conceptually and practically. He holds that although rights belong to the individual their exercise benefits the wider community. The community benefits through each member's exercise of her unique talents and abilities which contribute to the cultural enhancement and general success of the community (Gyekye: 1997; 62-64).

Having held this position, which appears fair enough, Gyekye then offers a startling rendition of how his moderate communitarian society really views rights when he says:

With all this said, however, it must be granted that moderate communitarianism cannot be expected to be obsessed with rights. The reason, which is not far to seek, derives from the logic of the communitarian theory itself: it assumes a great concern for values, for the good of the wider society as such. The communitarian society, perhaps like any other type of human society, deeply cherishes the social values of peace, harmony, stability, solidarity, and mutual reciprocities and sympathies (1997; 65).

This is a contradiction within his account. He wants to affirm the importance of rights and the fact that moderate communitarianism is equipped with the necessary structure to recognise them. But at the same time he, in a very puzzling manner, tells us that the very same moderate communitarian society cannot allow itself to be obsessed with rights. I think it is fair to inquire as to what Gyekye's moderate version will be obsessed with. Gyekye says it will prize harmony, peace, stability and solidarity. If that is the case I suggest that there is no difference between the radical communitarian and Gyekye. They are both not obsessed with rights and they value harmony, peace, stability and solidarity. Gyekye's moderate communitarianism is on that score the same as radical communitarianism. He merely claims that his version will recognise individual rights. The radical communitarian can also make the same claim as Gyekye.

But Gyekye does not end there, he proceeds to either reveal the true radical communitarian in him, or more spectacularly to reveal the similarity of his theory with Menkiti's own when he says:

Individual rights, the exercise of which is meaningful only within the context of human society, must therefore be matched with social responsibilities. In the absence of the display of sensitivity to such responsibilities, the community will have to take the steps necessary to maintain its integrity and stability. The steps are likely to involve abridging individual rights, which, thus, will be regarded by the moderate communitarian as not absolute, though important (Gyekye: 1997; 65).

Gyekye then goes to argue that the exercise of rights must be within an appropriate social context and that it is legitimate that concern be raised about that social context. It is not clear what those conditions would be. However, what is clear is that these two positions approach each other when contrasted with the view that the notion of a right is something inalienable or not abridgeable. Gyekye is on par with Menkiti here because he has also effectively given rights a secondary importance as Menkiti does. It must be remembered that Menkiti does not completely reject the importance of rights. He merely sates that

whatever the importance of human rights could be, it is secondary to the importance of the community. In all important respects the views match each other.

When the interests of the community and that of the individual are at stake, it is clear on this account that the individual will emerge as the loser. Her rights will be abridged to preserve the interests of the community. On this account Gyekye is guilty of advocating for a society that has no respect for rights, a society that has no respect for the inventiveness of individuals (which he claims to respect) and a society that is conservative.

Gyekye does not also tell us which rights can be abridged and which rights are incorrigible. He refrains from categorising or mentioning what rights individuals have and when those rights can be violated. Rights can be categorised in order of importance with some rights taking precedence over others. But it is one thing to say that rights need to be balanced with each other. But if they are all subject to being waived-then in what sense are these rights at all? It appears as if Gyekye does not take the notion of rights seriously.

4.6 Inevitability of the Communitarian view

As we saw in chapter two, there is another school of thought that conceives the person in African thinking from a metaphysical point of view. However, the communitarian view appears to be dominant and this dominance, as Kaphagawani has argued above, was promoted by politicians who had their own purposes and goals for promoting it. The scholars who support this strand, according to Kaphagawani are also driven by the need to show that Africans are different.

It appears as if the communitarian account of the self is motivated by the twin desires of emphasising African difference as well as finding justification for communalist or socialist political systems. Appiah provides insight into the nature of the theory of person that people hold when he says: "Naturally, a theory of the person is hard to isolate from the general views of a people about the world - social, natural, and supernatural - in

which they live” (2004; 26). This is markedly the case with the communitarian account of personhood. It is heavily influenced by the importance that is given to the community and relationality that it accords to African thinking. The philosophical problems that arise are clear in Gyekye’s account. While claiming that there is indeed a place for rights in his theory he immediately turns around and is prepared to allow those rights to be waived in favour of the community.

Another striking example is Gbadegesin. In his account of a theory of destiny, he is at pains to communalise such a personal and individual reality. He argues that an individual’s destiny is connected to the destiny of other people starting with his immediate family and extending to the whole community. Although destiny and the life of an individual may be separated from the community, it will not make sense and cannot be fully grasped outside the community. This is because destiny joins the individual to the rest of the community and the community provides its members with meaning. But he is alert to the self-serving interpretation of this concept that is deployed by politicians when he says: “This insight about the interconnectedness of destinies may be a reflection of the traditional mode of living among the Yoruba and may provide an intellectual rationale for the political appeal to the notion of common destiny when it suits political leaders” (Gbadegesin: 2004; 60).

Thus it is clear that there is a common orientation in conceptual formulations is oriented towards the communitarian doctrine as Teffo and Roux suggested at the beginning of this chapter. While this may be the case, it does not mean that there are no faults inherent in this thinking both at the philosophical and practical level. On the philosophical level there are the difficulties I have discussed above and on the practical level the concept is open to abuse as Gbadegesin notes.

Sometimes the claim of the inescapability of communal considerations arises even when a metaphysical conception of the person is being attempted. This is evident in the work of Adeofe whose conception of the person is primarily metaphysical through his

identification of persons as having a body, mind/soul and something he calls an inner head. However he tries to balance the social aspect and the metaphysical when he says:

Any credible theory of personal identity must be metaphysically and socially stable, and the two forms of stability must be interconnected. By “stability,” I simply mean the ability to deliver consistent judgements. Metaphysical stability helps to explain the unity of the self, so to speak, that makes personal identity possible. Social stability helps to explain our socialised existence-our belief systems, social character, and projects of value that seem to make our lives meaningful. A theory of personal identity is likely to be stable in some form or another, but the challenge is to be stable in both forms in the same context at the same time with respect to the same determinations (Adeofe: 2004; 80-81).

Ramose makes the same point when he describes the relationship between person as metaphysically construed and as socially construed. He argues that there is a difference between what he calls a holonistic and individualistic conception of the person. The individualistic conception of personhood accords primary importance to the individual in the conception of persons whilst giving partial recognition to the community. On the other hand the holonistic conception understands personhood in terms of wholeness. This wholeness refers to the individual's community and the kind of influence that it ultimately has on her. He sees both the individual and her community as intricately interwoven when he says: “This means that there is a mutual foundedness between the greater environing wholeness in the sense of both the encompassing physical and the metaphysical universe together with the human universe in the sense of community, are the ontological as well as the epistemological foundation of human individuality” (Ramose: 2002; 65). I am of the view that mixing ontological issues with epistemological issues creates confusion and does not help in rendering the concept of person clear in African thinking.

Further Ramose argues that human individuality on its own is not a sufficient condition for personhood. “In order to be a person the human individual must, according to traditional African thought, go through various community prescribed stages, and be part of certain ceremonies and rituals” (*ibid*). Whatever these stages and rituals are, they are the ones that perform the task of transforming one from an individual to a person. Once again the same objections raised against Menkiti, above, apply to Ramose’s account.

Achebe grants individuality to the person but curtails it when he considers the importance of the community. He says the idea of individuality can be traced to Christian thinking which sees every individual as a creation of God thus making each individual worthy. The Igbo, he says, claim that each individual is not only a unique creation but also that every individual was created by a unique creator. But interestingly he opines that: “All this might lead one to think that among the Igbo, the individual would be supreme, totally free, and existentially alone. But the Igbo are unlikely to concede to the individual an absolution they deny even to the *chi*.³¹ The obvious curtailment of a man’s power to walk alone and do as he will is provided by another potent force—the will of his community” (1998; 70). The individual is not an entity that is so fiercely independent that she can do whatever she wants. In her constitution and whatever she does her community will be beside her or always present in whatever she does or becomes. Here Achebe confuses issues of autonomy with identity and this confusion emerges because he is obsessed with defending the view that the community is constitutive of the individual.

Okot p’Bitek also perpetuates the problem. He opines that the human individual is tied by chains and these chains are things that an individual owes her society. He believes that even in death the individual is tied to her community when he argues: “Man is not born free. He cannot be free. He is incapable of being free. For only by being in *chains* can he be and remain “human.” What constitutes these chains? Man has a bundle of *rights* and *privileges* that society owes him. In African belief, even death does not free him. If he had been an important member of society while he lived, his ghost continues to be

³¹ Achebe says there are two translations to the word. One translation can mean god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul or spirit double. The second translation can mean day or daylight.

revered and fed: and he is in turn expected to guide and protect the living” (p’Bitek: 1998; 73). Thus not only is the individual constituted by her community and committed to it; she is also not free from it. She is shackled by it and it appears as if on p’Bitek’s account these rights are not only for the benefit of the individual but for the benefit of the community.

From the foregoing the effect of the community is all pervasive in African philosophising. Its effects are far-reaching and are taken to be responsible for explaining the physical world as well as the conceptual formulation of persons and how they are to behave in the physical world. However, this emphasis on the community raises a number of serious concerns which I seek to discuss in the section immediately below.

4.7 A Challenge to the Communitarian Inevitability

The all-encompassing acceptance of the importance and priority as well as determining powers of the community in questions that seek to address the nature of personhood has difficulties of its own. Kaphagawani, as we saw above, rightly points out that in some cases, particularly with Tempels and Mbiti, the motivation to stress the importance of the community up to a point of exaggeration is driven by the desire to emphasise the differences between Africans and Westerners. If communitarianism is only interested in articulating the African difference it may expose itself to the same problems as ethnophilosophy-as we saw in chapter one. Communitarianism may become another version of ethnophilosophy if it restricts itself to merely articulating what African people believe or what the African reality, however conceived, is.

The biggest problem as was hinted above is that considerations about the concept of person in African thinking have one enduring philosophical weakness. The problem is that there is a conflation of conceptual and theoretical concerns with empirical activities that happen within African communities. This reduction of everything into communalism is taken to be definitive of traditional African societies and thinking, but this is a suspicious position. As Appiah notes “[M]any African societies have as much in common with traditional societies that are not African as they do with each other” (1998; 115). It

is hardly contentious to claim that traditional societies are likely to retain certain features that are in accord with their times and ways of living. One of the inevitable results of traditional social set-ups is that they are closely knit, mostly rural, communities whose survival and flourishing depends on close co-operation. In traditional set-ups the social structures and practices of people are realistic strategies of survival rather than reflections of a metaphysics. Thus the claim that communitarianism is something that is distinctly African is exaggerated. Further, there is a huge gap between traditional practices and metaphysical truths. Traditional practices in themselves do not necessarily constitute metaphysics.

The second and more difficult philosophical problem relates to the manner in which communitarianism is presented authoritatively as a traditional African conceptual requirement. The manner in which it is presented is done in such a way that it is to be taken as beyond question. The problem with communitarianism is that it is not argued for on its own but its success is rooted on its own appeal to its authority as the authentic conceptual and practical way of all things African. It assumes itself in order to prove itself. Appiah hints at the same point when he issues his worry about African philosophy and appeals to authority. He says:

Certainly the elders of many African societies discuss questions about right and wrong, life and death, the person and immortality. They even discuss the question whether an argument is a good argument or a consideration a weighty consideration. And this at least is the beginning of philosophy as reflective activity. But often difficult problems are set aside by appealing to “what the ancestors have said” in a way that is reminiscent of argument from authority in the Middle Ages in Europe (Appiah: 1998; 115).

In my view this appeal the authority of what the ancestors have pronounced on philosophical issues is a live problem in African thinking and it manifests itself in many ways that tend to find an immediate answer without attempting to adequately interrogate

specific problems. In the issue of personhood above as well as in chapter two, those who proffer an explanation of persons in metaphysical terms at times without sufficient argument feel obliged to justify those accounts through links to communal success.

A clear explication of the importance of the community or its metaphysical significance is sacrificed for its claimed African authenticity and its unquestionable self-derived authority. A thick communal account of person is then given even though it is quite possible to question both the motives behind the origins as well as the philosophical success of the account as this chapter has attempted to do.

The communal account of person can be seen merely as an explication of the sociality of persons and how they need each other in their daily living. The affirmations they derive from their own interactions and in their moral values and achievements do not in any way determine the status of personhood. It is a testament of communality which varies according to how traditional a given community is. Highly traditional communities are likely to have community members who are undifferentiated, who will share the same values and share the same life. Modern communities are likely to create more individualised orientations. There is nothing distinctly un-African about modernising and losing communal aspirations. There is also nothing African in traditional Aboriginal communities who share the same values of community.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter attempted a critique of the communitarian conceptualisation of person in African thinking. Following Gyekye's distinction between moderate and radical communitarianism, I started by examining Tempels' force thesis and Mbiti's claim that is in opposition to the Cartesian view of person and ended with an evaluation of Menkiti. It is my argument that all these three accounts are beset with serious problems. Tempels' force thesis mystifies that force to a point of a blatant exaggeration as clearly shown by Kaphagawani. Mbiti fails to see the reality of the existence of an individual as a separate entity from her community. It is not constitutively possible that we are all one. Menkiti radicalises the importance of community and moral achievement to a point that fails to

explain what happens to those members of the community who are downright evil. He also fails to give an account of what is moral or virtuous within his communitarian model.

Gyekye claims that his version of moderate communitarianism is different from radical communitarianism and argues that it takes the issues of individual rights seriously. Although successful in his criticism of Menkiti, Gyekye's positive account is not different from Menkiti at all. He fatally concedes that all communitarian schemes will not be obsessed with individual rights. But the downfall of his project is his readiness to abridge individual rights in order to maintain the interest of the society. He also fails to give an account of what those rights may be and under what circumstances they could be abridged.

There appears to be an inevitable return to communitarian views in all of philosophising in African thinking. This communitarian orientation is fraught with serious problems particularly that of unjustifiably collapsing different philosophical questions such as of morality, ontology and destiny into one communalistic panacea.

Chapter Five: Critique of African Socialism

5. Introduction

This chapter attempts a critique of the African socialism that was discussed in chapter three. The early fathers of independence held that African socialism was the natural political regime that Africa had to follow because it was deeply embedded in the traditional understanding of persons and the traditional way of life in Africa. Hence chapter two discusses the concept of person while the third chapter looks at African socialism which is conceived out of the concept of person as well as the alleged traditional political and social organisation. While the fourth chapter attempted a critique of the communitarian conception of person within African thinking this chapter seeks to analyse and critique African socialism that is said to be born out of African communitarianism. Firstly, I seek to evaluate the claim that African socialism is authentically African. Secondly I seek to evaluate whether such a system is good in itself and for Africa.

The proponents of African socialism, as we saw in chapter three, hold that this political system is natural and original to Africa. They cite the political organisation of traditional society before the arrival of colonialism as evidence of the naturalness of socialism to Africa. They insist that their theories have nothing to do either with capitalism or with Western socialism. To them, African socialism is grounded in the nature of persons in Africa and the communitarian way of life. The African leaders discussed always distanced themselves from Marxism and Western communism for a variety of reasons, key among them being that in traditional Africa there were generally no class distinctions and those societies had very little disparity of power between the rulers and the subjects (Mazrui: 1986; 75). It was this egalitarianism and the fellowship in village life, according to Mazrui, that led Julius Nyerere to develop his brand of socialism.

It was the existence of classes and the differences between those classes which informed capitalism and led to the birth of communism in the West. Oyekan Owomoyela argues

that Marxism is not applicable to Africa because it rose to challenge an oligarchic and feudal system which privileged a small propertied class and kept the majority under oppression. “In contrast, African social systems before the arrival of Europeans anticipated, in many ways, the communistic ideals to which Marxism even today still openly aspires” (Owomoyela: 2001; 83). This view clearly supports the position held by African leaders as we saw in chapter three. That position is that Marxism and Western communism have no influence on African socialism as African socialism’s roots are found in traditional African ideas and societies.

A crucial feature of traditional society that is held to distinguish African socialism from Marxism and Western socialism is the consultative nature of decision making that was prevalent in African societies. Thus B.E. Oguah notes that for the Fanti people, the “chief’s rule is not an autocracy but a consultative system of government. He has to consult his councillors on all decisions affecting the society” (1984; 223). This consultation ensured that everyone was involved in decision making on issues that affected the whole society. This deliberation was not only meant to find common ground. A.H Wingo argues that “palaver was also an inroads search for answers to real disputes, real conflict of interests, real public problems” (2001; 158). The consultative discussions were not merely meant to serve as avenues for finding common ground and standing but also to iron out whatever differences, sometimes serious, existed among different members of the same society.

Marlene van Niekerk points out that the first leaders of independent Africa came up with African socialism because they had practical concerns and wanted to restore what had been disrupted by colonialism. She says an “example of this would be the way in which Nyerere’s concept of “Ujamaa” (“familyhood”) finds application in the Tanzanian educational system where the school is developed as a self-supporting family” (van Niekerk: 1998; 80). To Nyerere, for example, the corrective to colonialism and its alienating ideology was to return to the central importance of the family in traditional Africa and try and animate it to inform all facets of independent Tanzania. The popularity of socialism was widespread as indicated by George Ayittey when he writes:

The proliferation of socialist ideologies that emerged in Africa ranged from the “*Ujamaa*” (familyhood or socialism in Swahili) of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania; to the vague amalgam of Marxism, Christian socialism, humanitarianism, and “Negritude” of Leopold Senghor of Senegal; to the humanism of Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia; to the scientific socialism of Marien N’Govabi of Congo (Brazzaville); to the Arab-Islamic socialism of Muammar Ghaddafi of Libya; to the “Nkrumaism” (consciencism) of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana; to the “Mobutuism” of Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (Ayittey: 2005; 61).

Undoubtedly, as we saw in the third chapter, the popularity of African socialism is due to the effects of colonialism and the desire of African leaders to return to the authentic African way of both social and political organisation. However, the failure of their political, social and economic regimes which were driven by socialism was quite thorough and very public. This chapter will avoid the empirical questions of the failures of these leaders and their programmes. Instead I will seek to confine myself to the philosophical claims that are made in each leader’s case for their differing versions of African socialism. It should be acknowledged at this stage that it is not always easy to separate issues of empirical fact from the theoretical pronouncements.

I will confine my critique to the three leaders whom I discussed in the second chapter; Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Leopold Sedar Senghor of Senegal. Thus I will seek to question the basis of *Ujamaa*/familyhood, consciencism and negritude. I will treat each leader and his theory separately, but first I will attend to a general criticism that appears to apply to all three.

5.1 General Critique of African Socialism

The first problem that African socialism generally suffers relates to its status as philosophical enterprise or philosophical enquiry. African socialism is informed by the communitarian view of persons in African thought. This is taken as something special

and distinctive about Africans that makes them stand out from the rest of humanity. Armed with the communitarian view of persons in African thinking, the leaders then develop a philosophy that is sensitive to the communitarian outlook. The problem here is that these thinkers take traditional African societies to be uniquely distinct from all other societies. But as Appiah has noted African societies have as much in common with traditional societies that are not African as they do with each other (1998; 115). This means that all traditional societies, be they African or not, share certain common characteristics in virtue of them being traditional societies.

It can be said that those unique and key characteristics that are taken to be constitutive of what is authentically African could just as well be characteristic of pre-industrialised societies that largely depend on land for their survival and live in small communities where personal relations are important and where they all share the same fate. They may need each other's positive contribution to the well being of society and may need to be encouraged to co-operate as opposed to competing against each other simply because it would be against their interests as a collective and as individuals. This is just a factual claim about small pre-industrialised societies that depend on subsistence farming or some other less developed mode of production. Because of the unsophisticated and similar lifestyle that is prevalent in these societies it is inevitable that their political organisation would also be as simple as the traditional African socialism. It is a political system that basically caters for small and non-complex societies, societies where it is possible for the chief to play many roles such as being the ruler, the intercessor for the people, the judge and possibly the father figure to all members of his society.

It is not implausible to suggest that even the ideas and thoughts of the people in these societies tend to be generally unsophisticated and to be a function of the pre-development stage that the society is in. This can be shown by the manner in which ideas in these communities are generally superstitious or seek to explain all things that happen to humanity in terms of the anger or happiness of some ancestral spirits. Kwasi Wiredu laments the work of Western anthropologists who have taken traditional thought in Africa to be representative of African thinking in general. "However, instead of seeing the basic

non-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought as typifying traditional thought in general, Western anthropologists and others besides have mistakenly tended to take them as defining a peculiarly African way of thinking with unfortunate effects” (Wiredu: 1980; 39). He laments the attitude that is prevalent in some circles tending to speak of African philosophy as if it were essentially traditional. He says this attitude negates the efforts of modern Africans whose philosophy has taken into account all the developments that have happened in logic, mathematics, sciences and humanities. He says there are various causes that have combined to promote this attitude. “African nationalists in search of an African identity, Afro-Americans in search of their African roots and foreigners in search of exotic diversion-all demand an African philosophy fundamentally different from Western philosophy, even if it means familiar witches’ brew” (Wiredu: 1980; 46). The problem here clearly is that need to discover something so different about African thinking which stands the danger of going the “witches’ brew” route.

I wish to argue that this is particularly the case with African socialism. The claim, so strongly stated by its proponents, that it is not inspired by Marxism or Western communism is at least misleading. For a start, if this concept was so thoroughly African it surely would have a name of its own in one of the many and rich languages that are found on the continent. It would not be “ujamaa” or familyhood as Nyerere would like us believe. It would not be the dubious “Negritude” as Senghor has it or Nkrumah’s Nkrumaism or even worse consciencism. If socialism in Africa had always been there and was most perfect here on this continent then there ought to be at least one proper African term that precisely calls socialism by its name not by proxies such as Nyerere’s familyhood, Nkrumah’s consciencism and Senghor’s negritude. It is not entirely far-fetched to suggest that Africans who lived in that traditional Africa had no knowledge or the slightest tendency to think of themselves as socialists of any shade.

Kofi Busia makes an interesting observation but draws an outrageous conclusion when he states that: “African socialism is a compound of several ingredients. It is compounded of reactions to colonialism, capitalism, Marxist-Leninist doctrine, combined with the search

for economic development, national sovereignty, democratic freedom and internationalism, and for roots in African tradition and culture” (1967; 75). Busia’s view on African socialism starts by making it clear that it is a mixture of several things which do not necessarily appear to be complementary. Those ingredients do not even have the same origin. It is therefore mind boggling to have such an assortment which includes reactions to capitalism and colonialism finding its roots in African tradition and culture. Busia’s characterisation of African socialism is correct in that it acknowledges the influence of other factors such as Marxism and reactions against colonialism and capitalism. However, the widespread overriding desire to root it in African traditional social organisation is highly suspect, conceptually, because traditional societies did not have the opportunity to confront colonialism and capitalism in all their ugliness and complexity. That was left to the nationalists with Nkrumah in the lead of liberating his country in the middle of the 20th century. The motive, as Wiredu has pointed above, of the early fathers of independence, in coining and implementing African socialism, had more to do with their own need to affirm an African identity and African values as opposed to resuscitating an old political system.

Two final criticisms that deal with a very practical concern, born out of the claims made on behalf of African socialism by these leaders, must be stated even if briefly. These points of concern also apply to all other African leaders who at various stages sought to impose a one party state on their people. The three leaders that this thesis is looking at, alongside many other African leaders, at various stages of their political careers, argued that the idea of a one party state was natural to Africans because it could be found in the traditional set-up of African societies. But the truth of the matter is that the traditional exercise of power did not favour any consolidation of power in the form of a one party state that is run by a closed cabal of politicians who seek to amass power for themselves. Instead, as Busia notes, in the traditional Ashanti system of Ghana no king or chief could ever be autocratic. People were allowed to make their opinions known and the chief’s primary task was to dispense justice. “Neither authoritarianism nor the one-party State can be traced to traditional political systems like these. Arguments to justify the one-party State or authoritarianism cannot be based on the ground of tradition” (Busia: 1995; 213).

One party states serve to suppress any dissenting voices and cement the power of the rulers. There was nothing traditional about these rising in Africa. Ayittey argues that although the chief was both a powerful institution and person, the system was such that he never used that power to advance his own interests but merely led the consultative processes and respected all the institutions that surrounded him and did all that he had been instructed to do by these very same institutions. "In theory, the African chief wielded vast powers-which led many observers to characterise him as autocratic. But in day to day administration and legislation, the chief rarely made policy. He only led-an important distinction. Chiefs and kings were not above the law and had to obey customary laws and taboos" (Ayittey: 1999; 88).

The second criticism is that given the opportunity to exercise power, after the end of colonialism, African leaders generally did not effect real changes to return Africa to its roots. The early leaders of newly independent Africa could have made these changes but they did not. On the contrary Frantz Fanon observes that "the nationalist parties copy their methods from those of Western political parties; and also, for the most part ... they do not direct their propaganda towards the rural masses" (1965; 88). Given real power to effect change they did not use that power for the benefit of citizens on the continent. Ayittey makes a pertinent observation when he states that; "After independence, African leaders and elites did not establish political systems that bore any resemblance to indigenous systems. It is true that they inherited an authoritarian colonial state at independence. However, they could have dismantled it and returned Africa to its roots. They did neither" (1999; 92). This is a serious indictment, yet true. The African leaders untruthfully claimed that they were returning independent Africa to its traditional roots through their varied versions of African socialism. Instead, they embarked on all sorts of acts that largely brought disrepute to themselves and the continent at large. It is worthwhile to quote Ayittey at length:

History shows that most of the nationalists who took over the controls of their countries' economies failed in their efforts to generate development, disgraced themselves, and ruined millions of African lives in the process.

Tarnishing their own record of courageous struggle for independence, most of these nationalists fell, with monotonous regularity, from grace to grass to the grave. The case of Nkrumah was perhaps the most pathetic. He was overthrown in 1966 while headed for Hanoi, where he said he intended to find a solution to the Vietnam War. Ghanaians furiously tore down the statue he built for himself, charged him with extortion and corruption, and sent his photograph to 60 Interpol member countries (Ayttey: 1991; 163).

Indeed it was a sad end to the founding father of independent Africa, but probably one that could not be regretted and that was deserved. Appiah succinctly characterises the grim situation that was awaiting Africa during this period characterised by a swift end to all celebrations welcoming freedom replaced with the reality of Africa's problems. "By 1966, when the first of our many post-independence coups exiled Nkrumah, the real, if limited enthusiasm there once had been, had largely evaporated: and the complications began to take up our attention" (Appiah: 1992; 260). Thus African socialism not only failed to take Africa to its traditional roots (whatever they were), neither did it succeed in bringing dignity to the Africans. The politicians had missed an opportunity to take Africa back to its very traditions that they so much cherished.

I will now proceed to offer a critique of each of the three forms of African socialism discussed in the third chapter. I will start with Nyerere's version that he identifies as ujamaa or familyhood, and then I will offer a critique of Nkrumah's consciencism and end with Senghor's negritude. The main thrust of my argument is that Nyerere essentially fails to develop his traditionalistic conception of African society to a sufficiently sophisticated theory that can adequately respond to the needs of a modern society or stimulate the economies of such societies. I argue that his belief that the traditional modes of living that animated traditional societies could be retrieved and applied to modern societies was simplistic. Further, following Gyekye, I will argue that Nyerere seriously misrepresents traditional societies in his treatment of public and private ownership and that his emphasis on work, as if African societies were the hardest working of all, is

misleading. Following Paulin Hountondji, I argue that Nkrumah's consciencism is informed by a misguided apprehension of what he thinks is the universal mark of African metaphysics. Finally I will argue that negritude, as a philosophy, does not succeed in its primary goal of affirming the strengths of the African or black person because it embraces the very same characteristics that were deployed by those who were either outright racists or merely doubted the mental capabilities of the African.

5.2 A Critique of Nyerere

In chapter three we saw that Nyerere was a firm believer that socialism was actually an attitude of mind and that Africans needed either to be re-educated or to educate themselves to return to that attitude of mind. Secondly, he argues that in traditional African society everybody was a worker whose contribution was to the greater good and benefit of society as opposed to being a wage labourer. Thirdly, he argues that there was no private ownership of the means of production such as tools or land. Further he holds that socialism is there for the service of the people and does not seek to exploit anyone. Socialism, according to Nyerere, prizes equality. He argues that the cardinal point of socialism which should be accepted by everyone is the recognition that all people are equal. In his view although people have different abilities and will contribute differently to society they must ultimately be treated as having the same worth.

In my view there are at least two philosophically interesting claims that emerge from Nyerere's declarations on African socialism. The first has to do with socialism being an attitude of the mind that existed in the traditional societies and one that can be easily re-taught to Africans and could be quickly re-established. The second has to deal with the nature of communitarianism in the traditional setting and how it relates to African socialism as practised in modern independent Africa.

Nyerere's claim that socialism is an attitude of the mind that existed in the past and that can be easily retrieved and learnt for the benefit of the African is faced with an ontological difficulty in that it seeks to identify the African mind with a certain outlook that is essentially not given to propensities of greed, self-interest and a general need to

acquire things for oneself. It strongly appears to be the case that Nyerere insists on this attitude of the mind to justify the social organisation of traditional societies as communitarian and what he sees as the political consequence of this order-African socialism. In other words, for Nyerere, the justification of African socialism is communitarianism, and the justification for communitarianism is the attitude of the mind of the individuals in the traditional African societies.

Nyerere does not give us an explanation of what it is that causes the mind to be so oriented towards the community. He merely insists that in the traditional society that is how things were. This mind, because of the tenets of ujamaa which teach that society is structured along the lines of family relations, will seek to benefit all members of society, Nyerere would insist. Besides this circularity, Nyerere does not give a special feature in the traditional society or in any history of the existence of Africans which is responsible for that attitude of mind. I am not persuaded that Africans either in the past, in the present or in the future by nature of just being Africans, even if they were communitarian, would shun all things that have to do with capitalism as a matter of constitutive inclination. Nyerere seems to suggest that this is possible and those Africans who fail to do so fail at African socialism-which is essentially African; meaning that they have failed at African communitarianism-which means that they have ultimately failed at being Africans, whatever the implications of this failure may be. Even present day admirers of Nyerere such as Munyaradzi Felix Murove (2005; 165-169) and Symphorien Ntibangirirwa (1999; 89-92), enchanted by Nyerere, endorse his African socialism and humanism both in the traditional and modern setting without caring to account for that special feature that Africans possess-which predisposes them to such a state of the mind.

If Nyerere were to show that this attitude of the mind was true of Africans of the past, I cannot help but observe that it would have been a rather futile peculiarity of those Africans and their societies. Such a mental outlook that persistently seeks to promote the good of society with the individual never seeking to acquire anything for herself, or even sometimes minimally looking for ways to advance oneself would have disastrous consequences for individuals.

If there was such an attitude, the society could not prosper or function. The prosperity of society and general communal advancement depend on individual initiative. Such an attitude of the mind, as envisaged by Nyerere, does not benefit the community or the individual. Such an attitude is defeatist as it creates docile conformity that would actually lead to an unintended consequence since all forms of initiative are either severely underdeveloped, because of the mind creating such an attitude, or are severely neglected because such an attitude has been created in the mind. I suppose it is not altogether too liberal an interpretation to suggest that in such a society initiative and taking individual responsibility would be shunned and discouraged either overtly or inadvertently by social institutions such as the family and all other institutions responsible for the socialisation of the young members of society, with the result that by the time they become adults they are acutely aware of the importance of being the same and not seek any initiative. It is far more probable that such a mentality did not exist among Africans in traditional societies. Contrary to Nyerere's suggestion, it is probable that people in traditional societies, at times, exhibited acquisitive characteristics, greed and sought to advance their individual causes ahead of communal needs.

Gyekye argues that the problems that arise for African socialism stem from the fact that ideologues tried to anchor justification for their ideologies in communitarianism. A criticism that he raises that aptly applies to Nyerere's interpretation of communitarian societies is the way he tries to find justification for his political theory by claiming that African mentality was not acquisitive. Gyekye holds "that the African character is not devoid of acquisitive and materialistic elements, as the advocates of African socialism would want to imply" (1997; 146).

For example, Gyekye suggests that on the issue of land it was possible in African society for people to talk of ancestral land. This ancestral land would belong to a certain family or certain families by virtue of them being linked to the same ancestors. Since the mode of production was primarily the land, people would work on that land as families or a family that had received that land through a line of ancestors. He holds that the attitude

towards the distribution of land, as opposed to being a regimented matter for the community at large, was actually liberal. "Since livelihood depends very much on the exploitation of the land in an agricultural economy, this liberality is most appropriate" (Gyekye: 1997; 147).

It is quite clear then on Gyekye's account that it was possible for land to be held by certain sections of the community to the exclusion of other members of that community. If there was a possibility, which is very likely, of certain land being held as ancestral land, then those who were descendants of the said ancestors would have exclusive claim to the use or maintenance of that land. This would mean that not all land was held in-common as Nyerere suggests but that there was the possibility, if not reality, of some private ownership of the land.

Gyekye takes the point further by accusing the nationalists of having taken the humanist features of African traditional social and moral thought and turning them to African socialism. Richard Bell suggests that African humanism is different from classic Western humanism in that the latter emphasises the promotion of individual virtues and the exercise of rational self-control.

African humanism, on the other hand, is rooted in traditional values of mutual respect for one's fellow kinsman and a sense of position and place in the larger order of things: one's social order, and natural order, and the cosmic order. African humanism is rooted in lived dependencies. Where life's means are relatively minimal and natural resources are scarce, the individual person must depend on his or her larger community (Bell: 2002; 40).

As noted above, the development of what has been characterised as African thinking which is supposed to be representative of the whole continent is in actual fact a simple characteristic of communities that have limited resource whose members depend on each other for their own survival and who develop an ethic that is consistent with their

situation. This ethic is one that is best suited to govern such societies at their specific stations. This should not necessarily be read as the African mentality. As Gyekye fittingly puts it;

Communalism, which is a doctrine about social organisation and relations, is an offshoot of the Akan concept of humanism. It is perhaps indisputable that social institutions embody a philosophical perspective about human nature and social relationships. One way in which the Akan concept of humanism is made explicit is in its social organisation. Ensuring the welfare and interests of each member of society-the essential meaning of Akan humanism-can hardly be accomplished outside the communal system (Gyekye: 1987; 154-155).

I think the salient point that Gyekye is making is that the doctrine of humanism that existed in traditional African societies was characterised by a need to give an account of how one was to relate to her community at large with an aim of fostering the well-being of all community members. These were essentially economic and survival relations in small scale communities wherein all community members needed each other for their survival. The humanism expressed in the manner in which the society is organised will only say more about the economic and survival needs of that society than any higher or peculiar moral attitude.

The second and most crucial difficulty that arises from Nyerere's work relates to his attempt to forge a close relation between traditional African communitarianism and African socialism. To my mind such a close correlation has to be rejected because it attempts to, as a matter of logical necessity, claim that communitarianism inevitably leads to African socialism. This is not quite the case as the two systems are coined in totally different environments and the practical factors that give rise the conceptualisation of both systems are not the same. As I suggested above, African socialism is a mixture of ingredients that include responses to colonialism and capitalism, influences of Marxism

and Western socialism whereas traditional communitarianism is not concerned with these factors. Gyekye renders the point lucid when he argues that:

The alleged relation of identity between the two systems can logically be denied on the grounds that not everything that can be asserted of communalism can be asserted of socialism, and vice versa. I would contend that communalism is essentially a socioethical doctrine, not particularly-or perhaps narrowly-economic, whereas socialism, which was understood by the African political leaders as Marxism socialism, is fundamentally economic, concerned as a matter of testament, with the relations or modes of production (Gyekye: 1997; 148).

This analysis particularly applies to Nyerere who insistently points out that traditional African societies where the African mentality thrived unfettered were not capitalistic and all the evil relations of capitalism such as oppression of one class by another and wage labour were non-existent. It is clear that Nyerere is concerned with developing a certain mode of production, or economic order that contrasts with capitalism. In his attempt to develop that mode of production, he rejects Western communism and invents a certain mode of production for the traditional African society. He reads this mode of production into traditional African societies and claims that it has always been known as African socialism and is representative of the African mentality. African communitarianism, which is taken to be the foundation of African socialism, did not concern itself with what modes of production should govern society and what kind of productive relations are least exploitative or avoid exploitation altogether. Instead, communitarianism concerned itself with questions of the best possible ways of maintaining co-operative and harmonious relations between members of society and with questions of what kind of relationship existed, or ought to have existed, between the individual and her society.

Gyekye also notes the differences that exist between the notions of public ownership in traditional communalist societies and modern socialist states, like Nyerere's Tanzania. While in traditional societies the individual can use the land that has been deemed to be

public land or land that is owned by everyone, the same cannot happen in socialist states. The individual in a socialist state is not allowed access and use of the land that has been designated as state land, which the state claims to be holding in trust of all citizens. For Gyekye this distinction has a serious bearing on the individual's rights (*ibid*). I opine that it would be fair to infer that Gyekye's telling point is that African socialism as advocated by Nyerere is not a true version of traditional communitarianism because it fails to protect the rights of the individual. Nyerere points out that in African traditional societies everybody was expected to work, the right to work in those societies was extended to every individual who could work. This included allowing individuals access to land to work on and earn their livelihood. It was only the invalids, the very young and the elderly who were not expected to work. However, in socialist states, the right to work on any piece of land that is controlled by the state or in any state enterprise is not always guaranteed for anyone who wants to work there as was the case in the traditional setting. This means that this aspect of the right to work, to have an expectation of getting work and the actual acquisition of land to work on by the individual in the traditional society cannot be easily transferred to Nyerere's socialist Tanzania. Traditional communitarian societies may be conceived as radically different from modern socialist states.

Benezet Bujo also addresses the question of the possibility of individual property ownership in traditional African societies. He is reluctant to admit the possibility of individual ownership of property noting that in the "final analysis, the individual administers property in the name of the community. As it is not permissible to privatise life for oneself, one is not permitted to use property at one's own discretion, since property cannot be separated from the life force" (1990; 150). It must be noted as well that the individual is not totally disempowered to a point of having no initiative or influence in what can happen to property such as land that is held in common. The central theme here is that there should be wide consultation and this can be at the behest of the individual. Bujo admits as much when he further notes that one "of the consequences of this attitude towards property is that in some areas in Africa, the individual should first consult the relatives before disposing of property for another purpose than the usual one" (*ibid*). Whatever these usual purposes could be, the suggestion is that the individual has

more freedom, than Nyerere allows, in terms of how property, including land and tools, may be used or disposed. That alone, at least, shows that Nyerere's view on traditional communitarianism is either misinformed or deliberately engineered with the purpose of being used as an anchor of African socialism.

Further, Gyekye argues that nationalist leaders ignored the spirit of private enterprise and individuality that existed in African societies (1997; 149). In Gyekye's view the nationalist leaders' failure to take into account these two aspects undermines the authenticity of their version of socialism as representative of the true African tradition. From a historical perspective, Gyekye argues, private enterprise existed in the sense that if a lineage had to find itself faced with a very heavy debt, it could always resort to mortgaging its land and the mortgagee would hold it as private property. On the conceptual level he draws a distinction between public and private land arguing that if land could be held by the family, then it could not be accessed by everybody else, whereas if it belonged to the public, then anyone could have access to it. Thus, in his view, two forms of ownership existed in traditional societies. One was ownership by individuals and families and the other was ownership by the public. The former, he says, is equivalent to corporate ownership and the latter is akin to state ownership. "The conclusion, then, is that sociocultural as well as conceptual analysis indicates the existence of the idea and practice of private ownership as an outstanding feature of economic management in the traditional African culture" (Gyekye: 1997; 151).

However, for Gyekye, the real failure for the African leaders was their interpretation of traditional communitarianism as entirely an economic system when in actual fact;

It is a doctrine about social relations as well as moral attitudes: about what sorts of relationships should hold between individuals in a society and about the need to take into account the interests of the wider society not only in designing socio-political institutions and in evolving behaviour patterns for individuals in their responses to the needs and welfare of other members of society (*ibid*)

For Gyekye there is no necessary connection between these two systems as they are primarily occupied with different concerns. In my view, that connection that was sought by the early leaders of independent Africa was a forced connection that carries no logical necessity. It also lacks any empirical connection with the past and the leaders themselves failed to animate those essential characteristics of tradition when given a chance. Nyerere became an advocate of a one party state which has no justification in traditional society. Nyerere's claim that the conceptual origins of his ujamaa are to be found in the traditional societies of Africa is not only unfounded but appears to be animated by other motives that have nothing to do with what transpired in the authentic African conceptual scheme of communalism.

Perhaps Mazrui gives us the best representation of Nyerere's ideas and the effect his romanticisation of the village had on Africa when he notes that:

It was Julius Nyerere, founder President of Tanzania, who once said that while great powers are trying to get to the moon, we are trying to get to the village. Well, the great powers have been to the moon and back, and are now even communicating with the stars. But in Africa we are still trying to reach the village. What's more, the village is getting even more remote, receding with worsening communications even further into the distance (Mazrui: 1986; 2002).

Thus on the one hand Nyerere's conceptualisation of his version of African socialism and his attempt to ground it in African traditional societies is problematic. On the other hand, his practical concern and ideals about village life in newly independent Africa is nothing but a form of utopianism.

5.3 A Critique of Nkrumah

As we saw in the third chapter, Nkrumah argues that every society has a dominant ideology, although implicit, that seeks to direct people's lives. He holds that Africa is

animated by three segments which are the traditional way of life, the Islamic and the Christian way of life. Islam and Christianity, in his view, are alien to the African culture and need to be conditioned by the African traditional way of life. He riles against capitalism seeing it as foreign to Africa and having been imposed forcefully on the African people through colonialism. He argues that the African personality through its humanism tended towards communalism. He argues that this was the case in traditional societies and had colonialism not interfered with Africa, the transition from communalism to socialism would have been natural. But once capitalism interfered, the transition to socialism had to be revolutionary. He coins the term consciencism to describe his political philosophy. In Nkrumah's view consciencism would digest the Western influences on African society and give rise to a true African identity. Consciencism, Nkrumah argues, is in accord with the traditional African society and has egalitarianism as its basis.

Nkrumah was not only concerned with developing socialism in Ghana but was interested in the unity of the whole continent. He dedicated much energy to this cause and even wrote a book entitled *Africa Must Unite* where he sets out his views on the importance of a united Africa. Bankole Timothy suggests that there was some deceit on Nkrumah's part. "Nkrumah's image of himself which he portrayed to the masses was deceptive. For example, he gave the impression of complete dedication to the cause of Ghana and Ghanaians when in, in fact, his ambition was to become leader of a Union of Africa" (Timothy: 1981; 241). The suggestion is that Nkrumah's formulation of African socialism was targeted at giving an account of one Africa that had one thought and one that ought to have been governed in the same way with a central government possibly led by him.

It is important to note that Nkrumah, in his early work, particularly his 1964 edition of his book *Consciencism*, grounded socialism in African traditional society. His doctrine was known as Nkrumaism to his party adherents who had a specific agenda. These party adherents were anti-socialists and they coined the term to cover up the socialism in Nkrumah's ideology (Hountondji: 1996; 133). In his 1970 edition of the same book

Nkrumah spectacularly denounced African socialism and chose to advocate scientific socialism (Rooney: 1988; 183). It was this change that leads Ayittey to believe that Nkrumah was indecisive about the socialist ideology he wanted to follow (1991; 165).

However, Hountondji sees these changes in a positive light. He says there are different levels in Nkrumah's work. Hountondji argues that after *Consciencism*, Nkrumah's writings show that his work was not closed but an ongoing project. Nkrumah's early writings, according to Hountondji, were a euphoric attack on colonialism while his later work was a painstaking critique of neo-colonialism. "So the problems changed, and there was a remarkable *dislocation of the system*, I should say almost a *destruction of the system*, (a dismantling, a de-construction). Nkrumah, faced with new questions, found himself compelled in his answers to contradict theses which had seemed solidly secure in the original system" (Hountondji: 1996; 134). Hountondji cites three examples which exemplify Nkrumah's displacement.

The first example that Hountondji cites is one of violence. In his early work Nkrumah had advocated peaceful resistance which he had called positive action. This positive action was a mixture of Gandhi's non-violence as well as taking legal recourse to bring justice. However, later Nkrumah advocated violence as an avenue of change because he was convinced that imperialists were engaged in a conspiracy to control the third world and impoverish it (Hountondji: 1996; 135). The second change had to do with Nkrumah's views on class struggle. Before 1964 Nkrumah did not see class struggle as something that could occur in African societies. Instead, he believed that the egalitarianism and non-exploitative communalism that was found in traditional African societies could have continued as socialism in modern Africa. Later, however, he notes that capitalism has resulted in class struggle on the global scale and that Africa is not exempt from that struggle. Secondly, he notes that class struggle is brought into Africa from the outside. So, according to Hountondji, Nkrumah's new emphasis is no longer about the absence of class struggle in "traditional Africa but rather on the importance, gravity and irreducibility of class struggle in modern Africa" (*ibid*: 137). This, in Hountondji's view, leads Nkrumah to reject both Nyerere and Senghor's African socialism by demonstrating

that Africa is subject to the same laws as the rest of the world. The third example that Hountondji cites concerns Nkrumah's changing views on African unity. While Nkrumah had previously advocated the unity of the continent, he changed this opinion and chose to support the co-ordination of the efforts of different liberation movements that were fighting for freedom on the continent as opposed to a wholesale collaboration at the continental level. This change, Hountondji believes, was caused by the presence of puppet regimes on the continent that effectively hindered the progress of Nkrumah's goal of African unity. Thus Hountondji renders a very charitable reading of Nkrumah's changes when he holds that: "What these three examples show is that Nkrumah's work is not a closed system but open, attentive, pertinent and subject to constant revision. His thought was far more alive, restless and demanding than the abstract, dogmatic faith called 'Nkrumaism'" (*ibid*; 139).

In this way, Hountondji sees a certain continuity and constant revision and living up to new challenges in Nkrumah's thinking. It is not a closed dogmatic system as Nkrumah's party supporters would have believed but one that is constantly aware and in touch with the new challenges that are emerging for Africa's struggle for independence. However, Hountondji's reading of Nkrumah does not turn him into an admirer of Nkrumah or his supporter.

Hountondji starts by noting that Nkrumah's 1970 version of *Consciencism* had changed in some ways that were not particularly helpful for Nkrumah's project. Some of the changes that Nkrumah made, in Hountondji's view, destroyed the original coherence of his message in 1964. For example, Hountondji notes that in his 1970 edition Nkrumah deleted the following paragraph: "In my autobiography, I said that capitalism might prove too complicated a system for a newly independent country. I wish to add to this the fact that the presuppositions and purposes of capitalism are contrary to those of African society. Capitalism would be a betrayal of the personality and conscience of Africa" (Nkrumah: 1964; 74). Hountondji argues that the paragraph that Nkrumah deleted in his later version of *Consciencism* was a long held belief that socialism was linked to the traditional African society and it served, in the original version, to deal with the objection

that if Africa was becoming socialist; then it was delivering itself to another Western power. In 1964, Nkrumah merely asserts that communalism is faintly remembered as having existed in African traditional communities. Instead, in 1970, Nkrumah introduces a new paragraph that discusses the conditions for a socialist revolution. This for Hountondji is a strange revision which destroys the coherence of the original text.

The paragraph that Nkrumah deleted gave a solid grounding both for the theory of person in African thinking by alluding to a certain African personality which gave birth to the naturalness of African socialism. “This little paragraph therefore played a crucial strategic role in the original text. The fact that he later suppressed it suggests that Nkrumah had lost some of his confidence in the rationale of his project, perhaps because he now realised that ‘the assumptions and designs...of African society’ were really a highly fanciful hypothesis” (Hountondji: 1996; 146). Hountondji then argues that Nkrumah was fully aware of the existence of classes in African societies and those who claim that Nkrumah admitted no class differences in African societies have not read his work after 1964.

I am not convinced by Hountondji’s reading of Nkrumah and his conclusion, particularly that Nkrumah admits of class differences in Africa. In my view the changes that Nkrumah effects, as we saw above, are simply a kind of cosmetic surgery whose motivation is not properly provided. Nkrumah, in his 1970 version of *Consciencism*, condemns African socialism and endorses scientific socialism without providing an explanation for his sudden change. It would have been preferable for Nkrumah to state whether this change had been brought by openness to the realities that were unfolding before him or were informed by other factors such as disillusionment at having failed to attain his African unity dream: without that Hountondji’s reading is at best speculative. Hountondji claims that it was possible that Nkrumah saw the fancifulness of the designs of an African society which led him to drop his project. But this does not seem to be the case since Nkrumah’s changes are not wholesale but appear to be grafts, that even by Hountondji’s admission, kill the coherence of the earlier version. So, Nkrumah’s change does not appear to be comprehensive since Nkrumah does not explicitly dissociate

himself with his previous views but merely updates and discards a couple of paragraphs. The theory of consciencism remains largely unaffected. In fact Nkrumah's attempt to universalise the problems of capitalism and make them appear as if they apply to Africa with the same kind of effect as they have applied elsewhere particularly in relation to class struggles creates another problem for him. All these problems would be adequately dealt with by his new version of scientific socialism. What Nkrumah fails to appreciate is that capitalism, as a matter of reality, will never apply in the same manner in a country that is highly industrialised and a former coloniser as it will in a country that is not highly industrialised and that was formerly colonised. The creation of classes and the intensity of the differences between these classes would not be the same. The grievances of the oppressed classes in these societies (although they might overlap) would not be the same and to reduce different societies' encounters with colonialism to class differences would be extremely simplistic. The same point is made by Tsenay Serequerbehan when he notes that:

... to talk of "scientific socialism" in a singular and undifferentiated way - as Nkrumah does - is to superimpose European ideas and conceptions (in the guise of "objective" theory) on the African situation. In other words, the historical and cultural specificity of Africa and of the struggle for Africans is obliterated and covered over. And this is done in the name of a "universal" and "value - free" "science of history" - historical materialism - on which the scientism of socialism is grounded (Serequerbehan: 1994; 34).

Hountondji questions the meaning of the title of the book itself, but finds the sub-title, "Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation and Development, with Particular Reference to the African Revolution", to be even more obscure than the title itself. Hountondji wonders what the singular reference to the African revolution could be. He asks if it could be liberation from the colonisers, or if it could refer to a social revolution which is changing its means of production to the advantage of the proletariat. Hountondji

argues that development is a movement and wonders what stages of development Nkrumah's consciencism will have to go through.

Hountondji is right in at least pointing out this initial difficulty in the meaning of the title and what it wants to convey. But the problem is much deeper than that. Nkrumah's writing on consciencism is fraught with problems of ambiguity and obfuscation, particularly in relation to what consciencism is. As we saw in chapter three, he identifies it as the philosophical standpoint that best describes African political philosophy. In particular consciencism is supposed to deal with the tensions that arise as a result of the presence of Islam and Christianity on the continent which must be accommodated in the African tradition. Further he holds that there is a need for a social revolution which must be backed by an intellectual revolution which seeks to redeem society. This intellectual revolution/philosophy, according to Nkrumah, must be grounded in the actual environment in which people live. He then says the philosophy behind this revolution is known as consciencism which is responsible for taking Africa forward. Apparently, according to Nkrumah, this consciencism does not insist on being fixed on any ethical rules, as ethical rules are problematic since they are reflective of their own times. He then claims that consciencism has only one cardinal principle and that is every person must be treated as an end in itself. Finally, he adds that consciencism is founded on principles of egalitarianism and is in accord with the traditional African society.

It is quite evident that Nkrumah's claims are not only numerous but may also be said not to be related. For example, it seems very unlikely (as we have seen in the previous chapter) that traditional communitarian societies would insist on what sounds like the Kantian principle of treating each person as an end not as a means as Nkrumah does. So his fusion of the African traditional communalism, which consciencism is in accord with, together with a Kantian principle could be misleading. Nkrumah also points to the fact that consciencism is not concerned with ethical principles since they are constrained by their times. The problem that Nkrumah's project immediately encounters is that there is an inherent tension in his position. On the one hand he holds that there is a well known and fixed African ethic of communitarianism that is to found in the traditional societies of

Africa. He attempts to animate that ethic so it could inform the two other realities on the continent which are; the Islamic reality and the Western Christian reality. However, on the other hand, he holds that consciencism is not concerned with ethical rules as they are reflective of their time. I do not think that it is possible for Nkrumah to hold both these positions. I think the principles of the traditional Africa's communitarian ethic are fixed and are known to aspire towards a certain organisation of society. I do not think that they will allow the ethic they are supposed to animate, which is consciencism, to be an ethic of relativism.

Another serious problem is Nkrumah's attempts to link philosophy with ideology. This link is apparent in the subtitle of his book as we saw above and it leads Hountondji to ask a very important question about this link. "Are the two terms synonymous? Do we have here a mere repetition, a pleonasm, or is some distinction intended? Is philosophy the same thing as ideology, or are they different? And if they are different, what is the relation between the two terms, and what ought it be?" (Hountondji: 1996; 147). But Nkrumah is quite explicit in his embrace of philosophy as a servant of ideology when he holds that "philosophy admits of being an instrument of ideology" (1970; 56).

This admission leads Hountondji to observe that; "Philosophy, for him, exists merely to translate spontaneous ideological theses into a more refined language, to elucidate, enunciate and justify, after the event, the decisions of the ideological instance. This conception of philosophy explains the whole project of Consciencism" (1996; 148). I agree with Hountondji's view that Nkrumah uses philosophy to justify or proffer explanations for his ideological views. Not only does Nkrumah truncate the whole purpose of philosophy to justifying ideologies but he also fails, as Hountondji points out, to see that his ideology was one of the competing ideologies among many other possible ideologies. Hountondji accuses Nkrumah of committing the error of trying to put forward a single ideology that represents all Africans. The result is that "Nkrumah in fact links up with the vast majority of African anthropologists and accepts the classical ethnological ideology. In this way he neglects the pluralism of pre-colonial African culture forcing an

artificial unity upon what is really irreducibly diverse, and hence impoverished - the classic African tradition” (*ibid*).

Hountondji further notes that this is a very serious oversimplification which is also manifested in the way in which Nkrumah claims that Africa is faced with three realities, Christian, Islamic and African tradition, which are in conflict but have to be resolved through the intervention of the African tradition. Hountondji argues that Nkrumah firstly takes the Western and Islamic cultures as simply waiting to be incorporated into the African reality. He does not treat these two cultures as serious cultures that can stand on their own but as appendages of the African culture. Secondly, Hountondji thinks that Nkrumah is an enemy of diversity by his desire to see the other aspects of African reality subsumed under the African tradition. Hountondji sees consciencism as a philosophy of consciousness which seeks to re-articulate the lost African consciousness through merging three different ideologies into a single system of thought. Hountondji says the greatest weakness of consciencism is Nkrumah’s assumption that Africa needs a collective philosophy (*ibid*; 149).

Finally, Hountondji attacks Nkrumah for attempting to base his doctrine on what he calls a materialist metaphysic which professes the priority of matter over mind. “Politically, it adopts the central demand of nationalist ideology by reaffirming the right of self-determination for all peoples on the one hand and calls for the construction of socialism in a liberated Africa on the other. The most interesting point, however is the author’s assertion that the three panels of the triptych (metaphysical, ethical and political) are closely linked and inseparable” (Hountondji: 1996; 153). He argues that Nkrumah attempts to present a philosophy that appears to have different facets that are all interlinked. Thus he presents the relationship between metaphysics and politics not merely as one of juxtaposition but logical necessity. “In other words, every political stance is ultimately founded on a metaphysical stance and, conversely, every metaphysical assertion calls for a specific political choice. This is an infinitely hazardous view” (*ibid*).

I think Hountondji's objections to Nkrumah's project are formidable. I think the greatest weakness in Nkrumah's account is his attempt to develop a certain African philosophical system that he calls consciencism. His philosophical system has a specific metaphysics which gives rise to an ethical and political system. The problem with his metaphysics lies in its attempt to generalise certain features to all African people. His ethical system, which is supposed to be informed by the metaphysics, seems to hold a position that admits serious tension between the traditional communitarianism which is its foundation and its new articulation as consciencism. Finally he proposes a political system that proceeds, as a matter of necessity, from the metaphysics and ethics. The success of his project is limited by his attempt to develop a logically necessary relationship between metaphysics, ethics and politics. Nkrumah's position is also naive as it simply holds that the Islamic and Western Christian tradition can be easily subsumed into an African traditional communitarian system which will constitute consciencism.

5.4 A Critique of Senghor

In the third chapter we saw how Senghor explicates his own version of African socialism while rejecting Western socialism. One of the main reasons to which he appealed in rejecting Western socialism lay in the way that he conceived how Africans come to gain knowledge. He argues that while Europeans discursively and dispassionately gain their knowledge the African becomes one with the object. He argues that the Western way of gaining knowledge must be assimilated into the African way of thinking. One of the crucial bases of his version of African socialism was the non-existence of classes in traditional African societies. Further he calls his brand of African socialism "negritude". This negritude is supposed to be representative of the character of black people, such as how they come to gain knowledge and how they live in their communities - embracing communalism and shunning capitalism and exploitation. The key characteristic of Senghor's theory is his claim that Africans are different; certain key characteristics give rise to that negritude, and those characteristics are decisive in negritude being transformed into African socialism.

The term negritude itself does not originate from Africa. Wole Soyinka notes that although Senghor was the most articulate and lyrical poet in this area, the expression itself was invented by the Martiniquan Aime Cesaire. Soyinka traces the origins of the negritude movement to the African American poets famous for the Harlem renaissance such as Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Sterling Hayden, Claude Mackay and Paul Vesey. G. Moore supports this view of the origins of the Negritude movement when he writes;

The opening shots in the campaign to create a new African literature were fired not by Africans, but by black writers from the Carribean. The loudest and most resounding of these was probably Aime Cesiare's familiar cry:

Hurray for those who never invented anything

for those who never explored anything

for those who never conquered anything

hurray for joy

hurray for love

hurray for the pain of the incarnate tear (Moore: 1961; viii).

This manner of thinking which celebrated the simplicity of the African as one who has never invented anything, never explored, never conquered and one who stands for joy and love would have driven Senghor to also affirm that the African is not one who is interested in discursive and analytical knowledge but one who becomes attached to the object that she is to know.

Mazrui argues that part of the history of racism has been the comparisons of intellectual performance between different race groups. Mazrui notes that in the modern period of history, the black person has been on the periphery of scientific and technological achievement. The question then for Mazrui is; what is being celebrated? While some people try to trace all achievements as originating from Africa like shorthand and algebra and stress how Egypt influenced Greek thought, other people are looking for an alternative response, Mazrui claims, that does not celebrate any African achievement.

“An alternative response to black scientific marginality is not only to affirm it but also to take pride in it. Black countries ruled by France produced a whole movement called *negritude*, which revelled in the virtues of a non-technical civilisation” (Mazrui: 1990; 134). Thus Césaire’s poem opens up the celebration of non-scientific achievement. Earlier on Mazrui had opined that; “But for Leopold Senghor, former president of Senegal and the most distinguished proponent of *Negritude* within Africa, the great genius of Africa lay not in European concepts of rationality, but in indigenous capacities for intuition; not in the principles of scientific method and objectivity, but in the wisdom of custom and instinct; not in cold analytical reason but in warm responsive emotion” (Mazrui: 1986; 73-74).

Thus the issue is not only a celebration of having no achievement in the field of sciences and analytical reasoning. The defining feature of Africans becomes their ability to be warm and emotional and respond to all they encounter with such warm emotion. So the African does not only refuse to seek to go beyond that emotion but treats it as constitutive and definitive of who she is as an African. Essentially she is one who is able to empathise, to feel for the other and be one with the other, as if almost to become the other. But this celebration does not only end with the recognition that black people have not achieved anything in the sciences, it is extended to the struggle for independence and it is taken as defining of the African character.

Bell correctly characterises the relationship between independence, African humanism and *negritude* when he says; “Owing, in part, to the background of the concept of *negritude*, African humanism is identified with movements of national independence and with the development of collective African identity. The more political side of African humanism is also referred to as African socialism” (Bell: 2002; 37). *Negritude*, in Africa, is associated with the struggle for independence and African socialism. In particular the advocates of *negritude* seek to affirm the beauty of those African aspects that would have been seen as markers of African inferiority.

Abiola Irele makes the same point when he observes that there is a certain unity that characterises all of African thought in the various forms of ideology that are expressed in Africa. “This unity resides in the effort to bring the African mind to a new coincidence with its true foundation in a new African universe, to define as it were a founding myth as the basis of our action and collective existence in modern times. Herein lies what constitutes, in my opinion, the continuing relevance of concepts such as Negritude and African personality” (Irele: 1981; 113). Irele believes that this revival of such concepts is necessary because it is owed to black people because of the painful history they have gone through. For Irele, this is not a matter of casting a romantic glance at a past that is no longer fully functional. “It is a question of our regaining the historical initiative of which we were deprived as a people, and with it an originality of thought and of action, with a meaning for ourselves in the first place and ultimately for the world with which we are today ineluctably involved in a common adventure” (*ibid*).

Thus, for Irele, concepts such as negritude and African personality play an important role in recovering the history of black people and affirming their place in their current existence. This is in keeping with Frantz Fanon’s observation on the reactions of black people to colonialism. “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude” (Fanon: 1989; 47). Thus for Fanon although being a Negro is a negative creation that happens in situations of oppression and racism, the response of the black person in creating his own negritude is a good thing as it is self affirmation. “Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilisation that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (Fanon: 2006; 128-129). Thus for Fanon the effects of racism are such that the black person finds her entire history scorned and rejected and she has to come to terms with the fact that she is viewed as inferior and her reaction must be to seek her own affirmation.

Although Senghor’s thesis of Negritude may sound strangely affirming to those Africans on the continent and elsewhere it is faced with an immediate weakness which is supposed

to be its power of affirmation. Negritude assumes that everywhere black people have the same spirit. It assumes that everywhere black people are characterised by a refusal to engage anything they might need to know in a discursive, rational and distantly cold manner without being overly emotional or seeking to become one with the object of investigation. Although Negritude arises, particularly in the thought of Senghor, as a critique of colonialism, its claim that it represents an African personality cannot be taken seriously. All other methods and discourses of criticising colonialism do not necessarily share, at their very centre, this strange view of African people as all warm and emotional. D.A. Masolo makes a pertinent point when he observes that: “The practice of postcolonial critiques exposes the diversity and pluralism of African identities, thus undermining the tenets of Pan-African ideology and the culturalism of Western ethnology. The thesis in this approach is that the practice of philosophy is often culture-relative in many more ways than is readily accepted” (1997; 296). The attempts by the adherents of negritude to categorise black people as belonging to the same genre of feeling types fails, just like the nationalists, because there is cultural relativity which they have to contend with. African or black people are not generic feelers who are governed by a lot of emotion and who are generally eager to celebrate their lack of scientific achievement. As we have seen above, according to Mazrui, some black people have chosen to claim that all modern achievement, ranging from algebra to Greek thought is traced to Africans.

Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze renders the differences that exist between black people, despite their shared conditions, clear when he argues that:

“The African experience,” however, has never really been a monolith, on the continent or abroad. From Amo to Nkrumah to Du Bois, from Equiano to Locke to Senghor; continental and Diaspora modern Africans found a “language”- largely based upon their awareness of a collective entanglement with the history of the modern West, and their objectification and “thingification” (Verdinglichung) by this West – and so have also always individually and collectively struggled in multifaceted

and pluralistic ways against the oppressive tendencies within European capitalist cultures, and the illegitimate colonial structures that crush Africa's initiatives on the continent (Eze: 1997; 15).

It is thus clear that there are a number of possible responses to colonialism both on the continent and in the Diaspora and negritude is just one of them. It does not enjoy the status of being representative of all that African people are and this is in tension with a central tenet of negritude itself. But besides this crucial point, there is at least one interesting philosophical claim made by negritude which I think can easily be dealt with. Negritude claims that Africans are warm and come to knowledge through becoming one with the object that they seek to know. This by implication means that this is how Africans are constituted and they cannot do anything about it. The oddness of this claim is that it appears to be some kind of discrimination that is based on the sole fact that Africans' warmth or their coming to know something is by intuition simply because they are black people. It looks as if the claim here is that Africans cannot help themselves but fail at discursive and analytical thinking. Since they are such renowned failures at analytical thinking, the proponents would have us take comfort in celebrating the fact that we have never invented anything. This fact and celebration should be received without a single complaint because it has been noted and stated by Africans or black people such as Césaire and Senghor.

Interestingly when Tempels, the white Belgian missionary, states that the African is essentially characterised by force and her relations are about the increase of vital force, no less a person than Césaire pronounces a very sharp criticism on Tempels for placing ontology at the fore. "Since Bantu thought is ontological, the Bantu only ask for satisfaction of an ontological nature. Decent wages! Comfortable housing! Food!" (Césaire: 1972; 38-39). Quite clearly Césaire is not impressed with Tempels characterising Bantu life as essentially being understood in terms of the ontology of force. Later on his criticism on Tempels is even more biting when he says; "In short, you tip your hat to the Bantu life force, you give a wink to the immortal Bantu soul. And that's all it costs you! You have to admit you're getting off cheap" (*ibid*). The same sense

of indignity that Césaire feels about the way in which Tempels' force thesis characterises black people, is the indignity that I feel when Césaire, in his poetic lines above, asks us to celebrate having invented nothing and having never explored anything. It is a great indignity for a people to be reduced to joyful lovers who shed incarnate tears, and nothing more, even if that reduction is done by one of their own.

Hountondji acknowledges that Césaire's lines in his poem are moving and capable of raising a lot of emotion. "But even more remarkable is the fact that they display a black poet spontaneously employing a mode of argument originally devised in white society to express his revolt against white racism" (Hountondji: 1997; 158). Hountondji claims that Césaire was not being original in his celebration of the non-technicality of black people but that he was merely copying the works of functionalists such as Malinowski which was already widespread at the time Césaire published his poem. He claims that Senghor was also equally aware of the writings of Malinowski and other functionalists and was only too happy to invert their racism for his own use. For Hountondji, this is clear evidence that nationalism in the African colonies has never totally rejected colonialism but has only chosen to accept those parts that it thinks are favourable for the third world. "An initial stage of spontaneous revolt and unreflective self-assertion has been followed by a second stage, involving the discovery of favourable currents in violent contrast to colonial practice as it was experienced" (*ibid*; 159).

For Hountondji, complicity develops between those who see themselves as progressive Western anthropologists and the nationalists. Hountondji offers what he considers to be a simple explanation of negritude. "This garrulous negrism has a very simple explanation: whereas for Césaire the exaltation of black cultures functions merely as a supporting argument in favour of political liberation, in Senghor it works as an alibi for evading the political problem of national liberation. Hypertrophy of cultural nationalism generally serves to compensate for the hypotrophy of political nationalism" (Hountondji: 1997; 159). Thus Hountondji accuses Senghor of having side-stepped the question of national freedom by addressing negritude. Negritude is used as a cover that Senghor hides behind

embracing issues of culture instead of stepping up to deal with issues of freedom as well as economic and political issues.

Hountondji argues that this attitude of reducing political problems into cultural problems has the appeal for nationalists and anthropologists of enabling them to compare cultures and pretending that all problems are cultural. Political problems are simplified as cultural and eventually reduced to folklore. Hountondji argues that comparing a singular Western civilisation with African traditions favours a certain misconception which reduces all African traditions into a single tradition. This ignores the fact that African traditions are not the same but heterogeneous, contradictory and complex. "Above all, we ignore or pretend to ignore the fact that African cultural traditions are not closed, that they did not stop when colonialism started but embrace colonial and post-colonial cultural life" (Hountondji: 1997; 162). I agree with Hountondji that the attempt to present African life as static and not open to possibilities of new influences is fatally flawed. The fathers of independence, Senghor in particular, make the terrible error of trying to cast the African personality in a way that is not sensitive to the possibility of diversity and change. Hountondji is probably also right when he observes that; "For both groups this thesis functions as a refuge: it enables Western anthropologists to escape from the boredom of their own society and third-world nationalists to escape from the psychological and political rape perpetrated upon them by Western imperialism, by plunging back into their (imaginary) cultural origins" (*ibid*; 164).

Negritude is a misrepresentation of what African people are. It is an imaginary construction that has an appeal to both Western anthropologists and nationalists. They are strangely brought together to the same conclusion about African people through highly dubious assertions of the African personality that is generalised to the whole continent. While some remarks by some anthropologists are clearly racist, the same feeling arises when one analyses the works of the supporters of negritude. Serequeberhan rightly criticises Senghor's Africanite thesis that insists on the black person's mode of knowing being feelings and coming to be one with the object. "In this epistemically suspect "view" then, Africa is to "cultivate" its own most intuitive reason and Europe its own

most discursive reason! Therein lies the “originality” and the “true”-ontologically speaking-essential complementarity of each. Why does one think of Lucien Levy-Bruhl as one reads these lines? Is it at all possible that Senghor is trying to pass off Levy-Bruhl’s racism as *Africanite*?” (Serequeberhan: 1994; 46).

Thus the view advanced by Senghor is racist itself. It makes certain ontological claims about a certain group of people that are based on the skin colour of those people. Indeed it is difficult to see the difference between Senghor’s view and that advanced by mischievous racists. Serequeberhan argues that knowledge of immediacy, one that is not mediated, was held by Hegel to be a symbol of one being not a human being. Senghor is in actual fact endorsing that view and I suggest he ought not to be taken seriously.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to offer a critique of African socialism. I argued that the greatest general problem of African socialism is that it tries to take folk thought and generalise it to continental thought. It ignores the fact that the continent admits of certain differences and contradictions that cannot be stated in a generic manner. I pointed out the difficulties that arise in Nyerere’s ideas on ujamaa, particularly his claim that African socialism is a state of mind that Africans can easily return to. He fails to give a distinctive characterisation of what it is that is in the African’s mind that compels him to be pre-disposed towards African socialism. His attempt to transfer traditional communitarian set up into the modern political world is also beset with problems. Nkrumah’s consciencism also suffers the weakness of trying to find a single representation of African experience. Secondly his attempt to find metaphysical grounding from which the ethical and political proceed is beset with serious problems. Senghor’s philosophy of Negritude fails on the account that it inverts blatant racist notions and attempts to pass them off as affirmations of being African. His is a very strange ontology.

Conclusion

1. Summary of Main Conclusions

The main conclusions of this study are as follows: In the first chapter, where I seek to clear methodological issues in African philosophy, I conclude that ethnophilosophy and sage philosophy are not different from each other and neither is to be taken as philosophical enterprise in the strict sense of the term. I also conclude that nationalist-ideological philosophy is not strictly philosophical as it is devoted to developing party slogans and methods of governing newly independent Africa which are in accord with Africa's traditions. I argue that hermeneutics and professional philosophy are essentially philosophies of apemanship that mirror Western projects. I hold that the artistic trend properly ought to be identified as African literary work.

The second chapter concludes that there are two schools of thought in the conception of person in African philosophy. The first strand is communitarian whereby personhood is understood to be something that is determined by one's environing community. Although the second strand attempts what I have described as a metaphysical view it also returns to the conclusion that personhood is actually animated by one's environing community. Thus the African view of personhood is essentially communitarian.

The third chapter discusses the various versions of African socialism as advocated by Nkrumah, Nyerere and Senghor. I conclude that although these early fathers of independence did not offer an explicit account of personhood all their versions of African socialism relied on the communitarian view of persons. In the fourth chapter I conclude that the search for an African difference led to the exaggerated presentation of the communitarian conception of persons as the authentic African view.

The fifth chapter concludes that the veracity of Nyerere's claims about ownership in traditional societies is open to refutation. I argue that Nkrumah's consciencism suffers from a simple contradiction and that Senghor's claims about the nature of Africans is inverted racism.

2 Limitations of the Study

This thesis limited itself to investigating the nature of personhood in African philosophy and how it has influenced the development of African socialism. As a preliminary I investigated the nature of African philosophy in order to clear the methodological challenges. I view Oruka's classificatory schemata as unhelpful for the purposes of my project. I think the debate on the nature of African philosophy is interesting but congregating into different trends is not helpful.

In my discussion and critique of personhood I noticed that in African thinking the communitarian view of personhood is pervasive. In some instances where some philosophers attempt to develop a metaphysical view of the self they still return to the communitarian view. I do mount criticism against the communitarian view of persons. However, I do not seek to suggest what the conception of person ought to be either in Africa or in African philosophy. I only discuss the concept of person as explicated in literature and how this is used in the development of African socialism. I argue against the link between the concept of person and African socialism. I criticise the alleged foundations of African socialism. I do not seek to develop any political theory that would replace African socialism.

Thus my thesis can be said to have limited itself to a critical and evaluative analysis of the concept of person and how it functions in the formulation of Nkrumah, Senghor and Nyerere's different versions of African socialism. Further the thesis embarks on a critical analysis of African socialism itself. I find both the concept of person and the notion of African socialism open to serious philosophical problems. To my mind, at least, this critique is the merit of this thesis.

3 Recommendations for Further Study

In conclusion I think it worthwhile to offer recommendations for further study. This project does not suggest what the concept of person ought to be. However I note that there are two trends that articulate that concept. I have identified one as communitarian and the other as metaphysical. I think it would be worthwhile to investigate the

plausibility these trends *vis-à-vis* each other. The initial benefit will be that some clarity would be shed on the complementary and contradictory aspects of these trends. This in turn might either show that there is one concept of person or there is more than one concept of person.

A second worthwhile endeavour, to my mind, would be an attempt at investigating a political theory within the African context that goes beyond the claims and aims of African socialism. I think it is important that there be developed an African political philosophy that is responsive to both the genuine needs of Africans on the continent and takes into account the various African realities both negative and positive. Such a political philosophy would be one that is not only interested in retrieving and furthering African traditional beliefs. There is no gainsaying that the African continent is in many parts afflicted by political failure ranging from civil wars, power grabs, an absence of democracy in the modern and traditional sense, corruption, poor governance that results in the spread of otherwise preventable hunger, disease and death-just to name a few. All these problems and a plethora of others can be directly owed to political incompetence. I think it would be beneficial to develop a political theory that to address all these issues and empower African people without crudely resorting to the traditional.

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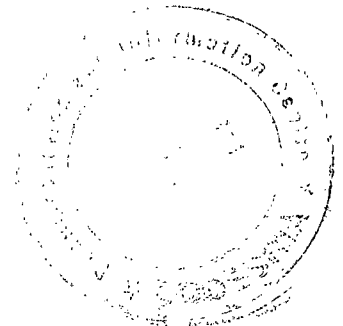
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