

**ADVANCING THE CONCEPT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IN AFRICAN
PHILOSOPHY BEYOND CHIMAKONAM VERSUS BISONG'S CRITIQUE OF
PERSONAL IDENTITY**

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ABSTRACT

Considering the high level of technological invention of Dulls, Artificial Intelligence, Biomedical technologies resulting in gender transformation, facial surgery that have come to transform human looks and activities different from how they were biologically created, the question of Personal identity becomes a problem. The problem of what makes a person who that person is, is questionable and controversial. Arising from this, Chimakonam's view of body as a means of identity is not enough because it fails to account for the gap when such a person encounters two different societies while, Bisong's position is not complete because it does not capture the matter(body) upon which every consciousness rest. Consciousness does not just exist in its own it needs a body. Thus, this work concludes that personal identity is holistic and detailed when it combines both body and consciousness to give a personal identity, thus, insisting on one part as superior to one is false and inappropriate. The human person is a combination of consciousness and body and not as superior and inferior parts of which one alone is enough to give identity to the human person. This difference created by Bisong and Chimakonam's arguments is a bifurcation created by western thought where body (matter) and consciousness (Substance) lay emphasis on one being superior to the other and can be understood without the other. Therefore, every human person has both body and consciousness uniquely functioning together without emphasis on superiority for personal identity to be possible.

Keywords: Body, Consciousness, Person, Personal identity,

INTRODUCTION

The debates and arguments in understanding personal identity of humans is the purpose for this research. This is because reading through the views of Jonathan Okeke Chimakonam and Bisong Peter Bisong, it shows the divergent thoughts they have both presented and the inability for both views to accurately give a detailed holistic account on what constitute personal identity. While Bisong's account is consciousness based alone, Chimakonam's is bodily based, though presenting the sense-phenomenal approach. In this sense-phenomenal approach, he acknowledges the place of consciousness as part of what makes identity but focuses that it is

only the body that is phenomenal that can account for identity. Contrary to both Bisong and Chimakonam, this work argues for a holistic stand that does not give superiority or focus on a particular aspect of humanity to make identity. This research calls for a total combination of all human qualities to be able to give an accurate account of personal identity. Hence, coming from an African bias, personal identity is based on what the community says and holds of a person. In Menkiti's reaction, African tradition considers a person's identity based on what the community presents of such a person (1984, 172). Contrary to the communion ascription of a person, the problem of personal identity does arise from what constitute a person, what attributes or quality, how such a person can be identified before the level where the community can see the person and say something about the person. As such, it takes more than just what the community says of a person to address the issue of personal identity. The problem of personal identity is not resident on a one-sided notion of a person or experience but it must be a complete understanding of personality to avoid the problem of reductionism or 'societal based' assessment to suffice for personal identity as the case of Menkiti.

Chimakonam versus Bisong's views on personal identity explains that personal identity is based on bodily theory of identity and consciousness theory respectively. While Chimakonam promotes the body as a means of identity where he says "personal identity is to the body and wherever it is there lies identity" (2011, 197), Bisong on the other hand, ties identity on consciousness. To him, "the body theory could lead to the case he would call "multiple identity" (2014, 60). Thus, it is the consciousness of humans that can give human's identity since for Bisong " personal identity is not something external but internal" (2014, 61). These two divergent views as to what personal identity is, triggers the thoughts for this research.

Critically reading both Chimakonam and Bisong's positions, this work argues that the totality of human or personal identification in humans would be one-sided because both arguments are insufficient to argue for personal identity due to the gap created as a result of their separation of a part from a whole. Both scholars in their arguments took to separationist method of putting either the body or mind as superior to the other, thereby, failing to consider the holistic nature of human nature for its existence to be complete. Hence, if viewed from consciousness alone or the body alone, personal identity would be incomplete. This research avers that the nature of every person is a combination of body and consciousness with no division or difference as to one being superior or inferior to the other. So it takes both matter (body) and form (Consciousness) as one to make personal identity possible. Placing emphasis on either consciousness or body as capable of giving identity is also creating a gap where one is considered as superior to the other. Therefore in order to give personal identity a balance both the bodily theory of identity and the consciousness theory must be understood to give a holistic identity to a person. The body gives the matter a picture why consciousness which is the form enables the body to be active to be able to recall and participate in human activities, due to their functions and not on the divide of one being superior to the other. When this is done then, the society from the African traditional perspective can be able to say of a person what they can or know.

UNDERSTANDING THE AFRICAN IDENTITY

For decades, scholars have made several attempts in knowing the real nature of African identity, with each considering the issue from his/her own perspective. Though, the idea of what the African identity comprises of is complex and somehow ambiguous in nature. Nonetheless, the question of African identity according to Ndubuisi, bears on the principle of being that “what is, is and what is not, is not”. It shows, that being is and non-being is not (223). Explaining Popkin’s view, Ndubuisi further avers that “What is, cannot change into what is not without passing out of existence. Hence, the permanent, the real is and cannot be part of reality or become part of reality. It is what it is, and to become some-thing other than this would involve the contradiction, that it has become what it is not” (223). Thus, Universal Dictionary defined Identity as “the distinguishing characteristics of a person and personality”.

Dukor explain in the words of Ndubuisi that “the problem of identity in philosophy can be traced to the pre-Socratics era, when the early Greek philosophers tried to search for fundamental constituent of the universe, that is, what the universe is made up of. They all arrived at a conclusion that there must be an original primary stuff of which all things are made and also which explains the continuity in the changes and the underlying unity in the plurality of things (224). Even though they all hold on to different things (substance) to be the underlying element on which the universe is made: Thales said it is water, Anaximander- Apeirion (infinite), Anaximenes – air, Heraclitus- fire, atomist- atom and so on.

This means that the question of identity is ontological in nature, it is natural for one to question what actually constitutes his/her being in order to understand his/her distinctiveness among others. Still meditating on what constitutes the African identity, Ndubuisi asserts that African identity stands on the substance of which any African can be identified and associated with appropriately and comfortably. It bears also, on that underlying element of unity in the plurality of all African peoples. It does not subsist on the accidental facts, may be, by the virtue, that one was born and bred or lives in the African continent. This does not qualify to be an original primary stuff of the being.

This means that the constituent of African identity is beyond the physical attributes such as language, color, living within the African continent, to mention but a few. This is probably the reason why despite the varieties of languages and cultures within the African continent, they are still bound on a single identity. Thus the African identity finds its foundation on the African culture (self-hood). It is important and proper to assert that the African is easily identifiable ontologically. In African metaphysics, the self is conceived essentially towards other, that is, a “being- with-others”. The African is not just a human being but essentially a “being-with” (Ndubuisi 224). This expresses the communal life of the African person, which characterizes his/her identity. An African actualizes his/her being towards other beings, putting the interest of the whole (community) above his/hers. The African self, according to Ndubuisi, is defined in terms of “We- existence”. Life for the African personality is an incorporated system of

pleasingly harmonious daily rhythm. In its ontological relationships, the self in African metaphysics is attained to both the visible and invisible worlds. In preserving African identity according to Ezeani, there are some elements of culture which the Africans must not forget which is, the Philosophy of Ubuntu, which can best be described as an African philosophy that places emphasis on 'being self through others'. It is a form of humanism which can be expressed in the phrases 'I am because of who we all are' and ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu in Zulu language (126). African therefore, does not conceive and individual as a single being rather, as a relational being because it forms the foundation of African identity. It is the community which makes the individuals, that is the African self is defined in terms of "WE".

CHIMAKONAM AND BISONG'S VIEWS ON PERSONAL IDENTITY

With the advancement of technology, improvement in biomedical technologies, changes in human Structure is made easy and possible. Men trying to change to female (transgender), mental surgery, body transplant is possible, development of Artificial intelligence and droids to act in place of humans are all outcome of advanced technology. With all these, the need to understand the problem of personal identity is imperative to enable us identify humans in spite of these changes when they happen.

The power of personal identity in human society enables one to identify and also deal with the issue of those quality and attribute that makes a person what that person is. Chimakonam and Bisong have come out with plausible arguments on personal identity and how humans could be identified. On the one hand Chimakonam holds that personal identity is possible through the continuity of the physical body while Bisong on the other hand holds that consciousness is the major source of identity.

Chimakonam's argument for the physical body as a means of personal identity holds "personal identity is to the body, and wherever it is, there is identity" (2011, 197). By this, Chimakonam means that without the body, personal identity is not possible because everything about personal identity for him is about the body. Arguing further Chimakonam used a mental surgery illustration where Prof. C.S. Momoh's body received Chimakonam brain in a mental transplant surgery (2011, 172). Despite this surgery giving Chimakonam's mind to Prof. Momoh, the bodily theory of Chimakonam's position holds that the person is identified as Prof. Momoh because "identity does not involve internal mind but the external body " (Chimakonam 2011, 200).

For Peter Bisong, different from Chimakonam's position avers that personal identity is possible only with the help of consciousness. Bisong's position on consciousness strongly argues against the bodily theory of personal identity because consciousness is the only criterion that can adequately give identity to humans. Based on this Bisong says:

Personal identity resides in the consciousness. This is because it is consciousness that marks human from animals. This is not to say that the

body is not a criterion of personal identity, personal identity resides more in the consciousness than in the body" (2014, 50).

By this Bisong did not completely negate the bodily theory but gives more emphasis to consciousness. Consciousness for Bisong becomes the basis for identity and in the absence of consciousness then the body may be considered. Bisong feels consciousness enables one to be heard rather than been perceived.

These two arguments by Chimakonam (bodily theory of identity) and Bisong (consciousness theory) respectively, shows inadequacy when arguing for personal identity using either of them as a means of personal identification in their arguments, though valid and plausible, either of it is insufficient to give full account to personal identity. Human person was created as matter and form also known as body and spirit, so also is personal identity possible and complete with consciousness and body together. This work argues that the full understanding of personal identity is well grasped when both consciousness and body must always work together for a full account of identifying a person. This is so because it saves the problem of functionality and sensibility of perception. Through it, no one mistakes the thoughts because of the looks as the case in Prof. Momoh of Chimakonam and the little girl of Bisong. The combination of consciousness and body makes easy the complexity of explanation of biological structures of who and what resides in a person to be it actively or inactive. Therefore, a case of body or consciousness alone as a means of personal identity is one sided.

REACTIONS TO CHIMAKONAM'S DEFENSE OF SENSE-PHENOMENAL APPROACH TO IDENTITY PROBLEM

Considering the psychological standpoint of argument for personal identity as presented by Descartes, Locke, Reid and others, where they present identity as what is tied to the brain, Chimakonam presents further arguments on personal identity in negation to these views. Chimakonam's argument says that a presenting a person as a mind is ill- foundeded (2019: 24-25). Therefore, person is an external thing and not internal explains the social concept of personal identity that it requires not only the individual to think of oneself in identity but also for the society to be able to identify such qualities when a person is mentioned. This shows the one-sided interest in dishonoring the aspect of the mind in making part of identity. To every extent, A person is a product of mind and body. The society understands the person and gives identity because the combination of both body and mind is possible and functional. The society relates with all and not just the part.

Furthermore, Chimakonam's phenomenism explains that "personal identity seeks to show that (1) the sense organs supply us with knowledge which we need to construct the identity of individuals in a community (2) thus sense-perception is central to personal identity construction (3) which means that individual identity is a social property that is in the public sphere (4) and as a result, it is up to the other individuals in a private affair of the individual

involved”(2019:22). This beautiful position of Chimakonam only explains personhood as a subject of physical reality without psychological or abstract qualities. It shows a gap in the totality of understanding a person. Hence, this research calls for caution against picking the sense body perception as the means of identity in order to avoid the problem of exclusion of other facets of identity. In the words of Ahmed Sara (2006), while body identity theory provides valuable insights in understanding human physical attributes and qualities, when not carefully approached it can lead to reductionism and exclusion of other aspects of identity. This is one of the problems Chimakonam and Bisong’s positions ran into.

Interrogating Chimakonam’s position that; “Sense-phenomenalism does not subscribe to the dichotomy between mind and body. And so the question as to which comes first, or which is the basic does not even arise” (30), is quite impressive and plausible for the totality of a person but he inadvertently went further to project the body alone as that upon which identity is possible because Chimakonam argues that “it is the body that is unique and it is a social property” (2019:31), thereby, falling into the trap of placing the body as superior which he argues against. Also, sense-phenomenalism according to Chimakonam, does not dispute the reality of memories, but memories do not stand on their own, they must be possessed, in other words by the brain and not necessarily the mind which is mere figment of thought. Brain however, are internal parts of the body and so, cannot stand on their own. The contents of the brain are therefore, attributes of the body. The body is here defined as the person or as something that identifies the person” (31).

This position though accepted that memory is part of what makes identity but it went further to commit the problem of reductionism, by reducing all that makes the person as part of the body. It fails to point out the unconscious and motionless body does not give full identity of a person. This argument brings about over simplification that reduces individuals to only physical characteristics. According to Davis, this oversimplification can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce societal norms by reducing individuals to their physical characteristics, potentially leading to marginalization and discrimination (2015:37), so also has sense-phenomenalism reduced the identity of person to only the physical just because the internal organs act with the body but makes the body unique for identity to be possible. Finally, using Butler Judith’s (1990), lines, “body identity theory tends to prioritize certain dimensions of identity while neglecting others, which may marginalize individuals whose identities do not conform to established categories or who experience fluidity and intersectionality in their identities,” thereby, creating a divide that is not necessary between body and consciousness as separable.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE “BODY AND CONSCIOUSNESS” AS A MEANS OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Arguing that the body alone can be used to identify a person is not invalid but it is incomplete. Also holding consciousness as the criterion for identity alone is incomplete because

biologically humans are components of both body and consciousness to effectively function. Removing either body away from consciousness or form is tantamount to imbalance in human existence and structure. So also in giving identification to a person both body and consciousness must be together to help give a balance in knowing and understanding the human person. It is through this consciousness that human participate in their human activities and can recall events and circumstances they face using the body as it complete the part of existence. There cannot be consciousness as a means of identity alone as argued by Bisong where body is missing. No one can point at consciousness to say, this is consciousness A or B without allusion to a body for proper identity.

Both Chimakonam and Bisong arguments are guilty of discrimination of body and consciousness distinction. It is a division that created by western two-valued logic in trying to justify that there is difference between Matter and form, thereby creating one as superior to one and one always dependent on another for recognition. This division or distinction is the reason raised by Western Logic has mentally created a picture where Consciousness is seen as form and body is seen as matter, thereby, making one in need of another whereas, both body and consciousness are inseparable to make human being a whole. Arguing for bodily theory as responsible for identity or consciousness theory alone, is falling into the discrimination and division problem as a means of identity. This division is a gap created by false imposition of dualistic philosophy as a result of the binary logic of the west. Hence, for personal identity to be possible in functionality and recognition there is no division of any as superior to another.

In cases of sex or bodily changes, Chimakonam's argument of the bodily theory could not satisfy Bisong's argument where he says "an individual who changed himself to a woman through the aid of recent sex change technologies would possess a mixed identity" (2014,60), because it considered the matter (body) alone without the form (consciousness). The same problem Bisong's arguments lacks in dealing with this fact. In any situation where there is a body or sex transformation there is also an internally changed mindset, mood and it affects the consciousness too. These two (body and consciousness) have a unity that cannot be easily removed. Where these changes occur, identity is changed both in body and unconsciousness. That is why in lawsuit a common identification means, when Mr. A who changes from a man to a woman is asked or addressed, such a person is referred to the form and matter he or she carries at a given circumstance of action or situation when such need arises. Example, if Mr. A steals and changes to Mrs. A due to technological advancement, now Mrs. A, she will be treated accordingly as Mrs. A because there is a consciousness to show and there is also a body displaying the consciousness. Technically, without the body, now Mrs. A, would not have been able to be identified as then Mr. A, because both body and consciousness must work together for consciousness to be identified.

The problem of multiple identities cannot arise where both body and consciousness align. They cannot be any issue of mixed identity as pointed out by Bisong in criticizing Chimakonam. According to Bisong "the society cannot describe identity of Mr A to be a bird based on the differences of bodies. But if Chimakonam does not ascribe identity of "Mr. A" to the bird where

then lies the identity of Mr. A, is it lost with the bird?"(2014, 60). Asking further, he illustrated a story of a man in Boki would promised to show his son a lion and in the bush he turned to a lion. This argument is interesting but misrepresenting and inappropriate to account for multiple identities because there is no multiple identity in the first place. First, human is completely different from animals in all aspects of identity. Consciousness according to Bisong is where lies the difference or marks the difference between human and animals" (2014, 50). As such, both body and consciousness of human and animals are in appropriate for this argument because there are different creatures represented here. In spite of that, where Mr. A is a human, he act, behaves and consciously does human activities and where he becomes an animal such consciousness ceases. It cannot be said that one is both animal and human at the same time. The consciousness and body of a human has its identity and an animal has its peculiar qualities and traits of animals different from humans.

On the issue of death and problem of identity, it is important to note that the death of a body also is the death of consciousness of that body. Consciousness cannot be seen or felt outside a body. This position argues against Aribiah's position of personal identity as "nothing more than illusion where we cannot help but have"(77) personal identity is a reality because both body and consciousness exist together to be able to know what is illusory all real. The brain which gives us illusion of a self (Aribiah 77), is in a body. Personal identity does not exist in a vacuum to give interpretation. It requires a body that is conscious to be able to give interpretations of reality. The relationship that the body has with consciousness is what could be termed as life and being active in existence. At death Being assumes a different form, showing that consciousness alone is not a criterion for personal identity.

Impressively, Bisong did not fail to acknowledge that the physical body as well as consciousness add to constitute a person (2014,63) because this is where a balance is gotten but placing primary and total emphasis on consciousness led Bisong to be blind to the reality of self-consciousness as what it is not hereditary. To every person there is a unique consciousness because even in brain transplant, it is only "theoretically a person with complete Brain failure could be given a new and functional body while keeping their known personalities, memory and consciousness through such a process (Adams 2013,1). Hence, it is only at theoretical level can assumptions be made of transferring one's consciousness to a new body as explained by Bisong in the story of a 2 year old child whose father claimed to be from Oban while the little girl was claiming she was buried at Mbarakom and claiming she was once from Mbarakom (Bisong, 2014,64). This story critically examined, it could be a product of folktales told by elders to drive home a point. This is because upon death of this child, was there a mental surgery carried out where brains were transferred? Can someone identify consciousness alone without a body acting on this consciousness? These are questions begging for answers when either the body or consciousness alone is considered in personal identity. Personal identity is that which deals with the bodily aspect of human and the conscious aspect of human to prove human full identity. There can be no recognition of a person's identity without a body, just as there cannot be a personal identity of body alone without consciousness. Just like Chimakonam's body theory alone in personal identity is one-sided, so also is

consciousness being considered alone or as a superior part in personal identity as opined by Bisong is one sided. No one has a greater role because both are complementary. Thus, Bisong extremist position of placing superiority to consciousness could have been avoided if he ended in his "negation of any of them will give us a partial understanding of a person as well as identity" (2014, 63) but adding "in all kinds of combination, there is hardly a case where the constituent elements combine in the same degree to form a compound (2014, 63) pushed him into committing the fallacy of hasty generalization and an extremist position. Human structure is different from chemical and organic experiment carried out in a laboratory. The human system especially in personal identity, consciousness needs a body to function. Hence, presenting one as superior to another or capable of giving identity is creating a divide that is insufficient as well as inadequate to proof personal identity.

CONCLUSION

The dynamic and complex nature of humans is the reason for the long debate in understanding the problem of personal identity. Though the bodily theory of identity is valid as argued by Chimakonam, so also is the consciousness theory as argued by Bisong is valid. Unfortunately, these varying views present a single part argument for personal identity because each failed to see the complementary roles of both body and consciousness in human structure and biological designs when discussed together as one rather than separately. Human person is such that the self is known and can participate in reality because both the body and consciousness are together and effective. In the absence of one, it is a problem in getting full results and answers to human identity.

Finally, this research holds that both consciousness and body are two sides that make personal identity possible. There is no need for division as to which is responsible to make identity possible because such thoughts creates a divide and technically makes one to be more important over another. Based on this, there can be no complete story told from any memory or brain without allusion to body, so also is the body lifeless in the absence of consciousness. Hence, there should be no reason using only bodily theory or consciousness theory, or a single part story in discussing personal identity. Both body and consciousness are equally relevant for a true and complete identification in humans. Conclusively, no one is superior to the other if true identity must be gained due to their complementary nature and character.

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