ORALITY, ETHICAL MATURITY AND ANLO-EWE NORMATIVE NOTIONS OF PERSONHOOD

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Abstract
The spoken word and techniques of communication other than writing have been employed by indigenous people to craft a unique understanding of personhood. Indigenous oral traditions such as proverbs, maxims, idioms, folklores, and naming practices are embedded with aesthetic, intellectual, and creative resources that construct a particular modality of ethical maturity and personhood among indigenous people. This paper examines orality, ethical maturity, and Anlo-Ewe normative notions of personhood. It explores how, through a critical and deep philosophical exploration of some oral traditions, a certain conception of a person emerges. This qualitative research employs in-depth interviews of key informants and participants to gather primary data. Key informants such as sages, chiefs, clan and lineage heads, linguists, and other persons with a thorough knowledge of the indigenous knowledge systems of the Anlo-Ewe are interviewed to provide useful insights about the philosophical significance and motifs of Anlo-Ewe oral traditions. This paper highlights a conception of a person who would be a morally sound adult who demonstrates in practice a sense of responsibility to household, clan, and society. It is argued that the normative idea of personhood is a status earned by meeting certain community standards that are believed to define personhood. This normative conception of personhood is so fundamental that it could be described as the distinguishing and defining feature of African philosophical thought.

Keywords: Orality, Anlo-Ewe, Oral traditions, Ethical maturity, Personhood

Introduction

Scholars in African philosophy, such as Menkiti (1984) and Molefe (2020, 2019, 2017), have written extensively on the normative notions of personhood. Gyekye (2013, 2010, 1992) and Wiredu (2009, 2004) have also discussed the influence of orality in the normative conception of personhood in African philosophy, especially among the Akan in Ghana. However, little research has been done on how oral narratives are employed to construct ethical maturity and Anlo-Ewe normative notions of personhood.

Indigenous people, such as the Anlo-Ewe, employ several oral traditions to construct a particular understanding of ethical maturity and personhood. These oral traditions, such as proverbs, maxims, idioms, folklores, and naming practices, are enshrined with aesthetic, intellectual, and epistemological resources which envisage a particular understanding of ethical maturity and personhood among the Anlo-Ewe. This ethically mature individual (*tsitsi le nute5ew4w4me*) is equally evaluated as truly a person (*ew4 ame `ut4*). Such an individual has been formed and transformed in a society (by parents, guardians, and adult members) to become a morally mature adult person capable of discharging his or her responsibilities to the household, clan, and the entire society. Additionally, such an individual can exhibit certain societal values such as hospitality, generosity, kindness, patience, cooperation, greetings, truthfulness, and hard work. It is, therefore, hoped that proper and positive development through character formation, socialisation, and education will eventually lead to ethical maturity and (moral) personhood. Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that the opposite is also possible.

Objectives
The objectives of this paper are to:
i. Examine how indigenous oral traditions such as proverbs and maxims construct a particular modality of ethical maturity and personhood among the Anlo-Ewe.
ii. Investigate the aesthetic, epistemological, and creative resources embedded in Anlo-Ewe oral traditions.
iii. Have a deeper understanding of ethical maturity and personhood among the Anlo-Ewe.

Methodology
The research employed the analytic method to examine the various outlines of some oral traditions that are used in crafting a particular understanding of ethical maturity and normative notions of personhood among the Anlo-Ewe. The method involved a detailed analysis of some oral narratives, their language, content, contexts in which they are used, and the rationale behind the narratives. Participants for the study included sages, linguists, chiefs, clan and lineage heads, and persons with a thorough knowledge of the philosophical worldview of the Anlo-Ewe.

Conceptual Framework
The conceptual framework guiding this research is ethical formation. It refers to the process whereby an individual is formed and transformed in a society to become a morally mature adult person capable of discharging his or her responsibilities to household, lineage, and society. It is a process of human maturation and transformation aimed at making an individual act by the moral standards of a society. Children and young adults are taught and learn about morality through instructions, imitation, modelling, self-reflection, critical analysis, rewards, and punishments.

This gradual formation takes place from the time of conception until death at the home (which could mean more than a whole village), in all the public theaters of human interactions, such as workplaces, the court, the places and occasions of festivals and entertainment (Wiredu, 2009). Additionally, this human ethical formation is reinforced during evening gatherings, family meetings, settling of disputes, celebration of festivals, performance of rites and rituals, commemoration of events and ceremonies, undertaking occupational responsibilities, etc. The process of ethical formation is matrixed within a network of mutually interdependent relationships between the individual himself or herself, parents, guardians, adult members of the society, the lineage, clan, and the larger society (Chowdhury & Umadevi, 2023).

Ethical formation is both formal and informal. Formal ethical formation takes place during the performance of rites of passage, specifically during the period of seclusion when the initiate(s) receive intensive, systematic, and comprehensive education from elderly kinsmen and women. Additionally, formal ethical formation takes place during apprenticeship to secret cults and certain professions, such as blacksmithing and goldsmithing, and the period of confinement for a chief, diviner, priest, and priestess.

During puberty rites for girls, they are instructed by elderly kinswomen in the indigenous notion of ethically mature womanhood (Abotchie, 1997b). They are further instructed about the virtues of good housekeeping, respect, hospitality, fidelity, chastity, self-control, industriousness, cleanliness, personal hygiene, and how to prepare various types of meals and care for their future husbands. On the other hand, the giving of a cutlass, hoe, gun, and the building of a house ritually symbolise the values of hard work, diligence, independence,

resourcefulness, commitment, bravery, fearlessness, courage, responsibility, and self-reliance for boys (Doe, 2024).

Parents impart continuous daily informal ethical formation to their children. This formation is described as informal because it takes place at anytime, anywhere, with no specific syllabus and by any adult member of the community, such as parents, guardians, elder siblings, clan and family members, and the entire community. Nevertheless, key moments when informal ethical formation takes place include the performance of daily household chores (sweeping, cleaning, washing, running errands, fetching water and firewood, etc.), games, and recreational activities. It is hoped that ethical formation – formal and informal – will lead to ethical maturity and moral personhood.

Even though the ethical formation that an individual undergoes may be hard and demanding, it is considered very critical for the total education, development, transformation, and, more importantly, the preservation of the community's knowledge systems (Chowdhury & Umadevi, 2023). Ethical formation is considered one of the surest means of preserving ethics in indigenous societies and an essential process of preparing young boys and girls for the challenges of adult life. Thus, the significance of ethical formation can be understood primarily as a process of preparing individuals "to live in the community as a worthy moral agent" (Wiredu, 2009). Additionally, it is to keep alive the oral traditions and socio-cultural moral values of the communities, and to nurture the spirit of community bonding (Chowdhury & Umadevi, 2023).

Indigenous Oral Traditions

Oral tradition is a form of knowledge that is acquired and transmitted through spoken words and techniques of communication other than writing (Wiredu, 2009). It is one of the major means of acquiring and transmitting knowledge in indigenous societies. Boakye (2018) considers oral tradition as a true reflection of philosophy, community life, as well as depicting an authentic voice and spirit of the ancestors, and a reflection of the development in an indigenous society. Oral tradition is used for education, socialisation, recreation, and an understanding of the identity of a people (Boakye, 2018). They are disseminated during evening gatherings, family meetings, settling of disputes, celebration of festivals, performance of rites and rituals, commemoration of events and ceremonies, undertaking occupational responsibilities, etc. (Adom, 2016). During the performance of oral traditions, people are entertained, but most importantly, get educated and socialised (Boakye, 2018).

Indigenous Anlo-Ewe oral traditions, such as proverbs, maxims, idioms, riddles, puzzles, myths, folklores, taboos, and naming practices are embedded with aesthetic, epistemological, and creative resources which construct a particular modality of personhood among indigenous people. This conception of a person evaluates an individual as an ethically mature adult, as well as a truly person.

Anlo-Ewe

This paper focuses on the Anlo-Ewe as a specific ethnic group in a particular geographical area. The Anlo-Ewe are located mainly in the Keta Municipality and the Anloga District in the Volta Region of Ghana. It needs to be noted that the issue of clearly delineating the Anlo-Ewe "is not so easy … because it is a term with more than one referent" (Nukunya, 1977). The researcher's usage of 'Anlo-Ewe' is not in its generic sense to include the Avenors, Somes, and Aflaos but rather in a strict sense to refer to the group of Ewe located in the two districts mentioned earlier. Additionally, many Anlo-Ewe have migrated to other parts of Ghana, for example, Anloga in Kumasi and others. Despite the restricted use of the term 'Anlo-

Ewe', it must be affirmed that the other categories of Ewe earlier mentioned – Avenors, Klikors, Somes, and Aflaos – who are close neighbours, share a culturally similar philosophical worldview and historical affinity with the Anlo-Ewe (Nukunya, 1977). While acknowledging the close association between the Anlo-Ewe and other groups of Ewe in the southern part of the Volta Region of Ghana, Nukunya (1977) equally affirms marked cultural variations. He states:

> Language and common traditions of origin formed the most important bases of Ewe unity.… In the linguistic sphere (which is their second unifying factor), however, marked variations are found which make it difficult for people of one area to understand properly the local dialects of others…. It is clear that other cultural traits also differ from place to place. These are most clearly evidenced in musical forms, dancing, modes of salutation and facial markings…. Because of these differences, generalisations embracing the whole Ewe-speaking group are bound to be misleading unless the sphere or area of their application is clearly delimited. It is only through a detailed study of the different tribes that the similarities and differences between them can be established (pp.2-3).

Some major towns in Anloland that come under the research purview include Anloga, Keta, Tegbi, Alakple, Tsiame, and Afife because of their importance in the ritual worldview of the Anlo-Ewe.

Literature Review

The African normative conception of personhood distinguishes between persons and mere biological human beings on entirely different grounds. This normative conception of personhood is so fundamental that it could be described as the distinguishing and defining feature of African philosophical thought (Behrens, 2011). Two normative notions of personhood in African philosophy can be identified (Molefe, 2019).

The first notion, which I term moral personhood, assigns moral value to an entity by possessing specific ontological properties that are morally significant. This idea features prominently in bioethics and discussions on dignity or rights. In this sense, to be called a 'person' is to be classified as a moral patient and possessing moral status who deserves duties of respect. What is essential in this notion of personhood is that the entity in question is owed respect because it has the relevant ontological properties – rationality, consciousness, or sentience – without regard to how one uses them (Molefe, 2019). Such an analysis of personhood examines whether by merely possessing the relevant property, not its use, determines that a being deserves some moral respect (Molefe, 2019).

The second normative notion of personhood, which I term moral evaluative personhood, examines an individual's conduct about certain societal values such as generosity, patience, hospitality, solidarity, kindness, greetings, truthfulness, and hard work. The fundamental issue in this discourse of personhood is how individuals use their ontological capabilities to perfect or defect their humanity and not the ontological status of the human agent. One who is called a person is acknowledged to have added an essential dimension of educational moral transformation to his or her humanity (Molefe, 2019). To be called a non-person is to be evaluated as having lived below the moral expectations of society without denying one's humanity and the basic respect due to one merely as a human being (Wiredu, 2009). This second normative notion of personhood examines human beings as moral agents

who have developed morally virtuous characters. The evaluation of an individual human being as a person is to highlight specific moral virtues as deserving of 'high (moral) praise'. This analysis of personhood reports on the quality of the character of the human agent, which depends on the performance of specific societal moral values considered suitable for a befitting human being. Molefe (2019) rightly opines that "failure to live up to these norms leads to the denial of personhood" (p. 7).

According to Molefe (2019), some African scholars, such as Ikuenobe and Wiredu, argue that the moral evaluative notion of personhood is "more dominant" in the African philosophical tradition. In other words, ethical issues are more pronounced in an African conception of a person than the ontological aspects of the concept. Thaddeus Metz (2007) observes that this dimension of personhood is probably the dominant interpretation of African ethics. One is expected to go beyond being merely a human being by developing moral characteristics imbued with moral virtue (Gyekye, 2010).

Behrens (2011) rightly differentiates the two normative notions of personhood – moral personhood and moral evaluative personhood – in terms of *patient-centred* and *agent-centred* respectively. The *patient-centred* notion specifies the relevant ontological properties of the individual – rationality, memory, and so on – that mark him or her as a moral patient. In this understanding, any entity with the relevant property counts as a moral patient. Behrens (2011) explains that the *patient-centred* notion of personhood represents the value of a human person in terms of specific metaphysical capacities or properties possessed by the individual in question. The *patient-centred* idea embodies a view of personhood that assigns value to the individual about whether he or she possesses the relevant metaphysical capacities. It highlights the concept of *moral status* that identifies human beings and other entities (moral patients) as part of the moral community as they possess relevant metaphysical capacities (Behrens, 2011).

The concept of 'moral status' involves identifying some properties possessed by some entity in virtue of which it counts as a moral being and deserving of moral regard. This idea of personhood – *patient-centred* – is concerned with what is due to some entity, not for what it does or has done, but merely because it has the relevant properties. This means that some being is worthy of respect simply for being the kind of being it is, depending on what property is thought to be crucial – rationality, sentience or capacity for love (Metz, 2012). Moral status implies moral significance by which a moral agent deserves moral respect due to possessing relevant metaphysical capabilities. The possession of these metaphysical properties makes the moral agent a bearer of intrinsic value – a person. By being a bearer of intrinsic value, the moral agent is owed direct duties of respect (Molefe, 2020).

The *agent-centred* notion assesses the quality of the ethical behaviour of the agent as ultimately attracting moral praise or blame. The emphasis in this consideration is on moral performance. To be called a person is to be praised for having achieved ethical maturity (Molefe, 2019). Augustine Shutte (2001) thus argues;

> The moral life is seen as a process of personal growth….
> Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into community with others. So, although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded (p. 30).

The second normative notion of personhood invokes respect due to moral agents relative to their ethical performance, which Behrens (2011) refers to as the *agent-centred* notion of personhood. Those who perform well are called 'persons', and those who do not are 'non-persons'. In the second normative notion of personhood, to name a human being a 'person' is to make a moral judgement that he or she is leading a proper human life. It is, however, not to deny or denigrate his or her humanity *qua* a biological fact. Rather, it is to say he or she is

treating his or her humanity in the best way possible, morally speaking. In this light, personhood is a moral achievement that depends on the agent's performance (Molefe, 2019). Thus, to refer to some human being as a person is a commendation of and a commentary on his or her ethical behaviour. It is to judge an individual's behaviour patterns as morally praiseworthy or morally outstanding (Wiredu, 2009). Human agents who live according to society's normative standards are appraised as persons, and those who do not as non-persons (Gyekye, 2013). Menkiti (1984) explains that this socio-moral personhood has to be attained, and it is characterised by a widened ethical maturity. Besides, it should be noted here that while the first normative notion of personhood speaks of the respect one deserves merely because one possesses the relevant ontological capacity, be it rationality, sentience, or capabilities, the second refers to the respect one earns relative to one's moral performance.

It is critical to stress the two normative notions of personhood and how they play distinct roles in African moral thought. One is riveted on an invariable property possessed usually by human beings in virtue of which they deserve moral regard, which Kevin Gary Behrens (2011) refers to as the *patient-centred* notion of personhood. A human being possesses moral status which specifies some ontological features by which he or she is morally significant and for the very reason of possessing and not exercising this feature, he or she deserves moral respect (Molefe, 2018).

Motsamai Molefe (2018) opines that although these two normative notions of personhood – *patient-centred* and *agent-centred* – are moral, they differ significantly. While *patient-centred* involves the respect every human being is accorded purely because he or she is human, *agent-centred* refers to the consideration a human agent earns concerning individual ethical performance. The *patient-centred* notion grounds respect on ontology and the *agent-centred* on performance. Molefe (2018) describes the respect under *patient-centred* as invariable since all those with the relevant ontology are to be respected despite their performance. In contrast, respect under *agent-centred* is variable relative to one's moral accomplishments.

Despite the distinction, there is a relationship between these two normative dimensions of a person. It could be argued that the *patient-centred* notion forms the basis of any analysis of the *agent-centred* notion of personhood. In other words, the *patient-centred* concept informs the *agent-centred* notion. For instance, an individual accorded the moral praise of being truly a person should possess sufficient reason and the use of it. One may ask whether an individual who lacks sufficient use of reason but exhibits actions which deserve moral praise could be referred to as truly a person in African philosophical thought.

Ethical Maturity among the Anlo-Ewe (*Tsitsi Le Nute5ew4w4me*)

The first interpretation of ethical maturity in Anlo-Ewe is *2evi nute5e w4la,* meaning a child who is ethically mature or respectful. This category of ethical maturity refers to children who, though lacking experience, are seen as the reincarnation of an ancestor who exhibited a high sense of morality in the family. An interviewee described such a person as *ametsitsi 2evi* (an ethically mature child). Four interviewees argued that they were called *t4gbi* (chief) from childhood. The second rendition of ethical maturity is *ame kp4 nute5e eye wo w4 nute5e*. This interpretation, according to some interviewees, generally caters for relatively young persons but, because of their interactions with the elderly, possess rich and diverse experiences of life and also exhibit maturity in thought, speech, and in good character. Additionally, this interpretation is in tandem with the maxim: "When a child knows how to wash his hands, he eats with the elders". In other words, the maxim acknowledges that a young adult can exhibit ethical maturity and critical judgement as a result of his or her interactions with elders.

The third meaning of an ethically mature person (*ametsitsi nute5e kp4la klpe nute5e w4la*) among the Anlo-Ewe is of age, with vast and diverse experiences in life, and shows maturity in thought, speech, teaching, and, perhaps more importantly, in good character. The fourth interpretation of ethical maturity is about the ancestors. They are the spiritual elders in the supernatural world who have attained the apex and pinnacle of ethical maturity and are sometimes reborn to continue the life cycle of existence in Anlo-Ewe cosmology. The distinguishing factors in the above analysis of ethical maturity are length of experience, the depth of wisdom and knowledge exhibited, and commitment shown in discharging one's responsibilities, and not necessarily the age of the individual.

According to one interviewee, there is a clear distinction between (*amegaxoxo/nyagaxoxo*), that is, old man or woman, and (*tsitsi*) maturity in Anlo-Ewe. Among Anlo-Ewe, like other indigenous societies, (*tsitsi*) maturity is not measured only or necessarily in one's age or number of years but in one's knowledge, wisdom, experiences, behaviour, conduct, and attitudes (Gbolonyo, 2009). A person is as old or young (maturity) as he or she acts; a person is as old as the quality and amount of wisdom possessed, knowledge displayed, and productivity to society. Thus, (*tsitsi*) maturity, which is symbolically seen in the grey hair, is a compliment and elicits respect, status, responsibility, and pride. If an elderly person's behaviour does not merit his or her status and position, he or she is said to be (*2evi*) 'young' or a 'child' despite his or her age. Such a label is not a compliment but often a devaluation, disrespect, or even an 'insult' (Gbolonyo, 2009).

One interviewee argued that *ametsitsi* (maturity) in this sense is like a title given to persons who exhibit the qualities aforementioned. Thus, the Anlo-Ewe maxim "the best quality of liquor is in the mature palm tree" argues that the more mature and well-developed the palm tree, the better quality and quantity of liquor that it produces. Additionally, the maxim "what a mature person sees while sitting in a lazy chair cannot be seen by a child who climbs a tree", buttresses the argument that maturity usually comes with advancement in age and close interactions with elders. More importantly, maturity is associated with the wide and deep experiences of life and commitment shown in the performance of one's responsibilities. Hence, it is natural to credit an elderly person with wisdom because he or she has gained experience in life. Nevertheless, it does not always work that way (Gbolonyo, 2009).

Perhaps, a crucial assessment of an *ametsitsi nute5ekp4la kple nute5ew4la* (ethically mature or virtuous person) among the Anlo-Ewe is an individual who promotes the well-being of a family, for example, by taking care of a deceased brother's or sister's children. Additionally, such a person can articulate a critical intellectual analysis of a subject matter, an event, or a practical solution to a problem. According to (Gbolonyo, 2008), he or she must be able to provide the relevant facts, point out the underlying reasons, argue, and convince others about an issue under discussion. Such a person is considered to be a wise and deep thinker (Gbolonyo, 2008). Moreover, the intellectual and moral characteristics of an *ametsitsi* are not the preserve of elders. Indigenous societies recognise that these abilities are also found in some young adults who usually might have lived with elders.

An ethically mature or virtuous person among the Anlo-Ewe people must exhibit other-regarding values such as kindness, hospitality, generosity, patience, and wisdom in thought. Such a person performs his or her responsibilities towards his or her children, family and clan members, and the larger community. Perhaps, one of the greatest symbols of ethical maturity among the Anlo-Ewe is *akpasa* or *zi* (lazy chair or stool). As one interviewee noted, a child

does not sit on an *akpasa*. It is an *ametsitsi* (elderly mature man) who sits on an *akpasa*[1] and shares his rich experiences of life and maturity with children and young adults. It is, therefore, a great insult to be questioned (*akpasa mele a5eme na wo ma ha*), meaning whether one has not got *akpasa* in one's home. This question seeks to find out whether one has no ethically mature person in the family who would offer pieces of advice to him or her? Hence, a child who wants to sit on the seat reserved for elders would be reminded that a child breaks a snail's shell and not a tortoise's shell. A child must fit himself or herself into where he or she belongs.

Two Normative Notions of Personhood among the Anlo-Ewe

The first normative notion of personhood in Anlo-Ewe thought describes a person possessing moral status by having certain metaphysical-ontological features which deserve duties of respect and honour. By merely possessing certain relevant properties, such as soul and spirit, and not necessarily their use, implies that a human being must be accorded some moral respect. In Anlo-Ewe philosophical thought (*ame*), that is, a human being possesses certain basic moral rights (life and dignity) which must be respected and protected by every member of the community.[2] It is an acknowledgment of the moral status of an individual which Kevin Behrens (2011) describes as the *patient-centred* notion of personhood. Among the Anlo-Ewe, an individual who lacks sufficient use of reason would hardly be evaluated as a person. The statement "*mele ame me o*" according to the Anlo-Ewe, means an individual is not in human form. It is about an individual's moral and intellectual deformity rather than a physical one, although the latter also applies when the individual is insane (Hiagbe, 2008).

The recognition of the moral status of an individual among the Anlo-Ewe is similar to the position of Polycarp Ikuenobe (2017) that a community can recognise individual abstract rights, but could place limits on some rights in some situations. This is usually done to individuals such as *hl--dolawo kple dugbalawo*, that is, persistent deviants and criminal behaviours in terms of denying certain actions or choices in some situations. For example, Anlo-Ewe punish certain deviant behaviours such as incorrigible thieves, persistent adulterers and rapists by the death penalty- that is, burying alive to the neck or banishment some seven decades ago (Abotchie, 1997a). These forms of punishment involve the community taking away or failing in some form to recognise some of the deviant's rights, especially the freedom to live in the community. Similarly, in many traditional African societies, a certain category of people is not allowed to marry. For example, people who do not have sufficient use of reason since they cannot execute the duties and responsibilities associated with marriage and family life (Ikuenobe, 2017).

Ikuenobe (2017) argues that establishing the recognition of one's substantive (as opposed to abstract) rights on the demonstration of ethical maturity or moral actions that are conducive to communal harmony does not imply that individual rights are not recognised by the community. Among the Anlo-Ewe, when a persistent deviant or violent criminal threatens the peace and harmony of a community, he or she has failed to manifest in his or her actions a sense of moral dignity, duty, and personhood. In that regard, he or she does not deserve his or

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[1] One interviewee argued that sitting in an *akpasa* is the preserve of men. It is very uncommon for an elderly mature woman to sit in an *akpasa*

[2] The Ewe word *ame* or *amegbet4* also refers to a human being. More specifically, *ame* refers to both the living and the dead. When a person dies, his or her name is hardly mentioned. He or she is referred to as *amea*, the person or *mia5e amea*, our person; *wo k4 amea gb4nae*, the person is being brought; *wo le amea dim*, the person is being buried. Hence, the term *ame* or *amegbet4* is ambiguous, like *onnipa*, the Akan word used for both a person and a human being.

her substantive right to freedom to be recognised. When a community states that people cannot choose to do certain things because of communal harmony and people's well-being, it is not an indication of a lack of recognition of their autonomy or other rights (Ikuenobe, 2017). It is rather a recognition of the destructive effects of certain patterns of behaviour, not only to the individual but more importantly, towards the entire community. It must be reaffirmed that in indigenous societies like Anlo-Ewe, emphasis is always placed on individual responsibilities and obligations rather than individual rights.

The second normative notion evaluates the conduct of an individual about specific societal values such as hospitality, generosity, kindness, patience, cooperation, commitment to one's responsibilities, etc. To refer to someone as *ew4 ame `ut4* (he or she is truly a person) is to say that he or she lives according to the moral standards of the society, and so is an embodiment of the society's values. When the statement *ame ma, amee loo* (that person/human being is truly a person) is used about someone, it denotes a normative judgement[3] about his or her character as being hospitable, generous, truthful, patient, and kind. According to Hiagbe (2008), such a person contributes positively to the well-being of others or society. To say *menye amee wò nye o*, meaning he or she is not a human person, suggests that the individual has no morals (Hiagbe, 2008). It is a highly contextual statement. Nevertheless, in essence, it refers to an individual who fails to exhibit certain societal values, as mentioned earlier. Thus, the argument of Gyekye (2013) about the Akan that there is a clear distinction between the concept of a human being and the concept of a person is very much applicable to the Anlo-Ewe: *an individual can be a human being without being a person*.

It is in showing other-regarding values such as generosity, patience hospitality, solidarity, kindness, greetings and in the performance of one's social responsibilities that earn one the high moral praise of being evaluated as *ame ya, amee loo...,* or *ew4 ame `ut4* meaning, this person, is truly a person. It is worth reiterating that all the participants contacted for the study in evaluating an individual as *amee loo* that is, truly a person, mentioned other-regarding values that he or she exhibits. In addition, his or her morality must not ground the basis of good conduct on the likes and dislikes of any being, 'natural' or 'supernatural (Wiredu, 2004).

Among the Anlo-Ewe, someone who demonstrates unethical human conducts such as lack of generosity and concern for others is judged as *menye amee wonye o*, or *me w4 ame o* or *ame na kp4 abe ame ene* (not a person or person in a diminished sense). Although it is important to clearly delineate between individuals who (persistently) fail in the second normative dimension of personhood on the one hand and (hardened) criminals on the other hand, one cannot deny the propensity of the former to degenerate to the latter. Individuals who have failed in the second normative dimension of personhood or are persons in a diminished way are still considered as valuable and do contribute to the well-being of a clan or a family. Hence, the saying, *av4 n4 me 5ea, enyo wu tren4n4* which literally means, a cloth in the house is better than being a bachelor. The Anlo-Ewe abhor bachelorhood to such an extent that they would prefer a man marrying than to remain a bachelor throughout his life. In other words, it is better to have a wife, whatever her character than to remain a bachelor. Although the wife might not be the ideal woman, her presence and services are considered better than bachelorhood. Similarly, *ze gbagba be ye mew4a 2eke o ha, ya tso tsi na d4n4wo*; meaning, a

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[3] Although Komi Ahiatroga Hiagbe argues that the statement *ame ma, amee loo* is used to 'describe' someone's character, the researcher agrees with Kwame Gyekye, who in assessing a similar statement about the Akans, *oye onipa paa* proffers that such a statement refers to the 'normative form of judgement' about an individual's character. Hence, the statement *ame ma, amee loo* and *oye onipa paa* in Ewe and Akan respectively denote a normative judgement about a person's character and not a descriptive judgement about a person.

broken pot says even if it has not done much, it can prepare medicine for the sick. Among the Anlo-Ewe, a broken pot is not useless but very useful in the preparation of traditional medicine for the sick.

However, individuals who persistently fail to attain the second normative dimension of personhood among the Anlo-Ewe **and** exhibit certain patterns of behaviour such as murder through witchcraft or evil magic and persistent adulterers, rapists and robbers are not only evaluated as *menye amee wonye,* that is, not persons. They are also considered (*wobu wo5e ame nyenye* or *ame- nyenye mele wo me o*) to have lost their personhood and are thus equated with *gbemel7,* a wild beast. This expression is highly opprobrious which describes an individual who can no longer be tamed and is therefore not considered worthy to live among human society.

Gbemel7wo are individuals who are described by the Anlo-Ewe as *dugbalawo, nugblegawo* and *hl-dolawo* (blood related crimes such as incest, homicide, rape etc.). Such an individual is sometimes considered as *bometsila,* (an individual still existing in the beginning stage of the life cycle). *Bometsila* has not yet arrived in *xexeame*, that is, the earth, which is considered the second stage of the life cycle in Anlo-Ewe cosmology. As one interviewee argued, if *bometsila* is yet to be considered as part of the living, then he or she must remain at the beginning of the life cycle. Among the Anlo-Ewe, the very presence of such an individual among the human society is considered detrimental and harmful to the total well-being of the community. According to Agbanu (1999), such people threaten the security and solidarity of the society. Hence, to protect the very existence of the Anlo State, social concord, and the safety of other members of the community, the individual who persistently and consistently fails in the second normative dimension of personhood by committing certain grievous acts is given the death sentence or banished.

The above analysis of *me w4 ame* reveals a categorisation of individuals evaluated as *not persons* among the Anlo-Ewe. First, some individuals are considered not to be persons or to be persons only in a diminished way. Secondly, some individuals are deemed not to be persons and have lost their personhood and are considered as *gbemel7wo.*

It is relevant to add that the Anlo-Ewe are not quick to invoke the death penalty on any misdemeanor, immoral acts, or on anyone unable to achieve personhood. Every opportunity is given to people who fail in the project of personhood to reform. Hence, the death penalty, that is, one buried alive to the neck at *T4k4 At-lia*, the fifth landing stage, is resorted to as the last measure in dealing with people who can no longer be handled by any form of social control mechanism. As one interviewee argued, such individuals are human beings but do not act as persons. *T4k4 At-lia* is an attempt to totally eliminate certain behaviours such as persistent adultery, robbery, death through witchcraft, incest, and incorrigible individuals from a family, clan, or society. As rightly noted by Chris Abotchie (1997b), it is usually the family or clan members of the deviant who suggest the death penalty. His argument was corroborated by all the interviewees the researcher contacted for the study. *T4k4 At-lia* was abolished in the middle of the twentieth century.

For Anlo-Ewe, one who persistently fails in the moral evaluative dimension of personhood loses some rights that are ascribed to a person *qua* person. Hence, for the Anlo-Ewe, it is not enough for an individual to be considered a person *qua* person or a human being, but that this biological entity needs to be transformed to become a truly person. The equation of a human being to a wild beast is rightly the answer that an Anlo-Ewe will give to the question of Masaka; if it is acceptable that personhood is something that one may fail at, one is bound to ask what will become of those who persistently fail at it (Masaka, 2018).

Conclusion

Ethical maturity and the normative notions of personhood are viewed as the distinctive features of African philosophical thought since they encapsulate the essential nature of African ethics. The moral evaluative notion of personhood encompasses the ideas of moral maturation, the performance of other-regarding virtues, and society as the crucial catalyst in attaining the status of ethical maturity. Although the Anlo-Ewe notions of personhood might not differ from other African conceptions, they have significant caveats about individuals who persistently fail to attain the moral evaluative notion of personhood. Such individuals are considered non-persons, and very few are considered wild beasts. Ethical maturity and the moral evaluative notion of personhood among the Anlo-Ewe are structured around ethical values which are other-centred. These values reinforce human relationships defined by reciprocal obligations and emphasise interdependence as opposed to autonomy or individualism. Ethical maturity and Anlo-Ewe moral evaluative notion of personhood are achieved stage by stage and gradually by transitioning from the status of (*2evi*), a child characterized by no moral responsibility and lack of experience, to (*ametsitsi*), an adult person with a widened sense of (*tsitsi le `ute5ew4w4me*) ethical maturity.

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