5 Personal Identity in African Metaphysics
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Pre-theoretic concerns about personal identity challenge us to provide a coherent and unified response to the following questions: What is a person? What is it for a person to be the same persisting entity across time (or at a time)? How many ontologically distinct entities constitute a person? What relationship, if any, exists between an individual's first-person, subjective experiences and our objective, third person's perspective? African philosophy takes the challenge much more seriously than Western philosophy. In the former, unlike in the latter, plausible responses to one question are routinely informed by plausible responses to others. In this essay, I explore the extent to which an African theory of reality has provided integrated responses to the personal identity questions and build on those responses. My approach, partly descriptive and partly imaginative, ought to be familiar; it has been borrowed from a tradition that dates back at least to John Locke. What emerges is a tested conception of human existence that is formidable enough to be explanatorily useful vis-à-vis personal identity questions.

The Ontological Distinction
A tripartite conception of a person characterizes the African thought system. A person is conceived to be the union of his or her ara (body), emi (mind/soul), and ori (‘inner head’). Unlike ara, which is physical, both the emi and ori are mental (or spiritual). This dichotomy might induce us to think of the African view as dualistic. But it would be a mistake to do so, since ori is conceived ontologically independent of the other two elements. Thus, the African view is properly thought of as triadic. It is philosophically interesting that a person is a creation of different deities. Ara, the body, is constructed by Orisa-nla, the arch deity; Olodumare (God or ‘Supreme Deity’) brings forth the emi; while another
deity, Ajala, is responsible for creating ori. Ara is the corporeal entity from head to toe, including internal and external organs, and it becomes conscious with emi, which, apart from its life-giving capacity, is conceived as immortal and transmigratory. The inner or metaphysical head, ori, the other non-corporeal entity, is the bearer of destiny and, hence, constitutive of personality.

Understanding the Distinction

Thus, within the purview of African metaphysics, a person is made up three elements, ara, emi, and ori. Since their ontologies are logically independent of each other, the three elements are ontologically distinct and properly conceived as a triadic view of persons. Ara refers not only to the whole body, but also its various parts. However, the metaphysics does not make clear how much of a body is minimally needed for sameness (or continuity) of body. Presumably, our nontheoretical assumptions about what sameness or continuity of body amounts to will suffice for our discussions. However, those nontheoretical assumptions may include those that are peculiarly African, for example, the abiku or ogbanje syndrome, in which some children are believed to continuously repeat life cycles. As evidence for this syndrome, Africans point to similarities of bodies involved to posit bodily continuity between them. What is not clear is whether in these special cases, similarities in bodies are constitutive of, not merely evidence for, bodily continuity. Emi is the mind/soul. Its presence is indicated by phenomenal consciousness, an effect of divine breath that manifests (sort of) in breathing. We may note parenthetically that nonhuman creatures and plants have emi. Injunctions are usually made not to maltreat nikan-elemin, things “inhabited” by emi. This attitude, however, has not led to Jainism. Emi is taken to be essential to having ratiocinative activities, but it is not endowed with person-like characteristics as in certain Western traditions, for example, Descartes's. Indeed, the Western view that where the soul goes, there goes the person is not African, not at first blush anyway. Some African philosophers, however, have described emi as “the most enduring and most important characteristic of a person,” but there is no support within the African system of thoughts to understand this in a Platonic or Cartesian sense. That emi is considered most enduring might tempt us to think that for Africans ensoulment embodies personhood much like in Western thought systems. But this temptation should be resisted for they also contend that emi has no variable qualities, that is, emi has no distinguishing characteristics. What emi does, it seems, is help ground consciousness. Thus, while emi is most enduring and perhaps the most important element of a person, it is arguable that it encapsulates personhood. Ori refers to both the physical head and the inner/metaphysical head, and the latter is sometimes referred to as ori-inu to avoid ambiguity. Notice that Africans seem to think that there are metaphysical components of several body parts, most notably, the head, the heart, and the intestines. But the metaphysical components of the latter two serve largely the semantic function of conveying the roles of the relevant body parts in the proper bodily and psychic functioning of a person. One philosophically interesting question then is why only ori has been elevated into an ontologically constitutive element of a person. A plausible response is that ori, unlike other metaphysical components, is a deity in that, among other things, it is considered worthy of worship and appeasement. But this response is not satisfying: Why has ori, and not any other metaphysical body part, been deified? Why is deification of ori not due to its ontological status rather than the other way around? These are attractive quasi-logical inquiries, but I strongly doubt that they are promising enough for follow up. A more promising and fundamental issue to pursue is whether ori is a deity as it is generally claimed. A useful distinction to explore here is between an entity that is a deity and an entity towards which we only maintain what I will call a ‘deity stance.’ Some substantial considerations make it plausible to think that ori belongs to the latter category. Consider, first, the following. Suppose ori is really a deity. That everyone has ori makes each person a deity or possessor of one. But neither view adequately represents the African view. The view that each person is a deity is attractive, but not African. It conflicts with the African view that some individuals become deities on becoming ancestors; you cannot be becoming what you already are. Second, the view of ori as both a deity and an ontological constituent of a person makes supplications by the person to Ori supplications to him- or herself. This would be odd unless supplications in this context are taken as metaphorical
expressions of good wishes about oneself. Indeed, on this view of ori, it would be difficult to understand deferential attitudes to ori as both a deity and an ontological constituent of a person. And since we are all agreed that ori is ontologically constitutive of a person, it is more plausible to reject the view that Ori is a deity. Against the first consideration, an objector might argue that Africans as a matter of practice posit a hierarchy of deities, and that Ori is a deity in and of itself does not conflict with the belief that individuals become deities on becoming ancestors. That Africans posit a hierarchy of deities is true, but the transition from one deity to another is alien to the African view.

The Thought Experiment

What is a person in the African view? This question is ambiguous between two different but related questions: What are the constitutive elements of a person? What makes a person the same persisting entity across time? In response to the first question, the constitutive elements are ara, emi, and ori. The task is to determine the extent to which this response would help with the second but interrelated question about persistence. Suppose we become Cartesian, and conceive of the soul of one person, Adler's, transferred to the soulless body of another. If ensoulment embodies personhood, Adler now has a different body. (Locke, who does not think that the soul is immortal, would want Adler's brain transferred instead.) But do we have any reason to think of the issue this way rather than a case of mental derangement or clairvoyance? This is the personal identity issue in Western metaphysics. In reidentifying a person, do we trace the body or the mind? Generally, the mental (or psychological) continuity theorists think that we are to trace the mind because the mind encapsulates all that is really important: our hopes, fears, beliefs, and values. And if our mental life were to cease, we would have ceased to live. For them, we are defined by the mental. Bodily continuity theorists, on the other hand, think that we are to trace the body. That way, they reason, we respect the biological fact that we are basically organic beings, no matter what else we happen to be. Underlying the issue here is the distinction between a person and a human being. ‘Person’ refers to the fact that we are social entities, ‘human being’ to the fact that we are organic entities. The mental theorist emphasizes the first fact, the bodily theorist, the second. Thus, John Locke, a mental theorist, assumes that if we successfully transfer, say, Adler's brain into John's brainless body, the John-bodied person is now Adler. For the John-bodied person now exhibits the mental life of Adler. (Of course, there are serious difficulties in imagining this kind of exchange, but let us put them aside till much later.) Lockean followers, for example, Derek Parfit, have gone further by claiming that transfer of the brain is not necessary; what is important is securing Adler's mental life in John's body no matter how that comes about. What is important in these transactions, they argue, is that relevant mental lives continue irrespective of how this is done.

Defending Continuity Theories

The mental continuity theory and the bodily continuity theory are the two main competing views, though some variants of the former, and hybrid views of both, are sometimes considered interesting enough to merit separate discussions. But, in general, alternative views to the main ones are not encouraging. Suppose, for instance, the John-bodied person (after the transfer of Adler's brain) is considered a new person altogether, that is, he is neither John nor Adler. The problem with this view is that it is totally inconsistent with our understanding of human origins; new humans cannot, in our view of the world, come to exist as described. To illustrate, suppose that two qualitatively identical pieces of paper are ostensibly turned into a slice of cheese and a baby. Which transformation would we accept as real? Some might be inclined to claim that neither is real, but if we must choose, it seems a lot more plausible to accept the paper–cheese transformation than to accept the paper–baby transformation. This is because our metaphysical intuitions about human origins are so firm that we are prepared to discount what would
ordinarily count as empirical evidence to the contrary. Some objectors might argue that the John-bodied person is better considered a new person, rather than a new human being. Their objection would be that our strong metaphysical intuitions are about human beings, not human persons. Indeed, given our willingness to consider some nonhuman species persons, our philosophical imagination is not stretched to consider the John-bodied person neither John nor Adler but a new person, though not a new human being. The problem with this view is that the John-bodied person is peculiarly capable of performing any of the roles formerly associated with Adler, the physical circumstances permitting. In particular, the John-bodied person is willing to be held liable for promises, obligations, and duties formerly defining of Adler's personhood. More perplexing would be the willingness of the John-bodied person to follow up on the promises, obligations, and duties of Adler in accordance with Adler's own life plans. There is thus no serious justification for claiming that the John-bodied person is a new person. The distinction between 'person' and 'human being' is meant just for this: to preserve the practical value of our life plans and projects. Since Adler's life plans and projects are successfully pursued by the John-bodied person, it seems more plausible to consider the John-bodied person Adler than a new person, which is what the psychological continuity theorist claims. 

The Soul

There are good reasons, then, for the Western metaphysician to consider the psychological continuity theory and the bodily continuity theory as the main competing theories of persistence of persons. The next task for the Western metaphysician as he or she sees it is to determine which continuity theory is more plausible, and which variant of that is most explanatorily useful. Some useful philosophical insights have emerged in that determination, and I will touch on the most promising, but, first, a discussion of some tensions that undermine the whole issue of persistence in Western philosophy. Consider the Cartesian dualist concerned about persistence. The Cartesian dualist claims that body and soul are the two ontologically irreducible constituents of a person, with the soul being the essence of the person. Since for the dualist the soul is the person, the issue of persistence is concerned with tracing the soul. Where the soul is, there goes the person. But surprisingly, neither of the two main theories of persistence expresses this dominant view of most people. The more plausible the Cartesian theory seems, the less plausible either theory of persistence. Notwithstanding degrees of psychological and physical continuities involved, if persons are ensouled, it is the soul that underlies persistence. The soul by itself escapes tracing, but so much the worse for personal identity theories, the dualist would claim. ‘Scientifically minded’ philosophers, as most Western philosophers are in their professional lives, would claim that the Cartesian notion is not as plausible as its competing materialist views. What Descartes teaches, they will argue, is the importance of our occurrent and dispositional mentation in personhood, which is encapsulated in the various psychological continuity theories. Materialists are right that psychological continuity theories make clear our inclination and willingness to define ourselves by our mental lives. In that sense, then, the theories encapsulate the Cartesian insight that a person is a thinking thing that, *inter alia*, doubts, understands, and denies. Of course, materialists are not all agreed on what psychological continuity theories consist in. Some, for example, Derek Parfit, claim that the informational content of our mentation is all that matters, irrespective of how that sameness of information is secured, either by the brain, computer chips, or whatever. Some others, for example, Sydney Shoemaker, argue that sameness of information is valuable in persistence to the extent that there is sameness of brain or a functionally analogous entity. There is disagreement as to how much information needs to be preserved for sameness of persons, but we may put all that aside here. Yet other materialists, for example, Bernard Williams, would argue for a physical continuity theory: sameness of the body (with or without the brain, but preferably with the brain) is necessary in preserving identity. Apart from the most obvious cases, these three ‘scientifically minded’ approaches deliver different judgments on issues of persistence, and there is considerable disagreement on which approach is
most plausible. Indeed, most of the discussions about persistence in analytic Western metaphysics turn on determining which approach best reconciles our deeply rooted intuitions about the nature of persons with certain thought experiments about persistence, though it is not always understood that way. In any event, all this, I hope to show, is much ado about nothing.

Persistence and the Nature of Persons

Consider again the Cartesian solution. Whatever else we might think about the solution, we must concede that it has two main advantages over the continuity theories. First, it links its ontology of persons with its view of persistence. The soul is an ontological constituent of a person and, on its view, sameness of the soul constitutes sameness of person. Psychological continuity theorists are right in thinking that part of the attraction of same soul criterion is that it *ceteris paribus* preserves sameness of mentation. But this is not all — its linkage between *what* we are, our *whatness*, and our persistence is important, however difficult determination of the latter is. Without the linkage, what we are is one thing, our persistence, another. But whatever disagreements we may have about persistence, there is a pre-theoretic supposition that our persistence is about *us* and ought to preserve our *whatness*. Sameness of mentation does not provide the link; it perhaps constitutes evidence for our persistence, but it is silent on what we are. Different but inconsistent ontological assumptions about us are possible with sameness of mentation criterion. This partly explains the disagreement among psychological continuity theorists, hence, the desire of some of them to also emphasize sameness of brain. But we are not our brains, however important that organ is in our proper functioning. Thus, in securing Adler's occurrent and dispositional mentation in the John-bodied person, the latter does not then become Adler. Or, to put the same point differently, that the John-bodied person is Adler violates our ontology, and the violation is not mediated by transfer of the brain. Notice that I am neither claiming nor suggesting that we *are* organic entities. We are not our bodies, and in general, I consider physical continuity theories much weaker than their psychological counterparts for the simple reason that they uniformly fail to consider the practical importance we attach to personal identity.

The second main advantage of the soul is the apparent integrated unity that it provides our mental lives. Mental characteristics over time, however similar and overlapping, would not by themselves constitute the mental life of an individual. Some psychological theorists realize this, but apparently think that the brain could provide the cement. Although sameness of brain provides evidence for psychic unity, it does not constitute it. David Hume, after first claiming that our identity is *ersatz*, realized this when he lamented in the appendix of the *Treatise* that he could not find what binds the constant flux of consciousness and sensations. Hume finds it difficult to reconcile his atomistic principle that our perceptions are distinct and separate with the psychic unity that seems to characterize us. The usual Humean relations of contiguity in time and space, and causality, would not do here, since they are neither necessary nor sufficient for psychic unity. Hume's own radical empiricism prevents any appeal to the soul, but Hume's failure as confessed to in the appendix is a failure of continuity theories.

First-Person vs. Third-Person Perspectives

Another tension that threatens discussions about persistence in Western metaphysics is the third-person perspective of those discussions. Formulations of schemata for continuity theories, bodily or psychological, neglect the first-person perspective: Adler is the same person as John if Adler is bodily or psychologically continuous with John. The underlying assumption is that the continuities and, supposedly, personal identity, are objectively and, hence, third-person verifiable. Yet concerns about, say, *my* personal identity, are about *me*, and one would expect personal identity
discussions to reflect this subjective aspect of the issue. The question then is what it is for a third-person, objectively
determinate entity (or cluster of entities or aggregate of parts or whatever) to nevertheless be me, and not someone else. For
continuity theorists, the challenge would be to identify what it is about my intentions, beliefs, desires, and other psychological
phenomena that make them mine. One possible solution is that all the psychological phenomena “supervene” on the workings
of my central nervous system, not someone else’s. But this is not satisfactory enough, for we might ask what it is in particular
about my central nervous system that makes it mine. Another alternative route to generating the same issue is to posit a
distinction between my psychological phenomena and central nervous system, on the one hand, and between the central
nervous system and me, on the other. My psychological life, it seems, could have been sustained with a different but perhaps
structurally similar central nervous system. Moreover, we understand the claim that I could have had a different psychological
life (or body) and a different nervous system and still be me. That is, we understand what it is for me to be a subject undergoing
radical psychological changes and still be me: “Help! I am undergoing these terrible changes in my psychology.” Language use
is hardly decisive in these matters, but it seems reasonable to claim that the cry for help here is not tautological: My psychology
is undergoing these terrible changes in my psychology. Thus, focusing on psychological phenomena is, in general, mistaken.
Also, we understand that my complete physical and mental surrogate, capable of a life third-person qualitatively
indistinguishable from mine, would not be me. No amount of Parfitian intuitions about what presumably really matters “in
survival” will change these bare facts about me and my persistence. It is easy to determine how our intuitions might have gone
wrong. With Adler's brain successfully transferred into John's brainless body, we intuit that the John-bodied person is now
Adler. In this case though, the John-bodied person, too, thinks that he is Adler. That is, judgments from both the first-person
and third-person perspectives agree with each other. We assume that our objective, third-person judgment is correct, and that
the subjective, first-person judgment is correct to the extent that it concurs with the former. We think of situations, say, hypnosis and false memory, in which the first-person's judgments are not reliable, and become further convinced
that subjective judgments by themselves are untrustworthy. But our assumption here is mistaken. There is nothing personal
about personal identity without the person. If there is no epistemic gap, so to speak, between a first-person judgment and the
person, then the judgment is the correct determination of identity, irrespective of any contradicting third-person judgment. Thus,
we cannot neglect the first-person perspective; it is central to personal identity.

Applying the Concept of Ori

My concern with personal identity is concern with my psychic unity, not my soul—unless I am worried about the possibility of
life after death. Concern with psychic unity is concern with the extent to which activities in my life fulfill a purpose. The purpose
in turn provides meaning to my life, and it is that meaning that evidences to me psychic unity, that my life is on track. Now, we
do impose purpose on ourselves. For example, I may decide to spend the rest of my life feeding the homeless. But this kind of
purpose and attendant psychic unity are second best. Notice that I could have made my purpose the harassment or killing of
the elderly, and my psychic unity could have been derived from this. Thus, self-imposed purpose and psychic unity may help to
calm the nerves, but what is needed is the purpose that emerges from a quasi-historical self-actualization. Self-actualization here
depends on our state of being and on the state of being we are yet to become, albeit with a ceteris paribus become. A life
lived consciously or otherwise in conformity with this state of becoming is a life on course, and the purpose that emerges from it
provides genuine psychic unity to the individual. Ori, understood as destiny, embodies the quasi-historical self-actualization.
Trees do not have ori, and neither do cats, dogs, and dolphins. My concern with my identity is with whether my life is on track.
It helps if my physical and psychological lives are not radically discontinuous, but this requirement is neither necessary nor
sufficient for my identity.

For greater perspicuity of issues involved, imagine a transfer of Adler's ori to John's physical head — without his ori, of course.
Since ori embodies personality, the moderating characteristics underlying an individual's social relations, John's new life should
now resemble Adler's former life. But what does ‘resemble’ mean in this context?
Two pictures suggest themselves. First is the Lockean picture: John is now capable of fulfilling the social roles of Adler, for he now exhibits Adler's former mental life. Second is what I will call Abel's picture: John now has the characteristic fortunes (or misfortunes) defining Adler's former life. The second picture is closer to the African view; the first would make ori functionally isomorphic with the brain (or soul) in Western metaphysics, thereby undermining the philosophical basis for ori.

To sharpen the example, assume the following: Adler's former life had been enviable. His desires were nicely moderated. He was successful in friendships, business, health, and in his communal relations. He could hardly do anything wrong. John's former life was the exact opposite. He failed consistently in his endeavors. His sincere and worthy efforts to succeed and be perceived differently came to naught. Indeed, John was not doing anything substantially different from what Adler was doing, but the outcome for John had been consistently bad, and for Adler consistently good. Africans would ascribe the disparities in results to their choices of ori. If we now suppose an exchange of ori between Adler and John, we would expect John's life to be consistently worthwhile and admirable, and Adler's life consistently the opposite. The supposed exchange between Adler and John exemplifies what we might call, broadly speaking, an exchange of personalities. With changes in a person's personality, there are likely to be corresponding changes in the person's social roles; and with new social roles come new social identities. This explains the motivation of the mental theorist in Western metaphysics in assuming there had been an exchange of persons in cases involving an exchange of social roles. Notice that the main objection to the mental theorist is that his or her solution violates our organic nature. The African solution appears not to have done this. Human identity is preserved in the union of the body and the soul (emi). In ori resides personality. A tripartite conception of a person allows for transferring the latter without violating ‘human beingness,’ at least not in the way the bodily theorist finds objectionable.

A possible objection might be that an exchange of ori might not lead to an exchange of social roles, and that there would be no basis then for thinking people have exchanged anything. To illustrate the objection, consider again the Lockean mentalist approach. In transferring a brain from one body to another, our intuition that personhood is transferred in the exchange of brains is based partly on the assumption that such a transfer would lead to exchange of social roles. But with an exchange of ori, we need not assume an exchange of social roles. What an exchange of ori secures is a change in fortunes and self-realization. A change in fortunes might lead to a change in social roles, but this need not be so. Thus, with the exchange of ori a person may be suitable to perform only his or her former roles and tasks. The question then is why we must think personhood has been transferred with the exchange of ori when there is no noticeable change in social roles.

The objector here incorrectly assumes that our concern with specific social roles underlies our concern with personal identity. To be sure, our view of ourselves is to some extent manifested in the social roles we perform. This explains why social roles may help to flesh out our intuitions about personal identity. Social roles help to make clear what is personal about personal identity. However, our concern is not with specific social roles but with whatever roles we are involved in to be as enhanced as possible. No specific social roles are constitutive of anyone's identity. Mental theorists are confused about this. They correctly notice that we care about the continuity of our intentions, beliefs, and memories. They correctly assume that the reason for this is because we care about the success of our projects. And since our intentions, beliefs, and memories are particularly suited for our projects, they wrongly elevate the projects into the criterion of personal identity. They reason that our projects define us and we are whatever can fulfill the projects under consideration. But if, as African metaphysics suggests, our concern with personal identity is that whatever projects we are engaged in are to be fulfilled as well as possible, then it is a mistake to elevate these projects into a criterion of personal identity as the mental theorists have done. The concern with the continuity of our intentions, beliefs, and memories is a concern not with specific projects but with the successful completion of whatever projects there are, as long as they contribute to our self-actualization. Thus, the mentalist intuition about the defining role of projects in a person's identity cannot be used to undermine the view of ori as a constitutive element of a person.

Conclusion
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 judgments. Metaphysical stability helps to explain the unity of the self, so
to speak, that makes personal identity possible. Social stability helps to explain our socialized 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. Continuity theories dating back to Locke's— including Hume's— are socially, but not metaphysically, stable. Hence, their general inclination, despite varied reasons, is to think of the concept of a person as a “forensic” notion. However, both forms of stability are linked in the concept of ori. Ori provides the needed metaphysical support to our social existence; it helps to make our beliefs, character, and social projects really ours. With ori, our social existence exemplifies a self-actualization process. That is, we know that the social projects we care about are those we ought to care about, not just ones we fortuitously care about. The same with our beliefs, desires, and social existence in general; things are the way they ought to be. Notice that the ability to engage in self-evaluation is worthy on its own, but it is a poor substitute for self-actualization. Being able to reflect and self-determine which social existence we want for ourselves is not as desirable as knowing which social existence we ought to want. Indeed, what is attractive about being able to determine for ourselves is that such a process promises to give us what we ought to want for ourselves.
The self-actualization process allows me to recognize a social life as mine, not my surrogate's. Notice that the recognition is not dependent on the particular contents of the social life. The explanatory insight we gain through the concept of ori is demonstrated when we consider the quagmire in folk wisdom about what makes an individual flourish. Most people concede that material wealth does not make an individual “happy.” The same can be said for having a good job, friends, intelligence, and an admirable character. We might be tempted to think that a life with all the characteristics is a “happy” one. Not necessarily so. A moment's reflection shows that such a requirement is neither necessary nor sufficient for the individual to be “happy.” I want to suggest that a “happy” life is one that is in sync with the individual's self-actualization process. The quagmire is due to not having the concept of ori (or its functional analogue) as a mode of explanation in the cultural repertoire of the perplexed. Ori provides an individual with a stable, truly integrated identity that is also first-person perspectival and self-concerned. And it is this kind of identity that is able to provide unified responses to the identity issues with which I started the essay.

Notes

Many of the ideas contained herein were first presented in Boston at the 1994 APA Eastern Division Meeting under the auspices of the APA Committee for International Co-operation. A subsequent refinement was presented in Kingston, Jamaica, at the 1995 Annual Conference of the International Society for African and African Diaspora Philosophy and Studies.
4. As Gbadegesin duly points out, another term for ori is enikeji, which roughly translates “partner” or “surrogate.” He quotes, with approval, Wande Abimbola's claim that ori is a divinity. I argue later in the essay that it is perhaps more accurate to claim
that the Yoruba maintain a “divinity stance” toward ori. That is, they only relate to ori as if it is a divinity.


6. Ibid. 196.

7. Ibid. 198.

8. This is one approach. Another is to think of the Yoruba as being in an objective-subjective participatory mode with the body. Since she is not her body, a Yoruba ‘sees’ her body as an object, so to speak. But she also ‘sees’ her body as intrinsically hers. The synthesis is a system that posits metaphysical components of bodily parts. For now, I choose the former approach.

9. After all, the Yoruba do literally say that if we must choose between the orisa and ori, we are better off with the support of ori.


end p.82


13. For a strong opposing viewpoint, see Marya Schechtman, “The Same and the Same: Two Views of Psychological Continuity,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31.3 (July 1994).


16. This is probably the point Marya Schechtman is making but within the Lockean tradition. Her acrobatic effort to save the Lockean intuition fails. She guesses right that she needs a “substance-self,” but without ori (or a functional analogue) to work with, her reading of Locke is too forced. See Schechtman, “The Same and the Same,” 202, 206ff.


19. A word on thought experiments. Since the publication of Kathleen Wilkes’s *Real People: Personal Identity without Thought Experiments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), it has become fashionable to be unduly skeptical about the power of thought experiments to deliver reliable judgments about personal identity. For me, it is precisely because the notion of a person isordinarily too vague that we need thought experiments to make more precise the real issues. Understandably, the more a thought experiment subsists on our background knowledge, the more we are likely to consider its judgments firm and reliable. But that is the nature of the beast here and in many other things, too.

end p.83

6 The Concept of the Person in Luo Modes of Thought
D. A. Masolo

A careful reading of the debates on the concept of juok reveals the heavy burden of colonial influence in our ways of thinking about the world since the arrival of colonial institutions. *Juok* is a Luo concept, and it is usually translated as “soul” or “spirit.” Some African philosophers have taken note and rightly warn against the failure on the part of African philosophers to critically clean African thought of colonial superimpositions. Among such avant-garde thinkers is the Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu. He decries the colonial legacy evident in representations of African thought as the function of “the historical imposition of foreign categories of thought on African thought systems through the avenue of language, religion, and politics.” ¹ In his now classic text *The Invention of Africa*, V. Y. Mudimbe clearly charted the historical drama of the European construction of the