AFRICAN CONCEPTIONS OF PERSON AS GENDERED, ABLEIST AND ANTI-QUEER

ABSTRACT

This research aims to indicate the sense in which African conceptions of persons can be considered gendered, ableist and anti-queer. In making the case for this I look at the Force Thesis, Shadow Thesis and Ifeanyi Menkiti’s “normative conception of persons”. I argue that each of these theories marginalizes at least one of gender, people with disabilities or queer people in their account of personhood. Therefore, I conclude that they should be rejected as plausible theories of personhood in so far as it can be argued that inclusive theories of personhood, namely, theories of persons that consider gender, people with disabilities and queer people are preferable.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade we have seen much engagement with disability studies and more recently queer studies as focus areas in the various humanities disciplines. These focus areas aim at ensuring that people with disabilities and queer people are not discriminated against or marginalized in society. The point is that the rise in feminist, disability and queer studies in recent times and the importance that society places on non-discrimination suggest that exclusionary views, worldviews and theories have little place in building an inclusive society. Considering this and in the context of African philosophy conversations regarding queer people and people with disabilities have not been had. If African philosophy is a philosophy that firstly rose out of oppression, and comes from a space of writing about the lived-experience of people who were once labelled as the ‘other’, then it should have also started thinking about oppression outside of race and gender. I contend that any theory in African philosophy that wants to be taken seriously should consider some of the advances already made in feminist, disability and queer studies. To this end I will evaluate different conceptions of personhood in African philosophy and will evaluate them as acceptable to the extent that they are not gendered, ableist and anti-queer. That is,
for such theories to remain relevant and for them to be taken seriously their characterisation of persons must not exclude marginalised bodies (namely, gender, people with disabilities and queer people).

The inclusion of marginalized bodies is important because we live in a world where our views and theories need to be inclusive to gender, disability and queerness. A theory that is inclusive seems preferable than any theory that is exclusionary of minorities and marginalized groups, namely, women, people with disabilities or queer people. If legal theories of persons are inclusive to the three identified groups, it would be odd be moral theories of person do not collapse with the legal theories of person. Legal conceptions of persons should protect the moral conceptions, because in some communities if you are not recognised as a moral person, they may exclude you from legal consideration. It goes without saying that any conception of persons will be exclusive to something say dogs or cats, foetuses. But considering the scope of this project, my interests lie with gender, disability and queerness. These are interest that I argue ought to be included in any conception of persons given where human rights debates are currently. My concerns are made from a black feminist and intersectional perspective.

The identified criteria for inclusivity for the purposes of this project are that a theory must not be gendered in a discriminatory manner, nor ableist and anti-queer. Hence, we take the three criteria for our assessment: gender inclusivity, disability inclusivity and queer inclusivity to be the definitive criteria. These three criteria will be used to interrogate the conceptions of persons that are examined in this research. What I am looking for here, is an account of personhood that is inclusive to all three of the criteria. On this consideration, a theory that fails on any one of these criteria is to be rejected. This project seeks a) to determine how prominent conceptions of personhood in African philosophical communitarian theories are exclusionary according to gender, sexuality or ability, and b) to ascertain the merits of retaining (or rejecting) the theories under consideration for further philosophical consideration. As part of my assessment, I look at whether the prominent conceptions of person are inclusive. At the end of the research I contend that each of the prominent conceptions of personhood should be rejected because they are either gendered, ableist or anti-queer.
The theories of personhood that I look at in this thesis are more or less communitarian in different garb. The chosen theories of personhood that I look at have been construed as communitarian by scholars of African Philosophy. In my conceptual analysis, I indicate how it is only the force and the normative conception of persons that proves itself to be communitarian. Although Kaphagawani argues that Kagame’s shadow thesis is communitarian, it is clear this is not a communitarian position. But, so long as the shadow thesis is prominent, it remains in my assessment. African communitarian theories or African communitarianism as an ethic prides itself on the idea that its moral undertones and normative injunctions are compelling in virtue of its very robust descriptions of persons and society.

Communitarianism is one of the most engaged theories, whether in respect of its broader communitarian ethic or in the aspects of its conceptions of person. Having said that, a clear distinction should be noted between communitarianism as an ethic and a communitarian conception of persons. A communitarian theory of personhood is about persons, i.e. what makes a person a person in virtue of certain things about a community. But communitarianism as a theory itself is different from a communitarian theory of persons. Whereas the latter states that one is a being in virtue of their embeddedness in a web of relationships. The former can emerge from this, where the extent by which one can be a person is dependent on the communal rituals that one engages with. This is one conceptualisation of personhood as theorised by Menkiti. The separation between what communitarianism is from a communitarian theory of persons is then important. According to Masolo, communitarianism “calls for mutual and reciprocal responsibility from everyone… [it] requires of everyone to realize that they cannot live in [a] society and be indifferent. The ethics of participatory difference requires of everyone a responsibility toward those with whom they share a social space” (2004: 495).

Yet, if defenders and friends of communitarianism are serious about its moral undertones, I think that they need to seriously revaluate the theory. That is the ethic needs to look at whether its characterization of personhood is inclusive. Said differently, I am looking for a moral theory that will not have a gender bias, exclude people with disabilities or queer people. I think that all three of these categorizations are important. For the purposes of this project, I look at the founding forms of

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1 Hereon in referred to as communitarianism
communitarianism, that being the Force thesis, the Shadow thesis and Menkiti’s normative conception of persons.

Section I: Communitarian conceptions of persons as anti-queer, gender discriminatory and ableist: Conceptual analysis

Communitarianism as an ethic holds the view that the community’s identity is more important than that of the individuals, more importantly that an individual should act in ways that will ensure a harmonious society. This harmony is achieved if the individual firstly, understands and accepts the communal norms, and that the individual puts these norms first even if it comes at the expense of their own personal harmony. A further feature of communitarianism is that the conception of a person is not purely biological, in that being born a human being does not grant one personhood, rather communitarians hold the view that human beings are conferred or denied the status of personhood by the community. Whilst the studied theories differ on how individuals become persons, each view agrees that there is a special relationship between the individual and the community. It is important to note that when the term communitarian is used, this term refers to the African sense of community in its strictest sense, that it does not refer to the “aggregated sum of individuals”, rather as Menkiti defines it, it refers to the community in a “collectivist sense” – which is anchored by an organic dimension that holds a relationship between the community and the individuals living there (Menkiti, 1984: 179–180). I present these theories chronologically. I start with Tempels force thesis that came out of exploring the “Baluba’s ontological system”, I then look at Kagame’s shadow thesis that resulted from his “linguistic analysis of Kinyarwanda” (Matolino, 2014:10). Lastly, I explore Menkiti’s normative communitarian conception of persons. I’ll note further that Menkiti’s conception stands in contrast to Western conceptions of persons.

1.a Force thesis

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2 This statement does not entail that African communities are homogenous, rather I use the term ‘African’ in the same manner that scholars of African philosophy have used the term. Further to this, defining communitarianism in this sense ensures that it is not conflated with the Western definition of communitarianism, which Menkiti defines as a human group that constitutes human groupings characterized by a non-organic relationship between atomic individuals (Menkiti, 1984: 179-180).
According to Bantu Philosophy to be a person (a muntu) is to be a Being with vital force, Tempels explains that when Being is translated to Western terms, ‘Being’ is synonymous with ‘person’ (I will use the term Being/muntu/person interchangeably). Tempels states that, ‘muntu’ does not refer to the physical/visible human body alone. Rather “muntu signifies, th[e] vital force, endowed with intelligence and will” (Tempels, 1959: 36). Meaning that the definition of muntu is both biological and metaphysical: where the biological refers to the visible body and the metaphysical being the ‘vital force’. Force is understood as the “object of prayers and invocation to God, to the spirits and to the dead, as well as of all that is usually called magic, sorcery or magical remedies” (ibid.: 31). Tempels further explains that when the Bantu speak of force, it is not used solely in relation to the body, rather force refers to the “integrity of our whole being” (ibid). Force then is regarded as inseparable from Being, to be a person is to have vital force, vital force is regarded as the necessary element of Being. That is one cannot be a Being without this vital force, Tempels expresses this as “being is that which has force” (ibid).

To be a person is to understand that force has a fixed hierarchy (see below diagram A), it requires one to having the capacity of intelligence and will to understand and recognise this hierarchy. Furthermore, it entails that one must understand the ontological dependence of forces in beings, all forces influence each other of which Tempels states that they are the universal truth that “is accepted by everyone, it is not subjected to criticism” (ibid.: 49).

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**Diagram A:**

- **God**: The source of force for every creature. She possesses force in herself
  - "Archipatriarchs/ Spirits beings: whom God communicated her vital force with, they constitute the most important chain binding the muntu to God."
  - **Muntu**: a reflexive self-aware force endowed with intelligence and will. Muntu can directly influence inferior beings
    - "Inferior forces: animal, plant, mineral; they exist to increase the vital force of Muntu i.e. they are created for the disposal use of men. They do not exercise influence over themselves."
- **Force**: The integrity of being. All things in the universe possess this vital force on their own.
  - "that which might be human, making such a distinction that is Capital B, Being or Personhood is the result of possessing "vital force". Lowercase b, being, which might be human, animal, plant, or object, is the result of possessing "force". I think that making such a distinction makes his argument easier to follow."
Therefore, one is a muntu if and only if one is a being with will and intelligence. This means that if a being has will and intelligence this is both necessary and sufficient for that being to be considered a muntu. So, if it is the case that P is true if and only if Q is true, then Q is necessary and sufficient for P and P is necessary and sufficient for Q. If anything fails to be a being or fails to have intelligence and will, then it is not a muntu. So being a being with intelligence and will is a necessary condition and sufficient for Being. It follows that according to Bantu philosophy there is only one necessary condition for personhood; “intelligence and will”. There are only two predicates (force and intelligence and will) ∀x (Px ↔ Qx) – for all beings, if it has intelligence and will, then it is a muntu, and for all beings, if it is a muntu, then it has intelligence and will. If any being fails to have intelligence and will, then it is not a muntu (and vice versa (as implied by the ‘if, and only if’)).

People who have a severe cognitive disability⁶ will struggle to have to have ‘intelligence’ in Tempel’s sense and this is exclusionary. This entails that they will be excluded from the category of muntu and in Tempels terms such an individual will be treated as a ‘kidima’ which he defines as one who neglects to orientate his life in accordance with the given hierarchy of force. Tempels admits that such an individual would be regarded as a “sub-human, a man of insufficient mind to count as ‘muntu’” (ibid.: 49). The capacity of understanding and will is a sufficient and necessary condition to be a muntu, it makes the distinction between beings and Being, - understanding and will is important because that’s what muntu shares with God –it is

⁶ I limit my analysis to severe cognitive disabilities like down syndrome, autism, traumatic brain injury (TBI); an argument can be made that it would also exclude persons who have physical impairments whether they are born with them or because of an illness. Focusing on physical disabilities would be based on an assertion. When Tempels states that vital force can be expressed through the body, he does not refer to the body in biological terms. Rather, to the moral function of ‘the eye’ (having the ability to see evil) or ‘speech’ (when one says something horrible). Although Tempels argues that “every illness” results from “magical recipes” (such a statement can open the debate that a disability is a result of witchcraft – an issue I take up later).
marked by rationality and this spiritual connection with God. Without this distinction, the concept of muntu does not exist.

So, if intelligence and will is a criterion for having vital force, it excludes persons with cognitive disabilities (this would include both those who are born with severe cognitive disabilities and those that may become disabled because of an illness, injury or any other cause). This section gave an explanatory account of Tempels force thesis. In doing so, I highlighted the ways in which the theory could be regarded as ableist. The aforementioned analysis leads me towards the conclusion that the force thesis is ableist and for those reasons the theory cannot be accepted as an adequate account of a person.

1.b Shadow thesis

Alexis Kagame’s theorisation of personhood comes from a place where he wants to understand what muntu is. Kagame notes that “MU=Muntu= a man” indicating the singular is the root element of the “BA=Bantu=men” which is plural of muntu (1989: 35). In attempting to articulate a conception of a person, Kagame’s paper is split into four sections. The first section details the nature of muntu, i.e. what muntu is, Kagame contends that a man is –muntu-, by which I understand him to be referring to a human being. Tempels is not clear that muntu refers to person, my reading of his theory is that muntu refers to a human being. Later he states the point in which man becomes a man “i.e. compete in his nature”. I think that by this he means to say the point in which muntu can be referred to as a person. To ensure that these two distinctions are clear; lowercase m, muntu refers to a human being which has the vital principle of animality and intelligence. Capital M, Muntu refers to a person, this is a human being who “puts reason to good use” (ibid.: 37). (See diagram B - making such a distinction makes his argument easier to follow).

As stated earlier when Kagame explains what the elements of muntu are, I interpret this question as: “what is a human being”. According to Kagame muntu is “animated by a double vital principle: the shadow which he shares with the animal, and the vital principle of intelligence” (later Kagame makes mention of the heart) (ibid.: 35). Shadow which is the first principle, refers to the vital principle of animality, by this he means that muntu is partly an animal. The second principle, according to Kagame anchors the difference between muntu and other animals; this is the existence of
intelligence (which is immortal) and the heart. The existence of the shadow, is what muntu has in common with an animal, Kagame states that “two senses of sight and hearing are founded in the shadow principle of animality” (ibid.: 36). What I interpret this to mean is that both muntu and animal have the sense of hearing and sight which allows them to engage with their environment as physical bodies. The difference here is that muntu possess two internal faculties: intelligence and the heart. Kagame states these are not possessed by animals. He writes:

“By his intelligence, man accomplishes the three operations impossible to the animal:

a) to reflect upon the data of his senses;
b) to compare the facts of knowledge he has acquired;
c) to invent something new by combining previously acquired knowledge.

The heart integrates all that the interior man is, it harmonizes the operations and acquisitions of intelligence, by adding to them the acts which other cultures attribute to the will” (ibid.).

According to Tempels the heart refers to muntu’s unique personality i.e. memory, thought, spirit, sensation, conscience etc. (ibid.), which is something that makes her different from the next muntu. Kagame further adds that the “heart integrates all that the interior man is and harmonizes his total behaviour” (ibid.). Regarding the principle of intelligence, Kagame does not explain further what the three operations mean or why they are important.

After outlining what the nature of man is, Kagame articulates the point in which muntu becomes a Muntu, he notes that there are three divergent views. I will jump straight to the last view, which I think he agrees with is that a Muntu is complete as soon as they put reason to good use. That is when one says x is a Muntu, according to Kagame this refers to a muntu who has the two vital shadows and she puts reason to good use. That is it would not be enough for one to reflect, compare and invent rather, Kagame requires that Muntu must use his intelligence to good use (Kagame does not provide an explanation of what this may look like).
If the above reading of Kagame’s theorization of persons is correct, one can acknowledge the merits of Kagame’s theorization of persons for giving account of what separates a human being from a human person and an animal. It is clear how the argument that the shadow thesis would be formulated, as it would follow the same logic used against Tempels. One can note that the shadow thesis would not only deny people with severe cognitive disabilities personhood, but they would also be denied the status of human being. Unlike Tempels, Kagame does not inform us where people without ‘intelligence’ and the ability to ‘put reason to good use’, would fall.

1.c Normative conception

I now turn to the normative communitarian thesis and assess whether the theory is inclusive or not. I think that the normative communitarian thesis faces far more pressure in ensuring that it is inclusive. I say this because it is a normative theory of persons one that I argue has ethical undertones. I think that any theory that is normative should be inclusive since it stretches far beyond the minimalist requirements set by the shadow and the force thesis that state that intelligence, will, and reason are necessary conditions for personhood. But, although the normative conception of persons may seem preferable, it is not a sufficient theory of persons, as I show in this section the set rites of passages given by Menkiti close of the attainment of personhood for certain people. The normative conception of persons looks beyond the “presence of consciousness, memory, will, soul, rationality, or
Menkiti concedes that personhood is anchored by the ontological progression that an individual human life takes from being a human child into personhood which is characterised by this journey from an "it to an it" (see diagram C) (Menkiti, 2004: 324). For Menkiti the ontological progression of personhood is one that is temporal, in other words it “takes place in time” (*ibid.*.) Temporality underscores the procedural nature of gaining personhood – one cannot claim to be a person until the community grants that human the status of personhood. As Menkiti says, persons move from the “present to the past, so that the more of a past one has, the more standing a person also has” (*ibid.*.). This sentiment is echoed by the Somali proverb that states that “wisdom does not come overnight” rather, it is something that happens in time. Two implications can be identified here. The first is that biological organs do not make one a person, rather to be a person one must go through a certain process set by the community. The second is that it is primarily located in time, therefore time needs to be constantly “considered relevant to the in-gathering of the excellencies of the person as one goes” (*ibid.*.). That is, the defined social and ritual transformation process are not arbitrary exercises, rather they enable one to attain ‘excellencies’

Importantly, the community has a crucial role to play; the community plays the role of both the catalyst as well as the prescriber of the norms. So, for one to transform or perhaps to acquire personhood the community becomes the driver of these norms since an individual cannot do this on her own. Consequently, Menkiti arrives at this conclusion: which is that personhood is something that we can achieve and not something that one is born with by being a human. (*ibid.*: 326). Central to his theory is the notion that an individual has a special relationship with their community and this relationship is premised on the idea that for an individual to be regarded as a person, they need to meet the obligations that are prescribed by the community. According to Menkiti carrying out these obligations allows the individual to move from an it-status “of early childhood, marked by an absence of moral function, into the
person-status […] marked by a widened maturity of ethical sense” (ibid. 1984: 176). Menkiti’s idea is that an individual can gain moral knowledge through the various rites of passage, these rites of passage include for instance “naming ceremonies… puberty…marriage, the producing of children, the taking of titles etc.” (ibid.: 327).

![Diagram C]

The issue that I take with the normative communitarian is with regards to the rites of passage that Menkiti uses as criteria that would grant one personhood.

If my reading of Menkiti is correct, one can infer that a person is an individual who has moved beyond the it-status of depersonalized moral standing. To be a person according to Menkiti’s theorization means that one must firstly accept that the community has ontological and epistemic precedence over an individual. Secondly it means that one must go through certain rite of passage that ensure that one gets fully incorporated into the community. These rites of passage/social rituals ensure the moral maturity of an individual. What I understand from this is that if Menkiti were to say that Zinhle is a person, this statement would mean that Zinhle has moral worth, in so far has she has accepted and cultivated a need to go through the rites of passage. Menkiti states that “morality ought to be considered as essential to our

7 Own emphasis
sense of persons [...] an agent is bound to feel himself incomplete in violating its rules" (ibid.: 176-177).

Section II: Objections and Responses

I now turn to some possible objections that can be advanced against my reading that the studied communitarian conceptions of persons are exclusive either to certain genders, people with disabilities or queer people. To each objection I provide a response, the success of each response will allow me to assess whether there are grounds to advance these claims. If I am successful at this, then I would have satisfactorily demonstrated that the African conceptions of persons that I have outlined in this thesis have a gender bias, are anti-queer or ableist. As I suggested earlier, the normative communitarian faces far more pressure in ensuring that his conception of person is inclusive because it is normative, and so the normative communitarian will be judged harshly. Such a critique does not come from a position that is anti-African, rather it comes from a place that appreciates the communitarian doctrine and wants to ensure that the communitarians theory is inclusive to all. In my mind, the set criteria for inclusivity should have been considered by the defenders and friends of communitarianism in their continued engagement with the theory. These objections are broken down into three sections namely: ‘the argument for fluidity’; ‘the argument that homosexuality is harmful’; lastly ‘the argument that ableism is ‘unAfrican’. In each section I articulate a response to these objections that confirm that we have grounds to make the claims that the studied conceptions are exclusive.

In reading this section, the reader should be aware that my criticisms are directed towards the reality of the communal world, which as reported by Menkiti takes precedence over the reality of “individual life histories whatever these may be. And this primacy is meant to apply not only ontologically, but also in regard to epistemic accessibility” (1984: 171). Because Menkiti sees the community as the ontological determinant of personhood, which is not concerned with the realities of the individual. Rather, the ontological determinant is concerned with the reality of the community. Said differently, I am arguing from the position that our social world does in fact contain non-abled bodied people and queer people, and it is characterised by patriarchal oppression.
II. a. ‘the argument for fluidity’

The objection would then be that the normative conception of persons, is not concerned with the biological makeup of the individual, rather it is about a one’s moral standing within the community; which is gained in ‘time’. What makes one a person, is the moral growth that one gains and not what one’s gender or sexuality may be. Menkiti argues that “in examining the moral sense in the definition of the person within the African context, let me add that the traditional understanding in this area is something which makes great deal of sense given the special worth attached to person […] John Rawls makes explicit part of what is meant by the general ethical requirement of respect to persons, noting that those who are capable of a sense of justice are owed duties of justice, with this capability constructed in its sense of a potentiality which may or may not be realised” (ibid.: 330). So, Menkiti would argue that his conception of a person would require us to respect the different kinds of human beings that exist in society, in noting that a human being is a person insofar as they respect the moral norms of the community. In the next section I argue that the set moral norms hamper a person from gaining personhood.

1.1. But rites of passage have an inherent gender bias:

In responding to this objection, I argue that the normative conception of persons is gendered in a discriminatory manner. I illustrate this point by assessing the rites of passage that allow for social incorporation and the procedural attainment of personhood. Two arguments are advanced, first is the weaker argument; that argues that the rites of passages promote gender inequality, that is it leaves women as feeling like lesser persons in comparison to men. Second, there is the stronger argument that argues that the normative communitarian has a binary conception of gender, and as a result it discriminates against intersex people.

II. b. ‘the argument that homosexuality is harmful’

The rite of producing children is anti-queer. Anti-queer because the rite presupposes compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Considering the argument that I
advance, I will focus on homosexuality as a queer identity. Since homosexuals are defined as individuals who are sexually attracted to the same sex as theirs, in this kind of relationship it would be unlikely for such a couple to have a child. Of course, because of technological advancements today such couples can have children with the aid of reproductive technology, but one will recall that I limited the scope of this project to Traditional African societies where reproductive technology was arguably not an option. It is further worthwhile to remind the reader that when talking about the rite of producing children, such a rite is not synonymous to child rearing. Child rearing refers to the process of raising children, rather the rite refers to child bearing, which is understood as the biological reproduction of a child. Homosexual individuals are not incapable of child bearing outside of their sexual preferences, unless if they were infertile. It is their sexual preference that would hinder them from producing children within their sexual orientation. Since the normative communitarian argues that the rite of producing children amongst others is important for personhood. The argument is that this requirement is anti-queer/homophobic.

The aim of this section is to advance the plausible objection that can be put forth by the communitarian that his conception of persons is not anti-queer. The plausible objection that is explored is presented as a contemporary philosophical argument that has been advanced within African Philosophy. I argue that such an argument should be rejected. Fundamentally the only difference between a heterosexual individual and a homosexual individual is their sexual orientation (Rachels, 1999: 50), this answers the question asked by the Gikuyu woman in the opening quote of this section. I think that the communitarian does not give enough grounds to deny the latter personhood. It is unclear to me how failing to produce children make one not worthy of personhood. The communitarian is mistaken in thinking that personhood can only be found in the actual participation of the set rituals of incorporation.

In a nutshell, the objection would be formulated as: “No behaviour that is harmful to the common good is permissible, since homosexuality harms that common good and the individual’s interests - it is impermissible” (Matolino, 11). Said differently, the objectionable practice of homosexuality would be put that “it violates two important

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8Homophobia is defined as “dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people”. The point being made here is that communitarians could argue that they are not homophobic, for they do not dislike homosexuals. Rather that homosexuality brings harm to the community.
principles of life. The first, and most obvious principle, is that the homosexual does not add to the creative process of the life the ultimate act of this creative process is producing young, bringing young up and perpetuating the cycle of life" (ibid.: 10). For this creative process to happen, there needs to be sexual intercourse between two opposite sexes, homosexuals are not inclined to participate in this creative process. Which entails that not only can they not bear any children, but also that if there are no children birthed, then their own names cannot be carried through to the world of the nameless dead and living dead.

II.c. ‘the argument that ableism is ‘unAfrican’

The last objection that this thesis considers against the communitarian conception of persons as being gendered in a discriminatory manner, ableist and anti-queer is inspired by Chris Bell’s critique that disability studies is focused on only white people with disabilities, that researchers of disability studies have failed to include scholars like W.E.B Du Bois, Alice Walker and Ginu Kamani who have all written about disability. Such thoughts would have led some scholars to think that disability studies are a study about white disabilities. I take it that such a view nullifies disabilities, like the argument that gender is Western concept, such thoughts are reductionist and such a view cannot be held. The philosophical puzzle at hand is that if (as constructionists think) our views about the world are mediated by the conceptual frameworks we adopt (possibly those imposed on us by our social context), then there might be something to the view that the concept of disability is ‘western’. I will explore why nullifying disabilities brings forth some problems to African people living with disabilities. In responding to the claim that ableism is unAfrican, I contend that the issue of disability within Africa should be understood through an intersectional lens of disability and race. That is disability in Africa, the theorization and problematizing of able-bodiedness cannot be done outside of understanding the effects of colonialism.

The critique that the studied conceptions of persons are ableist stem from the idea that these theories have normalized able-bodies. Tobin Siebers defines this frame of thinking as “the ideology of ability” (2008: 8); which refers to the preference for able-bodiedness, he further states that the ideology of ability defines the “baseline by
which humanness is determined, setting the measure of body and mind that gives or
denies human status to individual persons" (ibid.). The aim of this section is to
ascertain the merits of rejecting the studied theories. This section does not seek to
provide an anthropological descriptive view of disability, but a plausible philosophical
argument on how the studied conceptions of person are ableist. I expose the
various ways that they exemplify themselves as ableist and responded to the claim
that ableism is unAfrican.

I suspect that the objection that the force and the shadow thesis are ableist (not
forgetting the normative communitarian ethic), could be put as follows: that
communitarianism theories of persons do not justify the ill-treatment of individuals
living with disabilities. Said differently, the theory merely articulates that such
individuals do not fall into the category of persons. Perhaps the communitarian may
add that he is not concerned about how communities treat such individuals as such a
concern falls in the realm of communitarianism as a theory