

Social History, African Identity and the Memory Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Individualism is as much a theory about collectivities as about individuals: the individualist claims that the best society puts the fewest limits on the liberty of the individual. Conversely, anti-individualism is as much a theory about individuals as about society: the anti-individualist claims that individualism sets the *self* adrift from its natural social context and thereby inhibits the development of selfhood. Both individualism and its critics affirm the existence of the individual self and social collectivities, they differ in their accounts of the nature of that self and its relation to society.

The names and titles we bear are helpless aids in the search for the true self. In a general sense, they only point to what we are; they hardly suggest who we are. The question is whether there is an inner core that bears these titles? We may well be inclined to ask the question is there a non-socially defined “*me*” who determines the choice of one title rather than another? Is there a part of me that defines me uniquely and not merely as one among many bearing the same title?

Efforts to answer these questions take many forms. Where philosophers speaks of the quest for self-knowledge, psychologists speaks of identity crises. For the serious philosopher, finding and maintaining self-identity can be a life long process. The philosophers’ quest for self knowledge is never regarded as a stage one passes through and leaves behind. It is an endless controversy. It is in this sense that Sklar (1964: 29) opined that “philosophical controversies are rarely resolved, but some do fade away. There are few, however, which have the extraordinary capacity for survival”. Issues such as these have led many to consider the philosophical enterprise as having preoccupied itself with issues of vague and uncertain nature, that philosophy is concerned with innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting distinctions, and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible

One of such endless controversy in philosophy is the metaphysics of self (personal) identity. Metaphysics, on its own, is the branch of philosophy that deals with the question of kinds of being. Metaphysics is necessary to the quest for self-knowledge because if the self cannot be located with a scalpel, if the self is not like physical entities that have a simple location in space and time (another contentious subject of philosophy), then we cannot know what other kind of being it can have, if any. The quest for self-knowledge is necessarily a do-it-yourself enterprise, but the philosophical tradition contains priceless aids for exploring the metaphysics of self, personal identity.

In recent times, one emerging controversy that border on anthropology, philosophy and social history is the nature of the African self. What is the African self? What are the essential characteristics of the African self? These and many other questions have always formed one of the serious emerging issues in philosophical anthropology. This paper aims at a modest examination of the relevance and significance of the memory theory in understanding the African self.

In terms precise than ever, the memory theory is one of the several philosophical attempts to answer the endless problems on the concept of personal identity. As discussed here, it is believed that the theory holds the promise and the provision of great intellectual insights on what the African self could possibly be. In specific terms, this paper posits the view that the memory theory affords us a positive intellectual clue to the constituents of the African self. What then is the memory theory and in what way does it shed light on the constituent of the African self?

In what follows, I shall proceed by considering the concept of the self or identity. Afterwards, I shall present an intellectual understanding of the problem, perception and plethora of views on the African identity. The last section shall be devoted to an apt understanding of the significance of the memory theory on the African self.

THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY

According to the Webster's Third New Dictionary of the English Language (1959) identity is construed as "the sameness of essential genetic character in different examples or instances. Or Sameness of all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing: self-sameness, oneness; sameness of that which is distinguishable only in some accidental fashion. The sense arising in shared experience, an instance of such sameness. Or unity and persistence of personality: unity or individual comprehensiveness of a life or character. Or the condition of being the same with something described, claimed or asserted, or of possessing a character claimed".

Curiously, individuals have a wide range of possible identities. They can have racial or ethnic identities, national or religious identities, or even hometown identities (Laitin, 1998). The talk about personal identities is firmly connected to the realm of genetic discourse. Although biological characteristics are objective, personal identities mean much more than these; they also include "a subjective sense of a continuous existence and a coherent memory" (Sills, 1968: 61). The subjective sense of identity is the sense of sameness and continuity as an individual, (Sills, Ibid.) a sense of belonging to a deep-rooted set of values which forms one's mental and moral attitude, and gives individuals their unique characters.

Identity is also dynamic and responsive to changing conditions. It is bound to shift with changing technologies, cultures and political systems (Stein et al., 1960). Above and underlying these factors are the historical legacies of our ancestors which "weigh heavily on who we are and who we can become" (Espiritu, 1998: 13). Identity is therefore a category of membership based on all sorts of typologies such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, caste, religion, culture, etc. (Laitin, 1998: 13). It is the way by which people define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of the above typologies (Deng, 1995:1).

In philosophical circles, there have series of interesting debates and controversies on the concept of identity. In its extant form, the philosophical concept of identity strikes at the ontological status of the self. According to Stroll (1967: 121-124) the concept of identity is the

problem of trying to give a true explanation of those features of the world which account for sameness, on the other hand, and for its diversity and change, on the other. In modern terminology, the problem is that of trying to give a true account of the use (or uses) of such words as "same", "identity", "change", and "diversity" and for such related expressions as "similar", "like", and "different", in order to delineate those features of the world which the use, or uses, of these terms is intended to mark.

The philosophical concept of identity, in its profound intellectual insights suggests the delineation of features which accounts for sameness of identity and dissimilar features which points to their opposites in general. Classical views and treatment of the concept of identity shows the historical import of the problem. Writers in the classical and medieval periods conceived of the problem as giving rise to meanings which are not without their problems. For them identity could mean permanence (amid change) or unity (amid diversity). According to Stroll (1967: 121), this classical understanding and rendering gave rise to the problems of change and universals respectively. In his words

The problem of change ...gave rise to the problem of substance, problems about the relation between what seems to be so and what is so (appearance and reality), and the problem of personal identity; and the problem of universals gave rise to the problem of individuation and the problem of abstract ideas (1967: 121).

Approaching the twentieth century, Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his *Philosophical Investigations*, refers to the idea of "Family Resemblance" as a clue to discussing the problem of identity. Of interest also are works of scholars in the logical tradition. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Frege (1952) and Russell (1956) gave substantive speculation on the ontological status of the principle of identity in consisting either in terms of relation of properties which all objects identical with itself possesses and which un-identical ones do not possess. Quine, on his part, considers the concept of identity to be a term laden with confusion. According to him, in recent times, the term identity is used loosely. However, he retorted,

a thing is identical with itself and with nothing else, not even its identical

twin...genuine questions of identity can arise because we may refer to something in two ways and leave someone wondering whether we referred to the same thing...the continuing identity of a person over the years is predicated not on his retention of substance, but on the continuity of replacement of substance, and the continuity of change in his shape, mass, and habits. Continuity also of his memory is expected, but occasionally a lapse in this quarter is taken in stride (1987: 89-91)

However, in general literature on the subject, the philosophical concept of identity can be persistently seen to cluster around these central propositions:

- @ The conceptualisation of a presumed constancy in things
- @ An external mark of individuality
- @ The process of investing something of the self in an introjected order
- @ Emphasis on negation i.e. differences between what is identical and that which is un-identical
- @ Relation between x and y, for example, when every property of x is a property of y and conversely (relation of necessity)
- @ Discerning resemblance in the overlapping of properties and features.

THE PROBLEM

Africa is a vast continent inhabited by communities and societies that have had different historical experiences. It is no doubt true that African societies are inherently pluralistic meaning that the social "units maintain at least a minimum of relations with each other" although with the existence of "pronounced cleavages between social units" (Kuper, 1965: 113). In the face of these pronounced pluralism, talk of an African identity seem not only controversial but also, on the whole, interesting and worthy of academic pursuit.

The search for an identity is an attempt to counter the depersonalisation and dehumanisation to which so many are subjected in our time. The problem of the twentieth century, as William DuBois conceives it "is the problem of the colour line – the relation of the darker to the lighter races of man in Asia and Africa, in America and the Islands of the Sea." Of the problem that besets the African continent, the problem of racism has been, no doubt, the most

persistent and obviously controversial.

In the depth of discussions, there are seemingly divergent discourses on the nature of the African identity. At the very outset, the idea of the African identity is traced to belongingness to the five groups enunciated by Sir Motimer Wheeler. "Today" says Wheeler (1973: 5) "it is often broadly asserted that there are five main groups of Africans. First there are the so-called "aboriginal" bushmen of the Kalahari region, Hottentots of the south-west, and Pygmies of the Congo forests... Secondly, there are the so-called "true Negroes of West Africa. Thirdly, there are the so-called "Bantu-Negroes" who occupy most of Africa South of the Equator...Fourthly, there are the diverse "Hamitic-Negroes" of north-eastern and East-Central Africa...Fifthly, there are the non-Negroid inhabitants of North Africa, including Hamites and Arabs".

THE PERCEPTION

In the literature on social history and anthropology, there have been varied perceptions on the nature of the identity of the African. At best, much of these perceptions can be branded as political and ideological propaganda meant to denigrate and desecrate the essence and existence of the African. In actual fact, the problematic of the African identity stems from these varied and varying perceptions from western tradition in an attempt to project the superiority of the west.

The relevance and significance of the memory theory in the light of the problematic of African identity will have more meaning and carry more conviction if undertaken in the light of and against the background circumstances and environment which stimulated or inspired the need for the reconstruction of the African history. In fact, the memory theory as presented here is an attempt to construct a philosophical anthropology of contemporary Africa on firmer historical foundations. Such historical foundation anchors on the fluid interplay between philosophy and anthropology of Africa.

The idea of memory, awareness and the innate ability to remember presupposes a sense of history. Conjectures about memory are historical conjectures. The conflation of identity in the light of memory and reflective consciousness are best understood in the light of historical

consciousness and awareness. If personal identity consists in reflective consciousness of one's past, awareness and memory i.e. ability to remember, and the idea of memory suggest a sense of history, then, it is conclusive to state that an interrogation of the African identity will cluster around its history.

But then what memory has the African of his history and his past? The memory of the African, in a major sense, is the memory of distinct episodes of racism and imperialism, which still hunt the African till the present time.

The African predicament is based on the perception that Africans have no history. The view is rife in Western circles that Africans have no past. For Marnham what is wrong with Africa is, in effect, its 'Africanness', now resurfacing in the post colonial era. In a glorious display of most prejudices extant about Africa, Marnham writes that "little is known of the pre-colonial era in Africa but there is evidence to suggest that it was for much of the time characterised by ignorance, slavery and ritual murder. Colonisation was marked by mechanised warfare, forced labour and brutal exploitation. De-colonisation to date has often been worse..." (1990:20) Africans are not only denied of a past and consequently, a history, they are deemed inferior to the West and whites. In an address of 1854 to the American Colonisation Society of which he was vice-president, Commander Andrew H. Foote of the United States Navy contended that:

If all that Negroes of all generations have ever done were to be obliterated from recollection for ever the world would lose no great truth no profitable art, no exemplary form of life. The loss of all that is African would offer no memorable deduction from anything but earth's black catalogue of crimes (1854:207)

Such insinuations implied that the African deserved to be exploited and governed by men of 'higher' race. And barely three decades after the naval officer's assertion, Africa was partitioned by the European powers. More than this, however, is the fact that Foote's claim and that of other European whites are denigrating and debasing claims on the African past. Africans are not only denied a past but that whatever history or past Africans have can be fruitfully considered the history of Europeans in Africa. This is validated in A. P. Newton's assertion in 1923 before the Royal African

Society that Africa had "no past before the coming of the Europeans" (1981:32). The Oxford historian Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper made a notorious variant of Newton's remark in 1962 that:

Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness...and darkness is not a subject of history (1964:9)

European writers in this tradition tended to portray the colonial interlude as essentially an age of liberation and enlightenment for Africans. In their view, the memory of any past to the African should, of necessity, be the history of the colonial masters in Africa. Hence, in Western construction and understanding, colonialism is like a saving grace to African history. And the end of colonialism is that of cultural, mental and psychological dislocation. Cultural dislocation as defined by Uroh refers to

a disorientation or better still, a delinking of a people from their heritage in arts, sciences, politics, social norms, religion and so on. Such culturally dislocated person finds it difficult to have a full grasp of the social realities around him or her. To lose ones culture is therefore like losing memory. This is the situation, which most Africans find themselves today... the African today is caught between a past s/he cannot recall, a present s/he is ill-equipped to understand and a future, s/he cannot contemplate (Uroh, 1998a).

This dislocation is occasioned by Africa's chequered history; a history of slavery and the devaluation of the African personality; of migration and the severance of link with cultural roots; of colonisation and the displacement of the Africa's traditional values; and above all, of the delegitimation of the Africa's traditional institutions and the attendant cultural amnesia.

THE PHYSIC: THE MEMORY THEORY

Prominent amongst the class of memory theorists is John Locke. The obvious defects and difficulties inherent in the Lockean perspective have given rise to the emergence of a host of other memory theorists. It is somewhat clear that Locke's ideas have always been the starting point, with minor or major diversions always following from the tenor of his arguments. However, a general discussion of the several and

varied attempts at grappling with this concept is not a misnomer.

It is generally opined that much of a person's sense of self is related to that person's biological sex and to the sex-roles assigned by society. The member of a primitive clan might express his identity in the formula 'I am we'; he cannot conceive of himself as an 'individual', existing apart from his group. When the feudal system broke down, his sense of identity was shaken and the acute question 'who am I' arose.

Streeter (1926:36) says that what a person knows of the "inner quality of life" depends primarily on the following three things: "first, the depth and the range of his own personal experience; secondly, how far he has the imaginative sympathy to penetrate into the inner experience of others; thirdly, the extent to which he has reflected on the material so presented. Much of this formed the background of Hume's decline into scepticism. According to Hume, there is no basis for the supposed consciousness of a self. In the opening page of his essay entitled "Of Personal Identity" Hume contended that:

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity...to attempt a farther proof of this were to weaken its evidence; since no proof can be derived from any fact, of which we are so intimately conscious...for from what impression could this idea be derived? (1978:251)

For Hume there is no impression that gives rise to the idea of self. If there were, that impression must continue invariably the same through the whole course of our lives; since self is supposed to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.

While Hume's position is a sceptical one, Davis posits that man can have an identity. Davis concern is different from Hume's. His formulation of the problem of identity does not deny Hume's position that there is no inner, substantial, unalterable core. Rather, he asserts that one's self develops in time as one "consolidates" the self and world through reflecting on self-identity. Davis discusses two senses of identity: personal and social. According to Davis, a society whose citizens do not have a strong sense of identity is likely to experience

chaos. A society full of contradictions is a society without an identity; a society with a common ideology is a society with identity. As an individual acquires an ideology – personal or social – he develops an identity. The confident individual needs both a personal and a social ideology (1982:272). In other words, a common ideology provides the platform on which individual and collective identity can be freely sustained and projected.

William James found his sense of identity through an invigorating sameness and continuity, which can be referred to as "subjective sense". In his words

A man's character is discernible in the mental or moral attitude in which, when it came upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: "This is the real me!" (1920:199)

Locke provided the intellectual foundation of the memory theory of identity. The memory theory of identity is to be distinguished from the bodily theory. The latter simply states that an individual x is identifiable with itself just in case that the bodily qualities of x is the same or appears to be same. In asserting the identity of x, it is argued that apart from physical appearance, other physical tests can be conducted in order to ascertain the identity of x. Such includes blood tests, fingerprints, photographs, a given tribal mark, some natural mark or signs in the body etc.

Locke defines a person as a "thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness which is inseparable from thinking". According to Locke, this self-consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, constitutes the essence of personality. Consequently for Locke, the identity of a person is to be found in the identity of consciousness. In his words,

...since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that which makes every one to be what he calls self, and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists personal identity i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now it

was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects on it, that that action was done (1982:253)

It is clear from the above that Locke's understanding of personal identity entails reflective consciousness. To be identified and identifiable with oneself is to possess the ability to be conscious of one's past. This bothers on awareness and memory. A person is the same person we saw ten years ago just in case the person possesses the reflective consciousness of his past. An individual not conscious of his past cannot be claimed to be the person he claimed to be. The unwavering detail is brought out in the following:

For, it being the same consciousness that makes a man be himself to himself, personal identity depends on that only, whether it be annexed solely to one individual substance, or can be continued in a succession of several substances. For as far as any intelligent being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness it had of it at first, and with the same consciousness it has of any present action; so far it is the same personal self. For it is by the consciousness it has of its present thoughts and actions, that it is self to itself now, and so will be the same self, as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come...

In summary, Locke's treatment of the problem of personal identity leads to the obvious conclusion that memory i.e. reflective consciousness as the sole criterion of personal identity. For him, the necessary and sufficient condition of personal identity is a person's awareness and memory.

The memory criterion for personal identity suffered a setback arising from Locke's treatment. However, there are other philosophers who have made attempt to salvage the memory criterion. A modern instance is Sydney Shoemaker. According to Shoemaker, "memory provides a criterion of personal identity". In defence of the memory criterion, Shoemaker provides logical implausibility of arguing that bodily characteristic provides criterion of personal identity. According to Shoemaker

One is inclined to suppose that the real criteria of personal identity must be criteria that one uses in making statements about one's own identity. And since it appears that one can make such statements, and know them to be true,

without first knowing the facts that would justify an assertion about the identity of one's body, the conclusion would seem to be that bodily identity cannot be criterion of personal identity.

How does, in Shoemaker's view, the memory establish personal identity? For Shoemaker, the memory criterion establishes personal identity because of the logical relationship or truth entailed therein. For Shoemaker, "it is a logical truth...that if a person remembers a past event then he, that same person, must have been a witness to the event, i.e. must have been present when it occurred and in a position to know of its occurrence." Shoemaker's argument seems to be this: Locke ran into problems by concluding that memory is the sole criterion of personal identity. Memory, according to Shoemaker, is not the sole criterion of personal identity just as bodily identity is not the sole criterion of personal identity. But that memory, though not the sole criterion, is one of the criteria, and that in an important sense. But then what is this important sense? The important sense, according to Shoemaker, is that memory claims are generally true because it is a logical fact. In his words,

It is, I should like to say, part of the concept of a person that persons are capable of making memory statements about their own pasts. Since it is a conceptual truth that memory statements are generally true, it is a conceptual truth that persons are capable of knowing their own pasts in a special way, a way that does not involve the use of criteria of personal identity, and it is a conceptual truth (or a logical fact) that the memory claims that a person makes can be used by others as grounds for statements about the past history of that person. This, I think, is the kernel of truth that is embodied in the view that personal identity can be defined in terms of memory.

I have set out the foregoing in the belief that the characteristics of the African identity in the state of analyses and the nature of African identity to be explored in the light of the memory theory will be better evaluated. One prominent idea in projecting the African identity is the recourse to the idea of African personality. In the largest sense, the African personality is "the cultural expression of what is common to all peoples whose home is on the continent of Africa", a personality which embraces "the qualities of man both as citizen of Africa and as a member of the human race" (Quaison-Sackey,

1963: 36-37).

But then one could ask what is it that is common to all people whose home is on the continent of Africa? Does "Africanity" entail merely a geographical delineation such that everyone who is born there or resides there is simply African? In that case, all sorts of folk irrespective of colour, historical root etc would lay claim to sharing identity with others. But then identity appears more metaphysical clustering around the ontology of humanity.

Another way of looking at the idea of "common trait" inherent in the African personality formulation is reference to culture, colour. Taking culture for instance, it is a proposition too plain to be contested that not all on the continent practice and cherish the same culture. "In terms of culture" writes Busia (1962:73; see also Abraham, 1962: 115) "there is not one social tradition; there are different social tradition and ...different nationalities". Sir Wheeler's categorisation reveals a glaring distinction with respect to issues of culture. To this end, talk of African identity in terms of culture is at best precarious.

The idea of colour as the expression of what is common to an African identity is given particular attention in the concept of Negritude. Negritude, as developed by Senghor and others point to the existence of common psychic traits possessed by the Negro African. This psychic trait refers to "his heightened sensibility and his strong emotional quality". Negritude, in short, is both an acceptance and affirmation of the quality of "blackness". However, the concept of Negritude appears complex in character, for in one sense, it will have no geographical boundaries as such. Apart from this, Sir Wheeler's categorisation includes Arabs that are strictly speaking, non-blacks, and yet by dint of geographical delineation are referred to as Africans.

A careful analysis of the concept of African Personality and Negritude in the idea of the African identity reveals its close connection with the ideals of Pan-Africanism which is basically a political movement aimed at fostering the realisation, creation and re-creation of the *integral African character* through a programme of political ideas, actions and agitation. Being a political programme, Pan-Africanism presents the problem of how to transcend the political to the metaphysical. A philosophical interrogation

should emphasise an ontological basis for determining and describing Africanity.

Generally, we do not usually ask for the problem of identity except there are confusions surrounding the subject. An African can be compared to the idea of the common man, who is the representative of the African. In this, it is taken as given that one is never fully. A person makes himself through the process of living. In this light, we must then have various things to look for at different times in the task of identification. Different categories of things, including man, have different modes of identification at different times and for different purposes. The question then is what criteria of sameness are we to appeal to in classifying things?

The question of identity goes beyond persons. An African is more than what he is as a person. In a way, the problematic of an African identity is indeed an ideological thing. However, we can use the memory theory in constructing and projecting the identity of an African in a positive way. Even though the memory theory is a metaphysical theory to unravel the aching question of personal identity, it is still a truism that the memory theory affords and articulates a cultural critique of the predicament of the identity of an African.

We are never fully. A person is always becoming and never fully is, until the end. In the light of the memory theory, the African can remember his past no matter how confused or problematic or even undefined that past may be. Even though the predicament of the African identity is an ideological thing, it is still true that the memory theory provides the positive platform on which the African identity can be discussed. Even if Africans have split identity or crises of identity, or that our identity is of a confused people, it is still a truism that we can use several features to denote that identity and since identity is becoming, we can then have a clearer glorified identity.

The African of today is the African of the past in the sense that we can discern sameness in the identity of the African. The little the African can remember of his past is worth remembering. A worthless past can still be remembered no matter how clumsy. The legacy of the memory theory in the construction of Africanity consist in the view that the African has a conscious memory of his past with which

he looks forward to construct and project a better future. In other words, the identity of the African can be located significantly in his ability to engage in a positive reflective consciousness of his past. His memory would be of a member of an exploited race. But curiously this is not peculiar to his race alone. Other races have also constructed a unique identity out of a similar story of exploitation.

As suggested in the memory theory, the idea of memory, awareness and the innate ability to remember presupposes a sense of history. Conjectures about memory are historical conjectures. The conflation of identity in the light of memory and reflective consciousness are best understood in the light of historical consciousness and awareness. If identity consist in reflective consciousness of one's past, as highlighted in the memory theory, and the idea of memory suggest a sense of history, then it is conclusive that the identity of the African clusters around his history. In the significant sense this history or memory is the memory of distinct episodes of racism and imperialism which still hunts the African till the present time.

But then analysis must go beyond this. The memory of the African transcends the era of imperialism. This is because, like all other peoples of the world, the African is inseparable from his history and culture. His history is the record of what he did and thought and said. Again, his culture derives from the totality of ideas, concepts and values that characterise the society that he found himself.

The problematic of the African identity stems from the age-long view that Africans have no identity in as much as it is believed that he had no history except the history of the Europeans in Africa. Today, the task of constructing African identity through his history is not only challenging but made more intellectually stimulating given the wealth of analysis afforded by a growing community of scholars in unearthing the facts about the African past. In most cases, the wrong perception of the African identity stems from a deliberate neglect and misunderstanding of the symbolic and practical logic of a community viewed from the normative perspective of the community concerned. Much of this trend characterised the heart of anthropological perspectives emanating from the west.

In a nutshell, the memory theory as a

philosophical response to the problem of identity has afforded an anthropological study of the African identity in the light of his memory, reflective consciousness of the past, awareness and history. In its epistemological import, the memory theory has shed more light on the African identity in the sense that, from that theoretical standpoint, if the African is said to lack a history i.e. a memory, how come we can recount or recollect them now? The memory theory has significantly emphasised the view that identity is not static. To the memory theory, every person, including the African, is continuously becoming meaning that identity is not static. For the memory theory, each individual should be able to recall his past. For the African, the present may truly be confused, and the future may be bleak, but we have a memory of our past just as the west does. It is this constructive understanding of our past now that helps in directing and marshalling a future in which what is critically an African identity appears empowering and manifest a *qualifying* ego.

Significantly, though, the memory theory is meant to apply to individuals, not groups. However, as persons, each African can be identified by this theory. Even if it were true that darkness remains the larger percentage of the past of the Africans, it is still a fact that darkness is part of history because certain events still constitute part of that darkness. Their contact with the west can also be the basis of his emerging identity because, according to the memory theory, he has a memory, also, of that contact. Assuming the truth of the claims of the west about Africa, Africans still remain identifiable as Africans in terms of those very statements. Africans may reject the identity so constructed by the west, based on their own memory perhaps. But as argued, if it is a logical truth and a conceptual truth that memory statements are generally true, then it is the case that the kernel of the truth about the African identity is embodied in the view that the identity of an African can be defined in terms of the distinct episodes and varying patterns of history and memory he has about himself.

The African identity is distinct and clear from received opinions and prejudices. According to Chinua Achebe, the African identity is in the making. In his words

It is, of course true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity

that is African. But, at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and meaning (Quoted in Appiah 1992: 73)

KEYWORDS Philosophy. Identity. Self. Memory. Culture

ABSTRACT In recent times, one emerging controversy that border on anthropology, philosophy and social history is the nature of the African self. As discussed, the problematic of the African identity stems from the age-long view that Africans have no identity because it is believed that he had no history except the history of the Europeans in Africa. This paper discovers that, today, the task of constructing African identity through his history is challenging. In most cases, the wrong perception about the African identity stems from a deliberate neglect of the symbolic, practical logic of the normative perspective of the community concerned. This paper concludes that the memory theory, as a philosophical response to the problem of identity, has afforded a philosophical study of the African self in the light of reflective consciousness of his past. In its epistemological import, the memory theory has shed more light on the African identity in the sense that if the African is said to lack a history i.e. a memory, how come we can recollect them now? The memory theory has significantly emphasised the view that identity is not static. Given this state, the African identity appears empowering and manifests a qualifying ego.

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