



BLENDING EMOTIONS AND ATTITUDE: THE RHETORIC OF 'NIPA' AS REPRESENTED IN THE AFRICAN CONCEPTION OF PERSONHOOD

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ABSTRACT: *The normative concept of personhood is fundamental to African moral philosophy. In Ghana, among the Akan, the word 'Nipa' (and 'Gbomo' among the Ga) evokes a myriad of emotions and reasoning between speakers. However, existing literature primarily highlights the connection between personhood and Western conceptions of rights, often neglecting the rhetorical dimensions of how personhood is enacted in everyday language. This article examines the African conception of personhood by analysing the polysemic character of 'Nipa' as a rhetorical device. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with Akan and Ga speakers in the Greater Accra and Central Regions of Ghana. Data were analysed using thematic analysis, guided by Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals ethos, pathos and logos, as an analytical framework. Findings reveal personhood as an ethos-based attribution of moral credibility, personhood as a pathos-laden instrument of communal sentiment and shaming and personhood as a logos-driven system of cultural reasoning about social duties. The study contributes to African philosophical discourse by demonstrating that 'Nipa' functions not merely as a descriptive label but as a performative rhetorical act that simultaneously constructs, evaluates and regulates moral identity within community life.*

KEYWORDS: Personhood, rhetorical appeals, Nipa, Gbomo, African philosophy, ethos, pathos, logos.



INTRODUCTION

Universally, the normative idea of personhood is central to African moral thinking. However, what exists in literature explicitly brings out the relationship embedded in the Western idea of rights related to personhood. Menkiti (2004) highlights the nature of communalism by dwelling on a concept of social-moral personhood that is based on the community. To Menkiti, communalism represents a community that views social rules, which shape moral personhood and point to the social-moral relations among persons. His views further refer to community, people, and their relations in terms of organic 'collectivities in the truest sense.' It is worth noting that the community involves individuals that exemplify 'beingness together' or 'beingness with others'.

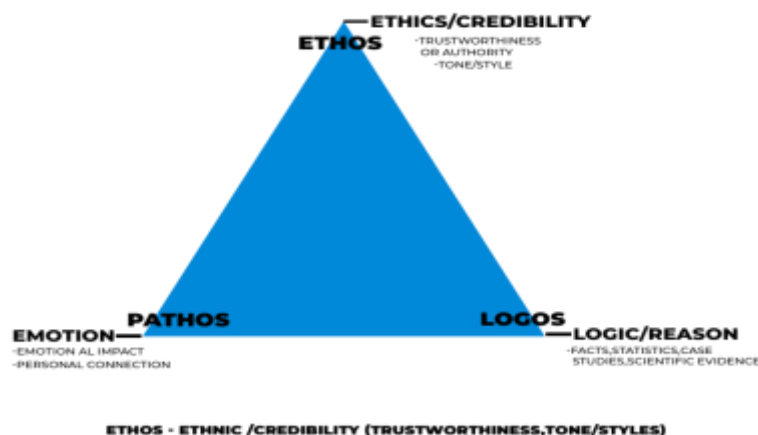
Menkiti further points out that morality ought to be considered essential to our sense of ourselves as persons. The "ought" reiterates a normative conception, not an emphatic point related to the anthropological description of all African traditions. Riesman (1986) has noted that 'the creation of meaning in a society, including the meanings of womanhood, manhood, and personhood may usually or even always involve a power struggle.' 'What is clear is that this observation is borne out by available anthropological evidence.

Despite the richness of philosophical discourse on personhood, a significant gap exists in the literature: few studies have examined how the concept of '*Nipa*' operates rhetorically in everyday communication. Most treatments remain abstract and theoretical, neglecting the emotional, credibility-based, and logical appeals embedded in ordinary language use. This paper addresses that gap by asking two research questions: (1) How is the concept of personhood represented in African concepts? (2) How does the concept of personhood appeal to emotions and reasoning in language use?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: The Rhetoric of Personhood through Aristotelian Appeals

This study was anchored in the classical rhetorical theory of Aristotle, specifically his three persuasive appeals: Ethos (credibility/character), Pathos (emotion/affect) and Logos (logic/reason). While Aristotle originally applied these appeals to formal oratory, contemporary scholarship has extended their utility to the analysis of everyday language, moral discourse and cultural conceptions of identity (Kennedy, 1991; Meyer, 2017). In this study, the three appeals serve not merely as descriptive categories but as analytical lenses through which the polysemic Akan concept '*Nipa*' (and its Ga equivalent '*Gbomo*') can be understood as a dynamic rhetorical tool in social moral communication.

**Figure 1: Rhetorical Triangle**

Source: *Author's Construct*

Ethos: The Appeal to Credibility and Moral Character

Ethos refers to the speaker's or subject's perceived character, trustworthiness, and moral authority. Within the African conception of personhood, achieving the status of '*Nipa*' is intrinsically linked to demonstrating socially recognised virtues such as responsibility, integrity, and communal reliability. When a community member describes another as 'oye nipa paa' (he/she is a real human/person), they are making an ethos-based judgement. This utterance publicly certifies the individual's moral standing, thereby granting them social capital, deference and access to communal networks.

In this study, ethos is operationalised as linguistic markers of moral approval or disapproval (for example, 'woye nipa' and 'onnye nipa', meaning 's/he is human' and 's/he is inhuman', respectively); community recognition of consistent virtuous behaviour; and contrastive judgements between those who have achieved personhood and those who have not.

Pathos: The Appeal to Emotion and Shared Sentiment

Pathos involves arousing emotions such as pity, anger, joy, shame, or admiration in an audience. In Akan and Ga communicative contexts, references to personhood are rarely neutral; they carry strong emotional weight. To call someone *Nipa* can evoke feelings of respect, gratitude, or communal pride. Conversely, denying personhood (e.g., 'onnye nipa') provokes shame, ostracism, or moral indignation.

Pathos is also embedded in proverbs, metaphors, and communal storytelling where the concept of personhood appears. For example, the allegory of the "crocodile with two heads and one stomach" (Gyekye, 2004) evokes a visceral sense of shared vulnerability and mutual dependence. In this study, pathos is operationalised as (a) emotion-laden expressions



associated with personhood; (b) metaphors and proverbs that elicit affective responses; and (c) narratives of moral failure or success that generate communal empathy or disapproval.

Logos: The Appeal to Logic, Language, and Cultural Reasoning

'Logos' refers to the use of logical argumentation, evidence, and structured reasoning. In the context of African personhood, logos manifests not as formal syllogisms but as culturally embedded rationality. Thus, the internal logic of social norms, cause-effect relationships between actions and moral status, and the linguistic structures that encode these relationships. The Akan language itself contains logical propositions about personhood: for instance, if an individual consistently performs communal duties, then (logically) that individual is recognised as 'Nipa'. This is conceptualised to represent the individual's sense of patriotism and diligence towards humanity and, by extension, society.

In this study, logos is operationalised as (a) semantic analysis of the word '*Nipa*' in varied grammatical contexts; (b) conditional statements linking actions to personhood status; (c) contrastive logic between personhood and non-personhood based on observable behaviour; and (d) causal explanations provided by respondents for why certain individuals are or are not granted personhood.

Integration of the Three Appeals

The three appeals operate simultaneously in natural communication. A single utterance about personhood can simultaneously assert ethos, evoke pathos, and deploy logos. This study adopts an integrated rhetorical analysis, where each instance of 'Nipa' or 'Gbomo' in collected data is examined along three dimensions, as shown in Table 1.

Discourses on Personhood: Communalistic Views

Academic and philosophical discourses on personhood and self-identity in Africa revolve predominantly around a communalistic understanding of the self. While the emphasis on the social features of self-identity is of great significance to the constitution of a specifically black African concept of the person historically served another important function, albeit one with a subversive political undertone. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, conceptualising an encumbered self, enmeshed in the fabric of social life, as opposed to the ostensibly unencumbered self of Western liberal individualism, was of theoretical importance to emerging black African politics of identity and representation. The goal of this politics was to reclaim human dignity for the colonised African. As Mbiti (1999) famously stated:

The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (pg. 106).

The pan-African intellectual and political movements of the colonial era, whose major goal was to decolonise the African mind, required the creation of counter-images to the European concept of the person. Consequently, the Pan-African project consciously eschewed Eurocentric, ecological reifications in the discussion of African identities, while redefining difference in a positive sense. Accordingly, African philosophers writing about the African concept of the person during the colonial era had to distance themselves from Western liberal individualism.



The idea of personhood entails a dialogical morality where our chief moral goal is self-realisation, but this goal can only be achieved by fulfilling our other-regarding duties. It is for this reason that Gyekye (2004) informs us that African ethics is an 'other-regarding and capacious morality.' If this is true, then it should follow that the idea of personhood entails a morality of duties to others. Consciousness of events or objects, be they internal or external, forms an aspect of personhood. The ability to reason, whereby one may develop the capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems, is a likely condition of personhood.

The Moral Thought

The 'other' imagined by a morality of duties is every human being. The idea of the common good represents a conception of a good life salient in African moral-political thought. At the heart of this conception of a good life is the idea that all human beings have some basic needs they share in common. These are needs considered crucial for their well-being (Wiredu, 2009). If these needs go unsatisfied, life will be brutish and uncompromised. It is for this reason that Gyekye (2004) informs us that a morality of duties is concerned about 'social living' and is 'related, ultimately, to the basic desires and needs of human beings.' Thus, our other-regarding duties are efficacious in securing the well-being of all, as captured by the idea of the common good.

With respect to personhood, African philosophers have developed justifications for their ideas and views. Gyekye calls for construal, noting that criticisms of Menkiti involve a misunderstanding, in that Menkiti's view is neither a metaphysical thesis nor radical in the sense of undermining individual rights and autonomy. The criteria for achieving personhood in Akan society are built on two kinds of ideologies. The first is the natural fact that we tend to care for our kin and feel responsible for those with whom one is in a reciprocal relationship. The second is that societies need some way to encourage and support members' feelings of empathy for those beyond their families.

According to Wiredu (1992), in Akan society, marriage and procreation are necessary but not sufficient conditions of personhood. The strength and health of children lies in the joint responsibility of spouses. 'Wiredu' refers to an individual in Akan society who shoulders the responsibility of people who may or may not be related to him. If such an individual supports people not related to him in any way or who are distant relatives, that individual is likely to earn the attribute 'oye nipa'. When an individual fails to meet the standards, he attracts negative reactions from members of a society.

The Akan Concept of Personhood

Wiredu (1992) refers to former Zambian President Kaunda's praise of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher as 'truly a person'. The concept of 'person' to which Kaunda referred has particular significance within the Akan linguistic context. The Akan word 'onipa' is an ambiguous term that may connote several meanings. It may in certain instances refer to the biological species and sometimes be used to indicate one's status in society. To Wiredu, the double meaning reflects an important conceptual distinction between 'human' (biologically related) and 'person' (an entity with special outstanding moral and metaphysical qualities worthy of praise).



An individual's status as human is not influenced by degrees or levels; neither is the status of an individual given as a reward for efforts. Being human is not procedural. By contrast, personhood is something for a human to become through individual achievement. Menkiti (2004) offers a radical form of communitarianism, which he sees primarily as a thesis about the metaphysical and ontological nature of personhood determined by the community. He argues that this view is problematic because it provides an incoherent view of personhood in which an individual can become more or less of a person.

The duty for one to realise their true humanity takes central stage in African moral thought, and this duty is essentially connected to promoting the well-being of other human beings. If rights were to take a central place in African thought, this would threaten the very possibility of individuals attaining a status of personhood that entirely depends on them prioritising the social goal of securing the well-being of all. Rights focus on duties owed to the subject, the right-holder, whereas the prospect of attaining personhood is essentially connected to purely other-regarding duties to secure the well-being of all.

Personhood in the Contemporary World

In relation to personhood in the contemporary world, Eze (1997) notes that contemporary African philosophy may be considered a counter-colonial practice:

The idea of African philosophy as a field of inquiry thus has its contemporary roots in the effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations and to examine, question, and contest identities imposed upon them by Europeans. (pg. 21-26)

Thus, it is evident today that some African scholars, both local and international, continue to project and defend a “we-existence” ontology of the person, which trumps the primacy and subjectivity of the ego. In contrast to an independent, self-authenticating source of valid claims, a person in Africa is a self only in relation to how he or she lives in the community. In this view, the concept of the person constitutes an abstraction that may have been very useful for the enunciation of a specific politics of identity and representation. In furtherance of this, morality of duties establishes a universal moral vision that encompasses all humanity.

The literature reviewed above demonstrates a rich philosophical tradition examining the normative dimensions of personhood in African thought. However, a significant gap exists: few empirical studies have investigated how the concept of ‘Nipa’ functions rhetorically in everyday communicative contexts. Most treatments remain theoretical, drawing on linguistic examples anecdotally rather than systematically analysing language use. Furthermore, it appears there are marginal or no studies that have applied Aristotelian rhetorical theory to understand how appeals to credibility, emotion, and reason operate in the daily deployment of personhood language. This study therefore addresses that gap.



METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study employed a qualitative approach to research. This approach is relevant and appropriate when the study demands an exploration of meanings, interpretations and rhetorical functions of language in natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative research design allows for the depth of analysis of data. Also, for the purpose of this study, it examines how personhood is constructed through everyday communication and human interaction.

Population and Sampling

The study was conducted in two regions of Ghana. Thus, the Greater Accra Region (representing Ga language speakers) and the Central Region (representing Akan language speakers, specifically Fante and Twi). These regions were selected to ensure geographical and linguistic diversity while maintaining focus on the two principal language groups where the concepts of *Nipa* (Akan) and *Gbomo* (Ga) are central to moral discourse.

Participants sampled for the study were adults aged 25 years and above. They were selected using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria were (a) native or fluent speaker of Akan or Ga, (b) resident in the study area for at least 10 years, and (c) active participation in community life. A total of 24 participants took part in semi-structured interviews (12 Akan and 12 Ga), and 6 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each with 6-8 participants, stratified by language group. This yielded a total sample of 62 individuals.

Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interviews

An interview guide was developed based on the theoretical framework and literature review. Questions explored: (a) how participants use the words 'Nipa/Gbomo' in daily conversation; (b) examples of situations where someone was called 'Nipa' or denied that status; (c) the emotional and social consequences of such attributions; (d) participants' understanding of what qualifies someone as a person.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

The Focus Group Discussions were used to generate collective narratives and observe how participants negotiate the meaning of personhood in group settings. Each FGD lasted 60-90 minutes and was facilitated by a native speaker of the relevant language. The relevant language for this study comprised Ga and Twi.

Natural language observation

Researchers also recorded instances of 'Nipa/Gbomo' use in natural settings (marketplaces, family gatherings, community meetings) with informed consent, capturing authentic speech events.



Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Education, Winneba. All participants provided written informed consent. Pseudonyms are used in reporting findings. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any time.

Data Analysis

Data collected was transcribed from audio to text and later translated into English. Data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following six phases: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Coding was conducted using NVivo 14 software. The coding process was deductively guided by the three Aristotelian appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) while also allowing for inductive themes to emerge. Inter-coder reliability was established by having two independent coders analyse 20% of the transcripts, achieving a Cohen's kappa of 0.84. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through: (a) triangulation (multiple data sources: interviews, FGDs, and observations); (b) member checking (participants reviewed summaries of findings); (c) peer debriefing (regular discussions with colleagues not involved in data collection); and (d) thick description (detailed contextual information to support transferability).

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the study encapsulates the findings that emerged from the data and further discusses them to reflect the theory and other literature as the study sought to unravel them. The first theme centres on how *Nipa/Gbomo* functions as an ethos appeal. That is a public attribution of moral credibility and trustworthiness. Accordingly, interviews and FGDs conducted, participants consistently described personhood as something earned through demonstrated responsibility. For instance, an Akan male participant (45 years old, farmer) stated '*When we say 'woye nipa', we mean this person can be trusted. He does not run away from his duties. He pays his debts. He attends funerals. He helps when there is trouble. That is a real person.*' (Participant 1)

Similarly, a Ga female participant (52 years old, trader) explained that '*Gbomo*' means someone who carries the weight of family, simply someone who is human. If you are selfish, only thinking of yourself, we say '*jee gbomo ko ni*'—he is not a person. Personhood is about what you do for others. (FGD, Ga2). These responses empirically validate Gyekye's (2004) claim that African ethics is fundamentally "other-regarding". That is to say, the individual is a reflection in the mirror of others. The participants do not define personhood through individual achievement, wealth, or status alone but through demonstrated responsibility toward others. This finding aligns with Wiredu's (1992) observation that the Akan individual who shoulders responsibility for both kin and non-kin earns the title '*oye nipa*'.

From the perspective of the theoretical framework, these utterances function as ethos accreditations. When a community member declares another to be *Nipa*, they are not merely



describing behaviour but publicly conferring moral credibility. This act has performative force. Thus, it seeks to elevate the individual's standing, granting them social capital, trust, and deference. Conversely, the denial of personhood (*onnye nipa, jee gbomo ko*) strips the individual of moral standing, marking them as untrustworthy and socially peripheral.

Another sub-theme that was revealed had to do with contrastive ethos. This has to do with what appears to be the useless person. In effect, the denial of personhood served as a powerful ethos-based sanction. Participants frequently used expressions such as *onipa hun* ("useless person") or *onye nipa* ("he/she is not a person") to condemn those who failed communal expectations.

An Akan female participant (38 years old, teacher) recounted that "there is a man in our village who does not attend funerals. He does not contribute to the community fund. When his own mother was sick, he did not visit. People say 'onnye nipa.' They mean he has no moral standing. You cannot trust him", (Participant 7).

This finding extends Menkiti's (2004) normative conception of personhood by demonstrating the negative sanctions that enforce it. Menkiti emphasised that personhood is something to be achieved, but he gave less attention to the rhetorical mechanisms through which communities withhold recognition. The data revealed that the denial of personhood is not merely a passive absence of praise but an active rhetorical sanction that functions as social punishment.

In terms of ethos, the individual described by Participant 7 has failed to build the credibility required for personhood. The community's response, '*onnye nipa*', is a unanimous affirmation of moral bankruptcy by the individuals in the community. This finding resonates with Riesman's (1986) observation that the creation of meaning in society involves power struggles. The power to confer or withhold personhood is a significant form of social control.

Furthermore, participants described personhood not as a one-time achievement but as a gradual accumulation of ethos as a subtheme. An elder in one FGD explained by saying "*A child is human, yes. But a child is not yet a person. Personhood comes with age, with experience, with showing that you understand how to live with others. When a young man begins to take responsibility as in marrying, building a house, helping his siblings and so on, then slowly, slowly, people start to say, 'he is becoming a person.'*" (FGD, Akan1).

This finding provides empirical support for Wiredu's (1992) distinction between being human, thus one who is born, and being a person (moral and achieved). By this, Personhood is a social status attained via moral behaviour and community involvement rather than a biological trait. Nevertheless, it adds a dynamic dimension: personhood is not a binary state (person vs. not person) but a gradual process of ethos accumulation. Participants used phrases like "becoming a person" (*oye nipa no*) to indicate this developmental trajectory.

From a rhetorical perspective, this gradualism means that ethos attributions are not singular events but ongoing evaluations. Each act of responsibility adds to the individual's moral capital; each failure diminishes it. The community functions as an ongoing audience that continuously assesses the individual's credibility. This finding challenges Gyekye's (1992) assertion that personhood is prior to acquisition (that one is a person because of what one is, not what one acquires). While Gyekye (1992) is correct that human dignity is intrinsic, the data show that social recognition of personhood appears as the lived experience of being treated as a person and is acquired through action.



The second theme revealed how personhood language operates as a pathos appeal, generating emotional responses that regulate behaviour. References to *Nipa/Gbomo* were consistently accompanied by strong affective content.

Being called *Nipa* evoked feelings of pride, while being denied personhood evoked shame. A Ga male participant (61 years, retired civil servant) shared an idea in a comment and said, *'When the chief called me 'gbomo dientse', a real person, at the last festival, I felt my chest swell. My family was proud. My children looked at me differently. That word carries honour.'* (Participants, 9).

Conversely, an Akan female participant (29 years, unemployed) described the shame of social censure in a scenario she shared and said, *'I heard my aunt say about my cousin, 'onnye nipa'. My cousin was there. She started crying. She did not speak for two days. It is worse than any beating.'* (FGD, Akan3). These responses revealed the emotional stakes of personhood attribution. The pathos appeal is not incidental but central to how personhood language regulates behaviour. The pride associated with being called '*Nipa*' serves as a positive reinforcer, encouraging individuals to pursue ethos-building actions. The shame associated with personhood denial serves as a negative reinforcer, deterring antisocial behaviour.

This finding extends the philosophical literature by demonstrating that the normative force of personhood is not merely cognitive (a matter of understanding what is right) but deeply affective (a matter of feeling pride and shame). As Aristotle recognised, effective rhetoric moves the emotions because humans are not purely rational beings. The same holds true for moral discourse in Akan and Ga communities: the concept of '*Nipa*' works because it touches the heart, not just the mind.

The intensity of the emotional response from FGD, Akan3, and Participant, "worse than any beating" and "did not speak for two days" – indicates that personhood denial functions as a form of social death. To be told one is not a person is to be excluded from the moral community in the most fundamental way. This finding supports Masolo's (2010) observation that selfhood in African contexts is constituted through recognition by others.

Metaphors and emotional resonance also emerged as one unique theme from the data. Participants used vivid metaphors that amplified the emotional weight of personhood language. The crocodile allegory (two heads, one stomach) appeared frequently. The famous allegory was exemplified by P4, *'We are like the crocodile. The two heads fight over food, but the food goes to one stomach. If one head is selfish, both suffer. That is why we say a person who does not share is not a person...he does not understand our life.'* (Participant, 4).

This metaphor, identified by Gyekye (2004) and Wiredu (2009) as central to Akan moral thought, functions as a pathos amplifier. The image of the crocodile symbolises a real, tangible creature familiar to Ghanaians. It makes abstract concepts of interdependence and shared fate viscerally concrete. The metaphor evokes an emotional response: fear of suffering, empathy for the other head, and recognition of shared vulnerability.

From a rhetorical perspective, metaphors are powerful pathos appeals because they translate logical propositions into sensory and emotional terms. The logical proposition "individuals depend on the community for well-being" becomes emotionally resonant when embodied in the crocodile allegory. This finding suggests that African philosophical discourse, often



presented in abstract terms, is grounded in rhetorical practices that engage the whole person. This normally includes the reason, emotion, and imagination of the person.

Another theme that was revealed from the data had to do with emotional pain; personhood denial served as a powerful mechanism of social control. An elder in an FGD noted that, *'You do not need police to make people behave. Just say 'onnye nipa' about someone, and they will change. The shame is enough. I have seen proud men humble themselves because they could not bear the community saying they are not persons.'* (FGD, Akan2). This finding revealed the efficiency of pathos-based social control. Formal legal systems require evidence, procedures, and enforcement mechanisms. The personhood sanction operates through the single utterance *'onnye nipa'*, yet its effects are profound. This efficiency explains why communally orientated societies have persisted without the extensive legal apparatuses of Western states.

The finding also complicated the relationship between personhood and human rights. If the denial of personhood is such a powerful sanction, what protects individuals from its abuse? The data suggest that communities are aware of this danger. Participants noted that personhood denial is not taken lightly; it requires consensus and is reserved for egregious violations of communal norms. Nevertheless, the potential for misuse exists, pointing to a tension between communitarian ethics and individual protections. This is a tension that African philosophers such as Gyekye (1997) have acknowledged.

Logos-driven cultural reasoning emerged as the third theme. This theme demonstrated how personhood language embeds logos appeals. It concerns itself with logical structures and cultural reasoning that make moral evaluation coherent and predictable.

The data further revealed that there appears to be a conditional logic of personhood. Participants consistently used conditional statements linking actions to personhood status. This logical structure took the form: *If X performs communal duties, then X is recognised as a person.*

An Akan male participant (34 years old, carpenter) stated that It is simple. If you help your family, if you attend meetings, and if you contribute when there is a death, then you are a person. If you do none of these, how can anyone call you a person? The logic is clear. (Participant, 12).

This finding revealed that personhood discourse operates according to an internally consistent logic. The conditional structure is not merely a feature of the researcher's analysis; participants themselves articulated it as "simple" and "clear". This challenges any suggestion that African moral thought is purely intuitive, emotional, or inconsistent. Rather, it operates with a rationality that is culturally specific but logically rigorous.

From a logos perspective, the conditional statement establishes a predictable relationship between actions and outcomes. Community members know what is expected of them because the logic of personhood is transparent. This predictability reduces ambiguity and allows individuals to plan their moral careers. The carpenter's rhetorical question – "how can anyone call you a person?" – implies that the logical connection is so obvious that its denial would be irrational.



This finding also has implications for understanding moral education. If personhood follows conditional logic, then teaching morality involves making this logic explicit. Elders, parents, and community leaders can explain to young people: *If you want to be respected as a person, then you must do X, Y, and Z.* The logos appeal provides a rational foundation for moral socialisation.

Additionally, semantic polysemy as logical ambiguity was revealed. The dual meaning of 'Nipa' (human/person) created logical ambiguity that participants navigated through context. A Ga female participant (44 years old, nurse) explained; "Every baby is a gbomo in one sense—alive, human. But we do not call a baby 'gbomo' in the full sense. That comes later. The same word means two things. You know from the situation which meaning is intended." (FGD, Ga1)

This finding empirically illustrates Wiredu's (1992) observation about the polysemic nature of *onipa*. However, it adds an important dimension: the ambiguity is not a flaw or confusion but a functional feature of the language. The same word can refer to biological humanity (which all humans possess) and achieved moral personhood (which only some possess). Speakers navigate this ambiguity through contextual cues.

Similarly, casual explanations for personhood status emerged as a theme for consideration in the study. Participants provided elaborate causal accounts for why individuals achieved or failed to achieve personhood. These accounts demonstrated culturally embedded rationality when Participant 10 intimated that "my uncle is a person because he built the family house. Why? Because his father died when he was young, and he had to take responsibility early. That made him understand duty. So now everyone respects him. That is cause and effect".

This participant's explanation is notable for its explicit causal language: 'because', 'that made him understand', and 'that is cause and effect'. The logo's appeal here is not merely implicit but self-consciously articulated. The participant understands personhood as following from a causal chain: early responsibility → understanding duty → respect → personhood.

This finding provides empirical support for the claim that African moral thought is rational in the sense of offering explanations for why individuals behave as they do. It also suggests that personhood is understood as emergent from life experiences rather than as a static trait. The uncle did not become a person simply by performing isolated good deeds; he became a person because his life trajectory shaped his character. This developmental understanding of personhood resonates with Menkiti's (2004) emphasis on the processual nature of becoming a person.

In summary, the findings and discussion revealed that personhood language in Akan and Ga communities operates through three interconnected rhetorical appeals. The first one, which has to do with ethos, considers the concept of *Nipa/Gbomo* as a public certification of moral credibility. This is earned through demonstrated responsibility toward others. However, its denial of personhood serves as a powerful ethos-based sanction. Considering pathos, personhood attributions generate strong emotional responses. This includes pride, shame, indignation and empathy that regulate behaviour. Metaphors and proverbs give credence to these emotional appeals. Furthermore, the logos sees personhood as embedded logical structures that make moral evaluation coherent, predictable and teachable.



Consequently, these appeals do not operate in isolation but in an integrated fashion. The rhetorical force of *woye nipa* comes from its ability to simultaneously establish credibility, evoke emotion and deploy cultural logic. This integration explains why the concept of personhood remains central to moral discourse in contemporary Ghanaian societies, even as traditional norms face challenges from urbanisation and technological change.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the African conception of personhood is best understood not as a static philosophical category but as a dynamic rhetorical practice through which communities construct, maintain and contest moral order. Human beings have intrinsic dignity by virtue of being human, but they achieve the status of *person* through demonstrated virtue recognised by the community. The language of personhood is the primary vehicle through which this achievement is acknowledged, celebrated, or denied. In that, the idea of personhood is embedded in the use of language. Thus, the verisimilitude of personhood thrives on the wheels of language through credibility, logic and emotions. As Ghanaian societies continue to modernise and globalise, understanding how this language evolves will remain a vital task for philosophers, linguists and communication scholars alike. The rhetorical framework developed in this study offers one tool for that ongoing work.

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