Article Title: The Culture of Community: An African Thought Value

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ABSTRACT

Some community values among African societies seem to be prominent and obvious while others within the same scene tend to be regarded as subtle. Different world-views over issues within the periphery of communities, however, seem common but unappreciated. There is, for instance, an ever increasing gap between youth against elders, literate against illiterate, employed against unemployed, Westerners against Africans, etc. The gap dictates the presence of the tag of war within and without communities. On the one hand, there are community members who want to integrate community values, whilst on the other hand there are those that want the reverse. It can, here, be deduced that, these forces have brought in confusion, dilemma, misunderstanding, misrepresentation and dissatisfaction. The question is dramatically, not whether or not we should conditionally change from African community values to non-African community values. Rather, to create the need among Africans to understand contribution of some of the thought values of the "culture of community" in an African perspective. Unless we (Africans) know the whole issue of "What", "Why", and "How", we will never be our own, rather suffer and remain slaves of foreign values in our own land.

INTRODUCTION

In modern times, now the new millennium, much has been the change, paramount to the installation of new life shapes. The world of modern technology, economic issues, matters of religion, variable culture and traditions, contextual movements etc. have greatly contributed toward changes in life styles. There is a belief that "Africa is known for its extended families, for its cultural coping mechanisms in the face of need, and for its hospitality. These and other communal traditions are in some danger of being carried off…by modernization, westernization, urbanization and individualism. Rural-urban migrants in Africa frequently find themselves in between- without a suitable set of values to anchor them" (Stephens, 1998). But to no avail, however, even with the evidence of such changes, a question can be raised today, "How best has it been true to man?" Should it be said, "Such dramatic changes are the global standards of a better life?" or "are African community values inferior?"

I hesitate to say or conclude that a growing number of fellow Africans are today, struggling finding cultural refuge in non-African values within their own continent. An African Community Value seems to be losing its taste and fast disappearing from its original chore.

By far, a typical African definition for the term, "community" sounds contrary from purely Western world-view of the same word "community". To synchronize the two world-views, seems difficult unless we all learn to understand, appreciate, and accept the differences. This, I observe that would give us the best definition for community.

In this paper, I intend to confine my reflection on facts based on African thoughts on the value of the culture of community. I do not make any attempt to do an overhaul evaluation of any particular community either. In other words, this paper is not a comparative study though I will, to some extent, be mentioning some cultures outside African continent as examples within the context in question. Day to day life experience, I believe, is the best illustrative expression applicable in this matter. By saying this, I mean, participants ought to be referring their minds back to the communities they each find themselves in or once lived.

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE CULTURE OF COMMUNITY
Nature and purpose of culture of community entails the whole issue of historical background of the African community. Since the writer's desire is to present the value concepts, the historical background will also be presented within the light of nature and purpose. In human societies where seemingly the focus of this paper is directed to, CPK (1994) sees the need of liturgical renewal as it seeks to return to the African cultural heritage. Supporting this idea, Gatus (cited in Mugambi and Magesa, 1998) emphasized that African values would make good contribution by being incorporated into daily use in their life styles.

Defining the term "community" thus, it is significant if we are to clearly understand the subject that we are dealing with. Thinking about the definition of community in respect to only geographical, racial or ethno-centric confinement, is to deceive ourselves. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Martin Luther were respectfully cited in Grubbs (1994) saying, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community….But the reverse is also true; Let him who is not in community beware of being alone". "If I die then I am not alone in death; If I suffer, they (the fellowship) suffer with me"

The notion I am getting here is that the issue of community is beyond the thinking of many African people. Scott was once interviewed and responded saying;

> In modern times, the idea of "community" has increasingly been expanded to include not just the place where one lives, but the web of relationships into which one is embedded. Work, school, voluntary associations, computer networks – all are communities even though members live quite apart…

Initially, we consider people that have made a commitment to learn how to communicate with each other at an ever more deep and authentic level. Talking to an agrarian of a computer networking as a community may sound a myth so to speak because to him or her, community is what is within the surroundings, the "people" whom he/she is in contact with, can share joys, laughter and seek help. Human life relations in an African society comprise key moments visa-a-viz. birth, initiation, marriage, old

age, death, etc. No one individual within the community is seen as self-independent. Reyburn (1981) asserts that no man lives unto himself and no man dies unto himself. Community is the way of life of Africans in general…most Africans consider it a discourtesy, to say the least, to ignore the respect of other human beings, for people are important to Africans, whoever they may be (PACLA, 1978).

Some Practical Indicators of culture of community

Relationship networking basically is as old as man. It has been a determinant factor for the community life between members. Legun and Mmari (1995) analysed the theory of incorporation among communities in Tanzania and made an observation that this is what brings in the idea that role conflicts were at a very minimal level since community members were well recruited to assume their responsibilities. Elders were key instructors and nobody would question about it.

In 1994 Weisbord established a "Six – Box" strategy of diagnosing the organizational strengths and weaknesses commonly used in Organization Development. The Six – boxes include: The purpose, structures, rewards, helpful mechanisms, relationships and leadership. Paying a careful attention to study culture of community, one would definitely agree with the writer of this paper that, the six – boxes are very distinctly identified and the same could be used to analyze any African community.

Additional to the above indicator is, **respecting the morals, beliefs, customs, traditions and laws.** These were strongly observed. I am convinced that there is no African community which can be said to be less of any of the stated nuggets. Mbiti (1991), for instance remarks that, "African people take the moral life seriously" Young and Mack (1959) had the same idea that, "Folk culture has much in common…forms of moral control, and simple social order generally"

Mutual Caring and Sharing As it has been noted, mutual relationship between community members was among the key issues. In his writing, Batchelor (1993) indicates his feelings of disappointment that some African **mutual caring and sharing** have been lost to the West. "Sense of African brotherhood and relatedness based on Charity….In time of food scarcity sharing is still practiced by many" (Waruta, 1995). This kind of relationship looks informal yet regarded as a significant virtue among Africans. The forces behind were not as those influenced by pseudo-community but rather, due to the spirit of love, care and sharing.

Stine and Wendland (1990) drove deep the point as they said;
> A community's system of values is normally associated with a corresponding set of personal "affections"; feelings, attitudes, biases, esthetic tastes, preferences, and so forth. When persistent and widespread, there also, there to modify the accustomed manner of thinking and acting….Events that are unexpected and/or extra ordinary in an African setting are always unwelcome and usually feared.

Religious uproar has also been respected and given homage as significant virtue in extended African Communities. Kindness, respect, honest, peace and love, have not only been limited to one's neighbors. Until to date, it is vehemently believed that failure to these traits at any time would inflict problem like, missing the blessings from God. Mbiti (1995), a world known advocate of African Traditional Religion talks of the issue of intermediaries. He says, "they are guardians of family affairs, traditions, ethics, and activities. Offence in these matters is ultimately an offence against the forefathers who in that capacity, act as invisible police of families and communities"

In some of the cultures for instance among the Luo, *Kwer* and *Chira* are not new inventions. Ocholla – Ayayo (1976) discusses the two virtues saying, *Kwer* defines all moral acts, and obligations. *Chira* underlines all moral acts too, and the consequences of which may inflict suffering and/or cause the extinction of the whole society. What could be generally said is that the whole African community life is traditionally a religious based. The partakers of which are God fearing people no matter how much uninformed they may be thought of.

Furthermore, **education is evident** as the nature and the purpose of African community refers. Facilitation began right from home, the same discipline God had wanted it done among the Israelites (Deuteronomy 6:6-8) and extended toward the entire community. The whole idea of apprenticeship and mentoring were more practical than theoretical. Fathers modeled boys, while mothers taught daughters about their social and family responsibilities. It was, in this phenomenon that, "the value of talk" and "the value of understanding" grew their roots.

Among the Sukuma, the Ashanti, the Bahemba and many other African people groups, the community has been known to be the "home of education". Any elderly person participated in instructing not only his own children but all children in the community. The community shaped the members, hence the old African proverb; "I am because we are". Education also, took the form of languages, signs, symbols, idiom, gesture, stories, riddles, handcraft and observations. Ritualistic ceremonials were also revered. It can, based on what can be observed that failure in attendance to any of the stated

events was believed to lead one to be uninformed of the existed issues and situation in the community.

Time also seems to be one of the controversial aspects for the people that are originally not coming from within African communities. The paradox of "time and timing" according to Covey, it is the matter of making the distinction between the "urgency-paradigm" and "importance-paradigm" In his book *First Things First* (1994) Covey reiterates in his argument saying; "But there are entire cultures in the world that appropriate life from a "Kairos" – an "appropriate time" or quality time – paradigm. Time is something to be experienced…how much value you get out of it rather than how much chronos time you put into it"

Africans should not be confused as refusing attending to somebody who is in need just because, it is time to have a nap or just because it is not on "things to do list." Time to African communities is held with the sense of value in it. Timing is held more important than time per se or the urgency. It is relational sensitivity among community members that matters first.

THE PROCESS AND PRACTICE OF AFRICAN COMMUNITY
Depending on the kind of community somebody may be referring to, the formation of the community can take one of the two sides, formal or informal. It has well been understood that African communities largely depend not in the so called "status quo", as opposed to natural or automatic. A community that entails confusing and contradicting values is doom to corrupting because not only the strategic objectives are different, but also the means of achieving those objectives may likely be considered not to be the same. It is a culture which "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms…which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (Clifford in Rajaee, 2000).

The existence of African communities in that sense, have to share common factors within her members. Maxwell's Article "Forming a Dream Team of Leaders" includes four characteristics of a team that are also true to African community and which were later edited by Elliot. In summary, Elliot says;
1. The team members care for one another
2. The team members know what is important
3. The team members communicate with one another
4. The team members grow together

The African culture of community, therefore, is believed to exercise and share the same characteristics that Maxwell points them out. The same four characteristics have always assumed the "portraits" of African community's process and practice. Originally, African people practiced what was held to have common importance to all members of the community as contrasted to arbitrary attitude. Moments of sickness cases, natural disasters, funerals, etc. community members not only sympathized with victims but empathized i.e. showed their practical care. Communication was well applied in settling of disputes and reconciliations and learned to grow together. At child birth, for instance, other women would freely and happily take up responsibilities – bringing firewood, fetching water and do the cooking - that would be otherwise be done by the one who may have given birth.

At family level also, the concept of orphanages and child adoption was so uncommon. It was, instead, universally accepted for instance among the "Nyiramba" as it is in many cultures of Tanzania that the youngest son is charged with the responsibility of establishing his homestead within his parent's *boma* mainly in order to care for them when they become old. Furthermore, in the same manner the "Haya" culture, Lutahoire (1974) reports that the home of a son is located near the father's homestead; for it is part of the prestige and honor of the father and mother to have their son's house built near their own home. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, West Africa, the typical household consists an old woman, her sons, and daughters, and the daughter's children….In any of these…the household functions as the community (Grunlan & Stephen, 1988).

Communities have always demonstrated a need to prepare community future activists who are responsible for their upkeep. A raised issue should be clear to us all that, "Our teenagers like many others in the world have very many dreams for the life they want to live as they grow up" (Mhando, 2012) which from the word go discloses that most African communities did not just sit and talk but engaged practically to fulfill this responsibility.

The idea of male groups "daqaay", "Masomba", and "Barise" which means young boys, youth and elders respectively, are well known among the "Iraqw"of Tanzania. The youngest boys remained at home, youth did most of security work while elders' responsibilities were to ensure norms and cultural morals were kept for the welfare of the community (Thornton, 1980). These same practices are believed true to Maasai community where they have "layon" (uncircumcised boys), "moran" (youth), "endito" (girls), "shangigi" (old woman) each had specific responsibilities to fulfill.

Normative education

The Luo community system of education is another set up of community structure. Ocholla has called this system, a "normative education" He presents the concepts of "Duol – education" basically for owners of homestead, "Siwindhi – education" for girls, and "Simba – education" which is mainly meant for boys (1976). As can be observed, all education instructions; rules of respect of elders, rules that teach; do not kill, or tell lies and so forth, according to Ocholla, it is the community's responsibility under the confinement of a normative education.

The process of community is a well spread activities among the members. Cited in Lutahoire (1974) Parrinder confirms the fact. He reiterates that "With respect to socialization, the adolescents of Karagwe were always invited to wedding ceremonies, to the opening of new houses, and other festivities where they drummed and danced several days, girls danced with boys and at this occasion they often made friends who later become their spouses…these ceremonies were part of the community sharing experience between children and adults. Lutahoire adds "…families were asked to check their social-religion, economic and political relations…to help, forgive and correct their behavior" (1974).

Seeing the above explained observations, it can conclusively be understood that communities had the responsibility of ensuring that individual members of the community, groups, families and other institutions actively participated in the social affairs as expected by the community. While in the process of practicing her roles, community strengths were mobilized, promoted, institutionalized and maintained.

INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY

In the African mind set, it is the society that dictates, determines, and controls social affairs. The community designs, shapes and disciplines or sustains her members so that they can properly fit in a given society. I know that in many of a non-African context, it is the individual members that dictate how the society should conduct the affairs. In his study project, Peck (1987) arrived at a point and concluded in his finding that, "Community is another such phenomenon. Like electricity, it is profoundly lawful…is something more than the sum of its parts, its individual members…"

In brief, what can easily be concluded is that whenever there is no clearly identified and defined agreement on caring for one another, knowing what is important, communicating with one another, and growing together, a community's smooth running at any given set up remains a wishful thinking. An opportunity should continue to be provided for the passing on of knowledge, skills, norms, values and beliefs to young

generation. Kretzman and MCKnight (1993) stipulate well the place of elders in taking up this role. They say;

> Up until the present time in most communities throughout the world, the elders of the community have been viewed as the primary sources of wisdom and experience of cultural traditions. The elders of each group are thought to be responsible for the proper maintenance of cultural traditions. From this perspective the oldest members of the community are seen as primary contributors to the constantly continuing process of building community stability and development

The argument in point is that communities have a significant role to play for its people and existence. Powerful African leaders, for instance, whom I personally owe my appreciation to, I believe, have always emerged from community's influence. They have been born, stayed with, and lived for their people. Martin Luther King (though did not lead any African nation), Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkuruma and Julius Kambarage Nyerere, to mention a few, have left much to be admired. They all, despite personal shortcomings, led and demonstrated an exemplary leadership status because of what their respective communities contributed in raising them up.

Community members got their religious and moral strengths because those strengths were regarded as community values. Communities stressed them strongly. During sacred moments for instance where sacrifices were offered, the whole community was supposed to respect and participate. It is without doubt that specific forests, mountains, or hills were considered sacred in this context and not one person was allowed to visit the places but the leaders only identified by the community. To this present time, however, community members can still miss attending their farms, work place or even family matters in order to take part in burial ceremonies, wedding ceremonies and other religious and social rituals. All these are indications of the fact that communities in Africa have strong and active influence to their people.

Unity among members

Unity makes strong the influence of community. In the "Pan African Christian Leadership Assembly" held in Nairobi in 1978, "Unity" was reflected and one of the issues most emphasized. An observation was made that, "Unity is fundamental to us because of our family sense, because of the clan sense, and because of the tribe sense. The term brother already implies unity. When an African says; "You are my brother," that is unity for him already" (PACLA, 1971). The same connotation speaks well in other disciplines as well. When people are allowed room for agreeing to disagree even in political matters diversity becomes healthier. We easily hear what Mbithi claims as a value that;

> The political culture in question is generally pluralistic in that it is ethnically, politically and religiously diversified. Such a diversification requires an analysis which points out that pluralism is not a vice. This should gear the society to be judged worthwhile, promoting self-esteem and enriching mutual growth. This we term as moral pluralism.

We may wonder as whether our traditional communities were of any politics. A positive and a constructive list of contents that compose politics suffice to say yes our African communities embedded political culture and those contents exactly made the communities to exist in a powerful stance. According to Kim (2010) "We can define political culture as the set of values, beliefs, traditions, perceptions, expectations, attitudes, practices, and institutions that a particular society harbors about how the political system and processes should operate and what sort of government and economic life it should pursue." Contrary to what is currently demonstrated in the name of politics where there seem to be hatred, killing and so forth, mutual relationship, love and respect cemented communities.

In Tanzania for instance, the word *ndugu* may be entitled to every citizen regardless of gender or status. Among the people in Zambia, Clifford (1966) observed that;

> The great part of the day is spent with the community. Both men and women work the fields and children join the economic life. Birth, marriage and death, community occasions and conformity to the traditional customs and mores is highly respected than individuality

It is in this same tone of unity that community gets the power to overhaul peace among members as Asante observes, "The just person preserves the peace and wholeness of the community. This involves the avoidance of violence, fraud and other anti-social actions which destroy communal life and the pursuit of that which sustains the life of the community" (2003). Peck's (1987) argument cannot go unnoticed that, "The rules of community-making are the rules for effective communication…it is not just a global matter; it is a matter of concern…"

Such virtues, visa-a-viz., education, leadership development, religious matters, economic matters, relationship, unity and peace among community members, do not exist in a disintegrating community and if they do, we are afraid that it is for a short while. The question has to be raised, however, that, "Can the today's African leadership create a fundamental environment whereby our community members would feel at home in promoting and appropriating social life styles?"

14 SELECTED INTEGRATIVE QUOTATIONS REFLECTING THE AFRICAN CULTURE OF COMMUNITY

1. To do effective services…in traditional communities, the leader must have a good understanding of the people among whom he will serve (Margareth Traub)
2. Despite languages and cultural differences, the people of this continental community are one (Margareth Traub)
3. It is possible to recapture what was sacred in the African community (Sam Buti)
4. Within the human community that has lost the capacity to dialogue and exchange material, there is excessive permissiveness triggered by "do-not-care" attitude. Social disfunction thrives in such a society (Samuel Kamaleson)
5. …the maturity of the community is not a self-seeking maturity, but is a beneficial maturity to those who surround her (Samuel Kamaleson)
6. In African traditional world-view, the well-being of man is intimately connected with the well-being of the total creation (Mbiti)
7. A child in African communities must know its fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, grandfathers and grandmothers from early stages of life (Lutahoire)
8. …persons belong to community and are related to other beings (Lutahoire)
9. …a human being is always under the influence of his environment and temperament (Lutahoire)
10. Community is a spirit…is usually understood (Peck)
11. …community requires the ability to expose our wounds and our weakness to our fellow creatures (Peck)
12. If a man dreams a dream alone, it remains nothing but a dream. But when a people dream together, that dream can become a reality (African proverb)
13. To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so, involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community (Mbiti)
14. …both between man and man, and as well as between man and God…is essential for keeping interpersonal relationships in good repair and the community functioning for ultimate good of all concerned (Sine & Wendland)

CONCLUDING

The whole universe is not made up with equal globalized life values. The habitats of different geographical and status do not necessarily look at the same things and regard them as uniform. Different people have different life values.

The culture of community is a significant African thought value. These values advocate for life caring, sharing and relating. Intercultural experience among African people is seemingly becoming a problem with the fact that the gap between same community members keeps growing wider and wider. The assumption is that the sense of the

value of culture of community is deteriorating. Readdressing these community values would help in the whole exercise of bridging the gap.

In this paper I have attempted to remind readers on the strategic values that the culture of community was originally understood, appreciated and sustainably held. The paper has been a result of my experiential and a library study on the following sub titles; the problem, nature and purpose, process and practice, influence of community and finally reflective quotations on the culture of community in an African perspective. Much has not, however, been exhaustively said in this paper on the problem of African culture of community because to my own conviction I felt another topic would be needed to address or may be in another presentation by another presenter.

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