"AFRICAN HOSPITALITY AN ENDANGERED SPECIES": A CASE STUDY OF KENYA

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Abstract

This article critically examines how selected African theologians theorise on the concept of 'community' in the African context through their writings and oral discussions. It argues that uncritical theorisation on African community can be a catalyst to xenophobic conflict and a hindrance to real healing and reconciliation in Africa. African theologians have an ethical responsibility to purify and expand the understanding of 'community' to include the nation, and ultimately the community of nations. The article also makes a brief reference to Nigeria to further illustrate the various contexts of conflict.

Key Words: Conflict, xenophobia, ethics, community, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

University education plays a fundamental role in nation-building and in enhancing peaceful co-existence among people of different ethnic, racial, political, economic, and cultural identities. What is read, taught, heard, or watched on television has mesmerising effects on shaping lifestyles and relationships (Azumah 2001). As the highest centres of research and teaching, African universities and other institutions of higher learning not only offer a service to society, but are also strategic in shaping the worldview of people who later become decision-makers in society, and thus bring their opinions to bear on conflict situations in Africa.

The aim of this article is to examine how selected East African theologians theorise on the concept of community. It attempts to demonstrate how their ideas are received in universities and higher institutions of learning and how such ideas, through students, might have an influence on com-

munity relations in Africa. The article argues that there is a dire need for more critical reflection on the concept of community for better co-existence between members of various communities in Africa. A theological resource for reflecting on community - the Bible - is suggested.

The article begins by providing a definition of xenophobia and briefly outlining its various causes. More specifically, Kenya is discussed as a case study, showing how various causes of conflict bear on the expression of xenophobia in this country. The article then critically examines how several East African theologians reflect on the subject of community - both from a critical and less critical perspective - and how such reflections influence students and community relations in the society at large. Finally, the article proposes a number of new ways to reflect on community using the Bible as a resource.

2. DEFINITION AND CAUSES OF XENOPHOBIA

Xenophobia is defined as "the intense dislike, hatred or fear of 'others' perceived to be strangers" (Nyamnjoh 2006:5). Incidences of xenophobic conflict in Africa are many, with the most well-publicised ones including the Rwandan genocide of 1992, the conflict in Burundi, the ongoing conflict in Congo and Somalia, the violence in Kenya (December 2006 – January 2007), and the more recent xenophobic attacks which took place in South Africa during May 2008. One may argue that all these examples of conflict are centred on the fear of 'the other,' although each case has its own complexity of underlying causes. This article focuses especially on the Kenyan case because it is one that the author is most familiar with, having personally experienced it, and also because it provides a useful comparative study of conflict in Africa.

2.1 Politics, Religion and Issues of Identity

Smith (2008:1) argues that politics and religion play a role in conflicts over land and territory. By contrast, for philosopher John Gray (in Morris 2005:31), the "real" causes of conflict are material resources and their distribution. Religion and politics are secondary, not generic sources of conflict. However, conflict can also be understood metaphorically as the contest for hearts and minds, the competing ideologies, and the clash of civilizations as Huntington (1996:22-49) has argued. Although Huntington's hypothesis has received much criticism as being an unrealistic over-estimation of religion and culture in modern society, the contribution of religion and culture to conflict in the modern society cannot simply be dismissed. The world continues to witness many religion-based conflicts, such as the *Wahabbi* reform movement within Islam that calls Muslims back to the text of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith,* while the Hezbollah and Al-Qaida groups have allegedly been associated with conflicts in several parts of the world due to their hard-line positions on various issues (Ousman 2004:15). According to Ousman (2004:15), since Nigeria reverted to civilian rule in May 1999, several of her Northern states have introduced and extended the application of the Islamic Sharia Penal code. Lower courts that were previously limited to address matters of personal and civil law are entitled to judge criminal cases involving Muslims. Thus, there are fears that the rise of Islamists, together with the rise of intereligious violence, ethnic nationalism, and anti-western sentiments could transform Nigeria into a draw-card for violent militant Islamists, and consequently a haven for terrorist networks (Ousman 2004:15). Christian Pentecostal movements, with their strong emphasis on conversion and certain ways of interpreting the Bible, have also caused conflict in some parts of the world as a result of their insensitive disposition towards other religious groups (Wijsen 2007:75). There is

a real possibility for increased conflict between renewalist Islam and Pentecostal Churches since both are growing fast and are highly visible in the public sphere.

Conflict may also be understood as related to issues of identity and belonging, which have both physical and metaphorical dimensions. The competition to declare a place to be home, to establish a sense of belonging where physical space holds some inherent meaning that allows people to declare that here they belong, here they have roots and identity, can sometimes be very fierce (Smith 2008:1). Here the contest is not so much about the material value of a place, but about 'perceptions' that this particular 'place' belongs to 'us.' The Old Testament (OT) theologian, Walter Brueggemann (1977), underlines Dillstone's reflections on the distinction between space and place when he notes that space means a place without authority. Such a place is neutral or empty, waiting to be filled by anyone. However, a place is a space with historical significance, where some things have happened which are now in our memory, providing continuity and identity over the generations. In the indeginous Kenyan context, and certainly in the South African context, it could be argued that distinctions between space and place are less pronounced. The association of land with the ancestors clearly illustrates that land is intimately linked with history and meaning. Thus, in the Kenyan conflict, many people regarded as non-natives were chased away from legally owned land not just because of its material value but because of what it represented to the 'natives' - *their* land given to them by their ancestors, the place where the graves of their ancestors lay.

It is clear from the above that causes of conflict such as xenophobia are open to a variety of interpretations. Nyamnjoh's explanation of the causes of conflict is helpful as it combines a variety of factors. He states that conflict "often explains, as much as it is explained by, poverty, underdevel-

opment, economic disparities, and assumptions of social and cultural superiority" (Nyamnjoh 2006:5).

Issues of "identity," such as how people conceptualise "community" by ascribing a sense of belonging to some while excluding others, play a significant role in creating conflict. Therefore, discussions which take place in the academy and which have a bearing on the construction or reconstruction of identity ought to be taken seriously when seeking to alleviate conflict and to establish lasting peace and reconciliation. The post-election violence in Kenya provides empirical evidence on how issues of identity are significant in conflict situations.

2.2. 2007 Post-Election Violence in Kenya

Kenya suffered its worst conflict since independence following the announcements of the December 2007 election results of what had been a hotly contested presidential election. The violence was sparked off by charges that President Mwai Kibaki stole his way to re-election with opposition leader Raila Odinga and his supporters rejecting the declared victory. Protests degenerated into widespread violence as decades of economic frustration and ethnic suspicion spiralled out of control. In the days that followed, gangs of youth blocked Kenya's main roads and set fire to hundreds of homes of perceived 'outsiders'. In all, more than 1200 people were killed and over 500000 displaced ("Controversy over Inclusion of tribal identity," 2009). The effects of this crisis were felt not only in Kenya but also in surrounding land-locked East African countries such as Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi that depend on Kenya as a transit point for some of their goods (Kimani 2008:3).

Since the Kenyan post-election violence, which took place in December 2007, many attempts have been made to identify its possible causes. Subsequently, two important reports have been published in this regard, namely the *Kriegler* and

the *Waki* Reports[1]. Unfortunately, neither report seems to have focused on the relationship between what is taught in the academic institutions and conflict. For example, The Appointment of the Commission of Inquiry into Post Election Violence (CIPEV), better known as *The Waki Report* states:

> Furthermore, because the violence surrounding elections was ethnically directed, this increased distrust among different groups and vastly eroded any sense of national identity. Hence, ethnicity has now taken on a dangerous and negative connotation. The country should now deal with these issues. Currently, violence is endemic, is used routinely to resolve political differences, and therefore threatens the future of the nation. In conclusion the CIPEV observed that the country must also make decisions to change the way politics is conducted, as well as to its intersection with other issues related to land, marginalization and inequality, and youths short of that violence including that related to elections will continue to appear and will be ignited ever more readily (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung 2009).

While the above report identifies factors which contributed to violence and what needs to be done to address the situation, the role of educational systems and processes in the construction of various identities which may directly or indirectly influence violent situations was not considered. Therefore, the next section seeks to show how theological reflection in the academy might influence conflict situations in East Africa.

2.3 Theologising in EAST AFRICA

According to Gifford (2008:18), East African theological reflections are primarily produced by members of mainstream churches in their theological colleges and in public universi-

[1] The Kriegler and Waki Commissions of Inquiry were products of the mediation process that was led by Kofi Annan led and which brought peace to Kenya after the post-election violence of December 2007. The Kenyan Coalition Government, led by President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, instituted both commissions.

ties. Such literature is published mainly as papers arising from gatherings of the Ecumenical Symposium of East African Theologians (EATWOT Kenya), and the local branch of the Circle for Concerned Women Theologians (Gifford 2008:18) Thus, the "provenance determines the format of most of East African theological literature, namely the short paper" (Gifford 2008:18). Therefore, the corpus of East African theological literature has few monographs. The few books that are produced are generally collections of articles rather than extensive treatments of one topic. There are, however, some exceptions, namely theologians and church people who have extensively and theologically reflected on political themes such as the late Anglican Bishop Henry Okullu in *Quest for Justice* (1997), and Bishop Gideon Githiga's in *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism: Development of Church – State Relations in Kenya, with particular reference to the Years after Political Independence 1963-1992* (2002). Other names with impressive publications in this area include Jesse Mugambi and Laurenti Magessa from Kenya and Tanzania respectively.

Gifford (2008:18) argues that although issues of conflict in Kenya and East Africa in general tend to have socio-political causes, theological reflections in Kenya do not give adequate attention to this reality, namely the relationship between politics, power, and conflict. Instead, most East African writings have tended to focus primarily on issues of culture (Gifford, 2008:18). According to Gifford (2008:18), as recently as the 1990s, when the Churches (or perhaps individual churchmen) were very vocal in political interventions, "this was hardly a matter of political theology: the Churches were using the relative immunity accorded them to say what many were thinking but could not express". While I agree with Gifford's concern regarding the comparatively insufficient attention given to extensive theological publications in East Africa that focus on

issues of politics, power and conflict, I do not subscribe to his assertion that the engagement of particular Church leaders in political matters was not underpinned by theological conviction. Bishop Okullu's public pronouncements (see Terence 2008:73) as well as his writings (such as Okullu 1974), to give but one example, exemplify a clear theological basis.

Why are issues of culture so central to East African theology? This can be traced back to the early 1990s and was stimulated by missionaries. For the Catholics, this began with a contribution for the 1994 African Synod of Bishops which took inculturation as among its key themes. The distinctive aim of inculturation may be captured by the following statement: "African Christianity in particular and African culture in general, will be re-constituted from characteristically African frames of reference" (Mugambi 2003:145).

An important assumption of inculturation theology is that African culture has been sidelined and despised from the time of the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism hence the need to recapture the African's cultural identity. Thus, in a number of writings by East African scholars (for instance, Mugambi 2003 and Gathogo 1993), the tendency is to seek resources within the African worldview for reconstructing the African continent. Gathogo (1998:39) captures this as follows:

> These theologies of reconstruction are driven by the need to re-write our own stories; hence reconstruct our past histories, in order to genuinely move forward; and this can be seen as the key to addressing the concerns of our contemporary Africa.

The rise of the 'African Renaissance project' advocated by amongst others, the former President of South Africa, Thambo Mbeki, is a good contemporary example within the political sphere of the desire to take recourse to African resources for the reconstruction of the continent. Lately, the in-

fluence of this political emphasis on 'renaissance' is being reflected in theological, philosophical, and economic academic works such as those of Mugambi and Gathogo (see Mugambi 2003:143 and Gathogo 1993:39).

2.4. Inculturation Theology in East Africa

Gifford (2008:21) rightly observes that inculturation theology is mainly propagated through the "comparative method" where African realities are related to scriptural or traditional data. Many theological articles (such as Mbiti 1970:259) begin from the cultural practices of an African ethnic group, and then proceed to suggest what such values can bring into Christian understanding and practice of doctrine. However, there are also a considerable number of East African theologians whose theological starting point is usually the Bible before moving on to suggest resonances within African culture (see Kyato 1974). In the sections below, I will examine some discussions regarding African understandings of community, focusing particularly on theologians from the Inculturation School and those who are more critical of their opinions.

3. UNDERSTANDINGS OF COMMUNITY IN EAST AFRICAN THEOLOGY

The concept of *community* as a cultural and analytical category is important because its conceptualisation and practice have implications for community relationships. Mbiti (1969:104) observes:

> [T]he deep sense of kinship, with all it implies has been one of the strongest forces in traditional African life. Kinship is reckoned through blood and betrothal. It is kinship which controls social relationships between people in a given community, it governs marital customs and regulations, determines the behaviour of one individual toward another.

The concept is one of those that are mostly referred to in projecting African values as being 'positive'. Thus, many scholars have pointed to "African values" as a possible panacea to such intolerance in society (see e.g. Nyamnjoh 2006, Smith 2008, Magessa 1997, Shorter 1996).

In this section, I highlight the thinking of some African theologians who present the African concept of community in a positive light followed by section 4, in which I consider the statements of those who look at African understandings and practice of community in a more critical and thus, in my view, a more helpful light.

Various African theologians have attempted to discuss African traditional concepts of community in a positive light. For example, Sindima (in Magessa 1997:66) observes:

> We cannot understand persons; indeed we cannot have personal identity without reference to other persons… The notion of being–together is intended to emphasize that life is the actuality of living in the present together with people, other creatures, and the earth.

Magessa (1997) argues as though the notion of individuality is absent in Africa. He also does not attempt to critically appraise the concept of community in Africa by, for example focusing on the weaknesses of "communitarianism" in Africa.

Mulago has an equally positive approach to the traditional African understanding of community. He observes (Mulago 1969:139):

> The life of the individual is grasped as it is shared. The member of the tribe, the clan, the family, knows that he does not live to himself, but within the community. He knows that apart from the community he would no longer have the means of existence.

This is once again a rather descriptive assessment of community in Africa.

Mbiti (1969:2) has remarked: “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”. The possible inhumanness of ‘community’ is not explored at all in Mbiti’s assessment.

Theuri’s (2002:194) is a most nostalgic view of African communitarianism :

> [P]rior to the coming of the colonialists, Africa had its own traditional system. This system encouraged Africans to live in harmony and to share the goods of the land communally. The aim of production was not profit but sustenance of the community. However, with the coming of the foreign culture the seeds of individualism and consumerism have overtaken the African spirit of generosity, hospitality and solidarity. The spirit where each person was for the other’s welfare is long gone and class structure system has taken root in Africa.

Theuri (2002:194) further unequivocally states:

> Within the traditional African Social organization, there was no class struggle because a single community member’s problem was a moral responsibility for all the other society members - every one was ‘equal’ to each other; resources were equally distributed among all. The sick, the orphaned, the widows, the Africans lived in the model that is only reflective of the Early Church.

In similar vein, the Kenyan Government Sessional Paper (No.10 of 1965) laments, “The sharp class divisions that existed in Europe and America have now replaced the traditional system”.

It is clear that the above statements tend to be overly positive about community relations in traditional Africa. For these scholars, things went wrong with the advent of modernity and colonialism.

4. CRITICAL VOICES

The African continent has not lacked critical voices in this regard, but they are few and sometimes unknown in some parts of Africa. In his 2008 article, "The tribal rot that is in Kenyan politics," Barasa comments critically on the notion of community in Kenya in the light of recent post-election violence. His article deserves extended attention:

> Most individuals act according to the psychological, social and religious foundations of their local communities and operate in the shared belief that the political is communal... the communal ethic is clearly visible in the manner in which Kenyans vote in general elections. It is not the vision of the politician that seems to matter, but their tribe… It is almost a norm in Kenya that prominent politicians are crowned community 'elders'. These elders command enormous respect and following from their communities to such an extent that the elder's word is never challenged unless he or she 'betrays' the community. Similarly, the logic of elections is focused on the proximate, which is, the local and communal. In this rationality, the greater good of the nation as a whole is suspended while short-term and micro-perspective dominate. From this communal ideology, local communities in Kenya [and elsewhere in Africa] choose to act in any manner feasible to protect their communal rationality and realized or perceived material gain... Thus, violence becomes one practical approach to ensuring that the community remains resilient and protected from actual and perceived enemies.

Barasa's analysis clearly indicates the role that identity and power played in the violence following the 2007 Kenyan elections. Gathogo (2008:41) rightly argues:

> [P]rimarily, ubuntu expresses itself well in the provision of assistance to 'our people' who may mean – the members of the blood relatives, tribemates, clanmates, political camp mates, social camp makes, and so forth. This has its obvious dangers in that the criterion in determining who is 'our person' and 'who is not one of us' is indeed a tricky one'. In the African Theology of reconstruction, its chief proponents such as Elelwani Bethuel Farisani, Hannah Kinoti, Charles Villa-

> Vicencio, and Jesse Mugambi have all failed to see the political motivation behind Nehemiah's rebuilding project of the wall of the City of Jerusalem.

Thus in analyzing discussions of community, we must be able to see beyond the terms and uncover their political underpinnings especially in conflict-ridden contexts.

There are some problems with excessive communitarianism. For example, the communal ties may be so strong that an individual may need extreme courage for self-assertion within the community. Further, communitarianism can lead to bad practices in socio-economic life. For example, community members can abuse the traditional solidarity provided by a relative, although this relative is burdened with responsibility for his own wife and children.

Community pressure can at times be enormously strong. And because the individual has to wait for seniority and the community before taking any initiative – in contrast to a case where the individual usually stimulates the community - it often causes frustration for the progressive individual. The individual is also limited to a specific position in the social hierarchy.

The basis for one refraining from doing wrong is simply because there will be shame when one's faults are exposed, causing one to lose one's position in society. Therefore, personal relations are often more important for African than the truth. Thus, if one realizes that speaking the truth is going to cause trouble and incite people to hostility and hatred, one will rather keep quite. In the churches, this tendency has resulted in the sins of the members and the church officials being concealed - even though the gossip continues behind the person's back!

Writing in 1978, an African Christian theologian, Adeyemo (in Van der Walt 1997:28), argues that the negative side of Afri-

can communalism is that salvation and blessedness for the African (even the African Christian) often entails acceptance by society. Muller (in Van der Walt 1997:28), a researcher who wrote in 1972, observes: "Good group liaison is to me the central core of the urban African's view of life, and constitutes his actual idol, to which he is enslaved". He further observes that the church would have to be much more cohesive as a group in order to attract people, while also accepting that traditional communalism is by nature (group) egoism, and differs from God's scriptural revelation.

One radical critic of African realities is Ka Mana. Mana (2004:29) does not blame only European colonial administrators and missionaries for the state of affairs in Africa today. He also blames the African heritage and values, for example, Africans' over-concern with unseen reality, which makes them prisoners of tradition and not future oriented. He argues that attempts to solve Africa's problems by going back to the past alienate Africa. Wiredu (1980:5) refers to Africa's "three evils" found in its culture, namely anachronism, authoritarianism, and supernaturalism.

"The communitarian social structure, an outstanding and famous feature of the African cultures, has thus come to nurture patronage," argues Gyeke (1997:254). This emphasis on community leaves offices with unqualified and incompetent personnel and promotes overstaffing, inefficiency, and laziness. It destroys incentive and drives away qualified and competent people (Gyeke 1997:254). It has been argued that communitarianism may have functioned well in closed societies, but has become dysfunctional in present day-open ones.

The above examples of African voices critical of community have intentionally been largely descriptive. However, the following is common to all of them:

- Certain conceptions and practices of community lead to a political ideology of ‘we’ versus ‘them’ which is potential seed for conflict.
- These notions of community disable the community’s capacity for self-criticism.
- The notions obliterate the individual’s capacity for self-determination.

In order to discern the link between discussions on community in the academy and their influence on students and society at large, I conducted qualitative interviews with 40 undergraduate theology students between February and May 2008. I interviewed this particular group of students because they were being trained to be ministers in the various churches in Kenya, with the possibility of their becoming decision-makers at the grass-root level in their day-to-day pastoral work. The objectives of the interview were to determine:

1. Their understanding of African writers on community.
2. Their own appreciation of the role of ‘community’ in peace and reconciliation in the context of post-election violence in Kenya.

Out of the 40 interviewees, only 7 showed an awareness of critical religious literature on the African conceptualization and practice of ‘community’. Thus, most of the students tended to be affirmative of African culture, especially regarding the practice of community. Even when I challenged them about the failure of African culture, to stop recent post- election violence, for example, the majority of the respondents argued that the ‘other,’ in this case the West or the politician, was to blame. Most of the respondents blamed the ‘West’ for the problems facing the African continent.

Among the most commonly referred to scholars (65%) was Mbiti - perhaps an indication of his works being widely consulted by the students or their teachers, or his long presence on the theological landscape. By contrast, younger African philosophers such as Wiredu and Huotonji were not mentioned at all. The African agency in recent post-election violence in Kenya was missing in their answers. Instead, 60% of the respondents pointed to the intervention of the Western countries as being 'interference' in the affairs of Kenya. Among the 40 interviewees, 36 quoted Mbiti's statement on the centrality of community relations in Africa.

This once again led me to consider whether there is a co-relation between ideas in the academy and what happens on the ground as in the case of recent conflicts in Kenya.

6. IDEOLOGY AND CONFLICT

Academic and scientific scholarship in the social sciences may either be effected to serve specific ideological interests, or used by successive generations to serve such purposes. In *African religions and philosophy,* Mbiti (1969) decries past studies of African traditional religions and philosophy as having been unsympathetic and derogatory. He provides examples of such scholarship as having been represented by people such as Prichard (1965), Tylor (1871), and Spencer (1885) amongst others. He then commends "modern and current studies" which are represented by people such as Temples (1958), Danguah (1944), Nketia (1955), Kagame (1956), and Idowu (1962), which tends to be sympathetic to African traditional religions. Tayob (1999:ix), commenting on the same subject, argues:

> Stories - especially academic ones – are all carefully constructed out of particular interests and methodologies. There is no interesting story that does not originate from somewhere, rooted in interests and prejudices.

While sympathy is one stance in the study of the 'other' religion, this approach in African scholarship can have far-reaching negative consequences for community relations. The history of colonialism, imperialism, and missionarism testifies to this fact (see Mall 2000:35). While most studies by African philosophers, historians, theologians, and political scientists acknowledge that pre-colonial scholarship in religious studies as well as in other disciplines tended to be ideologically coloured from a Eurocentric perspective, they often fall in the same trap, which Ghanaian philosopher Appiah (in Robertson:1995:36) has referred to as a "reverse discourse".

> The pose of repudiation actually presupposes the cultural institutions of the West and the ideological matrix in which, they in turn, are imprecated. Railing against the cultural hegemony of the West, the nativists are of its party without knowing it…
>
> (D)efiance is determined less by 'indigenous' notions of resistance than by the dictates of the West's own Herderian legacy – its highly elaborated ideologies of national autonomy, of language and literature as their cultural substrate. Native nostalgia, in short is largely fueled by that Western sentimentalism so familiar after Rousseau; few things, then, are less native than nativism in its current form.

Appiah's analysis explicates a particularly important point - namely that much of the conception of contemporary locality and indigeneity is itself historically contingent upon encounters between one civilisational region and another. Thus, within such interactions, many of them historically imperialistic, has developed a sense of particularistic locality (Robertson 1995:38) which may have a negative impact on intercommunity relations. In a similar vein, Wijsen and Tanner (2001:35) have observed that identity is relational and comparative. People acquire the feeling of being themselves in relation to others by inclusion and by contrast. Thus, identity emerges within an insider-outsider dichotomy.

7. HYPOTHESIS

The fascination for cultural identity is worldwide. For example, pastoral workers regard cultural identity as a basis for an authentic Christianity in Africa (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:74-75). However, it is also true that cultural identity can be destructive to the life of the community. Development workers view it as a source of resistance and progress (Wijsen & Tanner 2002:74-75). This has been witnessed especially at the Great Lakes where different cultures have sought to use their strength for political gain (Wijsen & Tanner 2002).

Given all the above, one can only but hypothesise as follows:

1. Selective use of university teaching material in religious scholarship can lead to prejudice[3] and the lack of a spirit of self-criticism that may indirectly account for incidents of xenophobia in Africa.
2. Because of the lack of a broad spectrum of materials including books, for example, by Francophone writers, the position of students on the concept of community is limited and one-sided.
3. This one-dimensional approach to the study of community in Africa may also be a reflection of the ideological bias of the lecturers concerned. Thus, it is possible that most lecturers of religion in Africa begin their discussion of community in Africa from a positive perspective, even when they are quite capable of being more critical. This approach may be accounted for partly by the reverse discourse tendencies earlier referred to in this paper.

[3] The term "prejudice" refers to a biased evaluation of a group based on real or imagined characteristics of the group members (Nelson in Rukyaa 2007:189).

8. TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNITY

8.1. Re-imagining Community

One cannot deny that ethnic or tribal belonging is important, even though it has degenerated into ethnocentrism and tribalism in Africa and elsewhere in the world (as has been amply demonstrated in the recent xenophobic conflicts in South Africa and Kenya). Although this state of affairs is to be deplored and combated, the notion of community can be expanded to embrace a wider human reality as demanded by the present global reality. Thus, for example, community reconstructed in the African sense would not mean the limitless expansion of human power and prosperity, as aspects of technological globalisation, business and economy would have us believe. Existence is not collective, not individual, but relational.

There is also a need to avoid the paganisation of indigenous culture (Wijsen & Tanner 2001) - as some missionaries, who see local customs and beliefs as idolatry, tend to do - while also avoiding the glorification of indigenous cultures (as some African theologians and anthropologists have done).

8.2. Towards a Biblical Theology of Hospitality

In seeking to reconstruct the concept of community in the African context, the Bible becomes an important resource. This is because the biblical model and mandate to welcome and to share hospitality with “strangers,” those who are outside one’s particular community or community of faith, is at the very heart of the Christian tradition. In the OT, hospitality is underscored with classical stories, such as Abraham and Sarah welcoming the three strangers (Gen 18), and with God’s command that Israel should welcome the stranger and they sojourner because they too had belonged to those categories of people during their slavery in Egypt (see Lev 19:33-34). In addition to specific OT stories which helped to shape

the hospitality tradition, the overriding 'grand narrative' of Israel's history is important. Embedded within the covenant between God and Israel was Israel's identity as an alien and its related responsibility to strangers (Lev 19:33- 34).

In the New Testament (NT), discussions of hospitality continue and extend, but also transform OT understandings. Hospitality in the NT includes the entire ministry of Jesus in word and deed. Jesus' gracious and sacrificial hospitality expressed in his life, ministry, and death should undergird the hospitality of his followers. In Romans 15:7, for example, Paul implores believers to "welcome one another" as Christ has welcomed them.

To understand the NT concept of hospitality, we need to explore the words "foreigner" (or stranger) and "sojourner". Some versions of the Bible use the word "alien". In Matthew 25:35, the Bible uses the Greek word *xenos* (from which we derive the word "xenophobia") to refer to foreigners and strangers. In our context today, we may compare them to immigrants, tourists, students, temporary workers, undocumented workers, visitors for business, and others. In the NT tradition, there was a sacred bond between host and guest, and hospitality was seen as one of the pillars of morality. Though part of everyday life, hospitality is never far removed from its divine origin.

Finally, the eschatological vision of the Book of Revelation refers to the city of Jerusalem as a metaphor to show a life lived in relation with God. The image presented here espouses space as imbued with sacrality, meaning that there is no space-place / secular-sacred divide. In addition, place is not defined in terms of exclusivity as private, commodified space, but it is defined inclusively as home to every tribe, nation, race, and tongue.

This Biblical theology of hospitality, briefly outlined above, ought to inform and transform reflections in the academy regarding community relations. Such reflections would in turn have a spillover effect through graduates who serve in hurting communities that abound in Africa, bringing healing and reconciliation.

9. CONCLUSION.

This article sought to examine theological and philosophical reflections on community in the East African context and to suggest their possible relation to conflict. It also endeavoured to argue that there is a need to re-discover new ways of understanding community in order to contribute to peace in Africa. From my survey of selected books by African religious scholars, and discussions with students of theology, I discovered that most of the materials used tend to be overly positive about traditional community relations in Africa. Thus, Africa is presented as having been good before 'the other' came and tampered with the peace of her peoples. This generally one-dimensional emphasis on community relations has the potential to exacerbate rather than contribute to peaceful co-existence among communities. It is important, therefore, that African scholars of religion, theology, and philosophy seek to be more critical of African cultures, showing students 'other' voices if lasting peace is to be established on the continent. The Bible, with its emphasis on hospitality to all peoples, irrespective of their origins, is an important resource in looking at other ways of understanding 'the other'.

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