

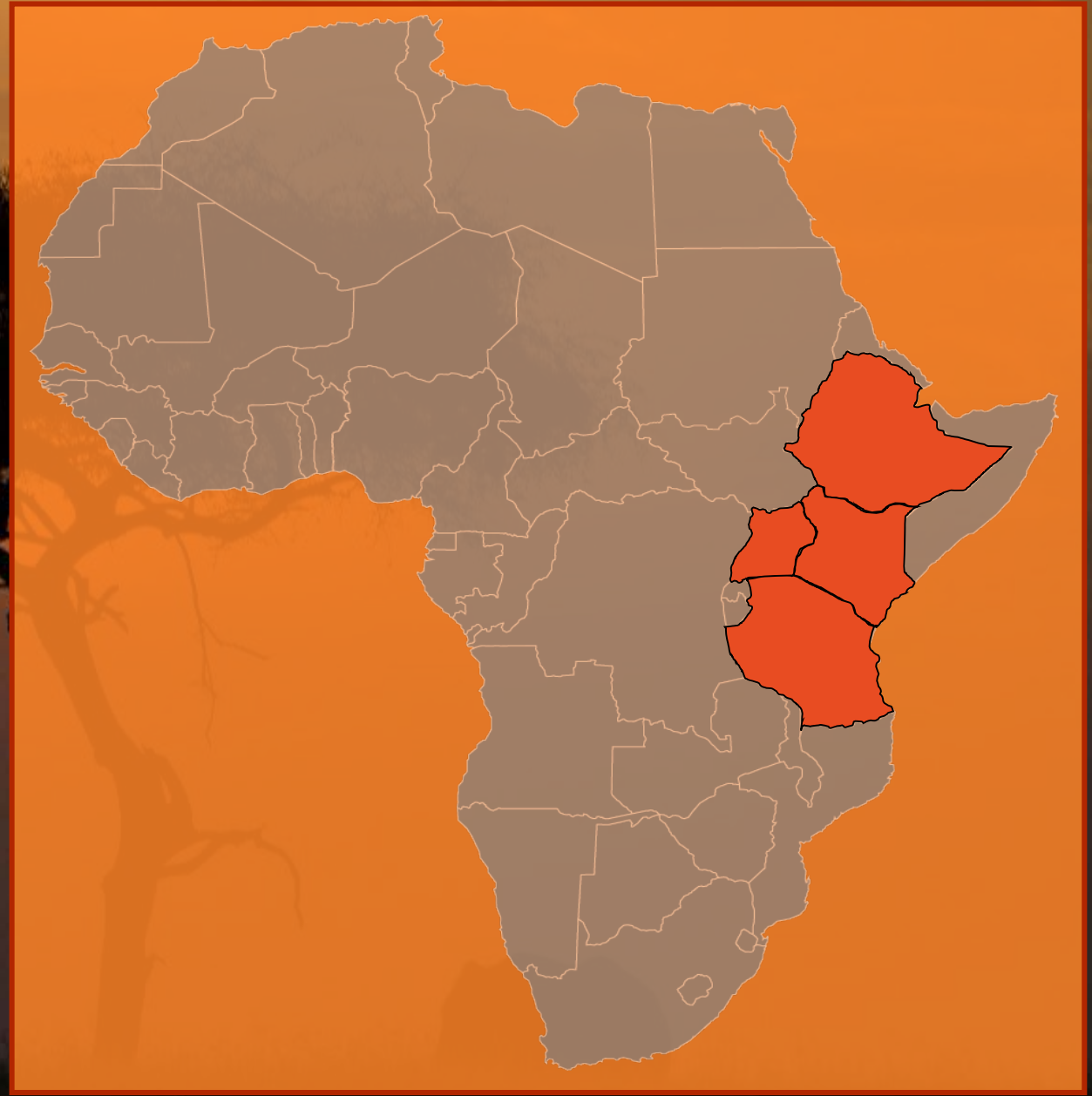
East African Perspectives of Family and Community And How They Can Inform Western Ecclesiology

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East Africa

Ethiopia
Kenya
Tanzania
Uganda



Family Ministry

- 1) Writings on Family Ministry indicated underdeveloped views of community by Westerners
- 2) Need to look outside of the West
- 3) Africans are commonly known as having a strong grasp of “community”



A Common Statement

“[East Africans] are so much better at community than [Westerners] are.”



An Accurate Swahili Proverb

“Iwapo unataka kwenda haraka, nenda peke yako;
iwapo mnataka kwenda mbali, nendeni pamoja.”



An Accurate Swahili Proverb

“Iwapo unataka kwenda haraka, nenda peke yako;
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“If you want to go quickly, go alone;
If you want to go far, go together.”



Problem

- 1) What are present day views and practices of family and community in East Africa (EA)?
- 2) How can EA perspectives of family and community aid Western views and practices of ecclesiology?



The Hypothesis

Present day East Africans still hold traditional views of family and community



Literature review

1) Identity

“I Think, therefore I am”¹

VS

“Since we are, therefore I am”² Or, “I belong; therefore I am.”³



Literature review

On African views of *solidarity*:

“Mutual economic and social support, hospitableness, putting group interests ahead of individual interest to the extent of showing a definite bias against individuality, and active participation in society.’ In a word, it means interdependence rather than independence. It also means living in community rather than living in social or spatial isolation.”⁴

“Man is nothing without men.”⁵



Literature review

2) Value Systems

- Relationships exist for the purpose of relationships, and everything becomes a means to that end
- What is “right” and “wrong” is determined by whether or not something benefits or harms one’s relationships with others⁶

African view: “A friendship devoid of financial or other material considerations is a friendship devoid of a fundamental ingredient: mutual dependence.”⁷

Western View: “Disinterested friendship is the ideal [...]. Any friendship that includes material considerations is suspect.”⁸



Literature review

Role of community in social support

“It takes a village to raise a child.”

“[...] There is high moral value placed on family social support. That is, shared caretaking and support is not seen only as a convenient, available way to keep one’s household going (although it does assist in that goal); shared support is also viewed as a morally valuable, appropriate way to respond to meeting this goal.”⁹

:[In] every area of life, the individual has one basic responsibility: to strengthen the life of the community, be it clan, tribe or nation.”¹⁰



Results

1) General Perspectives

“Life is Common”¹⁶

Life is shared among the members of a community



Results

Structure of Families

“Father, mother, and their children.”

“Typically, the roles of the families are divided between the roles of the daughters and the roles of the sons, and the parents are the providers.”¹⁷



Results

Structure of Families

“Father, mother, children, adopted children (nieces, nephews, and other biologically-related children who are not the offspring of the parents they live with), relatives, and grandparents.”¹⁸



Results

Function of Families

- Difficult to differentiate from functions of community
 - Shared support
 - Shared responsibilities
 - Motivation is to strengthen the family through individual contribution



Results

Functions of Families

1. Relative Caretaking

a) Sibling Caretaking; care that siblings provide for one another within a family, regardless of presence or absence of parents

- i. Give money and necessary support to siblings¹⁹
- ii. Responsible for school fees and related educational costs²⁰

b) Family Care

- i. “The family is the counseling office; both nuclear and extended. If there is a problem that the immediate family cannot help with, you can have extended family help you.”²¹
- ii. “Not even the pastor is sought for counseling.”²²



Results

Functions of Families

1. Relative Caretaking

c) Child “lending”

- i. “[it is] not unusual for people to have their relatives live with them, such as nieces and nephews, and be treated no different than their own children.”²³



Results

Functions of Families

2. Roles within the home

- a) Men eat separately from women²⁴
- b) “Women do not allow men into the kitchen.”²⁵
- c) Older siblings responsible for the care of the house in the absence of parents²⁶
- d) “House Help” or “House Helper”
 - i. Hired by the family to help around the house (cooking, cleaning, childcare)²⁷
 - ii. “House helpers are treated just as their own children, and it is expected that they be treated that way.”²⁸



Results

Who is Family?

1. “mother/father/children” or simply blood related
2. Close friends²⁹
3. Non-biologically related only if they have been accepted as family³⁰
4. Those who share a common social bearing³¹



Results

Who is Family?

Common use of “family” language

“Baba” (father)

“Mama” (mother)

“Kaka” (brother)

“Dada” (sister)



Results

Functions of Community

1. Communal Discipline
 - a) Children discipline

“[If] I can see your kids doing something wrong, I punish them. [...] I can even beat them. In the evening, I can tell their dad what happened. [...] If you don’t rebuke them, then in the evening the villagers will say, ‘those kids did this and this. Where were you?’ If you were there, you would be in trouble because you did nothing.”³²

“Children are expected to treat men and women in their community as their own parents, and neighbors can discipline children.”³³



Results

Functions of Community

1. Communal Discipline
 - a) Children discipline
 - b) “Mob justice”
 - i. Stripping inappropriately dressed women
 - ii. Public humiliation

The Responsibility of administering discipline and maintaining social expectations rests upon the members of the community



Results

Functions of Community

2. Sharing of resources

- a) “What is yours is mine, and what is mine is ours.”
- b) EAs never have a budget set aside,³⁴ because “What is gotten is used.”³⁵
 - i. “How do we help [this other person] before ourselves?”³⁶
 - ii. Money distribution
 - iii. Grills
 - iv. Slippers
 - v. Jackets



Results

Functions of Community

2. Sharing of resources

- a) “What is yours is mine, and what is mine is ours.”
- b) EAs never have a budget set aside,³⁴ because “What is gotten is used.”³⁵
- c) *Harambee*; a community fundraiser for a large expense³⁷
 - i. Hospital bills
 - ii. Churches
 - iii. Funerals
 - iv. Weddings
 - v. School fees
 - vi. College tuition³⁸



Results

Functions of Community

3. Expectations of living in community

a) Regular participation

- i. “People are automatically included in everything happening in their presence.”³⁹
- ii. “If something happens to your house, the government workers will ask the neighbors, ‘what happened? Where were you? What did you do?’”⁴⁰
- iii. Growing difference between urban and rural areas



Results

Functions of Community

3. Expectations of living in community
 - a) Regular participation
 - b) Community care of children
 - i. “If I am gone, my neighbor can take care of my children.”⁴¹
 - ii. Orphans are cared for by the community⁴²
 - iii. “Many people are doing the same thing, just embracing someone else’s child they are not related to.”⁴³



Results

Functions of Community

3. Expectations of living in community
 - a) Regular participation
 - b) Community care of children
 - c) Hospitality towards guests
 - i. “Visitors are treated as family.”⁴⁴
 - ii. Household schedule follows after the needs/desires of the guest

“If you are visiting someone’s home, they take full responsibility for your needs. They house, feed and entertain you, and you are not expected to pay for anything. You are under their roof, and this means you should have no needs that they cannot provide.”⁴⁵



Conclusion

- 1) Hypothesis: Present day East Africans still hold traditional views of family and community
- 2) Thesis answered:
 1. How present day East African families and communities function
 2. Things to be admired
 3. Things to consider



Conclusion

“Iwapo unataka kwenda haraka, nenda peke yako;
iwapo mnataka kwenda mbali, nendeni pamoja.”

“If you want to go quickly, go alone;
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Conclusion

- 4) How East African perspectives of family and community can inform Western ecclesiology
 1. Increased expectations for family and community members
 2. Inclusive definition of “community”
 3. Shared responsibility for raising children
 4. Shared resources between community members



“Iwapo unataka kwenda haraka, nenda peke yako;
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Endnotes

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