

African Personality: An Anthropological Perspective for Leadership Development in Africa

by

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Abstract

This paper examined the concept of African personality among the Shona people of Zimbabwe in an effort to discover the meaning of 'personhood' from an African perspective and show this understanding relates to the development of leaders, and the promotion of human dignity. Using a qualitative approach, the study conducted in-depth interviews of traditional leaders, government leaders and youth concerning their understanding of the African personality. The study was premised on the understanding that African people have a unified vision of reality in which there is no room for irreducible dichotomies between matter and spirit, religion and daily life, and between body and soul. Results from the survey showed that as much as people cry for the return to the traditional cultural practices, colonialism, religion, global forces present critical resistance. Lessons obtained from the study point towards the need for a norm-entrepreneurship in order to establish a global person, and that the African personality is relevant as Africa contributes to the establishment of the global person.

Key words: African personality, *ubuntu*, acting person, norm-entrepreneurship, global personality.

Introduction

The study of African leadership in its attempt to promote the sanctity of life against moral evils like wars, conflicts, human trafficking, abortions and rape will be incomplete without a thorough understanding of the concept of personality in the African context. Literature on African personality barely exists outside the discourses on African philosophy where attempts are made to justify the existence of African history and philosophies against the Western classical philosophies. The existing literature on African personality testifies to the fluidity of the concept depending on whether one is defining it from a cultural, sociological, psychological, political or anthropological standpoint.

Luminary thinkers on African philosophy, religion and culture have testified to the complexity of the idea of Africa personality. Mbiti (1969: 269) stated that there is complete lack of knowledge about what the concept means, what to do with it and what to do about it in the current literature. Nkrumah (1964) remarked that African personality lacks clarity of meaning or distinctness of conceptualisation. Kaunda (1971), speaking on African humanism, defended African personality from the misconceptions of Western writers who fail to appreciate that, for the African, personality should have an intrinsic value of its own and the needs of every person should be taken as the criteria to measure progress.

This paper takes an anthropological position that African personality can best be understood from the African ontology which, according to Mbiti (1969: 50), is expressed in five leadership categories of God, the spirits, human beings, animals and plants, and phenomena and objects without biological life. It denies the bio-ethical arguments that make a distinction between a human being and a human person. It views personality as a way of conceptualising the identity and existential reality of the African person. It answers the question: Who am I as an African and how do I relate to other human beings and the created reality? This quest for identity is at the centre of *ubuntu (unhu)*, where the individual worthiness of a person is not measured by his/her contributions but by the fact that one is a member of the tribe (Kaunda, 1971).

It is the contention of this paper that the study of African personality has a strong bearing on our understanding of leadership within the African context. African personality studies will inform the values that leaders put into their leadership. It will shape the qualities of African leaders and can lead to a deeper appreciation of the dignity of human beings and respect for individual rights. It is a quest for identity and the foundation of our cultural values. Further, his paper takes a pragmatic approach that classifies all actions that militate against the well-being of people as moral evils. These evils include tribal and ethnic conflicts that are prevalent in Africa which have caused deaths, suffering and poverty. It also includes criminal activities like murder, rape, torture, political violence, human trafficking, lack of respect for human rights, abortions and discrimination - all of which undermine the dignity of the human person.

The paper attempts to locate the soul of African personality without claiming to provide answers the complexities of the debate. It acknowledges the historical forces that have influenced the understanding of African personality, but tries to relate the core values to the modern debate on human dignity. A field analysis was undertaken to understand the current generation of African people view of African personality and its relevance to integral development.

Understanding Personality

According to Okemwa (1997: 62-63), the term 'person' comes from the Latin '*persona*' whose Greek version is '*prosopon*' and has a double meaning. The first meaning is that of a mask used to be worn by actors in Greek and Roman drama. The second meaning is that of face, visage, role, character or part that is presented by an actor in a drama. Person, which in this sense, is compatible with Okemwa's analysis, is a character in a play or story. The Random House College Dictionary (1988) defines mask as a 'disguise' or to 'conceal'. This implies that in personality, a certain reality is or stands under what is seen or noticed and that acting is properly characteristic of a person (Okemwa, 1997). This reality that stands underneath what we notice is what Nkemnkia (1999) calls the dynamic vital force in African personality.

In psychology, personality sometimes signifies the basic constituent elements of the ego like body and soul. It is defined as an individual's distinct and relatively enduring pattern of thoughts, feelings, motives and behaviours. In social and cultural anthropology, personality is often taken to designate the characteristics of an individual or group of individuals, especially as a result of learning or education. In social sciences, 'person' sometimes designated one who is capable of possessing rights or obligations (Nyamiti, 1990).

Khoapa (1980: 9) makes a distinction between the Western liberal concepts of man with African as the basis for understanding African personality. He asserts that:

The African's conception of man sees biological life and spiritual life meeting in the human being and neither the one nor the other being present alone. The essence of human life is the unity of both principles. Man shares biological life (natural life) with the animal, but spiritual life divides him from the animal and gives him his personality.

This spiritual dimension of an African is best understood from a cultural perspective. The relationship between culture and personality stems from the fact that personality is mostly shaped by environmental factors and to a lesser extent by genetic influence. However, chief among the environmental factors that impact on personality are cultural influences (Benet-Martínez & Oishi, 2006). According to Triandis (1996). Culture consists of shared meaning systems that form the basis for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among members who share a common language, a historic period, and a geographic location. A number of studies have established that culture is a key determinant of personality or what it means to be a person (Church, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1998; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

In order to understand the cultural constituents of African personality, this paper examines some fundamental cultural aspects of the human person. These aspects confer upon a person, rights, obligations, dignity and worth. The four essential aspects identified are: the vitalistic dimension, sacred dimension, relationality, and freedom and responsibility which have been identified as constituting the core elements of African personality discourse.

The Conception of African Personality

African people do not conceive of personal identity apart from life in its totality, that is, where they come from, what they do, whom they associate with, their relations and their beliefs. This life is not considered abstractly, but is experienced in concrete existence, accompanied by vital functions and the good things of life like food, drink, wealth, honour (Nyamiti, 1990: 30). Loss of such elements is a diminution and extinction of life and personal dignity. A person is, therefore, one who has life in its fullness. This personal life is not a static reality, but a dynamic process realised through different stages of growth.

Nkemnkia (1999: 165) further maintains that African thought has a unified vision of reality in which there is no room for irreducible dichotomies between matter and spirit, religious tension and daily life, and between soul and body. The principle behind this unified vision is what he called the '*Vital Force*'. The supreme vital force, the source of life and life-giver, according to African culture, is God, who is the 'person' par excellence and He is the one who gives existence and increase of life and power to all other persons. Hence, the priority of life over entity forms the basis of African personality.

The Sacred Dimension of Personality

Personality, in the African context, is conferred to an individual by means of sacred initiation rituals, since the intrinsic vital dynamism of a person is sacred. In this perspective, sacred rituals which for most African people begins during the time of parental courting, affirm the personality of even unborn children. Once a person is born, one can only change the state and place of being, but cannot be annihilated, due to the vital union with God.

African Personality as Relational

Personality for the African can only be achieved through vital contact or communication with fellow human beings. The 'I' is not the point of departure, but the 'we', the collectively of the community and the tribe (Nkemnkia, 1999: 171).

The individual exists, therefore, the collectivity exists. When one member of a family or clan is honoured, the whole group shares in the glory psychologically and ontologically. The emphasis here is on the current that passes through the network than the individual power point (Ruch, 1984: 143).

Nobody can obtain personal dignity or honour in the African society without the official acknowledgement and acceptance of his status by the community. Nkemnkia (1999) calls it *vital union*. It is impossible to define the characteristics of a person and one's identity, without linking him or her to parents and departed ancestors. One enters into relationship with other persons not because of one's materiality but because of one's spirituality and not because of one's limitations but because of one's perfection (Uzukwu, 1996). In this way, we can conclude that personhood in African culture is a collective phenomenon which is not in opposition to one's individuality.

Freedom and Responsibility

For African people, genuine personality or human dignity cannot exist in its fullness where there is oppression on the social and economic levels or where there are natural evils like hunger, disease and ignorance. Liberation includes deliverance from all forms of oppression which are regarded as obstacles to the fullness of personality (Nyamiti, 1990).

The Problem of African Personality

As noted above, there is a relationship between 'person' and 'acting' implying that actions are integral to personality. This position finds support in Okemwa's (1997:75) assertion that a person is 'who' he is by 'what' he does, either professionally or habitually. Freedom and responsibility are actions that manifest personality and their suppression entails oppression of personhood. Through freedom, a person is able to transcend himself towards self-determination and self-actualisation.

The concept of personality differs from one society to another and what differentiates African personality from other cultures is the African world view with its emphasis on vitality, sacredness, relationality and freedom. Culture is dynamic and the conceptualisation of African personality has been heavily influenced by forces of colonialism (organised politics, organised religions, formal education and language). The nineteenth century saw most of the European countries developing into class conscious society whose civilisation was considered superior to any other civilisation in the world. This mentality was carried into Africa during the 'Scramble for Africa' whereby the colonial mentality of progress implied progression of African people from 'savagery' to civilisation through the adoption of European culture (Ricoeur, 1965).

Colonialism affected the collective, sacred, relational and freedom of the African person thereby stripping him of his personality. Poorly equipped intellectually to understand the African culture, colonialists declared their culture as superior and condemned African culture as barbaric (Pawliková-Vilhanová, 1988).

Mimiko (2010) puts it bluntly:

The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the art and act of subjugation of the mass of the people in the service of colonialism (Mimiko, 2010:641).

On the same problem, the Charter for African Cultural Renaissance (2006) recalled that:

... despite cultural domination which during the slave trade and the colonial era led to the de-personalisation of part of the African peoples, falsified their history, systematically disparaged and combated African values, and tried to replace progressively and officially, their languages by that of the coloniser, the African peoples were able to find in African culture, the necessary strength for resistance and the liberation of the Continent.

New forms of governance were introduced, undermining the traditional African chieftainship where a traditional leader played the role of political, religious, social and spiritual functions (Agbakoba, 2004). Organised politics was promoted in the form of dual systems of governance that puts local and central government administrators above traditional leadership. Elections were introduced as the best democratic forms of leadership and, since then, ethnic, regional and tribal conflicts emerged, destroying the 'ubuntu' values that characterised the African personality. Arbitrary division of borders meant the separation of ethnic tribes and this compromised their cultural unity. According to Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2011), a considerable body of research in African history shows that the main impacts of Europeans' influence in Africa are ethnic struggles, patronage politics, and spurred civil conflict, leading to poverty and underdevelopment. This, in turn, has forced African people to adopt European values in search of survival.

Colonialism promoted the spread of 'organised' religions. Rukuni (2007) maintains that major religions like Christianity and Islam were instrumental in the erosion of African culture and values. Unlike Christianity and Islam which had sacred Scriptures, African people were meant to believe that traditional religion does not exist because it is not written but transmitted as folklore (Njoroge, 1994). This confused many African people who, until today, find it difficult to justify the existence, authenticity and relevance of African traditional religion.

According to Mbiti (1969), Islam managed to conquer and plant itself among the African people, not through the doctrine of love as taught by Christianity, or by persuasion but through the sword. It is estimated that more than 400 million African people embrace Islam today (Khoapa, 1980). Unlike Islam which was more tolerant of other religions, Christianity had a major impact on the culture of African people. Early missionaries castigated all forms of cultural practices, labelling them as paganism, witchcraft and magic. Converts were threatened with hell should they continue to practise their cultural heritage. This resulted in loss of identity among the African people whose deep religiosity constituted their world view. Along with early missionaries came the introduction of formal education through opening up of mission schools. These institutions were used as vehicles for evangelisation and partly colonisation, thereby undermining traditional forms of education that advanced African personhood.

Traditional African education was value-based and the method of teaching was mostly experiential where students learnt what was available and desirable (Ocitti, 1993). The methods included oral forms of literature such as riddles, poems, storytelling and proverbs. The young copied from the adults and peers how to become a good member of the community. Cultural functions were also used to expose the hidden traditional beliefs and practices. Active participation was used in acquisition of skills through apprenticeship that was elaborate. Rewards and punishments were used to reinforce learning (Enos, 2006). Traditional education fostered the development of personality, and the formalisation of education meant designing a common curriculum that was irrelevant to the needs of the people.

According to Paulo Freire (1993: 95), '...one cannot expect a positive result from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion.' Articulating what he called the 'banking concept' commonly applied in formal education as the pedagogy of the oppressed, Freire (1993: 72) castigates a method where contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated, become lifeless and petrified.

Colonialism brought with it the introduction of second languages in all conquered territories. This resulted in many African people being turned into bilinguals or multilinguals as each society had its own native language. Language is one of the most effective vehicles for transmitting cultural values and norms.

By learning a new language, most African people were turned into bi-cultural individuals whose feelings, thoughts and actions are guided by two internalised cultures. Studies have shown that the presence of culture-specific cues elicit culture-specific attributions and values in bilinguals (Ramirez et al, 2004). Accordingly, bilinguals' personalities in individuals undergo a cultural frame switch when they change from one language to another.

It can be asserted that African personality was heavily affected by historical circumstances that fell on the African continent. It is the contention of this article that these forces had long-term effect on the nature of African personality. The question that remains is whether we can still talk of African personality in the global world of today. Is it still possible to extrapolate African personality today as the basis for advancing the dignity of the human person? Put in other words: Is there an African person whose world view can be differentiated from other non-African people? These questions form the basis of the discussions that emanate from a survey that was carried out in Zimbabwe.

Method

The main purpose of research is to explain, describe and validate findings. This study sought to describe African personality from a traditional African perspective. It further explains how the understanding of the concept of personality has changed due to various external influences. This section aims at validating the secondary data by exploring and analysing the current perceptions of people on what constitutes African personality. Using a qualitative methodology, this study makes a survey on how to characterise African personality today in order to establish its uniqueness or lack of it. A qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate for the study due to the nature of the phenomenon under investigation.

A total of 13 in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out among traditional leaders, church leaders, business leaders and social anthropologists. Participants were selected using snow-ball sampling techniques where the participant as the 'expert' on the subject was asked to recommend possible informers. The choice of the sampling technique was based on the fact that characterising personality needed someone with prior knowledge of traditional culture who can intelligently isolate the point of departure that led to the modern culture.

Among the participants were three chiefs, all of them in their late 70s, who had an experience of traditional culture. Chiefs were vital sources of cultural information on the rituals, rites of passage and other cultural values which were used in shaping personality. Two pastors were interviewed who provided vital information on the moral implications of personality. Four participants were former school teachers with two of them having worked as heads of schools for more than 10 years. These participants gave some compelling arguments on the transition that African personality went through from traditional to modern culture.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews using an open-ended questionnaire which was designed to collect data on the meaning of African personality, what constitutes a person, what distinguishes an African person from people of other nationalities, and implications on the understanding of personality on leadership and life in general. Data obtained from the interviews was recorded and collated into a narrative description of African personality. Where information was deemed inadequate for analysis, further secondary data was sought to triangulate with empirical data. Three major themes emerged from the discussion which included: personality as ‘the acting person’, personality as a moral dictum, and norm-entrepreneurship and the global personality.

Results and Discussion

Personality as ‘the acting person’

The term ‘acting person’ was coined by Cardinal Wojtyla (1979) as discussed in the writings of Okemwa (1997). It defines the ‘acting person’ as the propensity for the individual to be fully human with emphasis on individual freedom to reach self-determination (Okemwa, 1997: 14). Human actions are hereby given an ontological significance which differentiates them from natural happenings or acts of animals. Within this context, personality becomes the core from which actions, attitudes, values and spirituality originates. Personality defines the human person as ‘somebody’ with dignity as opposed to ‘something’ which can be used as a means to an end.

Research participants defined personality in terms of transcendence, where an individual not only transcends himself or herself but also transcends his/her actions as well. Actions were seen as an outward expression of one’s inner convictions. When asked what this transcendence is all about, one pastor responded that:

Personality is the capacity of an individual to reach out to the Supreme Being vertically, for vitality, while horizontally reaching out to other human beings, animals and the environment.

Participants were further asked to relate their understanding of personality to the African context. Most of the responses were centred on traditional family systems where individuals considered themselves as members of the same family irrespective of the nature of their extensions. Personality then took on a collective dimension as exemplified by the use of totems and family names. As one participant said:

If you tell me your totem, I can judge your behaviour. We, the Shumba Mhazi people are known for our fairness, courage and dominance.

While at face value this sounded like the individual is subsumed in the collective, participants noted that individual personality existed but within the broader framework of collective personality. Individual traits were considered to be inherited as well as acquired through cultural practices. Where individual actions and behaviour were deemed negative and unacceptable, the blame was ascribed to the immediate family, the extended family and the community at large.

Participants were further asked to explain the relationship between individual actions and personality within the African culture. Common responses were:

Personality is what is deep in the heart of a person, while behaviour is what that person does from his/her heart.

Personality is the soul where beliefs are held, while individual actions testify to what the soul believe.

Culture informs one's actions which when repeated and interiorised become one's personality.

One becomes an African person not because he/she is born in Africa but because his/her personality is informed by African cultural values.

Participants were asked to identify actions that characterise African personality and the following qualities were deemed common among African people: first, an African person has high regard for the extended family and assumes responsibility for the well-being of its members. This respect finds expression in sharing during times of joy or sorrow. It partly explains the reasons why there is rampant nepotism in Africa as the Shona proverb puts it: '*Chawawana idya nehama mutorwa ane hanganwa*' literally translate: When you get something, eat with your relatives because foreigners easily forget. Wealth belongs to the whole family and, hence the concept of common good starts at satisfying the needs of one's immediate family then to the extended and finally the community at large.

Second, an African person believes in the unity of the tribe and his/her actions are directed towards preserving this unity. This is aptly defined by the dictum; 'The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.' This partly explains why in the rural areas people can easily be mobilised to support a political party without even understanding that party's manifesto. Once the community is convinced that the aspiring candidate feels with them, and claims to act in their interest, that person is considered a member of the family and should be supported. This should not be construed to mean 'blind following' but must be understood within the context of collectivism and preservation of unity. Even where actions result in violence as in tribal conflicts, the violence is not taken for individual gain but in the spirit of unity and preservation of the whole tribe.

Third, an African person has a deep-seated reverence for God, irrespective of the different conceptions of who/what God is. This is also found in the writings of Mbiti (1969) when he wrote that: 'Africans are incurably religious.' There is a symbiotic relationship between religion and personality and this relationship stems from the fact that personality is built upon the cultural foundations which, in turn, are also built upon religious foundations. The introduction of Christianity and Islam has not destroyed this religious mentality but rather enhanced it as many African people embrace these religions as substitute for African Traditional Religion. As such, African personality is a manifestation of this deep African religious faith.

Fourth, an African person believes in the sanctity of human life. This belief is predicated on the understanding that a person consists of body and soul and, at death, the body is destroyed while the spirit continues into the next life. Actions of man/woman should be directed towards preservation of life. This explains why more people gather for an individual's funeral than other functions like weddings or graduations. According to Nkemnki (1999: 169), for the African people, 'life remains identical in everything, it is the first possession, while 'being' evolves and is composed.' Unjustified destruction of life of a human person attracted angry spirits (*ngozi*) which, according to Bourdillon, (1987: 233), can attack the individual through his/her family.

Participants were asked what they considered to be the source of African personality and how this personality is conferred to an individual. One responded:

Personality comes from the parents or the immediate family. If the parents do not have the right personality which they should have acquired from their own parents, then they cannot develop their children's personalities.

The role of the family as the bedrock of personality emerged in almost all the discussions. Participants felt that as long as the families are allowed to disintegrate, African personality will remain a dream. The family is the first institution in which an individual learns how to become a person. It is the first society where values are practised and behaviour is shaped. This is the reason why Rukuni (2007: 44) calls for the re-building of strong families, extended families and communities based on the values of *ubuntu*.

Personality as a 'Moral Dictum'

African personality is build upon a religious foundation that everything comes into existence, lives and changes its existence in the same theatre of the unique Author of life, God, who lives eternally and gives life to every living being (Nkemnikia, 1999). As a result, personality involves thinking, knowing and reaching out to the source of Transcendence, who is God. Nkemnikia further notes that:

‘One can say that the God of the Africans is not an abstract concept, but a living and supernatural reality. God participates in the life of man through cosmic and mysterious events but, above all, he is concerned with the happiness of his creatures.... For this very reason, the greatest desire of the African, which is to reach eternal life, is to know God in his totality’ (Nkemnikia, 1999: 144).

Knowledge here is considered in its existential and concrete form, based on a relational experience. Morality for the African people is a religious morality emanating from the belief in the world of spirits. One does not choose the path of morality but is born in it and understands that his/her existence has a moral obligation to God, to other human beings and to the environment.

Participants were asked to name the most essential attribute of African personality which should be nurtured for the development of the African continent. All of them identified *morality* as the starting point. Morality was taken to mean integrity of action and faithfulness to God, traditional culture and to the society at large. Some of the attributes of morality cited include *being kind, being mercifulness, being human, being just, loving, goodness and personality*. From these attributes, one can conclude that personality is synonymous with *ubuntu (unhu)*.

Ubuntu, though complex and differently defined by various authors, presents a starting point for which to understand the African personality. Its origins are traced to the Xhosa/Zulu maxim: *Umntu nguntu ngabantu*, that is literally translated as ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ Underlying this concept is the belief that individual significance is achieved only through the community (Creff, 2004). It is best expressed through humanness, sharing, respect, dignity, group solidarity and the common brotherhood.

According to Louw (n.d.),

For the Westerner, the maxim "A person is a person through other persons" has no obvious religious connotations. He/she will probably interpret it as nothing but a general appeal to treat others with respect and decency. However, in African tradition this maxim has a deeply religious meaning. The person one is to become "through other persons" is, ultimately, an ancestor. And, by the same token, these "other persons" include ancestors. Ancestors are extended family.

When asked about the reason why they felt that morality is central to *ubuntu*, one participants responded that:

Traditional norms and taboos were meant to address the security of the individual and the community at large, and these norms were engraved in the hearts of Africans such that trespassing was synonymous with injuring the community. Observation of these norms formed the basis of individual credibility.

Accordingly, African personhood was tied to what the community expected from that particular individual's behaviour. Community norms and rituals were central to the process of becoming a person. The rites of passage ensured that one gets the dignity of personhood with moral obligation to behave accordingly. Naming a child was an important ceremony which gave him/her an identity as a human being. Without a name, a child would remain as 'IT', devoid of identity. Initiation rites made an individual a member of the clan. An uninitiated person was considered a perpetual child. Marriage solidified one's role as a member of the family who should ensure continuity of the tribe. Failure to marry was considered a disgrace. Death ritual ensured that an individual joins the family of collective immortality.

Participants were asked to name some of the current practices that seem to contradict the traditional African moral dimension of personality. They responded that:

In terms of the conflicts that we experience today, our leaders have become so greedy that instead of ensuring the well-being of the whole community, they prefer to fill their pockets first. This greed has led to corruption and people now fight and kill each other for personal benefits, which is an abomination according to our culture.

An African person was faithful to the norms of the society. Sin was considered to have both a personal and communal dimension. When a person commits a sin, the whole clan is with him in the guilt. As a result, the community had the moral duty to educate its members on the expected behaviour in order to limit its guilt as well. While leisure was encouraged, indulgence was not allowed. Children were not allowed to take alcohol and adults were expected to drink within limits as drunkenness was considered shameful. A real person was expected to have self-restraint, discipline and operate within the limits of the institutional norms.

Norm-Entrepreneurship and the Global Personality

Critical to the discussion on African personality is the question of whether there is really something called African personality which is exclusive to the African people. Just like *ubuntu*, there is a danger of romanticising African personalities as a unique attribute when, in fact, all its tenets can be found in other cultures like the Asians and Latin Americans. What then is our unique contribution to the world in terms of African personality? This is a vital question that has never been explored and which should lend itself to empirical research.

Participants were asked to explain what they would exclusively label as African personality, which might not be evident in other cultures and societies of the world. They responded:

Our world view is holistic and everything we do, say or think has a spiritual dimension. We the living, our living dead (ancestors) and God play a vital role in our daily lives.

Contrary to Western humanism, which does not recognise religious beliefs as central to personality, African personality is incurably religious. Collectivity is here understood within the context of African world view where the ancestors are considered part of the living with the ability to influence the lives of the living. This is exemplified in the ritual offering among the Shona people of Zimbabwe where beer or an animal is offered to the spirit of the ancestors (Gelfand, 1992). Without subsuming the individual within the collective as the critics of *ubuntu* would argue (Sono, 1994), African personality's communitarian and religious priority is a recognition and acceptance of the diversity of cultural difference and a relational call to dialogue. According to Ndaba (1999: 14):

The collective consciousness evident in the African culture does not mean that the African subject wallows in a formless, shapeless or rudimentary collectivity...[It] simply means that the African subjectivity develops and thrives in a relational setting provided by ongoing contact and interaction with others (1994:14).

African personality can best be expressed in what Louw (n.d.) called a distinctly African rationale for the ways of relating to others. It is a call for African people to be true to themselves (Teffo, 1997). It testifies to the need for being human in our relationship with others both at the political, economic and social level. How this can be achieved amid the changing global cultures remains a subject of inquiry. When asked how practical can African personality can be applied within the current context, participants responded that:

There is very little hope that we will retain our cultural heritage, judging by the current wave of global change. Many leaders of today do not ascribe to the values espoused by African culture. We would rather prepare ourselves for the new global culture based on moral values and being led by moral leaders like Nelson Mandela.

Globalisation has opened up interchange of cultures for better or worse. Participants noted that the forces of globalisation have become too strong for the preservation of African personality. However, there is a lot that can be learnt from African personality which should contribute towards a global personality. Africa's contribution to the creation of the global person is its humanness and concern for the other. The *ubuntu* values can be advanced in a bid to create a world that is understanding, compassionate, respect for the human dignity, warmth and where earth's resources are shared among all people.

To accomplish this, Africa needs norm-entrepreneurs. These are the leaders who act as pacesetters and role models of African humanness like Nelson Mandela. Such people are innovators in the field of positive norms and they are capable to transforming the world through their moral influence. This call is, however, possible given the dissatisfaction being registered by anti-globalisation movements crying for a new world order.

Conclusion

African personality is not just a call for moral regeneration in the face of adversity. It is recognition of a deep-seated religious inheritance that seeks to be re-ignited amidst the current capitalistic and materialistic attitude of the world. Evidence provided by this research from the interviews carried out among traditional and business leaders indicate that African personality remains the basis for African Renaissance.

African personality has implications for the understanding of democracy. While the West hails majority rule as standard for measuring democracy, African democracy informed by African personality has regard for the minority and emphasis is on consensus as a form of democracy. Consensus recognises every person as having inherent right to be heard. African personality has a political decolonising effect as Gultung (1980) puts it:

It has taken the form of an assertive position of radically transforming, amongst other things, the educational systems inherited from the colonisers. It has assumed political decisions coherent with the plan for the society to be created or re-created and is based on certain material considerations that offer incentives for change.

The current intellectual discourses on African cultural values and ways of doing business attest to the realisation that Africa cannot develop using Western intellectual frameworks. Many problems in Africa like poverty, wars, corruption and murders, all points towards the need for a new paradigm shift within the continent. It is for this reason that this study proposes an investigation into African personality as a way to understand and shape leadership behaviour for the security and development of the continent.

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