The Role of Community in Human-Rights and Development Discourse: Resisting Apathy and Antipathy

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Abstract

The role of community in normative and descriptive terms is only tangentially recognised in human-rights and development discourse. When it has been recognised, it has straddled the boundaries of apathy and antipathy as metaphorical frames of reference. Apathy towards community is evidenced by marginal and insignificant references in human-rights texts and by its demotion to temporary, rural projects and consultation exercises in development policy and practice. Conversely, antipathy towards community is evidenced by the absence of a comprehensive ethic of how to think and act in relation to development from a community ideal. This article proposes such an ethic that not only prioritises values of locality, human interdependence and participation, but also yields a concept of development different from those available through human-rights approaches. The ethic of community is proposed here not through a critique of conventional human-rights and development approaches, but as an alternative to those dominant approaches and the ideals of individualism and market fundamentalism that they promote.

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**Introduction**

The international development community has had recent cause for celebration because of the reduction of extreme poverty, particularly in the global south. Approximately one billion people have escaped the deprivations and clutches of extreme poverty (defined in economic terms as the percentage of people with incomes below US$1.25 a day). In light of this achievement, new objectives – the Sustainable Development Goals – were devised ahead of the 2015 termination date of the now defunct Millennium Development Goals. This decline of extreme poverty is assumed to be the result of a type of individualism that has been promoted, sustained and nurtured by a consumerist culture across most of Africa and Asia and some parts of Latin America. This newly repackaged development orthodoxy to end poverty is contingent on the ability to create a new individualistic consumerist middle class.

Although similar changes are occurring across the global south, this approach is seen clearly in Africa. The dominant development narrative in Africa is now one of economic progress and poverty reduction facilitated by consumerist lifestyles and greater spending power evidenced by new shopping malls, houses, hotels and restaurants in many African cities (Smith & Lamble, 2011). Thirty-four per cent of the African population now comprise this new consumerist middle class (Ncube & Lufumpa, 2014, pp.1-9). African middle classes, who now own their own homes, have fixed salaries or small businesses, can afford private healthcare services and education for their children, are fundamental to economic prosperity and reduction of poverty. Apart from the middle classes, the number of extremely rich individuals in Africa has grown and are also credited with contributing to the decline in
extreme poverty. The collective wealth of 50 of the richest Africans is US$95.6 billion (Forbes, 2015), underscoring Africa’s thriving individualist and consumerist culture. Africa has an estimated 16 billionaires, one of whom has described the approach as a new form of capitalism called Afro-Capitalism (Edwards, 2013).

However, the celebratory mood among the mainstream development community may be premature. The reduction of poverty from an extreme to a less extreme condition does not mean that the previously extremely poor are not still poor. Arguably more disturbing is that the real beneficiaries of the development orthodoxy have been the rich, not the poor (Anderson & Sedghi, 2015). This can again be seen in recent developments in Africa, particularly the increasing number of millionaires since initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals. The commodities boom and exponential growth in the African economy have actually entrenched or deepened poverty and equality – an uncomfortable truth not readily conceded in mainstream development discourse. Neither has there been a meaningful attempt to understand the intricate but causal relationship between the economic growth and rising public and private corruption in Africa to the detriment of the poor. Economic growth and the individualist and consumerist culture is indicative of the increasing gap between the extremely rich and extremely poor. Despite the rise of new middle classes and the extremely rich, millions of Africans still live in drastic poverty, even if this might not statistically qualify as extreme poverty. This is, of course, an old story. Economic growth often has a narrow range of beneficiaries. In Africa, economic growth reverberates only around government circles and their collaborators and allies in the private sector. It is no surprise that only a minority of Africans have benefited from the current development orthodoxy. Economic growth is being devoured by this consumerists’ culture of the middle classes, extremely rich and global capitalists, further impoverishing the lives of the poor.
Poverty and inequality results directly from a consumerist cultural attitude that orients individuals to think of themselves first and foremost autonomously. The satisfaction of individual desires and the cultivation of individual interests is perhaps the most significant cultural aspect of the market-based orthodoxy of development. The consumerist middle classes and extremely rich are oriented to spend more on satisfying their desires, which have no trickle-down effect except accidentally on the lives of the poor, particularly on their need for healthcare, education and nutrition. The levels of inequality in Africa and most of the global south have been fuelled by an unrestrained individualism, which is expressed in various ways including a drive for instant gratification and hedonistic behaviours (Mark, 2102; Smith, 2012). The consumerist culture orients individuals to think of their life chances, opportunities, responsibilities and relationships with others in exclusively individuated terms. In the extreme forms, the individualist mind-set takes a form of narcissism that is too detached to encourage ethical comportment for the daily struggles of the poor.

Contemporary societies in the global south bear the mark of this type of individualism, which is not restricted to the lifestyles of the affluent population. This is perhaps a more difficult problem. The affluent lifestyles of the middle classes and extremely rich are not always despised by the poor; instead, the individualistic consumerist culture is contagious and regarded as worthy of emulation. At the margins of society, individualism lures and seduces. Like the rich, the poor are searching for self-fulfilment and seeking to minimise interpersonal obstacles to the attainment of egocentrism. This culture of individualism not only represents personal autonomy, but also the indifference to the human condition of others. A common observation in parts of Africa, and perhaps other parts of the global south, is the indifference not just of rich citizens, but also of poor citizens, to the plight of others. Most citizens fail to raise an eyebrow at the sight of a fellow citizen scavenging for food in refuse bins, begging or lying homeless in the streets. Indifference and lack of
empathy is not the only problem. There is an increasing level of antagonism between citizens in a bid to satisfy individual needs, leading to conflicts, sometimes violence. Social bonds traditionally characteristic of such societies have been broken; we are witnessing the end of community. Although the argument in this article is that there is both an apathy and an antipathy for community in human-rights and development discourse, the current development initiatives seem to have encouraged apathy and antipathy among individuals at various levels of society.

The current levels of poverty and inequality are one of the main reasons for the emergence of human rights in development discourse. In particular, the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Right to Development and the rights-based approaches to development it influenced were introduced to do more than provide a legal and justiciable framework to operationalise development through norms, standards and principles of human rights. The particular motivations for the assimilation of human-rights norms into the practice of development divide opinion. But a persuasive view holds that they were an attempt to make development more humane and compassionate by supplying it with a new normative orientation for institutions and practices of development specifically aimed at providing a standard of moral alertness and vigilance to generate awareness and appropriate responses to novel forms of suffering that arise from the development process. Integrating development discourse with human-rights-based principles of equality, non-discrimination and participation equips development policy and practice with moral and ethical dimensions (Rittich, 2004).

The widespread, persistent poverty in the midst of increasing wealth and opulence in the global south demonstrates that human rights are struggling to attain a more humane, compassionate and ethically oriented approach to development. Human rights may indeed be part of the problem and not the solution. With individual autonomy arguably the most
constitutive element of human-rights claims, they seem more supportive and protective than opposed to the individualism that arises from market-based development initiatives.

Individual autonomy is elevated by the market and protected by human rights with the highest value in the global south. This high value placed on individualism explains why human rights are easily assimilated into the neoliberal market development framework and cut off from the everyday realities of the poor whom human rights should be beneficial. Those who believe in the normative power of human rights ignore older criticisms that they have no epistemic and linguistic resources to enable moral recognition of and ethical comportment towards profound suffering and vulnerability (Weil, 2005, pp.69-98).

I argue that the key problem with human-rights-based approaches to development, apart from simply failing to provide a counter-narrative for how to achieve development, is a failure to protect or nurture, through legal and political institutions, community and community values in the process of development. The unawareness of the significance of community is reflected in and strengthened by contemporary theories of law and development, as in legal and political theory more generally. Law and development scholarship (Trubek, 1972; Trubek and Galanter, 1974; Trubek and Santos, 2006; Davis and Trebilcock, 2008) generally neglects the socially constituted individual, whose well-being is dependent on community and communal values and relationships. To say that contemporary human-rights and development discourse takes for granted the significance of the concept of community is not to say that it does not recognise the idea of community at all. Human-rights-based approaches have engaged with the concept of community to an extent that straddles the boundaries of apathy and antipathy as metaphorical frames of reference. As the next section will show, apathy is evidenced by marginal or insignificant references to community in human-rights texts, or by its demotion to temporary, rural projects and consultation exercises in development policy and practice. Conversely, antipathy is
substantiated by the absence of a comprehensive ethic to orient theories and practices of development from a community ideal.

Although communitarians from diverse perspectives in the Western legal and political philosophical tradition (Etzioni, 1998; McIntyre, 1984; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1995, pp. 181-203) have demonstrated the limitations of mainstream liberal legal and political theories of law and justice premised upon a similar sort of autonomous individual, they have not attended to the question of development and the need to provide an alternative narrative to the extremely isolated individual in liberal theories, policies and practices of law and development. My aim and response in this article is to propose an ethic of community that not only prioritises and seeks to promote values of locality, human interdependence and participation as its constitutive elements, but that also yields a concept of development that takes community seriously. The overall objective of this article is to situate the concept of community within an ethical institutional context by exploring how it can provide a frame of reference for theories and practices of human rights and development, so as to help criticise and improve the values and principles derived from a community ideal. As such, it is concerned with the practices associated with community, particularly how they may influence concrete ethical and moral decisions to achieve human rights and development.

Just as there are complex and multidimensional ways of understanding the concept of community, there are also a diverse range of ethical values and practices that can be derived from it. A religious or ethnic community will seek to prioritise different values than a work-based or business community. Bearing in mind the complexity of community, I argue that focusing on sociological notions of community is advantageous, not only because they take ‘locality’ as the most appropriate context in which to understand the experience of community, but also because they take the social constitution of the self seriously. This, in turn, can extract ethical and moral values that yield alternative understandings of human
rights and development that resist individualism of the market, which has been mainly detrimental to the poor. After outlining the negative engagement with community in the dominant human-rights and development discourse, I propose an ethic of community and highlight how the ethic should be taken seriously in human rights and development discourse, as it is with state and market-based approaches. Thus, the ethic of community sketched out here will point out a potential path that human-rights and development theory and practice should follow. The ethic of community is presented with a degree of generality for it to meet contingencies in local contexts without deviating too much from its core values. Moreover, although the ethic of community is desirable at the general level of human-rights and development discourse, its actual implementation must be open to local interpretation and adaptation. This also has the advantage of avoiding the ‘one size fits all’ approaches typical of human-rights and development discourse.

**Between Apathy and Antipathy**

How have dominant human-rights and development approaches in terms of theory and practice obscured the significance of community across the boundaries of apathy and antipathy as metaphorical frames of reference? This can be seen in various human-rights texts and development policy approaches. Contemporary human-rights discourse, as evidenced in its founding documents, has demonstrated a combination of apathy and antipathy for the concept of community. Although Articles 18, 27 and 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 make three references to community, these are no more than passing references. It was never the intention of the drafters of the document to establish any other type of human rights than individual rights. Despite warnings, the list of human rights in the UDHR mirrored the notion of the individual that was prevalent in Europe and America. The UDHR was founded on and influenced by a notion of individual rights derived from human nature as an attribute of all human beings. As such, the universality of human rights is
derived from their natural character in that they exist prior to and independently of any type of social recognition, whether by community, society or nationality. Human beings have human rights independent of those that are in the social practices, culture, morality or laws of their own country. Not only do these definitions ascribe human rights to human beings, but they tend to describe the rights-bearer in terms of certain fixed or essentialist physical features or properties. A bearer of a human right is wholly autonomous and discovers or is knowledgeable of his or her nature through reason. Individual autonomy is amplified to the highest value, and human rights are the primary vehicle for realising and protecting that autonomy. Thus, the antipathy for community is foundational to human-rights discourse, particularly if the origins of the UDHR can be found in various dimensions of natural-rights discourse.

Many human-rights documents inspired by the UDHR, even those that have emerged from the contributions of representatives of countries of the global south, have not moved discourse beyond this type of antipathy for community, even though it could be argued that, in light of the right to self-determination and collective rights, we have moved from a condition of antipathy to apathy for the concept. It can be argued that the human right to self-determination in the UDHR, Articles 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights implies a group, collective or ‘community’s’ right to statehood and to economic, social and cultural development. Although the aspiration for self-determination may imply an ethnic community’s right to seek statehood and self-government, it could also refer to a claim that falls short of statehood, such as economic, social and cultural treatment within a nation-state. Notwithstanding, statehood is certainly not the type of community that is absent in human-rights discourse, especially since human rights have traditionally been a discourse of states and not one of local, place-based or spatial communities.
Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on religious and linguistic rights, may refer to the rights of a collective entity, not necessarily a state-like community. So also do the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Declaration of the Human Rights of Indigenous Persons (1994), the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2009). In addition to third-generation rights, regional instruments, particularly the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1981), seek to ground human rights in a communitarian framework, whether in terms of peoples or national, ethnic, religious or linguistic communities. If group rights are a distinctive feature of the third-generation rights above, then human rights are clearly not hostile to the idea of community. However, the lack of a specific or comprehensive approach to community at present leaves these set of rights vulnerable to the criticism that human rights have an apathy for community.

This apathy is more apparent in the definition of group rights. Although there is an ongoing debate about whether group rights are rights that individuals hold qua group membership or are rights derived from the group itself (Jones, 2013, p. 103), human-rights discourse, except the right to self-determination, reflects the former and not the latter view. Human rights are assigned to particular categories of individuals first and foremost as individuals and not to or via the group. In other words, individual human rights matter in so far as they are supportive of group membership, and they can be enjoyed independently of group membership. Thus, groups rights are not too dissimilar from civil and political rights such as the freedoms of association, expression, thought, conscience, religion and political participation. It can certainly be argued that group or third-generation rights may provide the foundations to understanding the relevance of community to human rights, because various
groups are implied as species of community. However, the emphasis on community has not been sufficiently significant in human-rights discourse to ground community approaches to human rights or development.

The apathy for community can also be seen in the level of recognition given to community through the convergence of the discourses of human rights and development. The Declaration of the Right to Development (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1986; Sengupta, 2002, pp.837-839; Marks, 2004, pp.138-140; Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, pp. 1416-1418; Baxi, 2009, pp.124-155), the text that grounds the integration of these discourses, recognises some notion of community, but at the same time demotes it to temporary, rural projects and consultation exercises in development policy and practice. This demonstrates apathy if not antipathy for the concept of community. Although the right to development recognises, in addition to individuals, ‘peoples’ (Declaration on the Right to Development, 1986, Article 11), which does imply some sort of community that may be legitimate bearers of this right, it is still debatable what constitutes a ‘people’. Rajagopal (2003, p. 221) argues that the right to development was the first time that rights of communities had been recognised in human-rights discourse. Even if the right to development was the first to introduce the right of communities, it is still unclear whether it refers to a right of all types of communities or to a specific type, that is, ethnic, indigenous, linguistic or local communities. There is also another competing interpretation of the right to development that raises questions about its emancipatory potential apart from whether it does not end up as a right of states in the international system.

Despite these foundational questions about the specific nature of the right to development, it serves as a legal framework for the various policy and practical approaches and interventions of a variety of international development organisations, most notably the UN Development Programme. Although the relevance of the right to development in the UN
development approaches implies that human rights have been integrated into the older community-development initiatives of the UN, this is not the case. The UN’s community-development initiatives still appear to be carried out independently of any meaningful references to human-rights principles, which might result implicitly from the apathy or even antipathy for community in the foundational human-rights texts. The same can be said about the community initiatives of the World Bank: the Community-Based Development and Community-Driven Development approaches (Masuri & Rao, 2004). Apart from the absence of meaningful references to human rights, these two approaches rely on the concept of community for specific types of (often rural) protects limited in scope and timescale. As with the older UN community-development approaches, they seem to have disrupted or failed to recognise and strengthen existing community institutions. Where community institutions have been recognised, they are adapted to suit the objectives of the projects, which does not necessarily mean that they will be advantageous to the communities concerned.

More problematic about the use of community in the World Bank initiatives is that the concept is adopted almost exclusively in support of neoliberal market development initiatives. The concept of community matters only in so far as it is compatible with the dictates of the neoliberal market economy (Fukuyama, 1996). Thus, the concept is not valued for its own sake, but rather for its perceived and instrumental benefits to achieving economic growth and development. Mindful of the perceived advantages of the market, particularly in the distribution of resources, the approaches ignore the potentially destructive effects of the market, particularly the ways in which it can breed the types of possessive individualism and narcissism now characteristic of many societies in the global south.

Although the World Bank initiatives exist outside the framework of rights-based approaches to development, and although it is vague about what community entails, the idea of reconciling community with the neoliberal market opposes the idea of redistributive justice.
that led to the right to development. Human rights were used to offer more than a legal framework for the redistribution of resources. They were also used as an ethical framework capable of raising ethical awareness of and to mitigate the hardship encountered by many individuals through those neoliberal-inspired market initiatives (Rittich, 2004, p.221; Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, pp.1418-1419). Thus, a lot more should have been done (and still needs to be done) to resist the neoliberalisation of human rights and development by grounding these concepts in a framework that would promote an ethical awareness that might yield more humane and compassionate outcomes (Bedjaoui, 1979, p.63). It is not sufficient to achieve this effectively or completely through the language of human rights and development, even if they are posited as a collective paradigm.

Nevertheless, the apathy for community, as evidenced by the significant role of community in practical approaches to human rights and development, may itself be an attribute of development theory, that is, theories of modernisation, structuralism, basic needs or even dependency. Even the capability or capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011; Sen, 2001) takes for granted the significance of community, although some notion of community may be implicit in Nussbaum’s Aristotelian notion of personhood (Nussbaum, 2006, pp. 159–60) and her emphasis of the importance of affiliation. Nevertheless, these elements are difficult to reconcile with Nussbaum’s irreducible Rawlsian individualistic starting point, which she continues to defend. In spite of the existence of an Aristotelian personhood and of affiliation as a capability, both of which can lead to a community approach, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach as a whole does not view community and community values and relationships as central to the human condition or development.

An Ethic of Community

The concept of community often refers to a collective experience, history, set of values, identity and belonging that may be permanent, ad-hoc or temporal; nomadic or virtual; or
territorial or non-territorial. It implies a collective involvement that can be mobilised in different ways and in different contexts. Thus, there are diverse ways of speaking about community that are not always compatible with each other or, for present purposes, relevant to human rights and development. Although there is little agreement about what community means, what is perhaps agreed upon is its irreducible collective dimension. What might human rights and development look like if the concept and fact of community were made central to them? It is essential to appreciate the difference that human-rights and development discourse would make if it were to treat the fact of community and community values as central to it.

In this section I therefore propose an ethic of community that not only prioritises values of locality, human interdependence and participation as its constitutive elements, but that also yields a concept of development that differs from those available through human-rights approaches. Although there are indeed differing ways of understanding the concept of community, I take sociological definitions of community as my starting point to extract an ethic appropriate for human-rights and development discourse. Sociologists tend to define community as a form of social organisation in geographically small localities, that is, neighbourhoods, towns and villages. There are several advantages to this. First, sociological definitions of community, perhaps more than other concepts of community, take the social constitution of the individual seriously and draw attention to what it means to experience community empirically or practically. It treats the facts of community seriously, recognising that individuals are irreducibly communal beings, which is evident from early in life until death. Individuals are born into a family, and the immediate environment, most often their local community, is responsible for their socialisation. Crucial in this respect is the significance of common residency, which is ‘treated as the most congenial condition for
forming and sustaining community life’ (Selznick, 1994, p. 359), even though it is not
definitive of this, nor is it a conclusive characteristic of community.

An ethic of community for purposes of human rights and development builds on
sociological notions of community as a type of locality. This is not because small localities
are the most important way of thinking about community, but rather because it draws
attention to the congeniality of dwelling to the process of socialising the individual. Although
the concept of community is conceived in physical, material and tangible terms – that is, a
geographical location such as a neighbourhood, town or village – it is a material form loaded
with meanings and sentiments that are imagined, experienced and understood in varying
degrees by residents and, often, non-residents.

Thinking of community in tangible terms as a form of locality might automatically
imply that the community is rigid, static and unchanging. Indeed, this might be the case with
many small geographical communities. However, a localised geographical territory invokes a
diverse range of meanings. It can imply a bundle of activities in a geographical location,
ranging from living spaces and workplaces to shops, businesses and schools. Philip
Selznick’s work is an important reference point in this context. Not only does it reconcile the
sociological and political dimensions of community, but it also emphasises the normative
dimensions of community, including the relational dimension between human rights and
community (Selznick, 1994). Selznick’s work is also important in that it demonstrates how to
escape thinking about community in homogenous and static terms and think of it instead as a
variable of group experience (Selznick, 1994, p. 358). As a variable of group experience, the
concept of community is sufficiently flexible to take a variety of forms, but also the
appreciation that members of a particular community will belong to other communities
(Onazi, 2013, p. 9). This is, of course, contingent on taking common residence (Selznick,
1994, p. 359) as the most congenial aspect of creating and sustaining community life, thereby constitutive of understanding community as a variable group experience.

Thus, a local community is more than simply a particular geographical territory. Thinking of the physical environment in terms of complexity allows us to understand local communities as epicentres of a variety of activities, arising from social relationships, practices and exchanges that exist in the same place. This in turn allows us to understand community as an accumulation of diverse activities that exist within the same place. Thus, community as a form of locality is not static or homogenous, but heterogeneous and multidimensional. It is an epicentre of encounters, relationships and experiences, the existence of which can be used to understand the meaning and significance of the physical environment itself. The significance of understanding community as a form of locality is not just the neutrality of the physical environment or neighbourhood, or even its political potential – as will be demonstrated below – for human rights and development projects. Rather, the significance of understanding community as a form of locality is the moral quality of the social relationships and values of its inhabitants. A local community has no single meaning, identity, history or set of social relationships. A variety of human experiences and relationships are shaped by, and they in turn shape, the meaning of community. An important consequence of this is that a community as a form of locality does not exclude its members from belonging to or forming other types of communities. Thus, a local community is not a single ubiquitous community, but rather a cluster of communities, a framework for the cultivation of varying types of communal experiences and relationships. No one particular community, not even the ones we dwell in, exclusively determine all our social relationships (Onazi, p. 9). This perspective encourages multiple understandings of community, including how it may represent not only multiple interests, but also multiple individuals that belong to
differing communities united by a local physical environment that allows the expression of shared but diverse beliefs, interests and commitments.

When the concept of community is conceived in these terms – that is, as a factor of the socialisation of individuals through a variety of everyday experiences and relationships – it becomes obvious that community itself has an irreducibly moral and ethical dimension. This is one possible feature that distinguishes the concept of community proposed in this article from how it has occasionally been used in, for example, the World Bank’s community-development approaches. There, community is simply used as an instrumental concept, which says little about why the concept is valuable. It may be that the value inherent in a geographical or local community is that it can be thought of as a type of value-entity, although this might not always be the case. My claim is not that this is an empirical description of all local communities, but rather that it is an attractive value or feature of some local communities that can be emulated, encouraged and learned by other communities. It is also important to note that one cannot be too essentialist in outlining these characteristics of communities as localities. Even by these standards, most local communities will not possess all of these attractive qualities.

In other words, there are indeed descriptive and normative aspects of community (Selznick, 1994, p. 360). The normative dimensions of community not only importantly demonstrate why it should be valued in itself, not necessarily because it is a means to certain ends, but also dispense with the negative connotations the concept seems to invite. The concept of community is an end in itself, not just a means to certain ends. Like other values, the idea of community presupposes intrinsic ethical and moral values that need to be nurtured, promoted and protected. Thus, a local community not only highlights the importance of dwelling, but also the quality of the relationships among inhabitants. It encourages attention to their relationships both positive and negative: the negative are equally
as important as the positive. The relationships that assist individuals to grow must be given the same attention as those that harm individuals, or the conflicts that ensue from the processes of collective dwelling. An ethic of community must be aware of these potential problems and provide a yardstick to intervene when events get out of hand. It should provide the standards to aspire for, particularly when things go wrong. An ethic of community must be affirmative and critical (Selznick, 1994, p. 360). It is affirmative when ‘it explores, identifies and embraces the positive contributions of a particular community to human flourishing’ (Selznick, 1994, p. 360), while it is critical when ‘it asks of a particular community how far, in what ways and with what effects it deviates from a standard’ (Selznick, 1994, p. 360).

If local communities are taken as a starting point, apart from the value of the locality itself, the next consideration becomes what sort of ethical values can be abstracted from it, and furthermore, how can these values promote and protect human rights and development? If the complexity, as described in the previous paragraph, of local communities is taken seriously, then a variety of values would be prioritised, ranging from reciprocity, mutual respect, cooperation, friendship, hospitality, solidarity and compassion to love. This complexity can be advantageous in that it highlights the plurality of values that can be found in a local community. However, the complexity of a local community can be disadvantageous in that it may resemble a liberal theory that seeks to promote differing conceptions of the good at the expense of a single one or overarching sense of community. The ethic of community cannot avoid having an overarching value, but it must be articulated in such a way that it enables it to mediate between the differences of all its members. There are many suitable candidates for this, including asymmetrical reciprocity, mutual respect, cooperation, compassion, love and friendship. However, human interdependence is arguably one of the
best ways of supplying the proposed ethic of community with an overarching ethical and moral value.

One implication of thinking about community this way – that is, as a sort of locality that serves as a framework for a variety of activities ranging from social relationships, practices and exchanges to the formation of multiple communities within that locality – is that it draws attention to the significance to the value of human interdependence, a value in which the ethic of community seeks to nurture, promote and protect in different ways. The multiple connections between individuals in various local communities, including their multiple communal affiliations, imply that the ethic of community must take the facts and implications of human interdependence seriously. Human interdependence adds another, albeit ethical, layer to the notion of community. Human interdependence enriches the concept of community. Thus, community is not simply the crude and unconditional imposition onto individuals of the values of the collective entity, but rather it is the interdependence of individuals and the interdependence of the various communal affiliations of its members.

Human interdependence is also advantageous because it leads to other values, particularly the compassion, love and care for the human condition of others. Human interdependence entails that the well-being of an individual is tied to the well-being of others, who are ultimately enmeshed in the well-being and survival of the community. Not only does the ethic of community seek to protect and promote values of human interdependence to provide a supportive environment in which a variety of individuals and communities can realise their potential, it also seeks to nurture a better understanding of the ways in which individuals owe their survival or well-being to other individuals. Human interdependence entails that individuals are inadequate without other individuals; they are nurtured by the overlapping and interwoven relationships with other individuals for security and nourishment. The interdependent nature of human beings eludes dominant theories of
neoliberal market-based development, as evidenced by their failure to give it a central place. Conversely, the tentative ethic of community can supply a conception of personhood that recognises the irreducible vulnerable nature of all human beings, thus showing awareness of the temporal nature of rational autonomy apart from the asymmetrical relationships that realistically define human coexistence and dwelling. This way of thinking radically breaks from the autonomous individual synonymous with development discourse to a notion of the interdependent self who is constituted through interaction with others. Thus, the main goal of a development approach influenced by this type of ethic will be to promote compassionate laws, institutions and policies to nurture the interdependent individual in various walks of life. Similarly, a development approach influenced by this ethic must take into account that human interdependent relationships can sometimes go wrong, thereby anticipating the type of interventions necessary when they do go wrong.

A further implication of human interdependence is that individuals consider themselves as intricately connected with others and this encourages a type of disposition to be involved or to take part in a range of activities with others in a given community or across a range of communities. Participation, here, has multiple connotations. At a basic level, it refers to the processes of socialising individuals, processes which are themselves contingent on various opportunities for participation, whether within a given family or through kinship ties, friendships and interacting with others in the local community. Participation mirrors the complexity of the local community, allowing its members to participate in a complex range of activities. Related to this, the value of human interdependence, which is ultimately the value of community itself, implies that participation must entail a cooperative attitude, an interest in the lives of others and a willingness to collaborate with others and to share in their fortunes and misfortunes. Participation primarily entails empathy and compassionate
attentiveness and responses to the human condition of others. Participation, in this sense, means caring for or assisting others or a readiness to act in ways that will benefit them.

Nevertheless, participation has a further connotation. It is irreducibly political, but not in the way, with certain exceptions (Sen, 2001, p. 359), it is used in neoliberal development discourse, the aim of which is to involve citizens, particularly the poor, in decision-making processes, an aim synonymous with empowerment, the fulfilment of which has remained elusive. In the neoliberal development context, participation is for the most part instrumental to other goals and objectives; it is not necessarily valued in its own right. In contrast, traditional distinctions between economics and politics, public and private, family and society, and religion and secularity are blurred in the context of the notion of participation promoted in this article. Furthermore, participation in the present context is political, particularly in the Aristotelean sense, as a way to define the development of virtue and character (Aristotle, 2009, pp.5-10). The habit of political participation nurtures us into good citizens, which is irreducible from how we are good to others, which is crucially dependent on the asymmetrical exchanges involved in community politics. Participation is valued for its own sake, even though it often has an irreducible instrumental dimension when members of a particular community come together to resolve common problems that affect their collective existence. Even in the instrumental sense, and because it involves the pursuit of goals or resolution of problems, participation attains an ethical and moral dimension contingent on the nature of the goals pursued. Given that this type of participatory activity is driven by the desire of members of a community to improve the quality of their lives and to live dignified lives, it is difficult to separate the intrinsic from the instrumental dimensions of participation.

There is no denying that participation has an intrinsic dimension, but the ethic of community shows better awareness of the complex interaction between its intrinsic and instrumental dimensions. There is an intrinsic value in seeking to take part in various
activities with others. We not only take ownership and control over matters that affect us the most; we also become better people through empathy for the human condition of others. Participation is not just an important mechanism for aggregating information and preferences or for affecting policy choices and preferences. It also entails taking part in decisions that affect our life and the lives of others. Participation is particularly valuable because it is a process of mediating between diverse residents of a particular community. This way of thinking has a transformative effect on human rights and development, by making it not only less individualistic, but also more suitably oriented to pursue compassionate ends. The focus on dwelling, particularly the human interdependent nature of dwelling, encourages a disposition among those who dwell in a particular community to participate or to cooperate with each other in resolving common problems, or simply to help each other in difficult situations.

**Conclusion**

This article has assessed the extent to which the concept of community has featured in human-rights and development discourse. The insignificant attention of this discourse to the concept of community has prompted this article to point out how the concept can ground new approaches to human rights and development. The proposed ethic of community is a response to historic and contemporary theories and practices of development, including the legal and political arrangements they create, which bear the mark of a liberal autonomous individual. The alternative begins from appreciating the social nature of all individuals, who are born into and socialised by some sort of community, particularly the type of local communities in which individuals dwell with others. This is a basic human instinct, highlighting the interdependent nature of community life, which might entail other values such as compassion, love, friendship, cooperation, solidarity, mutual respect and recognition. Importantly, the human interdependent nature of dwelling encourages those who dwell in a
particular community to participate or to cooperate with each other in resolving common projects or to help each other in challenging situations. Participation is irreducibly political; it also has intrinsic and instrumental dimensions, both of which are united by the desire of members of a given local community to improve the quality of their lives. Thus, an ethic of community can ultimately provide a means to escape and resist the harshness and exclusions of dominant and formal human-rights and development initiatives.

The ethic of community leads to a number of questions, particularly whether it provides the type of comprehensiveness to dislodge the individualism inherent in mainstream market-based development approaches. It has been presented with a considerable general level of abstraction that it may lack the specific features to demonstrate how dislodging the individualism of the market can be concretely achieved. Despite this, it has been important to keep the ethic of community as general as possible, so as to allow it to accommodate locate differences. Seen this way, the ethic of community is best understood as an idealised vision of what can be specifically achieved in various local communities across the world. In another sense, it is those local communities, particularly those excluded from any meaningful impact of state and market institutions, that have supplied the epistemological resources for the ethic of community. Excluded from the impact of state and market institutions, many individuals in local communities across the global south have had no alternative but to contrive novel practices, associations, networks and other ways to collaborate with each other to create better lives for themselves and their loved ones (Onazi 2013, p.87-88). Thus, the ethic of community may be nothing more than a theoretical description of the ingenuity or agency in local communities in the global south, whose struggles for a better life demonstrate precisely the type of compassionate approaches to human rights and development that elude mainstream discourses. The creative forms of organisation found in local communities cannot easily be described and are as diverse as the local communities themselves. They may be
dispersed or centralised, permanent or ad-hoc, or simply random. Despite this, their presence in every city and village in the global south is unsurpassed by the best organised, financed and intellectually supported mainstream human rights and development policy or programme. These organisational forms are naturally resistant to any form of institutionalisation or formalisation. They will always be present where poverty and exclusion exists. They provide another reminder that the alternatives for a better world can realistically be achieved only by paying careful attention to the agency of the poor and excluded.
Bibliography


