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Mary Carman (2022) Circumscribing the space for disruptive emotions within an African communitarian framework, Journal of Global Ethics, 18:3, 386-402, DOI: 10.1080/17449626.2021.2021274

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Journal of Global Ethics

ISSN: 1744-9626 (Print) 1744-9634 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rjge20

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To cite this article: Mary Carman (2022) Circumscribing the space for disruptive emotions within an African communitarian framework, Journal of Global Ethics, 18:3, 386-402, DOI: 10.1080/17449626.2021.2021274

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2021.2021274

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JOURNAL OF GLOBAL ETHICS
2022, VOL. 18, NO. 3, 386–402
https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2021.2021274

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Circumscribing the space for disruptive emotions within an African communitarian framework

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ABSTRACT

Bernard Matolino has recently argued that African communitarianism is an ethics grounded in emotion aligned with reason. If he is correct, questions arise about what emotions have value within African communitarianism, especially as emotions like anger or resentment could stand in tension with important communitarian values, such as social harmony. While little critical attention has so far been paid to such emotions within an African communitarian framework, a wider philosophical literature examining the moral value of disruptive emotions could be drawn on to develop analyses of emotion within African communitarianism. In this paper, I explore how such an analysis could proceed. I argue that drawing on the wider emotion literature, and especially the concept of reactive attitudes introduced by P. F. Strawson, provides an initial case for even disruptive emotions to have value. Even so, we must question whether an analysis of emotion plausibly based on individualistic commitments is compatible with relational communitarian commitments. I nevertheless defend the compatibility and argue that, not only can disruptive emotions have instrumental value through their epistemic and motivational roles in the promotion of community but, importantly, they are partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships within which we are embedded and that form community.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 2 February 2021
Accepted 15 December 2021

KEYWORDS
African communitarianism; communitarian emotion; Bernard Matolino; reactive attitudes; anger and resentment

I. Introduction

African communitarianism is at its core a form of relational ethics, one which highlights our embeddedness in interpersonal relationships that promote the good of the community. Much contemporary philosophical work on African communitarianism highlights the centrality of values such as 'peace, harmony, stability, solidarity and mutual reciprocity and sympathy' (Gyekye 1995, 65), where a 'communalistic orientation will naturally prize social harmony' (Wiredu 2005, 347) or where communal or harmonious relationships are what constitute good character (Metz 2019a). As the former Archbishop of South Africa Desmond Tutu famously describes the sub-Saharan communitarian ethic of *ubuntu*, 'Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good. Anything that subverts or undermines this sought-after good is to be avoided like the plague.' Indeed, he continues, 'Anger,

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resentment, lust for revenge, even success through aggressive competitiveness, are corrosive of this good' (Tutu 1999, 35).

Yet, the relation between the good of the community, the interpersonal relationships in which we are embedded, and how community is promoted can be a complex one, where being embedded in interpersonal relationships that form part of community need not be at odds with actions that could otherwise be seen to disrupt values such as social harmony. As Colin Chasi (2014, 2021) argues, for instance, violence and rebellion against practices like colonialism or apartheid are actions that may in fact be consistent with such values because violence may sometimes be part of establishing a more just social order. Or, as Thaddeus Metz (2019b) proposes, punishment that expresses disapproval of wrongdoing could in fact be an action that aids social harmony by constituting reconciliation.

With this complex relation in mind, and if certain disruptive actions are arguably compatible with communitarian values, what role might disruptive emotions and attitudes like anger and resentment have within a communitarian framework?[1] While someone like Tutu finds no place for anger and resentment, it is quite plausible that disruptive emotions, similar to the actions with which those like Chasi and Metz are concerned, are partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships that form part of community. It is thus the aim of this paper to turn a critical eye to disruptive emotions such as these to assess in what ways, if any, they could fit into a communitarian approach.

Drawing on analyses of so-called 'reactive attitudes' like resentment within the wider, largely western-based philosophical literature, I argue that such emotions can play a role in interpersonal relationships within an African communitarian framework in ways that are compatible with community. Not only can they have instrumental value through both epistemic and motivational roles in the promotion of community but, importantly, they can have final value in the sense that they can be valued within a communitarian framework for their own sake. This is because they are partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships within which we are embedded and that form part of community.

To make this argument, I begin in section II by giving some background on African communitarianism and discussing Bernard Matolino's recent argument that African communitarianism is grounded in emotion, what he calls communitarian emotion (see Matolino 2015). I focus on Matolino's work because, while various philosophers have acknowledged the role of emotion especially of the sympathetic kind within a communitarian framework, they have not explicitly explored the implications of giving it that role. Matolino, in contrast, critically examines some of those implications. In section III, I draw on the wider literature on emotion and interpersonal relationships to identify important similarities between claims found there and Matolino's core claims. If we do draw on the wider literature on emotion, however, a range of emotions could be found to have value within our interpersonal relationships – including both sympathetic and disruptive emotions, as I discuss in section IV. This creates a tension between the values of social harmony and disruptive emotions. In section V, I thus take a step back to assess the viability of applying existing arguments about the value of emotion based on largely individualistic assumptions about personhood and agency within an African communitarian framework. Nevertheless, I argue that there is sufficient overlap to do so. As such, Tutu's rejection of anger and resentment as examples of 'anything that subverts or undermines the sought-after good' overlooks the important ways in which emotions like these

could in fact be partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships that form part of community, and in ways that can further promote community.

A short note on terminology is needed before proceeding. Throughout this paper, I use 'emotion' as a general term to refer to a range of affective phenomena, a usage which I believe is in keeping with how Matolino and others use the word. However, the affective domain is rich in variety, where there are emotional episodes, emotional dispositions, affective attitudes, even moods. What all of these have in common, and what sets them apart from non-affective mental phenomena, is that they have both a feeling component – perhaps the feeling of occurrent bodily changes, perhaps a motivational tension – and, crucially, an intentional component, typically a positive or negative evaluation or appraisal (for a useful discussion, see Ben-Ze'ev 2010). While I use 'emotion' loosely, as the paper progresses I will focus more specifically on affective attitudes – and even within that class, affective attitudes that are reactive attitudes. I will say more about these attitudes later when the discussion requires more finesse than simply referring to 'emotion'.

II. African communitarianism and emotion

African communitarianism is a relational ethic that highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships. This is apparent when looking at communitarian conceptions of moral status and personhood, as will be discussed in what follows. As I am not engaging with a specific account of communitarianism but more generally with the kind of conceptual framework it provides, in this section I offer general characterisations of communitarianism and the closely related concepts of moral status and personhood, drawing on Matolino (2015) to aid my discussion. In the latter part of this section, I turn to unpacking elements of Matolino's argument that communitarianism is grounded in emotion that is aligned with reason which, if correct, has potential implications for the value that emotions can have in our moral lives.

As already mentioned, African communitarianism is at heart a form of a relational ethic that emphasises the importance of the community and communal relationships, along with the duties one has to others. As Kwame Gyekye describes:

> The natural relationality of the person […] immediately plunges him into a moral universe, making morality an essentially social and trans-individual phenomenon focused on the well-being of others. Our natural sociality then prescribes or mandates a morality that, clearly, should be weighted on duty, i.e. on that which one has to do for others. (Gyekye 1992, 118)

A defining element of communitarianism, one which captures its relational nature, is how moral status is conceived. On an individualistic ethic like utilitarianism or Kantian deontology, for instance, an individual has moral status in virtue of some intrinsic feature of themself, such as the capacity to experience pleasure or pain or the capacity for rationality. On a relational ethic, in contrast, one has moral status in virtue of a relational property. In the case of African communitarianism, the relational property is made up of how one stands in relation to others within one's community and to one's community as a whole, giving rise to the importance of duties owing to one another. So, on communitarianism, the

relations that are important for moral status are with the community and others in the community.

In turn, if the bearers of moral status are persons, then a communitarian conception of personhood defines being a person in terms of one's successful discharge of duties to one's community, as a specific form of human function (Matolino 2015). As Matolino writes, 'This excellent human person is one who is attuned to communal demands that are placed on her' (2015, 42). What is also apparent in this quotation is the notion of excellence. Being a person is having a status of moral excellence, where personhood is an achievement for which one ought to strive but at which one could fail.

While communitarian conceptions of personhood come in different strengths based on what role they give to the community and to the individual (see, for instance, Menkiti 1984; Gyekye 1997), what they have in common is that personhood is constituted by the individual's relations with her community. The attainment of moral excellence and the status of personhood is determined by a successful discharging of duties within one's community (Matolino 2015, 43).

An important aspect of relating to one's community and discharging one's duties are thus one's interpersonal relationships. Again, to draw on Gyekye, we see that

> The success that must accrue to communal or corporative living depends very much on each member of the community demonstrating a high degree of moral responsiveness and sensitivity in relation to the needs and well-being of other members. (Gyekye 1992, 118)

That sensitivity presumably involves 'close sympathetic relations within the group' (Mokgoro 1998, 17). Or, as Kwasi Wiredu describes, the moral foundations of a broadly African morality involve conforming to the requirements of a harmony of interests, 'which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interests of others' (Wiredu 2005, 337). The communal relationships are, crucially, constituted in part by sympathy but also by closely related emotions that motivate actions that support the good of each other and of the community.

As is evident, then, emotion is central in our interpersonal relationships and thereby in communitarianism: there is 'an irreducible passional ingredient, not purely personal, for it is quintessentially social' (Wiredu 2005, 340). Now, while Matolino is not the first to draw attention to these 'passional ingredients', what he does do is offer a close examination of what it actually means to give emotion such a central role. In 'Emotion as a feature of Aristotelian eudaimonia and African communitarianism' (2015), Matolino draws links between emotion within the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's work on virtue and eudaimonia (roughly, human welfare or flourishing) and values within African communitarianism, arguing that the two philosophical approaches share important similarities. Matolino uses the comparison to expand on how what he calls 'communitarian emotion' is an important part of communitarianism, thereby 'rehabilitating' a role for emotion in African communitarianism. I'll turn now to presenting some of his key claims, specifically that emotion is 'an orientation that is deeply rooted in reason' (Matolino 2015, 59), where African communitarianism is grounded 'in an emotional base that is aligned to reason' (40).

Often, when emotion is discussed in some detail it is in the context of referring to Léopold Senghor's famous, or infamous, argument that African peoples have a distinctive mode of knowing, one that is communal and emotional (see Senghor 1995). Matolino

uses Senghor's arguments as a foil for his discussion where, while disagreeing with parts of Senghor's philosophy, Matolino nevertheless agrees with one core claim. This is a claim that he identifies as being central to African communitarianism, namely that African communitarian ethics is grounded in an emotional base. Why? Because, Matolino writes, the 'basis of affinity between Africans in their communities is largely based on some emotional connection' (Matolino 2015, 55). As Matolino notes, a communitarian approach to duties is of things owed to people *in virtue of* one's relations to each other, where one's commitment to what is owed to one another arises from an affective or relational dimension with which one identifies. This is the important role given to something like sympathy, where '[t]his ability to identify with the other is only made possible by some serious degree of mutual recognition between the agent and the other' (56). As a result, if Matolino is right, then African communitarianism is an emotion-based ethic as it is grounded in our affective relations to one another in some important way.

Now, Matolino raises two potential problems that face all emotion-based ethics, which are the worries that emotions exhibit partiality and that emotions are unreliable. The problem of partiality is the charge that our emotions are selective and fail to be responses to evidence regarding the actual rightness or wrongness of an action. The problem of unreliability is the related charge that we do not always experience emotions when and how we ought to; we sometimes experience emotions that we ought not to or at the wrong times. These problems are potentially magnified under communitarianism. As a system of ethics, communitarianism risks being parochial and of limited scope because we may experience emotions for those in our immediate community but not necessarily affectively identify with strangers, and we may fail to respond to the moral values at play outside of our immediate sphere of concern.

While the problem of partiality has been addressed in various ways in the literature, here I want to turn to an aspect of Matolino's defence of how *both* the problems of partiality and unreliability can be dealt with, one that is relevant for how we should understand the role of emotion within communitarianism.

Matolino contrasts Aristotle's eudaimonia with African communitarianism and argues that both offer practical frameworks for living an ethical life and are concerned with what it means to flourish as a human. With this contrast to hand, he turns to Sherman's (1997) discussion of similar problems facing an Aristotelian account of virtue that gives a prominent role to emotion. Drawing on Sherman's defence, Matolino points out that the partiality and unreliability of emotion can be countered by the fact that emotions can be responsive to reason because they are based on cognitive foundations, open to reflection and transformation. So, if our emotions may sometimes be problematic in their partiality or unreliability, they nevertheless are such that they can be responsive to reason and we can monitor and modulate them, taking actions to transform them. Ultimately, our emotion ought to, and can, align with reason. Matolino draws these components together to propose 'not only that emotion is reason', thus capturing elements of Senghor's philosophy, but also 'that there is an external standard to emotion which is intuitively reason and which would be consonant with the operations of emotion' (Matolino 2015, 58).

A new question then arises. If emotion should be aligned with reason, what is the reason that justifies communitarian emotion? Recognising the communitarian commitments, Matolino suggests that the reason that justifies communitarian emotion 'has to lie in an account that has to do with the need for the sustenance of the community as

a facilitator of all human (ethical and epistemological) possibilities', which is 'linked to the indispensability of the community in helping individuals answer questions of value' (Matolino 2015, 59). These questions of value include questions regarding what is valued as well as the significance of the values to 'how people conceive who they are' (594).

We therefore end up with a picture of emotion as not only playing a motivating role but also an ethical one, in the sense of mediating our identification with others, and an epistemic one, in the sense of mediating questions of value. Similar ideas can be found when Metz writes:

> Supposing the relevant sorts of relationship involve acting in ways that meet others' emotional and other needs, it will be essential for a moral agent tasked with maintaining such relationships to appeal to her own emotions, and far beyond those of guilt or even anger and resentment. Sympathy will obviously play an epistemic role here; if one feels bad for another person, then one has some evidence that he is faring poorly and could use certain kinds of help. Fear can be a reliable indicator of danger and prompt one to act in ways that help others to avoid it. Annoyance with, or the vague sense that something is not right about, a person's behaviour can reliably pick out his neuroses and unconscious motives and hence point to ways to help him or those who interact with him. Gratitude is often a signal that another person cares for one and warrants care in return. Simply liking someone is strong evidence that a good relationship with her is likely. (Metz 2013, 84)

Here, sympathy and gratitude but also fear and annoyance play a variety of roles, from ethical to epistemic. But how is it that emotion can function in these ways? What about the allusions to guilt, anger, and resentment at the beginning of the excerpt: how can we determine what emotions – and when – have value within a communitarian framework, especially those emotions that might conflict with communitarian values such as harmony? As mentioned in the introduction, others have argued for the compatibility of disruptive *actions* like violence or punishment with a communitarian framework that centralises values like social harmony (Chasi 2014, 2021; Metz 2019b), but similar attention has yet to be paid to disruptive *emotions* like anger and resentment. While the quotation from Metz above indicates that there could be important roles available to emotions, the challenge is to flesh out Metz's claims to examine whether and how emotions can function in these ways, as well as how we could determine what emotions – and when – have value within a communitarian framework.[2] As I shall argue in what follows, disruptive emotions do not just have instrumental value through their epistemic, ethical and motivational roles but are partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships that form community.

III. Emotion aligned with reason

In the previous section, we saw that one of the central claims of Matolino's account is that emotion, if it is to have the role it ought to have in communitarianism, must be aligned with reason. More specifically, Matolino appeals to an understanding of emotions as having cognitive foundations, allowing that they be responsive to reason. Because of this, emotions can be monitored and modulated. This characterisation of emotion finds currency in contemporary largely western-based literature on emotion, opening the possibility for a conversation between different philosophical approaches to expand on the nature of communitarian emotion. In this section, I draw attention to the similarities

between Matolino's claims and those in the wider literature on emotion, thereby unpacking what it means to say that emotions have a cognitive foundation and, more specifically, how this in fact refers to the intentional nature of emotion. In the following section, I explore some initial implications arising from this literature for the role of emotion within our interpersonal relationships, implications that illustrate a *prime facie* tension between potentially valuable but disruptive emotions and values such as social harmony.

The idea that emotions have a cognitive foundation is an idea with ancient roots. Indeed, Matolino himself engages with Aristotle's work. For Aristotle, experiencing an emotion is experiencing pain or pleasure where the pain or pleasure is *intentional* (Dow 2011). Intentionality is a philosophical term of art referring to how emotions, like other mental phenomena, are 'about' something. Emotions are typically 'about' a target object as being a particular way, where that particular way is evaluative in nature. How the object is presented makes up the intentional content of the emotion. My fear of the spider, for instance, is about the spider as dangerous, as *bad* for me, which makes up the intentional content. This intentional nature of emotion is usually what is referred to by saying that emotions have a cognitive foundation.

Note that by saying that emotions have a cognitive foundation one could just be making a minimal claim about emotion's being intentional while remaining neutral on how that works. One need not be making a stronger claim that emotions themselves are, or are constituted by, familiar cognitive states and attitudes like belief or judgement, an approach to emotions that has been largely discredited. While the jury is out on what the cognitive involvement in emotion is, all that is relevant for purposes of this paper is that the idea that emotions are intentional with cognitive involvement is reasonably uncontroversial and, in fact, is what distinguishes all affective phenomena from simple feelings, like pain and pleasure or a queasy stomach and sweaty hands (Ben-Ze'ev 2010).

Why does being intentional, however, entail that emotions can be responsive to reason? After all, we know very well that our emotions often seem to be immune to our beliefs and judgements. I may believe that the spider in the corner is a rain spider and judge it to be harmless, for instance, yet I may still experience shivers of fear. Nevertheless, as Matolino drawing on Sherman discusses, emotions can be habituated and trained such that they can be aligned with reason over the long run. This is in fact something that can be done not just by training responses in a Pavlovian sense that only targets behaviour and bypasses what it is that emotions are about, but can be done by appealing to the intentional content of emotion to change the way in which we think and respond to certain stimuli. A technique of reappraisal, for instance, has been found to be effective in regulating how we respond to the object of an emotion (Lerner et al. 2015). I might reappraise a friend's lateness as an accident rather than as something deliberate, say, and thereby regulate my anger: I no longer see her lateness as something offensive to myself. In such a case, the technique works by changing how I see the object of my anger via the emotion, which is addressing the intentional nature of anger.

There is another sense in which we could understand how emotion can be aligned with reason beyond simply being intentional. Like beliefs, emotions are a kind of mental phenomenon for which we can and do request reasons, unlike other phenomena like perception. That is, our emotions, like our beliefs but not like our perceptions, are the kind of thing that can be justified and which we hold up to a standard of justification.

If I see my cat in front of me, for instance, it is nonsensical for you to ask for my reasons *why* I see my cat; my perception can be correct or incorrect, but it cannot be justified. I just see my cat. In contrast, if I believe that my cat is at the vet, you can ask why I so-believe. My belief can be correct or incorrect, but it can also be justified or unjustified. That is, I can offer good or bad reasons for *why* I believe what I do. If my reason for my belief is that I took her to the vet this morning, I have a reason that justifies my belief. If I dreamt that she was there, in contrast, my reason fails to justify my belief. Similarly, if my fear about my cat as being in danger is based on the vet's diagnosis, I have a reason that justifies my fear. If my fear is based on some website on page three of a Google search for my cat's symptoms, the chances are that my fear is unjustified. Emotions thus have standards of justification, where they can be had for good or bad reasons, much like states that we more frequently think of as being aligned with reason. The way in which emotions have justification is thus another sense in which emotions could be aligned with reason, a sense that also traces back to the intentional nature of emotion.

In the literature on the rationality of emotion, yet another kind of way in which emotion could be connected to reason or rationality more generally is discussed, which is that emotions can be responsive to *reasons* (see Carman 2018 for discussion). Where being aligned with reason in the sense discussed above refers to how emotion can be aligned with *the capacity* of reason, being responsive to reasons instead refers to how emotions can be aligned with *reasons*. As we have seen, emotions have intentional content, and that intentional content can be assessed according to standards of fittingness. In this way, emotions are like perception: if I see my cat in front of me, my perception is fitting if my cat really is in front of me. If we take reasons to be facts, then my perception is fitting because it is aligned with the fact that my cat is in front of me, which can serve as a reason for further belief or action. If I am afraid about my cat as being in danger, my fear represents my cat as being in danger, and it is fitting if my cat really is in danger. Note that it can also be fitting but unjustified if my cat is indeed in danger but the reason for my emotion fails to justify it, such as that page three Google search. So, my emotion is fitting because it is aligned with the fact that my cat is in danger, which can serve as a reason for further belief or action. As a result, by attending to the content of our emotions, we can potentially learn information about the way things are, information that could constitute reasons for other beliefs or action.

The intentional nature of emotion has generated a vast literature about both what justifies an emotion and what, if anything, an emotion justifies and how. When Matolino proposes that emotions have not only a motivating and ethical role but also an epistemic role, we can thus see how this can be developed based on insights about the intentional nature of emotion. If, as Metz suggests, sympathy can play an epistemic role by providing evidence of how someone is faring, or fear can indicate danger, or annoyance can help to identify elements of a person's behaviour that need adjusting, we can see that this is due to the intentional nature of emotion, thereby answering one of the questions I posed at the end of the previous section of how emotions can function in these ways.

I also posed a second question, which still needs to be addressed: how can we determine what emotions – and when – have value within a communitarian framework? While Matolino himself does not provide further details about communitarian emotion, this wider literature on emotion, and especially the implications of the intentional nature of emotion, could be drawn upon to expand on the nature of communitarian emotion.

IV. The intentional nature of emotion and interpersonal relationships

Let us grant that emotions are intentional and let us grant, too, that Matolino's argument that communitarianism as grounded in emotion aligned with reason appeals to the intentionality of emotion. What, then, are the implications for what kinds of emotion can be found to have value within a communitarian framework, and when? An initial answer might be to identify those emotions that are instrumental in enhancing or contributing to core values like social harmony or in mediating our identification with one another, examples like sympathy, compassion, and gratitude. These are the pro-social emotions that are typically identified. However, if we accept that emotions are intentional in nature, can be justified by reasons, and can be fitting, other emotions need attention as potentially valuable, including harmony-disrupting ones like anger or resentment.

Now, because of their intentional nature, emotions potentially have epistemic value in directing our attention to certain evaluative features of the world around us. This insight has been drawn upon to argue that emotions like anger and resentment have important moral and political value. Something like anger, as Alison Jaggar writes, can allow 'us to perceive the world differently than we would from its portrayal in conventional descriptions' (Jaggar 1989, 145). If the emotion is fitting, we can learn about injustices and the wrongs that are faced. Because it is fitting, it can also be morally problematic to demand that others, especially those in situations of oppression, control or regulate their emotions like anger because this kind of demand may impose a new layer of injustice (Srinivasan 2018). In part, forcing someone to control their emotion can be forcing them to reject the import of the situation for what it is.

These kinds of arguments appeal to the epistemic value of emotion, raising important questions about the balancing of epistemic value with other kinds of value, such as moral value. What kind of role we give to emotions in virtue of their epistemic power will potentially be dependent on our background moral commitments, such as commitments to individual rights or to interpretations of justice. If so, then a communitarian framework that emphasises duties over rights might have different implications and nuances to how such emotions fit in, implications and nuances that need to be further explored. To kickstart such an exploration, I am going to focus on low hanging fruit, so-to-speak. A large part of the literature defending the value of disruptive emotions has been influenced by a particular class of argument, one which draws on the intentional nature of emotion to place relevant emotions at the centre of interpersonal relationships. I call this 'low hanging fruit' because such emotions may not just have value in a broad epistemic and moral sense, but in a sense that is directly relevant to a core focus of communitarianism: interpersonal relationships. These are our affective, reactive attitudes.

As noted in the introduction, I am using 'emotion' as a catch-all term to refer to a range of affective phenomena. One type in this range are affective attitudes. An emotion like anger typically involves one kind of feeling and response, whereas an affective attitude like resentment is more complex. As Macalester Bell describes, 'To have an affective attitude *a* towards *x* is to respond to *x* with distinctive patterns of affect and attention: it is to *see x as a*' (Bell 2011, 451). An affective attitude, then, can be understood as a way of seeing, where 'seeing *x* as *a*' is a feature of the attitude's being intentional.

Now, some of our affective attitudes are also reactive attitudes. Reactive attitudes are responses we have in virtue of being part of a moral community and having interpersonal

relationships. Because of our interpersonal relationships, as P. F. Strawson who introduced the concept of reactive attitudes describes in his essay 'Freedom and resentment', it matters to us 'whether the actions of other people … reflect attitudes towards us of goodwill, affection, or esteem on the one hand or contempt, indifference, or malevolence on the other' (Strawson 2008, 5–6). When we undergo a reactive attitude, we react to the attitudes others show towards us; we see them in a certain way. One such attitude is gratitude, where we experience gratitude in response to an attitude or action of goodwill. Another such attitude is resentment, where we experience resentment in response to a far more negative attitude or action of another.

Reactive attitudes are contrasted with objective attitudes, where we instead see the person as a 'subject' for 'treatment', to be managed in certain ways. For instance, we might react to the tantrum of a small child not with resentment but rather by saying, 'Oh shame, he doesn't know how to deal with frustration yet'. In other words, we explain away the child's tantrum and behaviour by highlighting how the behaviour is not an expression of the child's attitude towards us, not an action expressing ill-will or malicious intent. We can also modify our reactive attitudes by adopting an objective attitude. If I resent my cat for leaving muddy footprints on the floor, I am reacting to what seems to me to be an expression of ill-will towards me. But if I remind myself that it is only a cat, I adopt an objective attitude. This would be a form of reappraising, that technique for emotion modulation mentioned in the previous section.

What is important about reactive attitudes is that they are responses to others with whom we have interpersonal relationships and, crucially, responses to them as human agents. As human agents, they are in control of their actions and how they choose to express their will towards us. It is because of this that my anger at my cat is misplaced: my cat is not an agent expressing her attitudes through her actions. On the flip side, if I fail to take your actions seriously because I do not see you as being in control of them – I adopt an objective attitude – I can fail to take you seriously as an agent in your own right and cause you a particular kind of offence in your capacity as an agent. As such, my reactive attitudes are a constitutive part of an interpersonal relationship with other human agents.

The insight captured by reactive attitudes, that certain emotions and attitudes are constitutive parts of our interpersonal relationships whereby we recognise the nature of the actions and choices of others, has been influential in subsequent literature defending the moral value of emotion. For instance, defences of emotions and attitudes like contempt, anger and resentment (see Mason 2003; Bell 2009) have been inspired by how these phenomena form part of our interpersonal relationships. Can similar insights find place within African communitarianism?

We need to step somewhat carefully here. In the quotation from Tutu with which this paper opened, we saw that: 'Harmony, friendliness, community are great goods. Social harmony is for us the *summum bonum* – the greatest good' (Tutu 1999, 24). As Tutu highlights, social harmony is of vital importance. Living together in community, one both identifies with others and shows solidarity with others, seeking harmony and community with others. In a similar vein, Gyekye identifies certain values that contribute towards social harmony as being core to communitarianism and as giving rise to the centrality of duties within a communitarian ethic. As he writes:

> The social and ethical values of social well-being, solidarity, interdependence, cooperation, compassion, and reciprocity, which can be said to characterise communitarian morality, primarily impose on the individual a duty to the community and its members. It is all these considerations that elevate the notion of duties to a priority status in the whole enterprise of communitarian life. (Gyekye 1992, 118)

All of this is to highlight the importance of strong binding and friendly relations with one another, as well as the overall peace and harmony of the community. Values that enhance such relationships, like those that Gyekye identifies, are given pride-of-place. 'Anything' that works against harmonious relationships is, *prima facie* at least, problematic because 'they are corrosive of this good' (Tutu 1999, 35) – including anger, resentment or contempt.

V. Reactive attitudes and communitarian personhood

There might not actually be a need to resolve the *prima facie* tension between values like social harmony and the disruption of some reactive attitudes. This is because the analysis of reactive attitudes discussed in the previous section may be incompatible with a communitarian framework in the first place. In particular, the concept of reactive attitudes, as Strawson originally develops it, is grounded on a particular conception of human agency, one influenced by an individualistic Kantian conception of a person as having a capacity for rationality. As we saw in the first section, however, communitarian conceptions of personhood define the status of personhood in terms of one's relationships with others and with the community rather than in terms of an intrinsic feature of the individual. As such, the grounding assumptions between the analysis of reactive attitudes and a communitarian framework vary. Nevertheless, in this section, I argue that the concept of reactive attitudes is robust enough to still find application within a communitarian framework.

Now, as we saw, reactive attitudes are attitudes that we adopt that recognise the nature of the actions and choices of others, where they are responses to others as human agents who are in control of their actions and how they choose to express their will towards us. Strawson initially introduced the concept of reactive attitudes in a discussion about free will and determinism, addressing human agency. Human agents, at least on an influential western conception, are persons, where persons reflect on, care about and act on their motivations (Frankfurt 1971). This conception of human agency highlights how persons have a capacity for reflection, a capacity tied to a rational capacity within the individual. So, in recognising the agency of another in our interpersonal relationships, the analysis of reactive attitudes seems to depend on an understanding of human agency that ties closely to personhood, understood in individualistic terms.

Nevertheless, questions of agency are still important within communitarianism, as are questions of free will. For one thing, communitarian conceptions of personhood come in different degrees, where one such conception, Gyekye's so-called 'moderate communitarianism', allows that persons are more than just social relations, but also have what he calls a 'mental feature' (Gyekye 1997). Part of this mental feature is a capacity for rationality, where a person is self-governing and self-directed. That is, a person, on such a conception, is an agent.

More generally, agency is given a role in character development within communitarianism, where a defining feature of African communitarianism, as a system of ethics, is

that it is character-based (Gyekye 2011, 1995). As Gyekye describes, African communitarianism is 'a character-based ethics that maintains that the quality of the individual's character is most fundamental in our moral life' (Gyekye 2011, 8). Individuals are not born with virtuous and vicious characters; rather, character is developed and acquired through one's actions and habits. As character is developed, someone can be held responsible for the state of their character, through the actions that they have taken and habits they have formed. As such, 'what a person does or does not do is most crucial to the formation and development of his or her character, and, thus, to becoming moral or immoral' (10).

So, within a communitarian framework, someone's capacity to choose to act in certain ways, ways that can be good or bad, and their capacity to be an agent who is responsible for their actions, is a central feature in character and character development. Human agency might not be equated with personhood *per se*, as personhood involves more than an individual's agency, but it is nevertheless an important element.

The concept of reactive attitudes is at its core a concept of a kind of attitude that we have as part of recognising the agency of others expressed in their actions and attitudes. This centrality of agency, and the recognition of agency, need not only be interpreted against individualistic commitments but could be interpreted within a communitarian framework. In fact, remember what Matolino writes about the affective identification we have with others: '[t]his ability to identify with the other *is only made possible by some serious degree of mutual recognition between the agent and the other*' (Matolino 2015, 56 my emphasis). A communitarian framework would lend a particular flavour in terms of how we recognise others, what kinds of actions and attitudes we expect of others, and what kinds of actions and attitudes we judge to be morally virtuous or lacking. That is, it frames how we interpret the attitudes and actions of others and respond to their agency, offering a system of evaluative prioritisations of what matters and what does not against which someone's actions and attitudes can be held.

For instance, if personhood is a notion of moral excellence within the community, individuals are expected to reflect on, care about and act on their motivations when exercising their agency. Doing so, however, ought to be informed by both their relations to each other and to the community, as well as by their discharging of duties. Indeed, as Munyaradzi Felix Murove points out, 'A proper understanding of personal responsibility can only be that which is based on being sensitised to one's embeddedness to relationship with others', where 'responsibility is cemented to the idea that the individual is morally accountable to others' (Murove 2014, 39). When someone has failed to live up to the moral standards of the community or failed to discharge their duties, an attitude such as resentment may thus be appropriate as an attitude that responds to the expression of that individual's will through their agency. It just is recognition of how someone is faring on their journey to attaining personhood, a recognition that personhood is something that is achieved in large part through the actions one chooses to perform. It is also a way of communicating to others how they are faring – and holding them to account.

At the same time, however, expressions of human agency are not all that matter. Of vital importance are interpersonal relationships, not just as relationships between agents but as themselves constitutive parts of a conception of personhood and identity.

How one individual is faring may be a result of their agential choices and actions, but how one individual is faring is also how those relationships are faring. That is, someone making choices that exhibit ill will is not just a matter of that one individual's choices, as an island; that individual stands in relation to others within the community where the individual's choices impact those relationships. If the individual fares badly, then the whole is negatively impacted. An attitude of resentment, then, is not justified solely in terms of recognising the agency of others in the choices that they make, but also in terms of how the attitude forms part of interpersonal relationships, recognising the moral status of both oneself and of others as interconnected.

Reactive attitudes as constitutive parts of our interpersonal relationships can thus have value on a communitarian framework because they are recognitions of others as interconnected agents and a core part of being in community with others. Because of this they can also have instrumental value through their motivational and epistemic roles in contributing to the maintenance of the interpersonal relationships that form community. This does impose conditions on when reactive attitudes will be appropriate. Remember how Matolino describes the reason that justifies communitarian emotion: it 'has to lie in an account that has to do with the need for the sustenance of the community as a facilitator of all human (ethical and epistemological) possibilities', which is 'linked to the indispensability of the community in helping individuals answer questions of value' (Matolino 2015, 59). So, a full account of the value and appropriateness of reactive attitudes cannot rest at highlighting the constitutive role within interpersonal relationships but must also give conditions for when those attitudes and emotions can facilitate human possibilities, within a context where the community is indispensable.

This complexity is something that Metz alludes to and which we can now flesh out. In the passage quoted at length above, Metz writes that gratitude is 'often a signal that another person cares for one' (Metz 2013, 84). We can now see why gratitude can have this epistemic role: gratitude is a reactive attitude that is a response to an expression of another's attitude towards oneself. As a pro-social attitude, gratitude can also have Matolino's ethical role of mediating our identification with others. Further, and as Metz continues, gratitude 'is often a signal that another person cares for one *and warrants care in return*' (my emphasis). That is, gratitude has a motivational role in that it can motivate actions that can contribute to the maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Through these epistemic, ethical and motivational roles, gratitude has instrumental value in the promotion of community.

However, if responding to others in a way that recognises their agency is a constitutive part of standing in an interpersonal relationship with that person, then gratitude can also have final value in the sense that it can be valued within a communitarian framework for its own sake.

Remember, too, that Metz alludes to guilt, anger and resentment's being involved in maintaining relationships. As he writes:

> Supposing the relevant sorts of relationship involve acting in ways that meet others' emotional and other needs, it will be essential for a moral agent tasked with maintaining such relationships to appeal to her own emotions, and far beyond those of guilt or even anger and resentment. (Metz 2013, 84)

If guilt, anger, and resentment are attitudes we adopt in response to the actions of ourselves or another, then we can see how even disruptive emotions can have motivational and epistemic roles, where conditions for appropriate guilt, anger or resentment include that the emotions be put to task in maintaining interpersonal relationships. Similarly, for Metz, sympathy (even if not a reactive attitude) provides 'some evidence that [another] is faring poorly *and could use certain kinds of help*', or annoyance at another can '*point to ways to help him or those who interact with him*'. So, what Metz highlights in this extended passage is the epistemic and motivational roles that emotions and affective attitudes can have, where even disruptive emotions can have instrumental value in the promotion of community through these roles.

Once we bring in an analysis of reactive attitudes, however, we further see that certain emotions and affective attitudes are part of our recognising the agency of others and of our standing in relationship with them. Note that this role is not the 'ethical' role that Matolino identifies, where emotions can mediate our identification with others. In the sense relevant here, and under the conditions given by communitarian considerations, these emotions and affective attitudes do not simply mediate our identification with others – indeed, in some cases it is plausible that something like resentment could hinder our identification with others – but rather are partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships themselves. In this constitutive role, their value in promoting community is not merely instrumental but a core part of being in community with others.

VI. Resolving the tension: forming and promoting community

If Matolino is correct and African communitarianism is grounded in emotion aligned with reason, then questions arise about how it is that emotion can function in the ways that Matolino describes, and how we can determine what emotions – and when – have value within a communitarian framework, especially those emotions that might seem to conflict with communitarian values such as social harmony. As I have argued in this paper, once we recognise similarities between Matolino's claims and the wider literature on emotion, we can draw on that literature to inform a critical examination of communitarian emotion in pursuit of answers to such questions. Yet, doing so must be done with awareness of what the background moral commitments might be, especially as communitarianism is a relational system of ethics while much of the literature on the moral value of emotion may be based on individualistic assumptions.

With this hesitation in mind, in this paper I looked at the concept of reactive attitudes and argued that it could be applied fruitfully within a communitarian framework. We saw that, when applied within a communitarian framework, a reactive attitude won't be justified solely in terms of how it is a response to the expression of another's will through their attitudes and actions, but also in terms of how the attitude forms part of interpersonal relationships where one recognises the moral status of both oneself and of others as interconnected.

We therefore see that certain emotions and affective attitudes, including disruptive ones, can have instrumental value within a communitarian framework in the way that they can play epistemic and motivational roles. However, as part of recognising the

agency of others held up to standards of promoting community, these emotions can also have final value within a communitarian framework in the way that they are constitutive of the interpersonal relationships within which we are embedded and which form community. Pro-social emotions like sympathy and its kin are easy to see as having instrumental roles in promoting community or in mediating our identification with others, but the lens of reactive attitudes allows us to unpack how a broader range of emotions can not only have instrumental value, but also, given relevant conditions, be partially constitutive of the interpersonal relationships that form part of community.

Notes

1. From here on, whenever I use 'communitiarianism' or 'communitarian' in this paper, I am referring to African communitarianism.
2. In recent work, Metz argues that survivor's guilt can be interpreted as a manifestation of good character, where having a good character is living communally or in harmony with one another (Metz 2019a). Something like survivor's guilt or negative emotions like feeling bad for others could be manifestations of our standing in interpersonal relationships but they do not necessarily pose the same challenge to social harmony as disruptive emotions like anger or resentment because they can be more inward facing. As such, these different emotions need to be treated separately, where my approach differs from Metz' by looking more closely at the role of reactive attitudes within interpersonal relationships.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants of the 26th conference of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS) and of a workshop on political emotions hosted by the University of the Witwatersrand, as well as the editors and two anonymous referees of this journal, for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of the paper. I made substantial headway on the paper during an online writing retreat at the end of 2020 and would also like to thank my colleagues attending the retreat for creating a conducive and supportive writing environment (even while fully online).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work is based on the research supported wholly by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number: 121895).

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