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PRAGMATIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE *CHAGGA* CONCEPTS OF DISABILITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and describes the findings of the *Chagga* people's concepts about disability and their impact on people with disabilities, their families and their community. This chapter begins by describing the geographical locations in the study and provides a general overview of the findings. The subsequent section explains the ethnographical relationship, its importance, and the researcher's challenges. The next section describes the researcher's observations of the community's ways of living, accomplished without disturbing the cultural set-up, and how these observations guided the researcher's approach. This is followed by descriptions of the interviewees and the reasons for selecting them. Next are sections describing the community's concept about being a human and their rituals and ways of dealing with idea of and people with disability. The chapter ends with two sections, one on witchcraft, which describes witchcraft, witches, witch doctors, prayers for healing and the interconnected practices of thinking, relating and reacting to disabled people. The remaining section discusses how the community addresses people with disabilities, the lifestyle of beggars and homeless people with disabilities and the meaning of disability to the *Chagga* people.

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3.7 The Understanding of Humans According to the *Chagga* Community

It was essential in this work to comprehend the community's understanding of humans in order to help to evaluate the status, position and values of people with disabilities in comparison to people without disabilities. Traditionally, there was a culture of silence in the *Chagga* community regarding disability issues. For this reason, I often altered my terminology by using general terms like 'human being' instead of 'people with disabilities' to access community. Such an approach helped me to simply and practically see the way people with disabilities were perceived in contrast to people without disabilities.

I found that the social perception and praxis of understanding of humans among the *Chagga* people impressed other aspects of life. According to the community interpretations, a prime example was when someone's actions were wrong; they were no longer considered complete humans unless a ritual to clean the person was performed. Likewise, being disabled was not considered a normal human condition but a punishment for wrongdoing. This notion automatically disqualified any person with a disability from being a complete human in this society. The *Chagga* community members believe that people with disabilities have wronged God and the community. Therefore, a cleansing ritual should be performed to make them biologically fit and acceptable as a whole human in society. In the *Chagga* community, several rituals are performed to elevate one's human status in every stage of a community member's life (from birth to death). I considered those rituals to be a process to socially modify community members to shape them into the social notion of being complete humans.

The *Chagga* people use peculiar terminologies and idioms when talking about the concepts and understanding of human beings, which express each person's social position and status in the community. According to community standards, some people are socially perceived as less human because they are uncircumcised, married, diligent workers or do not have children. For this reason, the community disseminates its members into different classes. These classes make people live in a stereotypical state their entire life because they cannot reach the social standards of a complete human. However, it is worse for people with disabilities because they belong to the lesser human class their entire life.

Additionally, I found that the perception of humans in the community of *Chagga* is not contrary to the *Ubuntu* philosophy of African humanism, which affirms that humans depend on each other. The concept of *Ubuntu* focuses on the most important quality of humans in relation to one another. It includes basic values like respect, liberality, endurance, forgiveness and other acts of humanity Martinon J. P. (2013). Murove M. F. (2013) explains the *Ubuntu* concept is a way to be a human and understand that the individual's value originates from the community. According to the idea of *Ubuntu*, there is no distinction between the individual and the community because they exist in a reciprocal relationship. This reality of *Ubuntu* ideology is vivid and intertwined within the *Chagga* community social life, and decisions cannot be made without consulting other community members. The way of living is communal, and members view it as a good and pure life. No one is a complete human being if not intertwined with other community members for daily life activities. Agulanna C. (2010) in his research about community and human well-being in African culture wrote that a human being is not just an individual but a community. He also added that only the individual's life acquires meaning in society. The Views of Agulanna were prominent and practical in the *Chagga* community. Some *Chagga* people noted that life refers to the community and not the individual. Still, the experience of this work proved that the minority groups (people with disabilities, women and children) suffer from neglect, stereotypes and are not considered complete humans.

According to the results of this research, it is clear that the *Ubuntu* concepts accommodate the stereotype for the minority community members. This is because the *Ubuntu* ideology is structurally constructed by the community through clans, age groups and the ability to follow cultural and social norms, to name just a few. Among the *Chagga* people, *Ubuntu* ideology requires the ability to offer social support. Such support includes health care, food for the extended family, having a 'home' or owning land, a house or other facilities that any person could depend on for a living. This applies to all community members at the family and community levels.

Moreover, many signs and sayings in daily communication address people with disabilities as incomplete humans because they cannot perform the most socially expected activities. Descriptions of those signs and sayings are in a separate section. This imbalance of social interpretations of humans makes people with disabilities automatically and structurally ignored and isolated. Thus, disabled people cannot participate in community norms in the same way as people without disabilities; that suggests those people with disabilities do not participate in community meetings, decision making, sports activities, elections, or other everyday social tasks. It was noticeable that the understanding of equality, humanity, dignity, and the standard worth of human beings did not have the same weight for disabled people. The social strata of the community members is a living experience.

In addition, there was power domination within the *Chagga* community, which the ruling class wanted to maintain. Giving and receiving orders in different areas of people's lives was common and practical in the community. This is because the ruler and ruled classes were those who give orders and those who fulfil the orders. The division between the powerful and powerless people is a community standard of *Chagga* life. Going against the social structure of orders is considered misbehaviour and merits punishment. For example, the value of a teacher differed from the value of students; boys and girls were also valued differently. People with and without disabilities, children and parents were not exempt. Thus, the people in this community never had the personal power to choose the life they wanted to live. The *Chagga* people are under the control of the community, which hinders their freedom of choice and expression. The various levels and values of being a complete human were socially oriented and controlled by unwritten rules fundamental to social orders.

3.7.1 Rules of Admiration to Social Orders as Armaments

As I continued to research the social orders mentioned in previous sections, which split the community into distinct levels of humans, I realised that the orders given to community members are used as weapons to maintain the power of the ruling classes. Due to this, following social rules was one of the critical issues raised in most interviews and observations. Respecting the orders was connected with age, gender, power, generation and wealth. To illustrate this realisation, the following paragraphs describe fragments of some of the interviews that more precisely explain respect of social orders.

Hendry Temu, a retired primary school teacher who was interviewed on 5 October 2019, insists that "*heshima kwa mambo yetu yote ya kijamii ni muhimu sana, vinginevyo hatuna watu hapa",* which directly translates to ‘respect to issues of our community setup is very important, failure to respect them means that there is no humanity’. According to him, the community norms, values, habits, and taboos are not to be learned at formal schools. Instead, through interaction and socialisation in the community, one gains such knowledge. This social or community learning process leads to counting individuals as full humans. Otherwise, one is subhuman, particularly those who judge or question the social/community practices and their rationality to human life. In offering his example, Mr Temu continues to say that in his community, it is prohibited to discuss ‘such people’ openly (‘such people’ referring to people with disabilities, for him it is taboo to mention them). He persists that although he was a teacher, he followed the community’s orders. According to the interview with Mr Temu, it is possible to conclude that the ability to obey and follow social norms and orders credit a person with more value and respect as a human. Because of such attitudes as prevailed in the *Chagga* community, most people look for respect and value by observing the traditions and taboos even if they are irrational and inhuman by some community members and most non-community members.

Beyond that, the *Chagga* people do not have equal understanding or practices when valuing and respecting the community’s orders. I observed the differences in understanding and practising social orders because respecting and following community orders was necessary and not an option. Respecting all the given social orders was a demand of senior classes from junior classes. Many generations find themselves in such social systems out of their choice or will. Raised with these social standards, *Chagga* children automatically integrate them into their lives. Mambowe Janeth, one of the community elders in Kisereny village, said during her interview (7 October 2019) that "there is no community in which values and respect for humans are equal". According to her, more attention should be given to the elders, and any order they give should be heeded. Questioning them is considered misbehaviour. She concluded the interview by saying a very famous Swahili idiom, *"sikio halipiti kichwa"*, which means the ‘ears will never be taller than the head’. This idiom has different interpretations depending on the context. This means that ‘the elders will always have control in the community since they belong to the ruling class.

Raum O. (1967) pointed out that respect is part of the *Chagga* community; it must be learned from childhood and informal social education. It functions as a mystification to maintain the social gap between generations. Obedience to senior generations is learned in childhood. Therefore, when speaking or conveying a message, what matters most is the speaker’s age, not the content of the message. I noted that listening and acting upon elders’ statements had profoundly affected the community’s lives. Most community members were unable or unwilling to argue critically for things that affected their own lives or the community’s lives because an elder uttered the message. But I realised that people know what is correct but cannot practise it due to cultural barriers. The following statement, "*umepata wapi ujasiri wa kubishana na wakubwa zako?*" (Interview with Monyiaichi Ngina (9. October 2019), which means ‘where did you get a spirit to argue with the elders?, was often directed to the junior community members as a sign of misbehaviour for questioning actions/things done by elders. These attitudes make obeying elders’ orders an integral part of the community lifestyle. In various institutions, such as the church, public offices and families, the voice of the highest positioned leaders and elders are the final decision-makers for all subordinates, regardless of the impact or rationale. *"Tunawasikiliza wazee watasemaje” which* means ‘we are listening to hear what the elders have to say’, was a statement by the organisation coordinator, Mr Mringi J (21 October 2019), when I interviewed her about why they do not offer more space or a platform to the community members to learn from their organisation about people with disabilities. The question came up when I realised the gap between the community and most organisations that serve people with disabilities. In my observation, I found that the learning and cooperation platforms between the community and those organisations were minimal. Therefore, hierarchical power relations make community members, intellectuals and ordinary people conform to prevailing norms and thus unable to accept changes in various areas of their social life. It also makes younger generations live in fear of disrespecting or arguing with elders because they believe that such actions could result in a curse that may lead to something wrong occurring in their lives.

Through observation, I established that the deep-rooted notion of respecting the elderly and social conventions allow most of the questionable traditions and taboos to continue being observed in the community, even when they are harmful and worthless in the social and private lives of the *Chagga*. Through interactions with community members, I learned that most people from younger generations look forward to growing older and acquiring an elder status to garnish respect, give orders and escape judgement from the younger generation in any of their actions or decisions. My observations indicated that the community believes disability results from disrespecting the elders and community orders. Raum O. (1967), who carried out a study about *Chagga* childhood, suggests that respecting without questioning harms peoples' lives, despite its continued practice. According to Raum, this praxis is magic, as seen in the following statement:

> Magic is in fact no system of belief, but a type of traditional behaviour employed to control human destinies in hazardous circumstances. It is, as it were, a marginal phenomenon of behaviour. Normally behaviour adjusts the organism to change in the causal complex of which it is unit, or in things with which interaction has become habitual. Magic on the other hand, deals with the casual, the accidental, the unforeseen, and the interfering unknowable as defined by traditional experience. For this reason, where natural causes interrupt habitual interaction, as in death or catastrophes, primitive man concludes the element of chance is due to semi-human beings, to ancestors, and spirits. Magic, then, is predominantly a way of checking the instability and unpredictability of human behaviour and of influencing human or quasi-human action (Raum 1967, 41).

According to this research, it is definite that the meaning of humans derives from their society, and it is possible to conclude that their society physically and mentally shapes humans. Based on the findings of this research, it is possible to say that the *Chagga* people define what being a human is. Their definition categorises people according to age, sex, physical features, wealth and obedience. Therefore, the social stratum of the community members measures the treatment and actions towards their fellow community members. This hierarchy was demonstrated through different social services and behaviour among the members. This was possible and observable because it is part of their social lifestyle. These actions are a long-life principle that is found in all community members and connect members within their categories, differences, and diversity.

3.7.2 The Effects of Social Preconceived Perspectives on Disability

During the study, the effects of the preconceived social concepts of disability were noticeable in various aspects of *Chagga* life. There remain multiple physical and psychological incidences of suffering in the community, perceived and sensed directly among people with disabilities and those who care for them. For example, the general concept of disability as a punishment for wrongdoing is considered positive by some community members. According to them, it is an act that divides the saints from the sinners. This belief makes people with disabilities perceive that they are wrong, sinners and deserve their disabled status. This is how people in the community orient their entire life. Thus, threats, stereotypes, inequality, and inhuman actions are day-to-day experiences for people with disabilities and their families.

I noted that understanding who is and who is not a human in the *Chagga* community hinders the community from associating with people with disabilities. The gap between people with and without disabilities is an uncontrollable reality. Since people with disabilities are not seen as complete humans in the *Chagga* community, their rights and responsibilities are affected. There is no room for dialogue about disabilities. The social understanding of humans acts as a mechanism that limits people from making their own decisions or pursuing their wishes; the social system controls the freedom of speech and expression of different perceptions of humans.

Throughout my observations and interviews, I noted several fears and doubts when it was necessary to be closer to a person with a disability. These hesitations and worries resulted from how the community understands and views humans. The boundaries between people with and without disabilities limit the mutual acknowledgment and cooperation between the two groups. These social concepts create barriers against people with disabilities that exclude them from participating and playing an active role in the community. This reality is not based on their inability to interact or offer mutual or financial support but because they are subject to social limits that restrict with whom they may associate. Some interviews articulated these perceptions in more detail.

The interview with Anna Nyange (10.10.2019), a woman with a physical disability caused by a motorcycle accident, gave a clear picture of how her life experience differs from society’s perception of her. She experienced life both as a person without and with a disability. As a person with a physical disability, Anna experienced a lesser value and her status as a person declined in her community. However, she identifies herself as a complete and valuable human. Anna explained that after the accident, she could not walk correctly. She had to use crutches and, two years later, a wheelchair. It was difficult for Anna to manage everyday activities like she did previously. Her husband abandoned her and their son since she was no longer considered a human or capable of being a wife.

Anna's experience presents a clear image of how sudden changes in her physical abilities also affected her emotional and physical ties with the people around her. She was no longer considered a complete human. She experienced isolation and abandonment from her husband, family and society. In addition, Anna feels that her abandonment did not disturb the people around her. She said that "some of my closest family members told me that my husband has to find a wife because I can no longer serve him". Anna felt abused, humiliated and useless. This experience illustrates how disability limits physical access and emotional connections since people with disabilities are considered worthless and the least valuable humans. Anna clarifies this point by stating "all the abusive treatment happens because I am not the same, I am no longer a complete human or a wife. I am disabled. I lost human status to those who surround me".

Anna understands that what she is going through connects to the community’s understanding of disability. I consider her a role model for the community members because she spoke out for social transformation of the thoughts and actions towards people with disabilities. She said that "I did not give up. I communicate by telephone with people when I need help. Sometimes I get a reasonable response but sometimes I am ignored. But I shall keep moving on with my life to show that I am still a human despite my physical disability". Although closed doors surround Anna, I still consider her an insider activist for her positive thoughts and actions in defence of herself and other people with disabilities. Her courageous and positive thoughts about herself indicate that she has contemplations of capability within a disabled society. Anna’s views reflect how her society is disabled, more so than the disabilities she and others in the community experience.

In such circumstances most people with disabilities feel marginalised, unwanted, and unsafe in their homes. They experience loneliness and exile while the house is full of people. The freedom to express their feelings or decide is limited through the social setup. In addition, people with disabilities' choices are not always taken into consideration. This study found that people with disabilities cannot go to the doctor even when sick. A family member, who is not disabled, goes to the hospital on their behalf, which is a regular and comfortable custom in many families. The doctors and the families with disabled members feel safer in this exclusive health care system. The present investigation indicated that remote treatment happens not because the person with a disability cannot walk to the doctor but because of the social orientation of care for people with disabilities. Most families do not want to be seen with a person with a disability in a public area. This practice of going to the hospital on behalf of disabled family members is a way for families to hide their shame.

The interview with Abel Tesha (18.10.2019), the father of Maria, a girl with a mental disability, shows that when Maria is sick, her mother goes to the doctor to explain her symptoms and then picks up her prescriptions. Abel said that "it is not good to go with her in a crowd of people because she cannot walk correctly, and she is always spitting. We do everything for her and let her stay home. I do not feel comfortable to go with her anywhere, and I do not see the need to." This behaviour and attitude were typical in many families that take care of a person with a disability. Maria's situation is an example of what most people with disabilities experience. Their unfair treatment is a daily life practice that is acceptable in the community. This lifestyle increases the unfair perceptions and inhuman acts towards people with disabilities.

Further, observations confirmed that most community members felt unsafe getting involved with anything concerning disabilities. This unsafe feeling was associated with two communal fears: first, getting involved with disability matters may cause something terrible in their lives or the community; and second, involving oneself with disability issues presents a risk of becoming cursed for the wrongdoings of the disabled people they are helping, which is believed to be the cause of their disability. Such concepts increase the social gap between 'us' and 'them' and 'clean' and 'unclean' within the same society.