Topics to Consider in Unit VIII

- *What must be present in a "healthy" community? And – what role does music, dance, and creativity play?*

- *What are some of the primary discrepancies between Western value systems and those of African cultures? And – what is the impact of media, cultural colonization, and education in perpetuating discrepancies of "value"?*

- *What are "rites" or rituals? And – how important are they to the sustenance of healthy community life?*

- *What are some of the most glaring omissions about African cultures and their value in Western education? And – in what ways might Western cultures learn from African cultures to the benefit of altering their most predominant cultural imbalances?*

- *What/who is the "griot" or "djaly" – and what is the influence of this practice on modern Western music?*

- *How might we reflect on the comments of Mr. Sompa in the context of appreciating ancestry? What is the impact of a solid appreciation of the life cycle and ancestry upon the solidarity of community life? And – what role does drumming and dancing play in this regard?*

- *How can the evolution of "highlife" music be explained in the context of colonization and de-colonization?*

- *What can be understood by "pan-latino" exchange? What are some of the most striking similarities and differences in the music and cultural lives of the people of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil?*

- *In what manner are the songs, dances, and musical expressions of Pan-Latino cultures critical to their community life? What are some of the unique ways Roman Catholicism, West African rituals, and Spanish musical genres combined in the evolution of Rumba, Salsa, Merengue, Mariachi, or Cumbia?*

- *What are some alternatives to the separation of religion and music, dance and music, and community ritual and deeply interactive (not consumed) music — that are expressed in African and Latino cultures, which might enhance community life elsewhere?*

UNIT VIII

Africa and Latin America: Rites, Rituals, and Community Life

"One generation plants the trees; another gets the shade." Chinese proverb

> *"We were born to unite with our fellow men, and to join in community with the human race."* Cicero

"This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century— solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair. It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others." Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, 1986.

> *"How does one keep from 'growing old inside'? Surely only in community. The only way to make friends with time is to stay friends with people…. Taking community seriously not only gives us the companionship we need, it also relieves us of the notion that we are indispensable."*
> Robert McAfee Brown

At the apex of the commonalities in the human experience is the "cycle of life" and the simple and undeniable fact that human beings are essentially designed to mark or support each other through the cycle in communities. The extended family unit (*community*) is an institution structured to guard children, care for the elderly, and sustain the unit members over the course of their experience in the life cycle.

The effects of dysfunctional community within the family or extended family on the lives of the individual are readily apparent in societies or pockets of society where little emphasis is placed upon the community dynamics. In such instances, individuals and individual "freedoms" are given priority over the well-being of the community, and family and community life begins to decay. At this juncture, the individual is forced to fend alone for balance and cohesion within his or her journey through the cycle of life, bereft of the benefits of a strong support-system.

A healthy community structure provides:

A) The assurance that, in one manner or another, the physical necessities of food, water, shelter, and safety will be shared. This sense of personal security liberates the human spirit and its potential to engage willingly in the lives, successes, and trials of one's fellow community members, which in turn reaffirms a repetitive and healthy understanding of the *life cycle.*

B) The reinforcement of "belonging," regardless of the trials and difficulties encountered. Whether in rural Africa, South America, China, or Russia, whether in the midst of the hardships of the absolutely gravest tribulations in human history, strong communities endure, comfort and fortify their members during the trials through which they pass. Weak community structures generally crumble, or are divided or breached by sustained difficulties, so that the individuals experience considerable fear and resentment, or resort to "self-preservation" as the motivation for their actions.

We can also see the impact of community-*lessness* on youth in extensively material- or technology-oriented culture systems. It is a simple law of energy or cultural economics. In some cultures imbalanced by their orientation towards capital, personal wealth, and individual accomplishment, communities lose cohesion by the shear impact of decreased energy investment on behalf of the community. However, human nature (instinct) still requires safety, security, and belonging as well as both the need to care and be cared for. In such instances, the roles of counterculture, social or religious communities, communities based on interests or hobbies, will often serve as replacements for the extended family or village community.

Communities of this nature might include music groups, drug or gang groups, sport or hobby groups, recovery groups, and any host of other *communities*, some of which can have enormous positive effects in their replacement value on the individual's recovery of community life; others simply provide a temporary belonging, but with potentially destructive long-term consequences.

We've mentioned before the law of cultural economics: if we accept the potential that all human cultures are equal, but different, in the way they manifest their capacity, creativity, and intelligence, then the manner by which each culture group or society is *sophisticated* will likely be determined by where they invest their energies and capacities. In simplest terms, if you invest your capacity in playing basketball, or knitting, then you will likely be successful in those endeavors. At the same time, if you spend the majority of your energy engaged in making money or promoting your career, the likelihood that you will be an exceptional knitter begins to diminish.

Pic. 8.1 *The Masai (now primarily of Kenya) were known to be "warriors" in much of Western literature. Externally, they are perhaps best known for the warrior "jumping" dance, in which young Masai morani (youth) leap into the air from a standing position in order to demonstrate their strength and agility. Not included in Western literature is the fact that the Masai have an enormously strong sense of community and recognize that, whether to accomplish the task of herding cattle, finding water, or sustaining life in the face of droughts or other natural trials, they must work together—a phenomenon which likely results, in part, from the fact that the women have a very strong voice in community affairs.* Photo: Courtesy Wikipedia.org.

Although this is a simplistic example of *cultural economics,* when we consider many of the communities of Africa, South America, and the Caribbean, to which we will devote this Unit, we generally find cultures whose investment in the area of human capital is more profound than in material capital. That is, the economics of community life have generally received greater emphasis (historically) than those of material life. In some cases where struggles, war, disease or starvation have occurred (more frequently documented in Western media than are the cultures' sophisticated communities), we may find thousands of years of community focus have been circumvented by

Pic. 8.2A / 8.2B *The pursuit of profit over loss and the assignment of value to nearly all aspects of human culture (including thought) is one primary aspect of capitalism. Strong communities can be involved in the affairs of capital, but investment in the life cycle and human concerns generally takes precedence over concerns for material profit or loss.* Photo (below): Courtesy Wikipedia.org. *The second photograph is one of a farming community in Burkina Faso.* Public domain.

colonization and material-based values. Western colonizers encouraged placing **capital** (the assignment of value) to natural resources, land, and even human life (as property, or capital). Transplanted to African cultures, we should not be surprised to find an extraordinarily negative (or perhaps "un-African") impact on both human creativity and their community life as a result of this sudden shift of values.

> Hernando de Soto writes: *"In the west, by contrast, every parcel of land, every building, every piece of equipment, or store of inventories is represented in a property document that is the visible sign of a vast hidden process that connects all these assets to the rest of the economy … assets can lead to an invisible parallel life along side their material existence … by this process the West injects life into assets and makes them generate capital.*
>
> *"'Third world' and former communist nations do not have this representational process. As a result, most of them are undercapitalized … without representations."* [8.1]

Despite relatively small pockets of African community dysfunction (regions riddled with inter-tribal wars and greed, a topic which we will address later), what has ultimately occurred is not a lack of sophisticated development in African nations, but rather a stark *difference* in the manner by which they are developed or sophisticated. Perceived against the values of Western culture (capital/ownership and technological or scientific advancement), many African culture groups whose standards of advancement were centered in the cycle of life and the prosperity of community life have found a hard road to gain respect from Western societies. Against the initial forceful nature of colonization (*"he with the largest gun wins"*), the pervasiveness of Western media (*perpetual broadcasting of Western values to the world*), and, today, Western economics and a now-global hunger for technology (*which generally demands that all cultures compete against the standards of materialism and technology established by Western powers*), much of Africa and the cultures termed "third world" still place considerable emphasis on the extended family or village community.[8.2] Against the "louder" voices of Western education and media Western cultures are almost certain to over-emphasize their material and technological values through the tools of their own design, while devaluing arguably their greatest need (and the primary export of many African cultures)— the "technology" of community-development.

have available to us concerning African history is either from oral traditions or colored by the biases of the "outsider" Westerner. For these reasons, as we have done thus far with other cultures, we must go to the culture-bearers to acquire their voice and perspectives.

The Griot—The Ancestry of Storytelling

Storytelling may actually be no more important in the diverse regions of Africa than it is elsewhere in the world. But whereas some cultures may have a few hundred or a couple of thousand years of stories, many African communities have many thousands of years of stories and strong oral traditions through which these stories have been passed.

Pic. 8.7 *Location map for Mali.* Photo: Originally created for English Wikipedia by Vardion.

You may have already noticed that a high percentage of the artists and composers from whom we've already heard came into music through early contacts with music in their families. Many of them had parents and others—grandparents, for example—who were musicians and from whom they could learn both the techniques and passion for music. This is certainly true amongst the musicians, storytellers, and dance masters in most African communities. One of the most distinguished traditions is that of the ***griot*** (pronounced "gree – oh") or *jali (jeliyah, djaly),* a professional storyteller of western and northwestern Africa.

The *griot* is a West African poet and musician, and a repository of oral tradition. The griots' job is to spin tales and stories of their countries' leaders in a manner that is both pleasing and innovative. In other cases, families employ griots for special community events to enhance their importance or impact. The griots' original home was the territory of the *Mande* peoples in Mali, Gambia, Guinea, and Senegal, where their craft and musical storytelling is still alive today. (Note: the "griot" is also called *jeli (djely)* in northern Mande areas and *jali (djaly)* in southern Mande domains).

The Malinké term *jeliya (djelys)* means "transmission by blood." This translation in no small way defines the manner in which griots are honored in receiving their craft by virtue of the hereditary passing down of the skills and stories. ***Jeliya*** comes from the root word jeli (blood), which is also the title given to griots in areas corresponding to the former Mali Empire.

> *"In the Epic of Sundiata, King Naré Maghann Konaté offered his son, Sundiata, a griot, Balla Fasséké, to advise him in his reign. Balla Fasséké is thus considered the first griot and the founder of the Kouyaté line of griots that exists to this day. Each family of griots accompanied a family of warrior-kings, which they called diatigui. In traditional culture, no griot can be without diatigui, and no diatigui can be without a griot; the two are inseparable, and worthless without the other."* [8.5]

Pic. 8.7A *Mady Kouyaté, a descendant of the ancient griot (djaly) tradition, plays his kora and sings a song for passersby.* Photo: Authors.

Fluidity in Latin America Communities

> *"...all cultures provide men with façades to protect their egos. However, that which serves as a façade in his own culture may be stripped away by exposure to another culture and the learner may suddenly find himself standing psychologically naked. Therefore, the main prerequisites to second culture learning are receptivity, plus normal intelligence and a good measure of inner security."* Kleinjans (1972, p.18)

Pic. 8.18 *General map of the enormous area we call "Latin America."* Courtesy Public domain, CIA factbook.

At times, it is very difficult to find a balance between fully acknowledging the negativities in colonization, and slavery, and the effect of its arrogant and selfish origins on cultures today (not properly acknowledging this history offends the descendents of such indignities), while at the same time acknowledging the thrilling results of the unimaginable mixing and creativity these events spawned.

One area of the world offering multiple examples of the fusion process that occurred as the result of this rocky history is the Caribbean and South American African/ Spanish Diaspora. For reasons that have something to do with the Spanish style of colonization (i.e., versus the French or British), the enormity of fusions already experienced in Spanish cultures and, ultimately, the manner by which Spanish descendents mixed with indigenous and African cultures throughout, what we call **Latin America** is a vast blending of cultures that are emblematic of the cross-cultural exchange process in our musical world.

What we call ***"Pan-Latino"*** cultures are all the cultures in Latin America (South and Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean Islands) where, for over five hundred years, the *"Spanish"* (see previous Unit VII—Spain's history of fusion) both clashed and blended with indigenous, multiple African, and other European cultures. The following events occurred with only slight variation in degree, intensity, or time period in each and every "Latino"[8.12] culture:

- All Latino cultures had some form of indigenous ancestry in place prior to the late 1490s and early 1500s. In some cases, this ancestry may only have been in place for a few hundred years (as on some Caribbean islands); in others, such as in Mexico or parts of South America, indigenous populations may have predated colonization by as much as or more than 1500 years.
- All Latino cultures were colonized by Spain (or Portugal) between the years 1492CE and 1510CE.
- All Latino cultures experienced a significant decline in their indigenous populations, primarily as a result of a lack of immunity to European diseases, but in some cases due to slavery or extermination. In a few cases, indigenous cultures welcomed the Europeans as guests and a semi-symbiotic relationship developed.
- All Latino cultures (including Mexico) had some degree of infusion of (primarily) West African cultures into their mixing process within the first 20-100 years. The majority of Africans were from the Ghana/Nigeria regions (many were Yoruba).
- All Latino cultures eventually gained independence from the Spanish (or in some cases Spanish/French, Spanish/English, or Spanish/United States) colonizers. Most achieved this status in the 19th century, but a few (Ex: Puerto Rico) remain as territories of other countries (Ex: United States).
- All Latino cultures' music, food, dance, and religious expressiveness result from numerous fusions that were the product of the above dynamics *and* from the continued mixing with other Latino cultures which are essentially the product of nearly identical histories.

A subsidiary of the belief that we are all one human family is the very striking reality that, for example, in Latino cultures wherever they exist, there is a significant historical bond supported by mutual exchange