Kelvin Acheampong*

WP/CEAUP/#2021/2

The Peregrination into other selves colonization and african community spirit

CENTRO DE ESTUDOS AFRICANOS
UNIVERSIDADE DO PORTO

*University of Bayreuth

Índice

Abstract

The subject of colonization as one of the greatest forces militating against African culture and development has gained no little attention from various African writers, both of fiction and critical essays. This paper reflects on African community spirit (as encapsulated in the *Ubuntu* philosophy): what it is, its characteristics, and an attempt to trace the transition of African societies from a previously more community-centred character of living into a Western-patterned individualistic nature. While some dismiss this as merely an attempt to keep up with the times, the essay holds that this evolution is a result of colonization, whether directly or indirectly. The essay is an inter-textual analysis of creative works –primarily, Azasu's *The Invitation,* Aidoo's *Changes* and "The Message"*,* Armah's *Fragments* and Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

Key Terms: Community spirit/ communal spirit/ communalism, socialism, *Ubuntu*, colonization (the action of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area to promote one's own economic advantages)

1. AFRICAN COMMUNITY SPIRIT

"Do not let your mind be persuaded that you walk alone.
There are no humans born alone.
You are a piece
of us, of those
gone before,
and who will come again…
There are no humans who walk this earth alone.
A human being alone is a thing
more sad than any lost animal.
And nothing destroys
the soul like its
aloneness."

-Ayi Kwei Armah

Community spirit, for the purpose of this essay, is the "willingness and desire of individuals who share similar values to participate in activities that promote community interest" (Etzioni, 1994, p.15). It seems natural that whether it is a football team, an army of soldiers or even a band of robbers, a unique bond is created among people when they come together to work to achieve a particular goal. Durkheim describes this bond as one that "generates a kind of electricity that quickly transports them [the people who share the bond] to an extraordinary degree of exaltation" (1995, p.62), insinuating that there is intensification of joy when people come together as a group, particularly to work towards a goal they are mutually interested in. The result of the feeling of oneness that is created is the reinforcement of social bonds.

This community spirit, according to scholars like Turaki, for the African, "is derived from kinship. Kinship in this context refers to family relationships rooted in a progenitor around which a network of relationships is built" (Lausanne.org, 2017). Man, to the African, is not an individual. He lives in a state of relationships, associations, and interdependence. Man is a community; the world is a community. The community is man in relationships. In most African societies, not the living only, but the dead too are believed to be active members of the society. Accordingly, they are referred to as "living dead" rather than plainly, "dead"; death is merely a transformation of an individual to a higher form of existence, one believed to be invested with superior power over the living. The whole society – living, living dead and spirits– is a network of relations in which each person is eternally connected with everyone. In an attempt to conceptualize African community spirit, Kimmerle makes a point that African community spirit is philosophically concentrated in notions such as *Ubuntu*[1] (2006, p.5).

My humanity is bound up in yours,
for we can only be human together.

Desmond Tutu.

"If a philosopher trained in the West tries to understand the philosophy incorporated in *Ubuntu*," Kimmerle further argues, "they will notice that they have entered an unfamiliar terrain because *Ubuntu* differs greatly from what the Western philosopher is accustomed to" (2006, p.5).

A story is told of an anthropologist who when studying the habits and customs of an African tribe, had some children run to a tree. The first one to get to the tree, he promised, was to have a pack of candies. When the anthropologist gave the signal, the children took each other by the hand and ran together towards the tree, all of them arriving at the same time. Then they sat down, shared the candy among one another, and began to munch away.

[1] *Ubuntu* is a loanword from the Zulu and Xhosa languages of South Africa, which basically means "humanity".

When the surprised anthropologist asked why they did that, they responded, "How could anyone of us be happy if all the others were sad?" It is, undeniably, this notion of community which resonates in Armah's *Fragments* through the lips of Foli when he says to Baako, the traveller:

"Do not be persuaded you will fill your stomach faster
if you do not have others' to fill" (2006, p.15).

Ubuntu is characterized by the principle that a person blossoms in a group; the person internalizes the group in such a way that s/he ties his or her own well-being to the well-being of the group. *Ubuntu* speaks particularly about interconnectedness: the fact that it is impossible to exist as a human being in isolation, that the success of the group is more important than the individual's. Perhaps, the profoundest explanation of *Ubuntu* is the one that we have from Archbishop Desmond Tutu: "*Ubuntu* is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness… A person with *Ubuntu* is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in the greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, oppressed, and treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them" (1999, p.31). This is probably what Ramose tried to capture, albeit in fewer words, when he wrote that *Ubuntu* is organized around the fact that "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on this basis, establish respectful human relations with them" (1999, p.193). But Ramose adds another interesting fact about the concept: "when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, one should opt for the preservation of life" (1999, p.194).

Life is the highest value in African societies; in fact, even those who have not yet been born are considered as belonging to the spiritual whole of the community.

One of the arguments against African communalism is that the concept is a hasty generalisation (because it assumes that Africa is a single ethnic group with a single culture). Another criticism is what Onuaha puts bluntly: "Traditional African brotherhood did not extend beyond the tribe" (1968, p.11). First of all, owing to its obvious heterogeneity, "Africa", as used in this essay, refers to "several African communities with similar cultures", and not to the continent as a single unit with a single culture. Secondly, when one considers, among other things, the several inter-tribal wars in Africa long before the coming of the Europeans, one can only acknowledge the validity of Onuaha's argument: pre-colonial African communalism was limited within the boundaries of ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there existed several African communities with a sense of solidarity and brotherhood, which however ethnic, was distinct from Western individualistic societies.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN COMMUNITY SPIRIT

"A man is a man because of
others, and life is when you
are together.
Alone, you are an animal."

-Kofi Asare Opoku

Even if every man is, as Aristotle puts it, a political animal, there seems to be some unanimity, especially among African philosophers, that the level of sociality in Africa was unique, transcended the normal expected level of sociality, and thus, distinct from Western individualism.

First, African community spirit is seen in "joint ownership" of persons (and property) in the community. Prior to colonialism, African societies were basically communal. There was hardly any private ownership of property and the community was treated as being paramount to the individual. Chiefs, even, "owed their status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under them" (Ramose, 1999, p.194). Among the Akans, for example, the process of *destooling*[2] their chief was very simple: once the community decided that the chief was not ruling satisfactorily, they merely had to seize his sandals in public, and he was chief no more.

While Wafula maintains that because of this joint ownership "there was generally no exploitation of one group by the other within pre-colonial African societies" (2004, p.37), it seems more right to say that there was generally no exploitation within *ethnic groups*. It appears that there were several tribal feuds among various African societies which the colonialists exploited. For example, slavery in some parts of Africa, which preceded colonialism, was primarily based on prisoners of tribal wars. It must be admitted, though, that

[2] Because the symbol of rule for the Akan chief is the stool, the act of making a person a king and deposing them is described as "enstooling" and "destooling" respectively.

the kind of slavery which existed in pre-colonial Africa was not as brutal in its denigration of slaves as, for example, the transatlantic one was (which could be a possible justification as to why some Africans were complicit in the transatlantic slave trade).

The feeling of solidarity and oneness among people in African communal societies is often manifested in the classificatory use of kinship terms. What Wafulu observes of the Babukusus of Kenya can easily be appropriated for other African societies: "the terms for 'father', 'mother', 'brother', 'sister', 'son', 'daughter', and others refers not just to the real physical relatives designated by these various terms but to all members of the clan and society who, because of their sex, age and generation, correspond to the physical relations to whom the respective terms primarily apply" (1994, p.85). So one's parents, for example, are not necessarily the people who gave one birth. The typical Westerner would do well to approach African literature with caution, not always interpreting as literal terms such as "my wife", "our husband" and "our son" as these terms are often used by various speakers to refer to people they are unrelated by blood with. As an illustration to this point, the following welcoming address of the community union's secretary to Obi Okonkwo on his return from further studies abroad in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* leaves no doubt that the entire community considers Okonkwo as their own son: "The importance of having one of **our sons** in the vanguard of this march of progress is nothing short of axiomatic... we are happy that today we have such an invaluable possession in the person of **our illustrious son** and guest of honour" (1960, p.26). No parent claims absolute proprietorship of their biological children in African communal societies for as Aidoo shows in *Changes,* "your parents were the father who helped your mother to conceive you, the mother who gave birth to you, and all those who claimed to be brothers and sisters to you" (2013, p.148). Disciplining a child is therefore seen as a collective effort. Although this is not as strongly adhered to as in the past, in parts of Accra such as Jamestown, for example, of an elderly person who fails to discipline a wayward child (regardless of knowing the child or not), the following Akan proverb may be quoted: "an evil person is the one who says 'when the community spoils, I too sit in the spoils'" –unconcerned, that is. It is the responsibility of the elderly, therefore, to accept anyone's child

as everyone's child. It is not wrong to say, then, that there were no orphans in African communal societies; the child's welfare was not the responsibility of its biological parents alone, but of the whole community.

African community spirit is also seen in concern for the well-being of others and a willingness to share in their joy and sorrow. "If a dog's back itches", the Akans say, "it scratches it against a tree; but if a human being's back itches, his fellow kinsman helps him to scratch his back". In communal societies, a person's joy or sorrow is the community's. Whether it is marriage, a naming ceremony, illness, or death, you can be sure that the community will stand with you. Aidoo's "The Message" is testament of this fact: when senior Esi Amfoa (in the village) receives news that her daughter (who is in the city) has been "opened up" (that is, had a Caesarean section), the whole community empathises with her (1995, p.2). Of more wonder to the reader is how the whole community even gets to know that Esi Amfoa's daughter, who is far away in the city, has been "opened up". "The Message" is particularly relevant in this discussion because of Aidoo's examination of the disparity between communalism in the village and the individualism that has crept in and invaded the urban centres. No sooner had senior Esi Amfoa arrived from the village to the city than she realised that she had moved into alien territory. We are not surprised when we read in Azasu's *The Invitation* that the *halo*[3] invitation brought by Ayiglo to Awuku is a threat, not only to Awuku but his clan. In inviting Okonkwo home so the dowry for Obierika's daughter can be fixed (in *Things Fall Apart)*, Obierika welcomes Okonkwo to share in the joy of their family. That the gong-gong is beaten to announce events such as deaths to the whole community of Umuofia points to a genuine desire of people to share in the problems of others. One could simply capture this concept in the following words: "I am because you are, and you because of me". Wafula quotes Ntumba that, "where in western civilisations one would ask 'how was your trip to Holland?', certain African cultures would ask: 'how was our trip to Holland?'; a simple statement like 'I am sick' in the communalistic tradition would be put this way: 'we are suffering'" (1994, p.9).

[3] *Halo*, also known as "songs of abuse", is a war of insults among the Ewes, a tradition which is now extinct.

Religion also plays a prominent role in African community spirit. It seems that religion is the thread with which everything and everyone is connected in that spirit of community. Not surprisingly, therefore, there is much reference to the gods and to the spirit of the dead in many African creative works. Even after people have died, they are thought to still live in the community and at every major event, they are invoked. So Foli, the drunkard in Armah's *Fragments*, is prudent enough to invoke the living dead to protect Baako on his journey abroad:

"Nananom[4], you who have gone before,
see that his body does not lead him
into snares made for the death of spirits"
(2006, p.14).

Rituals are not observed for fun in African Traditional Religion. Rather, they are part of a conscious effort to keep the ties between the living and the spirits. As Steyne puts it, "the world interacts with itself. The sky, the spirits, the earth, the physical world, the living and the deceased all act, interact and react in consort… one part can't exist without the other. The universe, the spirit world and man are all part of the same fabric. Each needs the other to activate it" (1990, p.50). With this backdrop, it is easy to understand why it is not until Naana (the old woman in Armah's *Fragments)* takes the bottle of drink from Foli and pours it all out to the spirits (because Foli offers only scanty drops) that she is rest assured that *Nananom* will protect Baako. And although she commends Foli for the fine words that accompany offering of the libation, she does not fail to ask him, "did no one also teach you the power of the anger of the departed?" (Armah, 2006, p.12). Taboos, interdicts and superstitions, were thus one of the ways that community spirit, particularly between the living and the dead, was tightly knotted. In his autobiography, Nkrumah talks about the wreckage of the *Bakana* (a cargo boat owned by the British and African Steam Navigation Company) in his hometown.

[4] The Akans call their living dead "Nananom"

Although Nkrumah does not explicitly state it, it may not be far from the truth to say that the day on which the incident happened was a Tuesday[5], a view which is strengthened by the fact that the community held that "the cause of the shipwreck was that the god of the river, Ama Azule, wishing to visit his goddess of a neighbouring river, had planned the disaster in order that he should have a boat at his command" (1970, p.2).

One may side with Bodunrin in his denunciation of African communalism as irrational since it was sustained by superstitions (1981, p.165). Still, it may be impolitic to discredit African communalism—simply because it was kept alive by superstitions—especially when it is considered vis-a-vis the general corruption that has branded the postcolonial period in Africa. This is far from an attempt to eulogize African communalism, for it did have its pitfalls: even today, in certain African societies, the familiar tendency to award jobs and contracts to undeserving friends and acquaintances rather than to competent people, I believe strongly, has its roots in the notion of community spirit. The Ewes could not have captured this phenomenon more brilliantly: "you don't eat sour mangoes when your brother has climbed the mango tree". Notwithstanding, in pre-colonial African societies, the tendency to be corrupt, and pursue one's selfish and greedy desires was somewhat bridled by superstitions; the fear of spirits barred people from pursuing their self-centred interests.

Another characteristic of African community spirit is intense, intimate, personal relationships and strong bonds between members of the extended family. Traditional African communal societies did not make a distinction between the nuclear and extended family. "Kinship", Steyne discerns, was seen as providing "security and ideological identity" and breaking relationships was not only seen as a "disregard for custom but also sin" (1990, p.66). Since life is the highest value in communal societies, everybody in the family was regarded as valuable and conscious effort was made to keep ties with one another. Although it was sometimes abused, any relative, however distant, could arrive at any time at your home and stay for as long as they wanted, unquestioned, until their eventual departure. Family meetings were also not uncommon; even if members of the family stayed far apart, durbars, festivals

[5] The Akans hold it as a taboo to go to sea on Tuesdays

and periodic rituals brought all of them together at regular intervals. Like Wafula rightly observes, communalism in Africa was "a deliberately desired social structure which was established and zealously sustained by a people's will and desire to survive under the most tried conditions" (1994, p.8).

"A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is a good thing for kinsmen to do so."

--Chinua Achebe

Finally, community spirit is evinced in the law's emphasis on preserving social harmony. Priority was given to sorting out issues which threatened the oneness of the community. This is the reason that Togbi Tsikata, in Azasu's *The Invitation,* tries to convince Awuku's opponents to call off the *halo* contest. Far from being afraid of losing the contest, he was concerned about how *halo "*tore communities apart" (2006, p.24). The goal of decision makers in communal societies is to reconcile dissenting parties, not to punish one side and declare the other victorious. This point is demonstrated by the *Egwugwu,* the judicial council in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* whose "duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute" (1960, p.66). Mention too can be made of Chielo, priestess of Agbala, who when Okonkwo violates the Peace Week, acts to appease the gods in a swift move which suggests that the punishment for breaking the Peace Week would have been borne not only by the culprit, but the whole community. Institutions were intentionally put in place to oversee the peace of communal societies. More than that, in the event of clash of interests (between the individual and the community), the individual was required to reconcile his/her interests with those of the group to enhance group solidarity, for herein lay the existence, survival and well-being of the group and the individual.

2.1. EFFECTS OF COLONIZATION ON AFRICAN COMMUNITY SPIRIT

"The white man is very clever…
He has put a knife on the things that held us together
and we have fallen apart."

–Chinua Achebe

Colonialism provided Africans, heretofore used to a strong sense of communalism, a direct challenge to their identity as a people. Hitherto, "African societies had lived in a collective stage, every individual interest being subordinated to the general welfare of the community" (Wafula, 1994, p.1). The implicit ideology fueling colonialism (that one group of people is superior to another) is one that is alien to African communalism. Consequently, the onslaught of colonialism was heavily resisted in most African societies but in the end, the colonialists managed to subdue these societies.

Colonialism, unmistakably, was an interference in the development of African tribes. To this Wafula agrees: "the Africans were caught unawares, surprised and proved helpless before a European intrusion that was fast and overwhelming" (1994, p.126). The strength of pre-colonial African societies was in oneness (at the various tribal levels, at least); when the white man struck at the heart of communal spirit, things could not but fall apart.

It is almost impossible to discuss the effects of colonialism in Africa without touching religion, especially the clash between Christianity and African Traditional Religion. One of the most commonly held positions by African postcolonial writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe, but more especially the former, is that the missionaries were partners of the colonial government and conscious precursors of imperialism. These writers argue further that the preaching of Christ/ Christianity and the concomitant excoriation of African Traditional Religion (which as indicated earlier seemed to be the binding agent of community spirit) by the missionaries was a discreet move to brace the colonial government's dominance over the colonies. Indeed, from various accounts, it is clear that African Traditional Religion was often put on the defensive while God and Christianity were put on the side of European

values, implying that to be godly, one had, first and foremost, to abandon traditional values and be "Europeanized" (as if Africans had hitherto no sense of godliness).

But the story of colonization in Africa and the work of missionaries, although deeply interwoven, seems more complex than has often been suggested. Doubtless, there were some missionaries who supported the agenda of the colonial governments, but there were also missionaries who played vital roles as mediators between harsh government policies and indigenous peoples. Also, aside the concern of missionaries for the effects of slavery, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue, it is also very much the case that a number of the first generation of African anti-colonial protestors were missionary educated, although providing education, and so increasing literacy, was construed as a dangerous act (2007, p.128). So, "although for the most part the negative impact of missions has been highlighted, more complex readings of mission involvement in colonial situations show, for example, that mission presses were often the first places in which colonized peoples were able to find a voice" (Ashcroft et al., 2007, p.128). Nevertheless, it is very true that African religious practices were often denigrated by these missionaries as mere superstition or openly attacked as heathenism, and so used to justify the supposed "civilizing mission" of the colonizer.

For me, the saddest effect of colonization is how Africans joined the white men in the oppression of other Africans. I think that we can rightly interpret Obierika's lamentation in *Things Fall Apart* as Africa's: "our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the stranger. They have joined his religion and uphold his government… Our own brothers who have taken up his religion say that our customs are bad…Our clan can no longer act like one" (Achebe, 1960, p.124). One wonders why there is no celebration to mark Okonkwo's return to Umuofia after years of exile. How strange it is that no home offers him kola, even. Surely, 7 years is not too much to forget a warrior of his calibre? Okonkwo's return to Umuofia was certainly not as memorable as he had wished. This was his first shock.

Umuofia did not appear to have taken any special notice of the warrior's return. The clan had undergone such profound change during Okonkwo's exile that it was barely recognizable. And he grieved, the warrior, but not for himself; "he mourned for the clan,

which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women" (Achebe, 1960, p.136).

Had the white man no accomplices from the natives, colonization would be impossible. The thought of a handful of people subduing whole societies is nothing short of baffling. Colonization in Africa was plainly a case of the African labouring under the yoke of his own disunity, caused by the pride of people who were lucky to enjoy better opportunities than their less fortunate brothers.

Now, one could validly argue that Okonkwo caused his own downfall. While that position may not be entirely illogical, we must look beyond Okonkwo's killing of the white man's messenger; only then do we see the disintegrated clan, a shadow of its former self, that had lost the courage to stand with one of its own. It suddenly dawned on Okonkwo (after he had killed the white man's messenger) that Umuofia would not go to war—his second shock. This realization cracked the intrepid warrior's heart, allowing fear to sneak stealthily inside. No, it would be rather unfair to call him a coward; only that he too was human, and he came face to face with the epiphany of his aloneness. And one gets the impression that perhaps, the wisdom in the words of the drunkard Foli, the ones that are put in his mouth by Armah in *Fragments,* suddenly began to burn in his heart:

"nothing destroys the soul
like its aloneness" (2006, p.13).

As a final point, colonization brought disregard for tradition. The conflict of tradition versus westernization is captured in Achebe's *Dead Man's Path* when Michael Obi, the over-zealous head teacher of Ndume Central School, makes a path where he is not supposed to. "This path was here before you were born", the priest of the village warns, "and before your father was born… Our dead relatives depart by it and our ancestors visit us by it… It is the path of children coming" (1972, p.3). Mr. Obi's reply? "The whole purpose of our school is to

eradicate just such beliefs as that… Our duty is to teach your children to laugh at such ideas" (1972, p.3).

The period of colonization and its aftermath has been characterized by a disregard for native ways and bids to prove Western ways as superior. This struggle is depicted in *The Blinkards* too by Kobina Sekyi when characters such as Mrs. Borofosem[6] mimic Western ways without ascertaining the relevance of such Western practices in their own (African) world. In the case of Umuofia, the traditional emblem of authority came to be despised by some of the natives because we read that "a man such as Ogbuefi Ugonna, like a madman, cut the anklet of his titles and cast it away" (Achebe, 1960, p.128). The conflict in *Things Fall Apart* builds up to a crescendo when the over-zealous new Christian, Enoch, kills the *Egwugwu.* Hitherto, one of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *Egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated. It is an unfortunate thing to note that this struggle still goes on, not at all in the embracing of modernity, but in the inference that anything Western is more genteel.

But has the post-colonial era brought any redemption to the African? Has the African gone back to his former self? Has he attempted to? Is he struggling to? Or has he given up altogether, having settled in his heart that going back to the past is a fruitless effort?

D. THE "CHANGES"

> "*What we are now is not of our own free will, but rather through a colonial imposition."*
>
> *–Wiredu et al.*

It is no going beyond the truth to say that colonialism stripped the African of his true self; nor is it hyperbolic to assert that the "we" of African communal spirit has surrendered in defeat to the West's individualistic "I". In the mind of the pre-colonial African living dead,

[6] In Fante, one of the dialects of Akan, *Borofosem* is used to refer to one who is obsessed with Western ways

perhaps, no word would better describe the ways of the typical African today than "anathematic".

We read sadly in Aidoo's *Changes,* for example, of how young men like Ali Kondey are unable to keep up the relationship between themselves and their relatives. Aidoo does not allow us to guess the reason; she tells us herself that "people of his age or younger plainly couldn't care. They too were into living their own lives" (2013, p.119).

Esi, Aidoo's protagonist in *Changes*, explains that (one of) the reason(s) she desires to marry Ali Kondey is that there are fewer people around him (unlike Oko, her former husband, whose mother and sisters were always around him and so the marriage involved too many people). This is hard for Esi's grandmother to understand: *"Why? Destroy a perfectly good marriage because your husband has too many people around him? Ei! In the old days, wasn't that one of the big reasons why any family gave their princess to any man in marriage? And how can you tell yourself you like some man because you don't know a single relative of his? Ei! But wasn't that a good reason to avoid a man in the old days?"* (2013, p.111).

Aidoo's *Changes* chronicles the rise of a new African, one who is too willing to take off from his shoulder the burden of keeping ties with the extended family. Little wonder that the nuclear family system is progressively gaining root in Africa. The denigration and degeneration of communal spirit (that previously was the stamp of the African) is, metaphorically speaking, the blood the African has to continually offer to appease the foreign god, individualism. That Ali Kondey goes to Esi's parents—to inform them of his intentions to marry Esi– without any "solid person" but his employee suggests how far the African has come in this transition. In most African societies, marriage was seen not only as a union of two people, but of two families, and even communities. If a man wanted to marry a woman, he went to see the parents of the prospective bride with some members of his own family, who acted as a sort of guarantor and also proved to the woman's family that the man did not—in a manner of speaking— drop from the skies; the security of the bride lay in the fact that her husband-to-be was a member of a community, a community which she too would be a part of. So, such a thought as "going to ask for the hand of someone's daughter in marriage" with

no one else to back you but your employee would not have even been conceived in the past. Esi's grandmother's shock, thus, is not aberrant: "Ei! but how much could a person's employee possibly know about him?" (2013, p.103).

Aidoo's *Changes,* aptly titled, mirrors how much of the African's original self has been stolen through colonization and shows the other selves that our selves have been changed into. It is essentially because of this change that Esi "could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother" (Aidoo, 2013, p.80). The conflict between the two parties, Esi on one side, then her mother and grandmother on the other side, is a clash of worlds. The latter represent the older generation who have striven to maintain their original selves even through the period of colonialism. But they are old and quickly fading. Esi, however, symbolizes the newer generation, who seem not to have the minutest idea what their unique selves are. Accordingly, Aidoo describes Esi as fitting in that category of "modern western-educated Africans" who "couldn't help if they regularly bruised traditions and hurt people" (2013, p.133). Jackson Wafula lends his voice again to the discussion: "The Africans realized that colonialism had deprived them of their true selves, alienated them from their culture and disturbed their continuity in development" (2013, p.140).

It must be against this backdrop of the philosophy of communalism that some Africans feel betrayed—betrayed, not disappointed— by post-colonial African governments. In most African countries, the excitement of the populace as their countries gained political independence soon dissipated with the realization that the new African leaders were "mimic men" and exploiters too, very much resembling the former colonialists (if not worse–for blind mimicry does not produce replicas but caricatures). Consequently, the lives of Africans, particularly just after the period of colonialism, saw little significant improvement.

My diagnosis is that the disillusionment of independence in most African countries is an indirect result of the distortion of community spirit. Colonialism in Africa succeeded in distorting societal ties and creating a class of elites who were alienated from their own people. These elites, partly because they had been educated by the colonial government,

were African only in blood and colour, but not in thought and morals, and consequently, unrepresentative of the people they governed. Most of the African leaders who replaced the former colonialists failed to decipher that the relationship between the former colonial government and the colonies was not a ruler-ruled relationship but a master-servant relationship. So, the joy that filled the hearts of various African peoples as their respective countries attained independence was soon eclipsed by the realization that there was a greater battle to be fought, for colonialism had produced, to their horror, African leaders stripped of every tittle of *Ubuntu*.

Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere and Sekou Toure, among other African political leaders, have advocated that Africa readopt the system of communalism. They sought to harness communalism as a resource for development in the reconstruction of post-colonial Africa. They conceptualised an Africa with a new and stronger *Ubuntu* that defied tribal boundaries. "Our first step," says Nyerere, "must be to re-educate ourselves, to regain our former attitude of mind… and apply it to the new societies we are building today" (1970, p.166). As for Nkrumah, the fact that he regarded the independence of Ghana not as an isolated objective, but one that was a part of an African emancipation project is seen in his declaration of "the independence of Ghana [as] meaningless until it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent." But the question of whether or not *Sankofa*[7] is the way forward for Africa is one that in my opinion is more complex than it seems, and maybe, hopefully, another study might answer.

[7] *Sankofa* is an Akan word which emphasizes that it is not a taboo to go back to fetch something of worth at the risk of getting left behind.

References

Achebe, C. (1953). *Girls at War and Other Stories.* London: Penguin Books.

Achebe, C. (1959). *Things Fall Apart.* London: Heinemann.

Achebe, C. (1960). *No Longer at Ease.* London: Heinemann.

Aidoo, A. A. (1995). *The Message.* New York: The Feminist Press.

Aidoo, A. A. (2013). *Changes.* Accra: iCONgh.

Armah, A. K. (2006). *Fragments.* Popenguine: Per Ankh.

Ashcroft, B., Griffiths, G., & Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts Second Edition.* New York: Routledge.

Azasu, K. (2006). *The Invitation.* Accra: Ghana Universities Press.

Bodunrin, P. (1981). The Question of African Philosophy. *Philosophy, 56*, 161-179.

Durkheim, E. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life.* (K. Fields, Trans.) New York: The Free Press.

Etzioni, A. (1994). *The Spirit of Community.* New York: Touchstone.

Gyekye, K. (1987). *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kimmerle, H. (2006). *Prophecies and Protests –Ubuntu and Communalism in African Philosophy and Art*. Retrieved November 9, 2017, from Rozenberg Quarterly: http://rozenbergquarterly.com/ubuntu-and-communalism-in-african-philosophy-and-art/

Nkrumah, K. (2002). *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah.* London: Panaf.

Nyerere, J. (1970). *Ujamaa the basis of African Socialism.* New Jersey: Jihad Productions.

Onuaha, F. (1968). *The Elements of African Socialism.* New York: Renehalt and Winston.

Opoku, K. A. (1978). *West African Traditional Religion.* Accra: International Private Press Limited.

Ramose, M. (1999). *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu.* Harare: Mond Books.

Sekyi, K. (1997). *The Blinkards: A Comedy; and the Anglo-Fanti - a Short Story.* London: Heinemann.

Steyne, P. (1990). *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices.* Houston: Touch Publications.

Turaki, Y. (2000). *African Traditional Religious System as Basis of Understanding Christian Spiritual Warfare*. Retrieved November 9, 2017, from Lausanne Movement: https://www.lausanne.org/content/west-african-case-study

Tutu, D. (1999). *No Future Without Forgiveness.* New York: Doubleday.

Wafula, J. (2004). *Traditional African Communalism and the Neo-Communal Spirit in Africa: With Special Reference to the Bukusu Community of Kenya.* Nairobi: University of Nairobi.