

INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM IN EBRAHIM HUSSEIN'S PLAYS

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Abstract

Ebrahim Hussein is a Tanzanian, who has written eight theatrical works. These plays have attracted a lot of scholarly interest. This paper argues that Ebrahim Hussein's theatrical works depict the impact of individualism in African societies for individualism stands for a society in transition whereby the hitherto dominant collectivism that had for generations held traditional societies together was rapidly being replaced by the Western form of survival-individualism. His oeuvre appears to argue for the continuation of collectivism, which sadly has become eroded in many African societies.

1.0 Introduction

Although individualism and collectivism are recurring themes in Ebrahim Hussein's theatrical works, they have hardly received the attention they deserve in the present scholarship. All of Hussein's six plays—*Kinjeketile* (1970), *Mashetani* (Devils) (1971), *Wakati Ukuta* (Time Barrier) (1971), *Alikiona* (She was Chastened) (1971), *Arusi* (Wedding) (1980), *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* (At the Edge of Thim) (1988), and the two performative narratives, *Ngao ya Jadi* (Traditional Shield) (1976) and *Jogoo Kijijini* (A Village Cock) (1976)—highlight the negative effects of individualism and push for a collective life. Hussein's characters mirror the changes people are going through in many of the African socio-political situations. This paper examines Hussein's contributions to the understanding of the development and implications of individualism in Africa as well as its effects on the communities depicted in these works. As Ebrahim Hussein wrote these works during the *Ujamaa* (Socialism) period in Tanzania, the *Ujamaa* ideology is significant in understanding his thematic expressions. This ideology is based on communalist beliefs, values and norms of the pre-colonial communities. This paper argues that Hussein posits in his representation that collective actions and collective thoughts are tools used to serve the ends of the group.

In his pioneering book on Ebrahim Hussein entitled *Ebrahim Hussein: Swahili Theatre and Individualism*, Ricard (2000) presents the issue of individualism in two ways. First, Ricard questions the attitude of many of Hussein's critics who "reproach[...] him for his *ubinafsi* (individualism)" (p. x-xi), arising primarily from what he sees as their failure to comprehend the autonomy Hussein enjoys in producing his oeuvre contrary to popular sentiments. Ricard

then goes on and examines the portrayal of the theme of individualism as revealed by characters in the plays as they respond to the pressing issues surrounding them. Ricard makes a special note of how Hussein projects individual characters to expose the weaknesses of socialist principles and the gulf the promises, expectations, on the one hand, and the reality on the other hand. As Ricard's study focuses only on individualism, this paper takes a step farther by interrogating individualism in relation to collectivism. Generally, in African philosophy and socialism, collectivism is encouraged (Magesa, 1997; Shorter, 1998; Bujo, 1998). However, this paper examines how the various manifestations of individualism in his plays serve as conduit to understanding the failures to effectively promote collectivism in the contemporary society. This analysis, therefore, builds on Ricard's presentation in an attempt to generate a fuller understanding of Hussein's rather complex plays.

2.0 Individualism in Hussein's Plays

Individualism is a characteristic that marks the wayward characters of most of Hussein's plays. Indeed, the spies, stooges or informers of the colonial masters in *Kinjeketile*, Kitalu's family in *Mashetani*, the Chief in *Ngao ya Jadi*, the youth and other people in *Jogoo Kijijini*, Herbert Pala in *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim*, Bukini in *Arusi*, Tatu in *Wakati Ukuta* and Saida and Abdala in *Alikiona* put emphasis on the self. After all, the modern life ushered in to replace the traditional life is determined by personal and self-interests (individualism) and not public interests (collectivism), the hallmark of the traditional values not in the melting pot. First and foremost, these characters seek their own self-fulfilment; the aspirations of the broader community come in second.

Hussein explains that these characters break the established traditional socio-political systems because of the new values governing the new social set-up under the emblem of modernity. The behaviour of these characters is largely influenced by the capitalist beliefs that came with colonialism. The characters strive for wealth, power, profit and self-fulfilment because the present conditions demand that they put these interests first in order to be seen as success stories. They have been influenced by the capitalist ideologies because of their interaction with colonialists, capitalists and imperialists. Indeed, the contact between Europeans and Africans made Africans adopt European values, which advanced the spirit of individualism. Everything traditional at this stage was considered to be barbaric. Thus, the pursuit of egoistical interests in the sense of the Western conception of individualism in Africa can thus be traced to the advent of colonialism. The casualty was the communal web of life, which was neglected and eventually dismantled. As a result, the *I* (ontology of subjectivity) became the centre and the *We* began to be buried (Nkemkia, 1999: 171-172).

2.1 The Devils

The devils in *Mashetani*, Sesota in *Ngao ya Jadi* and the poison in *Jogoo Kijijini* are symbols used by Hussein to show the contradictory elements of the so-called modern ideologies. The devils, Sesota and the poison are destructive forces. These destructive forces point to the nature of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism and their impact on Africa. In *Mashetani*, Juma and Kitaru seek to engage in the only true and worthwhile relationship. Juma views Kitaru as a person who violates the communal mode of life. Kitaru, on his part, believes that the perfect mode of life is capitalism. Juma, on the other hand, believes that capitalism is bad because it destroys human behaviour. Of these characters Juma is the one who has been given the humane value, *Ubinadamu*. Conversely, Kitalu has been given the role of Satan (the devil). It is the characteristic that is seen as being responsible for, destroying the hitherto strong bonds in African communities. The Devil, according to Juma, places self-interests above moral obligations (*Mashetani* 10-11). Kitaru and his family are associated with satanic control as we witness in Act I. In this scene, characters are able to demonstrate how the devil negatively influences human behaviour. This scene attempts to contrast the life in the pre-colonial societies and the contemporary life.

Indeed, in African pre-colonial societies, the community took precedence over individualism. The individual was cherished as an integral part of the society, but he or she remained subservient to the wider interests of the community. As a result, a valued individual was one who worked conscientiously for the good of his society, not against it. Any elements of individualism were seen as destructive elements that would spell disaster for the whole community. In *Mashetani*, for example, Kitalu's father is called Satan because of his individualistic behaviour. He does not want to abide by the traditional norms of his community. This can be evidenced by Juma's mother who laments bitterly against the behaviour of Kitalu's father (38).

Similarly, *Ngao ya Jadi* and *Jogoo Kijijini* chronicle the efforts of the devil in influencing human behaviour. In *Ngao ya Jadi*, the chief who saves his community from the snake, Sesota, is held responsible for betraying the Masononis. The true colours of the chief emerge after his killing of one of the seventy heads of Sesota. The chief's life is shaped according to Sesota's behaviour because its poison has contaminated him:

Basi
 Miaka ikapita
 Miaka ikapita
 Watu wakaoana
 Watu wakazaana

Na vituko vikazidi
 Lakini mioyoni
 Simanzi ikatambaa
 Simanzi haini
 Kwa kila mwana-Masononi (*Ngao ya Jadi*, 48)

Well
 Years passed
 Years passed
 Years passed
 People married
 People got children
 And unusual events multiplied
 But in the hearts
 Grief crept
 Grief of a traitor
 To every person of Masononi

In other words, this is an example of social deviance. African life was generally supposed to be collective, focusing on the group as a political, social, economic and cultural unit. Under the ideology of collectivism, the affairs of the community superseded the claims of individuals. Hence collectivism in Africa was generally regarded as sacred rather than secular (Shorter, 1975). Because the poison from the snake affects the chief's behaviour, the community also suffers. The collective welfare of the Masononis becomes unimportant to the chief. His selfish interests become more paramount. The self-centredness that takes hold over his being blinds him to the importance of putting his subjects first.

What happens to the chief in *Ngao ya Jadi* is almost the same as in *Jogoo Kijijini*. The poison also affects the youth and other people. The *kunazi*, a cherry-like fruit, is produce of the renowned Mkunazi-Rahman plant. The villagers believe this fruit makes people kind and merciful. After many years, however, the tree is infected with poison from the roots of the nearby poisonous trees. As a result of the infection, the disease kills the beautiful tree:

Mkunazi huu ulikuwa unaitwa, Mkunazi-Rahmani
 Mkunazi Rahmani kila mwaka ulizaa kunazi
 Kunazi nyingi zisizo na kifani
 Na kila aliyeonja Kunazi- Rahmani
 Moyo wake uliingiwa mahaba, huruma na hisani
 Miaka ikapita
 Miaka ikapita
 Miaka ikapita
 Watu wakaoana
 Watu wakazaana
 Na watu wakaongezeka

Lakini kitaluni
 Mbuubuu ukatambaa
 Sumu isiyo na mithili
 Katika mioyo ya binadamu (*Ngao ya Jadi, 14-15*)

This Mkunazi was called Mkunazi-Rahman
 Mkunazi-Rahman every year produced a Kunazi
 Many unmentionable Kunazi's
 Everyone who tried to eat the Kunazi Rahman
 His heart was filled with love, mercy and kindness
 Years passed
 Years passed
 Years passed
 People married
 People got children
 And people multiplied
 But in the garden
 The roots crept
 Poison without limit
 In the hearts of the people

These words are symbolic. The Mkunazi Rahman symbolises African societies going through changes; the poison which infected the people of these societies is colonialism and its effects. The cultural values, norms and beliefs, represented by the Jujube tree, have been destroyed by the poison—modern values—brought by the colonialists. The kindness, humanity and love, virtues which are supposed to be generally associated with Africans in traditional societies are no longer illuminated in the people's hearts (14). As a result, the people become individualists. They have rejected their traditional ways of life and embraced capitalist ideologies, which turn them into characters that see the self as more important than the community (Mwaifuge, 2001).

2.2 Marriage and Individualism

Whereas *Wakati Ukuta*, *Alikiona* and *Arusi* focus on the question of marriage, they also highlight the effect of individualism. The goal of these theatrical works is to critically examine the deterioration of the African cultural values and the emergence of individual social values. Under the new set-up, the singular autonomy or freedom of an individual typifies African contemporary marriages. Because of changes taking place in the world, some Africans no longer believe that marriage is sacred and an integral part of communal relations (Bujo, 1998). The evidence is that some people marry without following marriage procedures set by their communities. From a historical point of view, an African marriage is both a family and communal affair. This is because it solidifies relationships

between and among families from different families, clans and ethnic groups, hence marriage is supposed to enrich communities. Not surprisingly, African traditional customs did not only consider marriage as sacred but also linked with religious beliefs. As Schapera (1966) and Clapps (1993) explain, marriage in many traditional African societies was an expression of the totality of being and fidelity to the spiritual beings, powers or forces. It is in this sense, Kaphagawani (1988: 2) places African communalism at the heart for a typical African community in terms of its ability to bring about social cohesion. As a result, individuals in the society consistently pursued certain fundamental norms and values in order to enhance the common social good. However, as the works of Hussein attempt to show, there has been a radical shift in the perception of marriage in many African societies today. As revealed in *Wakati Ukuta*, *Alikiona*, *Arusi* and *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim* people, especially the youth do not follow the marriage conditions prescribed by their communities. Instead of promoting traditional marriage customs, many Africans have embraced modern values. These values have also come with a price-tag, which is individualism at the expense of collectivism. Indeed, in *Wakati Ukuta*, *Alikiona*, *Arusi* and *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim* counterproductive characters like Tatu and Swai in *Wakati Ukuta*, Bukini and Mwanaheri in *Arusi*, Saida and Abdallah in *Alikiona* and Herbert Palla in *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim* tend to think of themselves first and never the community. This is not surprising because in the modern era, the life of an individual is not as strictly tied to the wellbeing of the society, let alone to the dictates of the family as was in the past, especially when the whims of an individual become an overriding factor (Himmelfarb, 1994).

To counter these characters who have abandoned their ways of life, Hussein has created other conservative characters to safeguard the interests of the community and the endangered traditional norms and values. In *Wakati Ukuta*, Mama Tatu is a traditionalist woman, who does not want her daughter-Tatu to be spoiled by the modern world. Mama Tatu's values and goals in *Wakati Ukuta* are shaped by coastal values. The Coastal people give women important social roles within the framework of their inherited beliefs (Swantz, 1965). Hence she does not want her daughter to be married without adherence to traditional values and procedures. She tells her daughter:

Mimi najali...Sitaki aibu mimi. Unalofanya wewe sio aibu yako tu, bali ya wote, mimi, baba yako, ukoo mzima. Mimi nimelelewa na wazee wangu, nilipokuwa mkubwa wakanipa mume. Sikumjua, hakunijua, lakini mpaka sasa tunakaa vema. Nami nitakufanyia hivyo hivyo. Mpaka nikupe nyumba yako halafu hapo tena shauri yako. Kama huyu Swai anakupenda mwache alete posa (*Wakati Ukuta*, 12).

I care...I don't want disgrace. What you are doing is not your own disgrace, but a disgrace to all of *us*, *me*, your father and your family. I have been brought up by my parents, when I grew up, they gave me a husband. We never knew each other. We are staying well. I will do the same to you. Until I give you your own house. If Swai loves you, let him bring the dowry.

Mama Tatu's use of *us*, the collective pronoun, is important here because it demonstrates that she associates the question of marriage with the whole community. Nkemkia (1999:171-172) explains that the superiority of the 'I' is rooted in the West and 'We' in Africa, where collectivism reigns. Furthermore, Mbiti (1995: 108-109) asserts that Africans believe that the individual can only say "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am. This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man." Seen this way, we can deduce that, for the Africans, the relationship between the individual and the community "is the central moral and ethical imperative of African religion (Magesa, 1997: 65). Thus, when mama Tatu tells her daughter that other relatives should know and participate in the marriage arrangement, the implication is that she is aware that from a traditional point of view, marriage is a communal event that should be sanctioned by the community. Mama Tatu wants the outcome of this marriage endeavour to strengthen the bond among members of the community. Inadvertently, Mama Tatu is emphasising the philosophy of "We." After all, an African community is formed by people who live and work together on communal farm land, communal shrines, masquerades, ritual objects and festivals for recreational activity, economic and religious purposes (Nkemkia, 1999). On this point, Ejizu (2010) explains:

The network of relationships among human beings is remarkably extended and deep. In fact, the words 'family', 'brother', or 'sister', etc. define far more for Africans than what they mean today for the average European or North American. The family for the traditional African, usually includes one's direct parents, grand and great grand parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts cousins, nieces and nephews...The extended family is the model...The extended family structure is held up to people as model, one in which parents, grand-parents, uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces live together and are cared for by their children, grand children and other relatives in mutual love and respect.

To put her daughter in the know, Mama Tatu reminds her of the life of her ancestors, which had a great bearing on her and other members of her community. She wants her daughter to uphold the same old traditional values that helped to keep the society together. To Mama Tatu, values define a community. Thus, when her determined daughter insists that she has the right to choose her own husband even if he does not pay dowry, she strongly disagrees with her and wants her to see things from a traditional perspective. Mama Tatu insists Swai must pay the dowry or his suitor-ship would come to nought. Mama Tatu is aware of the

importance of the dowry in an African society, which according to Mbiti (1994: 140) is sometimes called a 'bride/gift,' bride/price and 'bride/wealth,' depending on the traditional set-up of a given community. According to Mbiti, this gift mostly given to the bride's parents is the "concrete symbol of the marriage contract and security." This dowry is a socially accepted transaction in which families from both sides—the parents or relatives of the bride and the groom—participate without any misgivings. It is a social obligation meant to strengthen bonds between two families, rather than weaken them. As a traditionalist, Mama Tatu wants the traditional marriage formalities to be followed before Tatu's hand is given in marriage to Swai. Tatu, on the other hand, wants to be liberated from the shackles of tradition and enjoy life without the social inhibitions that she associates with communal values. She wants her freedom; she wants to go out with her boyfriend (11) and enjoy life. She considers herself a modern African woman and hence wants to imbibe from the fruits of modernity. Naturally, she comes onto a collision course with her conservative mother. Though it is not very clear what Hussein's intentions are here, it is evident from Tatu's realisation that traditional norms and values still have a place in her society. After Tatu and Swai get married without seeking the consent of their families—and of their society by extension, Tatu finally realises that she is at fault. She blames for the failure to allow traditional marriage procedures to be followed. In fact, she censures herself for being too individualistic. She tells Swai:

Sio kosa lako...Kosa letu sote...Kwa hiyo haina maana kukulaumu au kukuudhikia. Nilikosa kuwafanyia kiburi wazee. Nilikosa vilevile kukubali ndoa. Tungalifikiria kabla ya kukuona, lakini hatukufikiria. Tulifikiria madhari tunapendana basi inatosha. Hatukujua kuwa hata ndoa ina wakati wake...Nilikuja bila ya kitu na ninaondoka bila ya kitu... (*Wakati Ukuta*, 40-41).

It is not your mistake...It is our mistake...There is no meaning in blaming you or becoming angry. I made a mistake to be arrogant to my parents. We should have given marriage enough thought before jumping into it. We thought that provided we love each other it was enough. We didn't know that even marriage has its own time... I came with nothing and I leave with nothing...

The implication is that Tatu deserves to suffer because she went against the norms and values of her own society. Tatu has learnt that marriage among her Coastal people is a social and legal union contracted with the consent of the family. By getting married without the consent of her parents and her society, Tatu cuts herself from the familial bonds that are supposed to be established through such marital unions. As Mbiti (1991:108) notes:

Marriage in the traditional African view is an affair of more than two people. Therefore through marriage many relationships are established, and the married couple are very

much in the public eye. For this reason, weddings are carried out with celebrations and festivals, giving an opportunity for everyone to be involved.

In other words, marriage, as a social obligation, is supposed to be answerable to and in line with the societal values. Otherwise, a marriage severed from the umbilical code of the society was considered a bad omen, hence doomed to fail.

Similarly, *Wakati Ukuta* and *Arusi* portray the problems of contemporary marriages associated with the preponderance of individualism at the expense of collectivism. *Arusi* demonstrates how an individual's ambition can come into conflict with family ties. Bukini leaves his wife for economic reasons. He sees economic prosperity as a passport to a better life for himself and his family. The overriding attraction is the need to embrace a modern life style. This thirst for a modern life is part of the capitalist curse that drives on people till they had attained social mobility that bettered both their social and economic class and placed them above other individuals in the name of survival. After all, the capitalist mantra is: economic competition based on the struggle for survival and survival of the fittest. As Feagin and Feagin (1990: 88) note:

Social and economic life was considered to be by nature a life and death struggle in which the best individual competitors both should win out over others. The hierarchical structure of this capitalist society and its class divisions were thought to be the result of the operation of basic laws of nature.

As the Western powers extended their sphere of influence to Africa while in search of raw materials, labour and markets, they also converted Africans to their capitalist philosophy of individualism. This is what forces Bukini to leave his family in search of a better life. In his endeavour, Bukini cuts off communication links with his wife. In his absence and without hearing a word from her husband, Bukini's wife, Mwanaheri, yearns for another man. Her aim is to establish her identity and enjoy her freedom, contrary to the Coastal traditional customs which demand women's obedience even in the absence of her husband. The elders condemn Mwanaheri's behaviour, especially after realising that she has been impregnated by Omari, a violation of the traditional taboos, customs, norms and values. One of the elders sees Mwanaheri as an example of how the youths were disregarding traditional values (22). Here both the husband and the wife are considered to be at fault because of placing their individual needs and wants first: Bukini does not communicate with the wife because of his selfishness and personal interests. The wife rightly or wrongly is implicated in an extra-marital affair before she can establish the fate of her marriage to Bukini through the established social channels. From an individualistic point of view, Mwanaheri, as a neglected wife is right because she is after the values of life;

after all, she has an individual identity. But this brings her into conflict with community values that demands that she honours her obligations through the established channels. Hussein's goal, it appears, was to demonstrate the effects of individualism when characters are self-serving and ignore the wider interests of family and society.

In a similar vein, the play *Alikiona* examines the issues of individualism. In fact, the play offers a challenge to a kind of individual freedom that violates the ethics and morals under the veil of modernity. Like *Wakati Ukuta*, *Alikiona* is set in the Coastal area. It primarily focuses on the matrimonial life of four characters: Omari and Saida, the principal characters, and Abdallah and his wife. The marriage of Saida and Omari is problematic because Saida, the wife of Omari, has an extra-marital affair with Abdallah, another married man. These unfaithful characters have sex in the matrimonial bed of Omari and Saida (44). Regardless of their motives for having this extra-marital affair, their betrayal threatens the sanctity of the institution of marriage as practised among Coastal peoples. This means that an individual is supposed to be committed to only one's lawful or traditionally accepted wife or husband except in cases where a husband takes another wife, or more wives, under the Islamic laws also practiced among Coastal peoples (Swantz, 1965). But Saida and Abdallah see themselves as individuals trying to enjoy their mutual affection through consensual sex. In other words, they represent individuals who strongly believe that individualism is everything regardless of the societal or religious values.

However, Saida and Abdallah have violated the coastal values; they have broken the coastal moral code. What the play appears to suggest is that people not to lose sight of their traditional values which enrich human life. For instance, despite the humiliation he suffers at the hands of his wife, Omari remains wise, gentle and kind. He attends the funeral ceremony of his mother-in-law, and desists from punishing his wife even when she begs him to (64). Omari believes communal values are more important than self-interests. This moral orientation could be one of the reasons Lihamba (1985) classifies *Alikiona* as a moral play. Omari appears bent on making Saida realise the meaning of being a person in tune with societal values.

2.3 Individualism vs African Tradition Customs

Whereas Hussein's interest in highlighting the detrimental effects of individualism does not wane and extends to his later plays, there is a time gap between his earlier plays and the next one, which is *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim*. This play was written eight years after *Arusi*. Unlike some of his earlier works, *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim*, is a serious play with a notable change in the outlook of the playwright towards African traditional customs. Whereas in the other plays,

Hussein appears to embrace the traditional values that could help keep African societies together, in this play Hussein appears to actually condemn the effect of some of the traditional customs. Although the criticism is not direct, the play appears to label some of the African traditional values as counter-productive through the behaviour of Herbert Pala.

Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim is based on the historical crisis which shook Kenya in the 1980s. The crisis followed the death of a renowned figure in Kenya who died of a heart attack. This man had married a Kikuyu woman, who demanded to bury her husband. The husband's clan insisted that the widow should respect the Luo customs and traditions, which stipulate that the deceased be buried in his own village.

Hussein used the materials from this case to develop this play. Just like the historical case, the play *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* is set in Kenya. The play centres on the family of Herbert Pala, a Luo and Martha, a Kikuyu. They are married under Christian values. In Kenya, Christianity is projected as a "new" religion, which thrives alongside Luo and Gikuyu beliefs. The interaction of these three beliefs inevitably leads to conflicts, which the characters in the play are able to display.

In the play, the theme of individualism focuses upon Herbert Pala, the husband. The converted Herbert has abandoned the Luo tradition customs. But he ignores one of the cardinal Christian tenets that compel him to respect his wife, who is supposed to be part of his 'body.' Kisembo, Magesa and Shorter (1998: 45) explain that the oneness in a Christian marriage implies "a very profound sharing between husband and wife." However, Herbert refuses to sign the will so that his wife and son would benefit once he dies. As an educated African woman, Martha foresees problems that were likely to arise in future. She tries to convince her husband to sign the will as a precautionary measure. Coming as she does from a different ethnic group, that of the Gikuyu, Martha is aware that the Luo community does not accept her as Herbert's wife since her husband's community wanted Herbert to marry a Luo woman. With this hindsight, she tries to implore her husband to write a will.

However, Herbert Pala remains obstinate. He knows that the Luo do not approve of his wife, but does nothing to take care of her interest in case of his untimely death. He only thinks of himself. This individualism spells disaster for his wife and child following his demise. The Umma Klan, which symbolise the Luo community, invades his house and want to bury Herbert according to Luo traditional rites. But doing so would contravene the Christian beliefs to which Herbert and his widow subscribed. The conflicts resulting from a clash between traditional and Christian values have been widely documented; however, Hussein appears to single out Herbert as the cause of this unwarranted conflict by failing

to take precautionary measures that would safeguard the interest of his wife and his own, as a Christian Luo man. He knew that by marrying outside his own ethnic tribe, he was creating a bone of contention that he could dispel by writing a will clearly spelling out what he wants for himself and for his family.

From whatever angle one looks at the portrayal of the traditional customs, the playwright does not appear to support what they are doing to the bereaved characters in this play. Whereas in *Wakati Ukuta*, *Arusi* and *Alikiona* Hussein portrays and supports the positive values of traditional customs and their ability to unite and sustain traditional societies, in *Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim* Hussein seems to disapprove the actions taken by the Umma Klan against Martha. The Umma Klan knows that Herbert converted to Christianity, and yet they want Herbert to be given a traditional burial. They can be forgiven for striving to protect and guard Luo traditional beliefs. By burying Herbert according to Luo traditional rites and inheriting his property, they believe they are abiding by their beliefs. But the conflict appears unwarranted because Herbert had converted to Christianity, and hence Martha is right to demand for a Christian burial. Martha tells her son, Chris:

...Baba yako katuachia kichwa cha tembo. Tumewinda pamoja. Jamaa zake amewapa meno na usinga. Na sisi ametuachia kichwa cha tembo. Sasa naelewa kwa nini hakutia saini hati. Mwenyekiti sasa hivi anatayarisha mazishi ya Herbert...Anataka kumzika Herbert na kuandikisha kila kitu katika jina la Umma Klan. Kila kitu. Nyumba, viwanja, gari, fanicha kila kitu. Unavyotuona hapa, sisi ni maskini. Ndiyo maisha ya mwanamke. Unapoteza mume. Unapoteza maisha. Unapoteza kila kitu (*Kwenye Ukingo wa Thim*, 25)

... your father has left us the head of an elephant. We have hunted together. He has given his relatives teeth and a flywhisk. He has left with the head of the elephant. Now I understand why he did not sign the document. The chairman is preparing the burial of Herbert... He wants to bury Herbert and register everything in the name of 'Umma Klan.' Everything, [the] house, land, car, furniture, everything. We are now poor. This is the life a woman. You love a husband; you lose everything.

From this statement, it is evident that Martha holds her late husband for their plight. By leaving them with the "head of an elephant," Herbert has put them in a rather precarious situation, something that he could have avoided by writing a will. As his legal wife, she has more clout over her husband's welfare than the Umma Klan. But by failing to write a will, Herbert became complicit in empowering the Umma Klan. In this aspect and in the face of changes taking place in society, the play appears to suggest that the philosophy of "we" can be abused and result in the suffering of innocent people. It would be erroneous to suggest here that Hussein has u-turned and started condemning the same communal values that he has held dear in the other plays. Instead, he appears to suggest that there is also a need to consider the mitigating factor. Perhaps, it is for

this reason that the play appears to find fault the egotism of Herbert more than the actions of the Umma Klan. After all, had he left a will, his wife and child would not have been subjected to the kind of torment that his clansmen appear to execute with relish. On the other hand, Hussein seems to suggest that these traditional values appear harmful because individuals have hijacked them to save their self-interest, otherwise, they could have looked on the future of Herbert's wife and his son.

Herbert is tormented by his ambivalence towards himself and his society. He knows that as an individual he has decisions to make; but as a member of the Luo community, he also fails to make a decision that would put him directly in confrontation with his folk. He fails to decide whether he should live by the values of modernity he has embraced or the traditional beliefs of his people. By playing it safe, by sitting on the fence, he sows the seeds that make his family suffer. It appears his marrying an outsider haunts him, hence his finding another woman, Lydia, from his community. In all his actions, Herbert does not think of the welfare of his wife but himself (Act 1). Christian morality is seen in the name of human dignity (Keller, 1989). A Christian is supposed to denounce social injustices, racial, tribal and clan discrimination (Bujo, 1998). But Herbert Pala contrives to flout a cardinal Christian tenet by getting a concubine or second wife, and by failing to write a will that would safeguard the interests of his wife and child. In other words, it is his individualism that is more at fault than the communal aspiration of the Umma Klan to abide by their tradition. The fact that Martha dies defending her property against the angry Umma Klan's mob shows that the irresponsible Herbert has unnecessarily placed his wife in harm's way because of his selfish and irresponsible behaviour. In other words, Herbert responsible behaviour could have prevented the communal will from spiralling out of control and Martha's interests could have been safeguarded. This means Hussein is not directly attacking traditional values but stressing how actions of individuals can trigger unnecessary social chaos.

2.4 Collectivism in *Kinjeketile*

Indeed, if we look at Hussein's play, *Kinjeketile*, we see that collectivism rather than individualism has a place in an African society, especially in efforts geared towards bringing about the desired social change. The play emphasises the need for order, unity and strength. Kamera (2003) notes that a war cannot be fought without unity. He points out that one of the major obstacles facing the people in *Kinjeketile* is disunity which has to be resolved before the people embark on the war with the Germans. In African sense, one cannot separate unity and collectivism. Bujo (1998) argues that the survival of the community has a communitarian dimension developed by among others people working together.

Indeed, the primary character, Kinjeketile, after whom the play has been named, tries in vain to unite the people so that collectively they could confront the threat of the Germans that was threatening their social economic dispensation. Kinjeketile knows that a revolution is impossible without unity. However, because of individualism, many of the characters are self-serving and hence unable to mount a serious attack to repulse the Germans. Because of individual interests, some of the Southern Tanganyinkans have become spies, informers and stooges of the Germans, hence becoming enemies of their own people. As Kitunda, one of the characters, tells his folks:

... Sote sisi tunataka Njelumani aondoke. Lakini tutamuondoaje? Kwanza yeye ana silaha, sisi hatuna. Jambo la kufanya ni kuanza kukusanyakusanya silaha-kuiba bunduki za askali, kunyang'anya, kufanya chini juu ili tupate silaha. Hili haliwezi kufanyika mala moja. Tena basi itakuwa vigumu kulifanya maana hivi sasa kuna vibalaka chungu nzima. Utakachofanya, akina askali au mnyapala kasha sikia. Kwa hiyo kuyapeleka mambo hayo mbio mbio haifai. Tuna maadui, na katika sisi wenyewe kuna maadui (*Kinjeketile*, 5).

...we all want to get rid of the German. But how do we do it? He has weapons, we haven't. As our first duty, therefore, we must collect weapons. Steal guns from the askaris, seize them if need be, in short do everything to see that we've got guns. This will take time. Such preparation will have to be done with the utmost secrecy, for, as you all know, we have got enough spies, informers, and stooges to fill up a pot. You do one thing today and by tomorrow the askari, or even the overseer knows about it. We are hungry people, and hunger drives us to betray one another. So you see, we can't afford to rush into things, recklessly. We have enemies, even amongst our own people (*Kinjeketile*, 5).

Kitunda is aware that in order to accomplish self-advancement, many of his folks have sacrificed communal values and sided with the Germans. The spies, informers and the stooges are after self-interest, hence destroying the community ethos which the ancestors called for. They do not realise that the land that the Germans had grabbed from them was sacred and belonged to everyone, not just a few benefiting individuals. With individualism serving as a divisive element, it appears the Southern Tanganyinkans will be unable to face the Germans and take back what belongs to them. Casualty in this development is the rules established by the ancestors urging them to live in communion. This becomes clear in Kinjeketile's prophecy. Possessed by *Chunusi*—a spirit (Act II, Scene 3), Kinjeketile shows how individual interests are fomenting internal strife among African ethnic groups and nations. In fact, Kinjeketile attempts to use the 'sacred' water philosophy, that if they sprayed themselves with the water from the sacred river they would not be harmed by the bullets stems from a strong desire to bring back the strong communal values that once held them together as a community. Hence Kinjeketile warns Kitunda:

Watu hawaniamini mimi... Watu wanaamini maji. Na ulivyosema kuwa uwaambie vita hakuna, sikusema hivyo mimi. Si kweli. Nimesema tungojee mpaka tuwe na umoja-tuwe wengi (*Kinjeketile*, 25).

They have no faith in me...people have faith in the water. About the war I never said there would be no war. All I'm saying is: let us wait until we are completely united, until we are many.

3.0 Conclusion

In all these plays, Ebrahim Hussein's theatrical works appear to oppose individualism as a destructive element mainly because it is un-African and undermines the foundations upon which many African societies have been founded. All the theatrical works appear to suggest that individualism leads to the death of collectivism in Africa. In *Kwenye Ukingo wa Tim*, which appears to be an exception at one level, Hussein still appears to point out that elements of individualism when not channelled properly can disrupt hitherto healthy communal values and lead affected communities on destructive and inhumane path. That is why Herbert is more accountable for what happens to Martha than the Umma Klan. It is Herbert's selfishness and ambivalence that eventually unleashes the forces of the Luo on a destructive path that would make outsiders question the traditional values of the Luo. Overall, all these plays support collectivism as the bane of African unity while discounting individualism and its effects.

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