

## **The Re-evaluation of African Community Values in R.E. Obeng's eighteenpence**

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**Abstract:** *Kari Dako, the editor of eighteenpence regards the novel as among the first West African novels ever to be written although it seems not to be accorded that recognition so far. What engages attention with this novel is its view of, and evaluation of African community values. The discussion of African community values is carried out matter-of-factly without eulogizing of everything African. This novel, on the other hand, in spite of its passion about African values, takes a more critical view of these, examining them with unflattering candour, pointing out some of their inadequacies due to their basis in excessive social control generating a lack of the potential for the development of individuality which can enable the development of enterprise. Employing a mainly structuralist perspective, this paper examines the kind of African community values endorsed by this premier novel, and what it condemns and points out for further scrutiny.*

**Keywords:** *Community values, Enterprise, Individuality, Social control, Transformation*

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### **I. Introduction**

In his analysis of contemporary literature of Ghana from 1911- 1976, Angmor (1996:44) observes: ‘So far , in Ghanaian prose narrative, a two-fold aim is discernible which is more than merely writing for pleasure or for money. It is the desire to create a national literature and to put forth a comment or criticism on national issues. .. A natural consequence of this orientation is that Ghanaian prose narrative is a close representation of real life situation’. Noting that *Eighteenpence* fits into this description of Ghanaian literature, this paper aims to examine the arguments by which R.E. Obeng articulated his views on the values of his community and engaged in a conscious critique of his society’s values in the novel, comparing their effects to those produced through direct colonialism. With such arguments, he points to other ways in which society’s communal values could be recreated to engender the development of the individual, creativity and freedom, and the liberated mind, discarding an overly wieldy and time-consuming traditional value system which appropriated all individual life, energy, and resources with little or no return except to advance social control in society.

In a critical review of *Eighteenpence*, Dako (1994:366) struck the note of transformation in the novel at the review’s conclusion: ‘As Christianity demands a rebirth so does colonialism in the guise of modernity. It is not hard work that is rewarded, but the transformation into a colonial acolyte’. In the view of this paper, Dako’s evaluation of the transformation being advocated by Obeng appears to be influenced by the critical review’s emphasis on the depiction of womanhood and its critiquing of Eurochristian values. It can thus be pointed out that the focus of Obeng’s critique has been somewhat narrowed, and this can create a less persuasive perspective of the vision being sketched by Obeng which is in contradistinction to a society controlled by its ecology of social control and mechanisms akin to slavery. It is this type of existence that needs to be transformed into a different kind of society that enables individuality, enterprise and mental freedom. Consequently, whereas this paper agrees with Dako’s understanding that Obeng advocates a transformation or rebirth of society and its values, it differs in the kind of transformation or rebirth advocated. This latter view will be justified by recourse to the interpretation of the novel through its complex of recurrent or repeated motifs and contrasts, placing these within the larger structure of values, beliefs and symbols of the society as the underlying frame that gives them significance. It is hoped that this approach will open up several levels of significance for the novel and lead towards the perception of the kinds of transformation necessitated by Obeng’s critique of society.

### **II. Communal Values And The Vision Of Society**

Communal values should serve the individual and make life meaningful and worth living. They are capable of such achievement because they constitute the design and roadmap of any communal entity, consisting of the community’s vision and the possibility of the individual’s participation in and realization of that vision. The design and roadmap of the community, on the other hand, defines the values by which the community exists and functions, and the coordinates that create the logic of the choices that are made by the community as a whole and consequently by the individuals who participate in the community. This, at the same time, gives the reasons and sets the basis for the choices that are made and that are considered of value for the

society, creating the assumptions upon which both community and individuals could be assessed through their response to situations, especially to new ones. Thus, valorization is a function of the vision of the community. That vision is equivalent to the culture of the community (Bourdieu 1990; Bloor 1991). Valorisation is thus key to the novel's arguments, being its driving force and that of the plot of the narrative. And this leads us to the conflict at the heart of the story – slavery. What is slavery? And what are its different forms, and in what forms does it manifest itself in Gold Coast society? And what promotes slavery in the society? And how can this situation be overcome and transformed into a new kind of liberated society which is able to respond to new situations, embrace individuality and individual initiative and enterprise, education, and wealth?

As the vision enables the community to shape the values of the society by the valorization of ideas, actions, activities and ideals, it enables individuals to respond to situations and circumstances in the same way as the community can respond to the social, economic and political circumstances of the entire society. Since the vision of a society is to enable a consistent manner of response to situations and life in a society according to what is valorised, a vision that disempowers both individuals and the community to respond to changing circumstances, history and new social, political and economic contexts and evolutions can only find refuge in one fortress – the construction and administration of social control and dependency.

The manner in which this kind of situation and set up affects the building of the mental structures of a society are described by Bloor (1991:76) in his sociology of knowledge: "The connection between social ideologies and theories of knowledge is no mystery at all but an entirely natural and commonplace consequence of the way we live and think." Bloor explains how this happens: "The social ideologies are so pervasive that they are an obvious explanation of why our concepts have the structures that they do. Indeed the tacit employment of these ideologies as metaphors would seem almost impossible to avoid. Our familiarity with their themes and styles means that the patterns of ideas that we have picked up from them will have an utterly taken-for-granted character." The consequence of this orientation of living is that the social ideologies pervasive in the society are "unconsciously embedded in the very ideas with which we have to think. What may feel to the philosopher like a pure analysis of these concepts or a pure appeal to their meaning, or the mere drawing out of their logical entailments, will, in reality, be a rehearsal of certain of the accumulated experiences of our epoch." (Bloor 1991:76)

And it is the language we use that points us to these mental structures: "To learn these ideological stereotypes we may need no more than a full exposure to our language. The meanings of words are inseparably charged with associations and connotations. These form patterns holding together some ideas and experiences, repelling and disassociating others" (Bloor 1991:76). And the effect of this is the delineation of a certain or distinct type of logic in the society and its norms and behavior (Bourdieu 1990). This is what the style and language of Obeng reveals through its repetitions, parallelisms, contrasts and the kinds of words uttered by the characters in the novel.

Thus, in examining the mental structures of both the individual and the society, that is, the framework upon which both the life of the society and the individual are built, the drivers of the eco-system of R.E. Obeng's novel, *Eighteenpence*, can be discovered. Slavery had been abolished in the colony in 1874 (Dako 1994:367). Yet it had long been abolished before 1874; what happened in 1874, was a re-enactment and more determined enforcement of the attempts to abolish slavery. In 1842, a Danish officer noted in his official diary the difficulty the colonists were finding in implementing the abolishing of slavery in the Gold Coast owing to the way the trade had evolved into different forms that were even considered legal, and had been accepted as a matter of fact normal living in society. He observed:

"The expression 'export of slaves' has been used here instead of the more common 'slave trade', in order to distinguish between the trade for export and the same trade between people in the country itself. This latter or domestic trade takes place in the Danish-Guinean Establishment, and is even legally binding. For many years to come it will be impossible to enforce a prohibition against this trade, because fortune and the maintenance of life are based on this condition. The English have tried to apply the Slave Emancipation Act. According to its contents, it is the law on these coasts and regions insofar as they are subject to English rule. But their efforts have so far been in vain. Even the English themselves are seen possessing numerous slaves as personal property. It is true that they do not buy any slaves, but they have ways of avoiding this prohibition and recruiting their servants." (Storsveen 2010:19)].

This observation gives an indication of the persistence of the slave trade in the Gold Coast as it evolved, like a virus, into many different strains, in many different forms adapted to either outwit legal prohibitions of it, to produce wealth and preserve fortune, or to maintain it as a cultural feature.

By the time Obeng was writing his novel, it is obvious that these types of strains of slavery including indentured workerships were existing in different guises, obviously maintained and protected under cultural practices and social control mechanisms, even under chieftaincy. It is not therefore surprising that Obeng would interrogate the society with respect to its practices of chieftaincy and its relationship to slavery under the guise of cultural practices as he makes the meaning of 'pawning' the centre of the novel. What does it mean to be

pawned or to pawn oneself as Akrofi, the main character, did? What is its equivalence with an indentured worker status? It is the question Obeng makes Konaduwa ask, generating the conflict at the heart of the novel.

In the novel, Akrofi borrows an amount of eighteenpence from Owusu Ademueri, the husband of Konaduwa. When he was unable to pay back the money, he offered to pawn himself as a labourer in Ademueri's farm for a week. Konaduwa was asked by her husband to supervise Akrofi in the farm. Konaduwa, finding the development curious and ridiculous, confronted Akrofi on the farm with many teasing questions. He eventually left the farm, describing Konaduwa as 'dangerous as a loaded gun', and her 'words are as poisonous as a snake' (5). Konaduwa remained on the farm, imagining that Akrofi would inform her husband about her questions and envisaged the repercussions. She therefore proceeded to plot her defence by spinning lies about Akrofi's behavior towards her in the farm. The consequence was an avalanche of litigations resulting in many court hearings in the novel. The first part ended in Konaduwa's divorce and remarriage to Amoako. In the second part of the novel, Akrofi's actions create for him a new persona. He was interested in farming; he acquires land, consults the European gardeners at Aburi who taught him farming skills that improved his yields, and made him wealthy and powerful. He became even wealthier when he discovered gold on his land, won rights over the chiefs in the European court, and kept the gold and land. He created his own paradise, building a European-style house, a township, school, and become a philanthropist and hero to the ordinary people.

As slavery was valorized under various guises and concealed under various cultural practices as communal value with chieftaincy as its custodian, personhood was subsumed under communal obligations and responsibilities. The individual had to accept these norms as the cultural practices, beliefs, customs and traditions of the people and behave accordingly. The legacy persists today in the vestiges of cultural practices as even in the twenty-first century, the most highly educated Ghanaians would regard and vigorously defend the riding of chiefs on the heads, shoulders and backs of bare-chested men in palanquins as culture. This is in spite of the common fact of the invention of open-top vehicles and other means of transporting dignitaries through large crowds made possible by science and technology. Similarly, certain other practices of enslavement exist under various cultural guises that are defended by the most ardent scholars as culture.

The culture of silence was a mechanism for social control. Dissent, as symbolized by Konaduwa and her sharp wit and tongue, was dealt with through various other mechanisms of social control illustrated by Obeng under the numerous chieftaincy court sessions instituted against her. Such mechanisms include the labeling of dissenters as deviants and of 'unsound mind' (30) – a method adopted by both traditional society and the colonists, albeit in different forms. The toll that court sessions, swearing of oaths under the auspices of fetishes, slaughtering of sheep to appease gods, the pouring and demand for drinks in appeasement of chiefs and others, takes upon dissenters runs them down into debt, causing them to be subjugated and silenced. Thus individual voices such as those of Konaduwa are silenced. In describing one method in which dissent was silenced through social control, Yitah and Dako (2011) explain that the dissenters are first considered villains in society and in the case of women, customary marriage was used to achieve the result of keeping them silent as 'Their reintegration is only possible after they have confessed their misdeeds, received pardon and been folded back into customary wifely obedience.'

### **III. Community Values And Personhood**

The most common assumption among scholars on the African continent seems to be that communal values are the essence of the African, and therefore are intrinsic to African society, and in contrast, personal values and values related to individuality are the preserve and essence of Western and European identity and culture. The view that communal values are intrinsic to African society is summarized by Wiredu (2000:185), who explains that 'Communalism is a well-known variety of social ethic. It is attributed to Africa. ... Certainly, my own society – that is, Ghanaian society – is communalist in its traditional orientation. ... A communalist society is one in which an individual is brought up to cultivate an intimate sense of obligation and belonging to quite large groups of people on the basis of kinship affiliations. This inculcation of an extensive sense of human bonds provides a natural school for the enlargement of sympathies, which stretches out beyond the limits of kinship to the wider community.' In this sense, the discussion of personhood and individuality is limited; and when engaged, is made contrastive to Western and European ideals. Such contrast is almost always conjured, as Kaphagawani (2000) pointed out, in order to create a gap which is exploited for the exclusion of discussions relating to the development of individuality and the individual which should lead to the development of democracy. In the words of Kaphagawani (2000:66), 'Since Tempels, discussions of African conceptions of reality make a basic yet questionable assumption that such conceptions must be in contrast to their Western equivalents.' Obeng seems to agree with Kaphagawani in rejecting this kind of dichotomy and contrast and to endorse a complementarity of understanding of individuality and communality.

When *Eighteenpence* depicted the life of Gold Coast society before independence, it drew a tension between the individual and the society – traditional and communal society and the possibility of the development of individuality in the society, not as a contrastive to European values, but as a complementary

aspect of society. Dako (1994) identified this tension as one formented by the imposition of Eurochristian values on Gold Coast society. She identified this with the first part of the novel which is a racy, well-characterised part developing the characters of Akrofi and Konaduwa. On the other hand, she does not see the value of the second part of the novel, which she identifies as a model of the folk-tale. This paper however suggests that when viewed from the perspective of the tension between the practice of existing communal values and the contestation of those values by the rise of the individual and the development of personhood that confronts it, the two parts are significant in rendering the interpretation of the life of Gold Coast society at the time. The two parts draw a clear comparison and contrast between the nature and products of the traditional communal living and the nature and benefits of the new mode of living through the development of individuality. Thus, the novel consists of two parts which yield their significance primarily through juxtaposition and contrasts both within each of the two parts and in parallel with the two parts.

In describing the way in which fiction works, Scholes (1968) distinguished between plot and design. He pointed out how design is such an important part of a writer's art, and hence how a sense of design is essential to a full reading experience. Design in fiction takes many forms, but these can be broadly categorized into two kinds: juxtaposition and repetition. Juxtaposition is what is placed next to what in the arrangement of the story. Repetition, on the other hand, deals with images, ideas, or situations that are repeated. Repetition occurs not necessarily as an exact restatement of the images, ideas and situations repeated, but occur often with interesting variations in the course of the narrative, creating parallelisms.

Consequently, we can think of structure in one sense as those elements which shape our experience as we move through the story. We can also think of structure as those elements which enable us to see a meaningful pattern in the whole work. In this sense structure is close to design. 'For if plot has to do with the dynamics of movement of fiction, design has to do with the statics of fiction – the way we see a whole story after we have stopped moving through it'. (Scholes 1968: 36)... Plot wants to move us along; design wants to delay our movement, to make us pause and 'see'. The counteraction of these two forces is one of the things which enriches our experience of fiction. (Scholes 1968:37)

#### **IV. The Tension Between Communal Values And Personhood In The Novel**

As culture signifies stability, organic growth and communal values, it is not surprising that it will find an antithesis in the development of individuality and personhood. As Bloor (1991) notes, the antithesis of culture shatters its stability and hence will be thought to undermine unity, suggesting division, conflict, struggle and atomisation. It will also be thought to be opposed to spirituality and what is higher; for as culture suggests spirituality, individuality will be thought to suggest worldliness, practicality, utility and money. The manner in which the two domains will be contested will depend upon the kinds of logic set up in the culture and hence in the mental structures of the citizenry or population, that is, its social imagery. The effects of this logic and mental structure will manifest in the kinds of behavior and moral choices and values emphasized by individuals in the community as they encounter both new and old situations, and the manifestation of individuality.

Obeng depicts the systematic effects of a system upon the mentality, morality, choices, behavior and standards of living of the people who are adherents of the culture he depicts. He locates the main problem and conflict in the society and its communal life as that of slavery and the interpretation of slavery- the absence, negation, or deprivation of individuality; in other words, the depersonalization of individuals in the society. The problem begins in the misrecognition of Konaduwa's interrogation of Akrofi's understanding of his own circumstances, situation and its arrangements – an arrangement in which Akrofi indentures himself to Owusu Ademueri, the husband of Konaduwa, for failing to pay back a debt for the cost of a cutlass. Akrofi revels as if 'ignorance is bliss' and as if the type of living and choice he had just made should be regarded as a normal way of being and living. Akrofi had arranged, with the husband of Konaduwa, to pay off a debt he owed by making himself an indentured worker for a number of days. The relish and fervor with which he considered this set up as normal, dignifying and a morally righteous way of making payment for a debt owed astonished Konaduwa. Her questioning of Akrofi's understanding of the arrangement and her reading of the situation was surprisingly rejected and met with antagonism by Akrofi's reply to her Socratic questioning, raising the spectre of a misrecognition and the turning of the tables against her. The fear of this misrecognition generated the conflicts of the story, hinting at the consequences of the kind of restrictive atmosphere and conditions that social control had created in the society – silence was preferred, nothing should be questioned. Fearing that she had been misunderstood by Akrofi in her attempt to bring awareness to him, she had to resort to finding another strategy to preserve herself, making survival her goal. Through his design and plot, Obeng appears to argue that the values developed through the kind of communal values existing at the time have resulted in the production and acquiescence of excessive submissiveness in the individuals living in the community and buried in the social fabric of the community itself, leading to the apparent enjoyment of slavery which had been fostered because of the fear which ruled the society.

Akrofi's misrecognition of Konaduwa's awareness raising questionings is a result of culture and its social control mechanisms in Gold Coast traditional society. This axis controls the plot and its actions, and the questions being posed to African community values with respect to the freedom and creativity needed for advancement in society. Such social control mechanisms lead to the processes of producing slavish submission as Konaduwa was eventually reduced, and as was displayed by her foil, Abire whose life was always a slavish submissiveness and acceptance of everything the husband said and did, in the same way as the rest of the population that was reduced to informing on one another, looking out for the least mis-step or misuse of words to pounce on one another, and perpetrating deceptions and fraud such as was carried out by Gyesaw in the first part of the plot (35-39), paralleled by that perpetrated by the illiterate headmaster in the second part of the plot, and by the archetype of the traditional uncle painted in the character of Akrofi's uncle, Dowuona.

Different forms of slavery existed, and Angmor (1996) suggests that certain early Ghanaian novels used subtle criticism to point out the anomalies which affected even aspects of child education: "One is the practice of parents sending their child to be brought up by another person while the child attends school. The child lives literally as a servant to his or her guardian whom he or she appropriately addresses as master or mistress." (Angmor 1996:46). Storsveen's (2010:12) diary extracts give a picture of an attempt by the British authorities to suppress the slave trade through the introduction of private enterprises and alternative types of trade other than trades in human beings.

The inability to distinguish mental liberation and self-determination from traditional practices and social control is first signaled in Akrofi's misrecognition of Konaduwa's awareness-raising questions, and the question remains as to whether in the course of the novel, a change could result in Akrofi's thinking. The second part of the novel appears to answer that question. Akrofi becomes a self-made entrepreneur who takes on the traditional authorities, that is, chieftaincy and its institutions, through the colonial legal system and wins. He employed all that was new in the changing times to jettison the prying eyes and tight-fitting mesh of the traditional system that Konaduwa with all her wit and her vituperative mouth could not overcome. In doing so, Obeng opens the way for the discussion of the new changes that have to occur in Gold Coast life whether they wanted it or not. The new changes, nonetheless, require a new vision built on the development of personhood and individuality, not individualism. The process of the new changes are in parallel consonance with what Amuka (2010:90) observed about moral changes in society. He argued "...that morality itself is an elusive ideal that is ceaselessly sought by society through the repeated and endless resolving of dramatic tensions between novel agencies of what come to be named virtue and vice."

What sets up the dramatic tensions between the status quo and the new changes consist of the mental structures controlling the vision and behavior of the people. The new changes require accountable time. As Huxley (1937), cited in Winterowd and Murray (1985:114) pointed out, "For the man who lives in a preindustrial world, time moves at a slow and easy pace; he does not care about each minute, for the good reason that he has not been made conscious of the existence of minutes." Yet the use of time in the novel depicts a society that spent most of its time in traditional court sessions over trivial issues including allegations of insults, lasting practically the whole day and beyond. Obeng's arguments are not just about what is said, but also illustrated in what is not said. No substantial issues related to the welfare of the community, the liberation from the scourge of poverty, the advancement of the society through education, or any strategies forged to respond realistically to the new situations confronting it were discussed. Above all, the processions to and from the meeting grounds, and the excessive decorations and adornments of chiefs were a demonstration of the disregard for the necessity of accountability with time in contrast to the demands of the new inevitable dispensation. An illustration of this throughout the book is summarized on page 82 thus:

"The head of the court-criers then shouted, and the head of the palanquin carriers seconded it with a much louder noise to notify the people that the Adontenhene was about to rise. The former shouted at the top of his voice saying: 'Sore eee!' The potentate then stood up, adjusted his cloth and began to move. According to custom, they left the court in the same order by which they came. The drums, horns, people, everybody talked and the noise that was there was unimaginable. The Krontihene moved at a snail's pace, and hindered the progress of the Adontenhene, so a sword-bearer was asked to go and tell him to 'move-on; but he refused, saying that his royalty did not permit him to move any faster. He continued in such doubly slow march until the Adontenhene pacified him with a beautiful cloth of native weave. Having received this, he quickened his pace considerably, but not very long afterwards, he came to a halt, looking here and there, and unwilling to move. Another messenger went to urge him to move on, but he was obdurate. A handsome present of eight pounds was sent to him again with a humble request that it was getting to sunset, and besides, rain was threatening, and unless he hurried, the whole show would be spoilt. He then went in a good pace, and the gathering was thus able to disperse before the downpour began." (82).

Another effect of the mental structures cultivated by the beliefs, practices and the slavish status quo existing at the time was the cultivation of suspicion against hard work and wealth and the squelching of creativity and initiative. It characterized the refusal of the people to learn new ways and new things. On the

contrary, Akrofi was able to see the need to seek the opinions of the Agricultural Officer and Curator in charge of the botanical gardens at Aburi in the cultivation of his farms. His approach was met with skepticism and scorn in the society:

“Several acres were tilled, the ground dug, and beds were raised. People who passed by and saw the trouble he took in digging so deeply and raising beds in European style, were greatly surprised and amused, for to their minds he was wasting time and strength and money. They pointed out to him that from time immemorial their ancestors had been doing the farms in the old way, yet had reaped appreciable harvests, therefore it was sheer folly on the part of Akrofi to go to so much trouble. But as hard as they tried, they could not understand why Akrofi wasted such time and money so unnecessarily.” ( 83).

One would have thought that as a mainly agricultural community, members would have been interested to learn new ways of increasing their yields. Instead of assessing Akrofi's efforts with rationality and objectivity in order to valorize his methods of producing farm yields beyond the expectations of people and determining how they could access his rational methods of farming, the farthest they could travel in understanding the cause of Akrofi's success was to cast suspicions upon him and his ways of operation. Hence: “Because Akrofi dug his farm so carefully and did all the work in it in the European style, no other farmer or gardener matched him in the richness of his harvest. People began to think that he had some supernatural power with which he worked, because he reaped everything in much more abundance than any other farmer whose farm was about three or four times larger than Akrofi's. Any explanation he gave them was rejected; but he thought the people were simple-minded and that was why they could not understand; for it was a waste of time trying to make them see why such a small farm could yield such abundance.” ( 85).

In the words of Wiredu (2010:181), “Knowledge is necessary for action. That is axiomatic. Action is necessary for survival. That too is axiomatic. Therefore most certainly, knowledge is necessary for survival. ... The most obvious problem is that much of the knowledge we need in Africa now is in the hands, sometimes in the heads of non-Africans. This part of our cognitive needs is that part which can only be fulfilled through science and technology”. This realization had dawned on Obeng, and he wished his people had taken the cue. The rejection of knowledge in the form of the development of individuality, personhood and the acceptance of new methods of approaching life and responding to new situations has its effects on the society and the people, which is not positive, but negative. Consequently, the people remain in abject poverty, subject to the vagaries of the weather controlled by nature, and steeped in superstitious ways instead of responding to the new realities of education, science and technology in the complementary manner in which Akrofi approached his life and development of his personhood. In the end, they end up in a vicious cycle in which on account of poverty, they are wide open to dependency and manipulation. In either case, the traditional authorities or the colonial administration could say to themselves, ‘They cannot do without us’, turning them into easy materials for enslavement. The question is whether this situation is not carried over into contemporary workplace organization and ethics, and whether the mental structures that governed Gold Coast traditional society then have changed.

## **V. Conclusion**

The essence of the study can, perhaps, be captured by the understanding of fiction defined by Scholes (1968) that it is about movement, hence about change in the life of an individual, society, or conditions of a people or group. Hence drawing upon Scholes (1968:15): “Fiction is movement. A story is a story because it tells about a process of change. A man's situation changes. Or he himself is changed in some way. Or our understanding of him changes. These are essential movements of fiction. Learning to read stories involves learning to ‘see’ these movements, to follow them, and to interpret them.”

Obeng's arguments seem to suggest that the peoples of the Gold Coast, represented and symbolized in their traditions, customs and culture by the institution of chieftaincy ought to realize that times are changing, and only few cultures would not contemplate their survival without taking note of and responding to the circumstances of the times, and be influenced by the appearance and the development of either indigenous or foreign elements. The people and culture of the Gold Coast cannot be an exception in this principle of the inevitability of change. As new situations arose in the Gold Coast leading to its gradual colonization and the increment of the influence of European authority, trade and education over traditional authority and society, a response should be expected as the outcome, leading to a dialectical situation; on the other hand, a lack of response to the realities of the times were inevitably creating the growth and ascendancy of dependency and social control. In other words, R.E. Obeng tries to understand the response of traditional authority and society to the new situations arising in the Gold Coast with the increasing influence of European authority, trade and education. He was skeptical about the lack of realistic response to the situation as the old vision on which communal values and responses depended were crumbling away. Obeng was sending a distress call to Gold Coast society to wake up as the old methods depending on slavery, submissiveness, social control and the

suppression of the development of personhood and individuality were no longer adequate for the new dispensation.

It is apparent that by the beginning of the twentieth century, the practice of slavery had remained as it was in the past and evolved into a variety of practices. It is not surprising therefore that slavery and its ancillary practices should constitute the discourse that R.E. Obeng interrogates through his interrogation of the social control norms and institutions evolving from it. These norms had constituted a normal way of life, even a culture, which was generating consequences that made it impossible for the African society to penetrate the possibilities for change, constant renewal of self through debate and interrogation and the reflexivity that could enable it respond to the new situations being created through their interaction with the foreign powers. It also did not enable them develop the kind of solutions and institutions that could effectively help them to 'talk back' to the foreign powers. To be able to achieve this kind of texture and quality, African community values must leave space for openness, debate, reflexivity, and the development of personhood, to enable development rather than constitute itself into a closed area that superintends social control.

Consequently, whereas Akrofi signals the possibility of emerging from extreme poverty to riches and wealth through hard work, focus, bridging social capital and education, he also signals the degenerative quality of maintaining a status quo of traditions and customs that create all the fertile conditions that turn out a deprived, poor and dependent population who become beggars, cheats, plotters, slaves, fraudsters and imposters living under the auspices of superstition and social control.

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