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BLACK CIVILIZATION AS CULTURAL PRODUCT OF CONCEPTUAL CREATIVITY

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(Presented at the 1977 World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture, Lagos, Nigeria by Rev. Dr. N.K. Dzobo, Senior Lecturer in Educational Philosophy, Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana).

Introduction

Civilization is not a chance or instinctive creation. It is a purposeful achievement which is inspired and guided by a dynamic system of ideas. Thus the Gothic Cathedrals up to this day testify to a period in European civilization when people lived by faith and not by sight. Likewise the royal tombs of Egypt of the Pyramid Age testify not only to the accurate mathematical knowledge and the engineering skill which the Egyptians had attained. They bear witness as well to the veneration of the Pharaoh as a god and the belief in after-life. Civilization is generally influenced in its development by man's understanding of his universe and society, of himself and his destiny here and hereafter.

Black and African civilization has its own set of guiding ideas that provide its main spring and shape its course of development. The purpose of this communication is to examine Black and African civilization as a conceptual creativity and

it is an attempt to rediscover and restate some of the indigenous African concepts which are used to organize and direct society and life. The communication is therefore being presented in the spirit of revival of indigenous African Culture. The following aspects of that conceptual creativity will be examined after the definition of Black Civilization.

(1) African apprehension of reality:

(a) Its source: The dual deity, Mawu-Lisa, etc.

(2) Some relevant implications and observations.

(3) The Concept of Community.

(4) The Concept of Man and His destiny.

The sources to be used as the basis of the examination will be indigenous African proverbs, names, taboos, myths, symbols, legends, poems, religious beliefs, rituals and practices with special reference to the cultures of the Ewe and Akan of Ghana. Materials from these and any relevant sources will be used to show their unique contributions to the formulation of these concepts.

1. Black Civilization Defined

From the standpoint of the communication in this paper Black Civilization will be considered in the first place as the blossom of cultural creativity and productivity of the Black people. As a cultural blossom it manifests the cultural maturity and fruition of the people, and it is thus the actualization

and articulation of the historic destiny of such people. Such a destiny is latent in the genius of the Black people. In a deeper sense, Black civilization is then the authentic and mature expression of the creative genius of the Black people in its fullness and dynamism, in its manifold complexity and richness.

For a civilization to be authentic it must be rooted and must emerge from the indigenous way of life of a people. The Black people all the world over cannot therefore practise and function effectively in an alien civilization which has no roots in and does not emerge from their native way of life. Any senseless turning outward to alien civilization by the Black people will only breed cultural sterility and superficiality, and engender a sense of cultural captivity and impotence.

To assert and maintain the cultural integrity, purity and identify, and thus safeguard the authenticity of Black Civilization, such a civilization must be black first of all. That is, it must be created out of the cultural resources of and experienced by the Black people concerned in the first instance as the true expression of their own native genius. This does not, however, rule out the chances of Black Civilization assimilating enlightened and enriching contributions from other civilizations. As one African proverb says: 'Knowledge (civilization) is like a baobab tree (monkey-bread tree), no one

person can embrace it with both arms.' Cultural borrowing is a healthy thing, but the purpose of any such assimilation should be to enrich, to deepen and to provide an added dynamism underlying Black Civilization and not to pauperize and denigrate it. The observance of the principle of enrichment and added dynamism is very important in the meeting of Black Civilization with other civilizations because the technological impact of industrial civilizations on Black Civilization can be overwhelming and dazzling out of all proportions to their intrinsic worth. Cultural borrowing by the Black people must therefore have constructive and rejuvenating effects on Black Civilization and must promote and deepen its integrity and authenticity.

Judging from the preceding discussions it becomes obvious that in our present historical situation, the Black people must evolve definite principles of cultural development and assimilation. This will enable them to regain the initiative and authority in the development of Black cultures through education that is development oriented and is also intended to conserve the best and the finest in their cultures. The crucial concern of Black Civilization at this historical moment must therefore be the growth and development of Black cultures through original creativity, conservation and sensible assimilation.

There is a tendency, which is almost instinctive, to think of civilization as limited to the erection of imposing buildings and industries, to the building of multi-lane super highways and big city institutions which have devoted themselves to the dissemination of the products of an elite culture. Such a culture is permitted to touch the under-privileged majority either as an act of charity, or is imposed upon them so as to uphold the false supremacy and the hegemony of the elitist culture.

Black Civilization is not an imposition of the values and way of life of the privileged few on the unfortunate majority. It is humanistic and humanized civilization in the first place and communal in the second. It therefore addresses itself to the assertion that 'human life is the greatest value'.¹ By human life we mean life that is organized as an active and creative power and as a system of essentially human and communal relationships and aims at enabling the individual to realize his true selfhood and humanity through self-transcendence and the society its true sociality. Some of the fundamental questions raised by Black Civilization are therefore; 'What sort of man?', 'What sort of society?' and 'What sort of human

¹ K.A. Busia, Purposeful Education for Africa (Mouton & Co., London 1964), p.17.

relationships?' In brief, 'What sort of life?'

The value of human life and of man as the springs of African Civilization is expressed unmistakably in some indigenous Ewe and Akan names which employ the words, 'life' (agbe or nkwa) as their root-word and in other names and expressions that indirectly refer to the value of life. There are over a thousand such life names and expressions which appear in the writer's new book, African Names Now. Take the following for example:

- (1) Agbenyefia (name) Life is king.
- (2) Sunkwa (name) Pray (cry) for life alone because it is the most important thing.
- (3) Do agbe (farewell greeting) 'Go and sleep life' i.e. 'Good night'.
- (4) Nkpe dzi wo le 'Life is yours', This is a way of saying, 'Thank you.' in Guan.
- (5) Ameewu (name) 'Man is more important than gold'.
- (6) Amenyenu (name) 'Man is everything'.
- (7) Amenyefu (name) 'Our relations are like feathers on our bodies. They provide us with beauty and safety'.
- (8) Onipayede 'Man is sweet' i.e. precious.

Such names and expressions reveal the richness and some of the motivations of the conceptual creativity of Black Civilization. The first conceptual creation to be examined will be the indigenous conception of reality or being.

2. African Apprehension of Reality:

Before the indigenous theory of being is examined, there is a need for a short mention of the Western traditional classical theory of being to serve as an introduction to it and also as a basis of comparison.

The theory of being, also referred to as either the theory of reality, ontology or metaphysics, is a branch of philosophy that addresses itself to what is believed to be the essential and the ultimate stuff of the universe. It asks the question, 'If the universe is to be reduced to some elementary form of being, some ultimate reality, what will it be?' 'If all the special beings, and the groups of beings, if all the concrete and abstract beings were to be resolved into non-being, what is there that will be said to be?'

The answers given to these questions vary from one school of philosophy to the other. There are those who contend that the ultimate stuff of the universe is only one thing which is usually said to be either spirit, mind or matter. This view

is characterized as monism and those who hold it are called monists. The second school of thought maintains that the universe can be reduced finally into only two elements, namely mind and matter. This view is labelled dualism and those who hold it are dualists. The last school of philosophy denies the two previous positions on reality and argues that the universe is made up of more than two elements. This view is described as pluralism and those who subscribe to it are called pluralists.

The African theory of being discussed in this communication is essentially Ghanaian in character; it assumes the plurality of beings, i.e. the indigenous society believes that things that we perceive with our senses such as human beings, trees, hills, and things we do not see like witches, ghosts, spirits and gods are not illusions but are really real, and then goes on to assert that being *per se* is fundamentally structured in the form of a unitive duality. In other words, to some African societies being per se is made up of contrasting but complementary opposites, expressing themselves in organic dualities. Each duality constitutes a complete being and its structure can be compared to a coin which has two sides but remains one, or to the door-way of a room the same doorway that serves as an entrance, also serves as an exit, or finally to the Roman god Janus which has two faces one called the old year and the other the new year, but remains

as one being. The structure of this type of being is described as 'unitively dualistic' and its origin is in the religious thoughts of the Ewe, Akan, Ga, Borundi, Lango and Herero people of Africa. The origin of this theory of being will now be discussed in some detail.

(a) Its source: The Concept of dual deity: (Mawu-Iisa. Nyame Obatan pa and Ataa Naa Nyogbo)

Some Africans conceive of the godhead of the Supreme God as a deity with a dual nature, one female and the other male, and yet he is one in essence.² This conception of the High God is very pronounced in and is the main distinguishing mark of the conception of God among the Ewe of Benin (formerly Dahomey), of Togo and Ghana, and to some extent among the Akan and Ga of Ghana. According to the Ewe tradition the High God has a dual name called Mawu-Iisa³ which is a reflection of his nature. Argyle pointed out that, "The immediate striking feature of this deity is its dual nature"⁴ (see fig. one)

² John S. Mbiti, Concepts of God in Africa, (London, S.P.C.K., 1970, pp.29-30).

³ Earlier writers like Herskovits, Mercier, Forde and W.J. Argyle have exhaustively treated the Ewe concept of the High God in such books as, The Ancient Kingdom of Dahomey, African Worlds and The Fon of Dahomey.

⁴ The Fon of Dahomey, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966), p.176.

striving. Forde remarked that by presenting their two natures alternately to men, the divine pair impress on man the rhythm of life and the two series of complementary elements of which its fabric is woven.

In Akan religion the dual nature of the deity is also clearly expressed in the praise name Nyame obatan pa and in the name Asase Yaa (Efua), the popular name for the god of the earth. In the praise name Nyame Obatan pa, Nyame is the male and Obatan pa which literally means - 'the kind nurturing mother' is the female. In the earth's name Asase Yaa, (Asase means earth, and Yaa is a name for girls born on Thursday) it is understood that Nyame the male god is the opposite of Asase Yaa, the female god. Furthermore, the traditional Akan double-barrel names are constructed on the basis of the female-male duality. In each set the first name represents the female principle (referred to as the weaker one) and the second the male principle (referred to as the stronger one.) A set of such five names are provided here as examples:

1. Agyeiwa Kodie (eagle)
2. Adae Nununkum
3. Frempong Manso
4. Dua Agyeman
5. Appia Kubi.

The Ga of Ghana combine the male and female principles and so refer to the High God as Ataa Naa Nyogbo, i.e. 'The Father

Mother God'. These names further reveal the unitive duality of the godhead which is the basis of the organization of beings i.e. of anything that can be said to be, be it man, world or society.

To sum up: The origin of the indigenous theory of being is based on the concept of the High God who has a dual nature but remains essentially united. Argyle therefore concluded.

"Mawu-Lisa express together the unity of the world conceived in terms of duality."⁸ (see fig.2)

The union of the dual deity is said to be twin-like and sexual i.e. the relationship between the opposites in the duality is like the relationship between man and woman, between husband and wife, or between the two drums of the talking drum. The opposites in the duality are therefore not antithetical but rather complementary and equilibrical. Reality is therefore structured as unity in duality and is woven of series of dual and conflicting opposites which form complementary and balancing forces in it. Equilibrium and complementarity and the sexualness of opposites provide the basis for harmony and reconciliation which are therefore at the very heart of being. The fabric of life and that of the world are therefore organized on the basis of unity in duality with sexual and twin-like relationship among its opposites. This type of relationship is the sole-ground of creativity. In the thought of our fathers then creative harmony is the foundation of all being.

⁸. Argyle, p.177.

There are some resemblances between the Chinese philosophy of Taoism and the theory of reality being discussed here. Taoism is a philosophy of retreat from civilization into nature in order to attain harmony. To the taoist man and nature are organic and are not accidentally related and he must conform his life to his tao, considered as the law of nature's being, to realize his true self.

The taoist therefore conceives of the ontological harmony as one between man and nature, while the indigenous Africa conceives of the harmony primarily as forming the foundation of all being and thus the constituent part of man's being, of human society and relationships.⁹

In the indigenous thought opposites of any duality and their relations are modelled on the female and male relationship paradigm.¹⁰ In Ewe one of the opposites of any duality is therefore referred to as noa, i.e. female, (obea, Akan), and the other as atsua, i.e. male, (obarima, Akan), and their unity as atsuno, (or obea-barima - Akan). This last term atsuno is not used very often but it is

⁹For further reading on Taoism see J.B. Noss, Man's Religions, pp.294-299.)

¹⁰The German Philosopher Feurbach referred to this model as "fundamental condition of all personality, and of all consciousness....."
John Macquarrie, Three Issues in Ethics (SCM Press Ltd., London, 1970, 1970,) p.64.

assumed and heard in such insulting expressions as nutsumo i.e. man-woman, to refer to a man who behaves like a woman and is not courageous). The two talking drums are therefore referred to simply as atsua and noa, (obea and obarina) and the high-pitched one is the female (noa, obea), and the low-pitched one is the male (atsua, obarina). The term noa will therefore be used to refer to all gentle principles, to principles of creativity, passivity and growth inter alia, and atsua will be used to stand for principles of positivity and destructivity, for stability and lastingness, and for masterfulness, inter-alia, no matter in whatever duality they are found. The term atsuno represents the unity of the two principles.

The world-view represented by this theory of being will be categorized as Atsunoism which is coined from atsuno and it stands for an 'African brand' of dualism which asserts that reality in all its various forms expresses itself essentially as two opposite principles which are not contradictory but contrasting and complementary; and they harmonize to form a paradoxical unity expressed in duality. The term atsunoism is used to differentiate this world-view from the western philosophical dualism which as a theory of reality is used to

designate two world-views; One, the view that mind and matter are the two fundamental realities; and two, the view that good and bad irreconcilable and conflicting principles lie at the root of all things. An instance of the second view is found in the religion of Persia and in Christianity, where Ahriman and Ahura-Mazda in Persian religion, God and Devil in Christianity, stand for two eternally opposing and conflicting principles. In the classical dualisms conflict is considered to be at the heart of being while in African dualism creative harmony and reconciliation, unity in duality are at the heart of reality.

To the indigenous way of thinking it is true to say that in the beginning there is creative harmony and unity which are born of complementarity and balance of opposites. Conflict may appear later on and is resolved in the name of the pre-existent creative harmony and unity. Ontologically existence can be compared to an ideal marriage which begins in creative harmony and unity; conflict may and does appear later on but through reconciliation, creative harmony and unity are restored. Life to our fathers is therefore nothing but one continuous return to and search for more creative harmony and unity.

Because of this understanding of life disputes are resolved in the indigenous society primarily in the name of creative harmony and unity. It is therefore common to hear at the chief's Court the elders say that they are not going to blame any of the parties to a dispute but they are going to 'stamp or rub their feet on the case,' ~~or they are going to mend their~~ middle,' i.e. to restore the creative harmony and unity between them. The Ibo of Nigeria have the same attitude to dispute and so in Achebe's Things Fall Apart, in the course of settling a dispute the elders went into consultation, returned and declared. 'We have heard both sides of the case', said Evil Forest. 'Our duty is not to blame this man or to praise that, but to settle the dispute'.

It is interesting to note that in the West Civil Cases, especially, are settled by 'blaming one party and praising the other'. This is done in the name of justice but by doing that more conflicts are created within the fabric of society. More will be said about the role of conflict in Western thought in my observations.

2. Some relevant Implications and Observations:

(a) Implications:

Certain obvious but very important conclusions emerge from the above theory of reality. The first conclusion is, "Everything that is, is complete and united in terms of its opposites." It

follows therefore that to understand being you must apprehend it in ~~terms of its atua and noa principles, either as found within~~ or outside itself. Thus for example, man's nature is complete i.e. it becomes whole in terms of its opposites which may be described as his human and animal natures, or his ability both to do good and evil. This conflicting dual nature is basic to the being of man, whose nature therefore is not invaded by any strange element, but the tension occasioned by his dual nature drives him to seek resolution through creativity and productivity. In other words, the dual nature of man instead of being a handicap is rather the source of man's cultural creativity and civilization.

The second implication is "Since reality is made up of creative and destructive opposites, everything contains within itself, or in its relation to the other, the seeds of its own creation and destruction." Every man therefore has it within himself and in his relation to the other the power to build himself up or to destroy himself. It is also true that every man has the chance to be built up or destroyed in his relation to the other, be it a person or society. In other words, self-determination and self-destruction are two principles built into the fabric of life and society.

Thirdly, by the virtue of the doctrine of balance of opposites and the fact that none of the opposite in any duality can be destroyed by or dissolved in the other, "there is a creative tension built into life". This built-in tension drives life to seek for resolution, i.e. to improve upon things and situations. Tension and not conflict is therefore the true basis of change and progress. This view of the human situation is expressed in the proverb which says, 'The animal in the sky cannot afford to go to sleep'. (Dzila medoa alo o).

(b) Observations:

The Atsunoist theory of reality is one of the fundamental points of difference between the African mode of thought and that of the West. The West sees human life and society as essentially founded on conflict, eliminating competition and victory. The basic premise of the conflict view of life, which is derived from the traditional Western dualism, is its comprehension of society, especially, as comprising incompatible individual interests, stemming from unequal distribution of wealth, power or security. The conflict model therefore puts a great deal of importance on power, i.e. the ability of each opposite to realize its aim in the face of opposition from others. The conflict model, as is generally called, therefore sees life and society as in a state of perpetual ~~internal conflict and thus always bargaining as~~ each opposite seeks to

maximize its success/victory. These elements of perpetual bargaining for power in the name of sectional interests is absent from the creative harmony model, also called integrational model. The basic premise of the creative harmony model is the primordality of unity and creative harmony. Society is therefore seen as always in search of ~~more unity and harmony through creativity~~ and not made up of parties bargaining for power and acceptance of rival systems of values. In other words, the indigenous African life is mainly founded on peace, while life in the West is mainly founded on conflict and competition. This explains the aggressiveness of the West and the importance attached to peace in the indigenous society. The importance attached to peace is evidence in all indigenous prayers which usually end with the word "Kose, Kose, Kose or Dagbe, Dagbe or Dagbe, all these words mean, 'peace and blessing'. Among people who traditionally observe the seven day week, two days are given to the celebration of peace. The first day falls on Monday which is therefore called Dwoda which is a shortened form of Aho dwoda, meaning 'the day of cool body'. The second is Saturday called Memreda. It is a day of peace because the High God, Kwame Nyame, who is the Father of peace, was born on this day. Among those who observe the four day week e.g. the Ewe, the last two days called Domesigbe and Asiamigbe, are given to the observance of 'cool things' and so are called 'cool days' (nkeke fafewo). On such

cool days certain cool things are done, like wedding, enstoolment of chief, engagement, celebration of the New Year Yam Festival, and sleeping with a newly wedded wife for the first time.

Women are the symbol of harmony and peace and are therefore given cool names like Fafa:- Coolness, Fafali:- There is coolness in the marriage; Dzifa:- The heart is cool, Afeafa:- The house/home is cool, Blewusi:- Take it easy. Men who are the symbol of the destructive principle bear such names as: Oko:- War, Tukpe:- Bullet, Bekoe:- He has come to fight, Bediako:- The fighter, Kaleku:- The death of a warrior. It is interesting to note that up to this day some traditional societies have a machinery for war and peace. The man who is in charge of the peace apparatus is called Afetoganua or ganua for short. He has a cow bell called afetoga which is the symbol of his office and he is charged with the responsibility of safe-guarding and seeking the peace of his community and he is helped by some young men called sonfuowo. He uses his bell to exorcise anything that disturbs the peace of the community such as, epidemics, war, storm, criminal behaviour and accidental death. The harmony principle has thus been institutionalized through the office of afetoganua in the indigenous society.

This paper is not intended to give the impression that there are no conflicts within the indigenous society. There are conflicts, but virtue is not made of them and our national festivals like Hogbetsotso, Tedudu, Afahye and Homowo are instituted primarily to resolve intra-social and inter-personal conflicts in the name of ~~peace, harmony and unity~~. They ~~are~~ ^{are} therefore ~~at~~ ^{ing} healing wounds, renewal and reaffirmation of group solidarity through reconciliation and settlement of disputes and misunderstandings between individuals and within families. The means of achieving all this is through prayer and eating of a communal meal called in Ewe bakabake and in Ga Kpekple. The supreme purpose of the festivals is therefore the restoration of peace, harmony and unity.

Let me now illustrate the point of the dominance of the conflict view in the thought and action of the West with **first** an example from the religious thought of the West. Christianity views and interprets the human situation in terms of a rupture between God and man on the one hand, and between God and the devil on the other. From the very beginning of the divine-human drama in the Bible the conflict stage was set by posing Adam and Eve, the very first human beings, as acting contrary to the will of God. The conflict theme is followed throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament and the conflict situation is described

variously as 'falling into sin', 'disobedience', 'rebellion,' and 'apostasy', and the prophets became the resolvers of the conflict between God and the people.

In the New Testament the conflict theme has been personalized and projected on to a metaphysical plane. The human situation is seen as a rupture between God and the devil, with men captured by the devil. To deal with the conflict God came personally in Jesus to wage a war against the kingdom of the devil and to end man's rebellion. The conflict drama reached its climax in the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection was the victory of God over the devil/sin, or the victory of good over evil. According to the logic of the conflict theory the crucifixion is bound to end in the resurrection, because it is a logical necessity. Jesus is therefore referred to after the resurrection as Christus Victor, the victorious Christ, and his ascension is his triumphant journey to accept his victory laurel.

In the indigenous African religious thought there is no idea of a basic conflict between God and man, because the very essence of God referred to as either se or okra is the essence of man and the nature of this essence is unity in duality. The Ghanaian therefore does not consider it sacrilegious to name a child Nyame or Mawu, which are names for the High God in Akan and Ewe. One proverb expresses the harmony between God and man this way, 'God

does not beget a child and kills him'. (Mawu medzia vi wune o).

The relationship between God and man in the thought of our fathers is one of basic unity and harmony and not conflict.

The doctrine of complementarity and unity conceived in terms of duality rules out any idea of the devil as a principle eternally opposed to God in indigenous religious thinking. The word devil is therefore translated into the vernacular as 'satana' because there is no vernacular word for it. Even though the Akan word Sasabonsam is used to translate the devil in some cases, the essence of the concept of sasabonsam is not the same as that of the devil, because as R.S. Rattray pointed out sasabonsam has a dual nature, he is both good and bad. The Western devil therefore came to Ghana with the arrival of the missionary.¹¹

Under the influence of the conflict notion of the human situation both Moslem and Christian missionaries therefore see the indigenous African cultures and especially its religious heritage as satanic and thus diametrically opposed to their gospels instead of complementing them. This has led to a savage

11. These observations are made not as a way of judging the intrinsic value of the Christian religion but to show where indigenous African religious thought differs from the Christian thinking.

attack on the indigenous African cultures and civilizations through subtle but vicious propaganda, with the belief that Christianity or Islam will be victorious in the end.

The conflict theory is also used to interpret and organize the economic situation by the Marxist socialist. In marxian doctrine of opposites it is contended that everything contains two opposing forces. One is called the thesis, and the other the antithesis. The two antithetical forces will eventually destroy each other, but out of the destruction there will arise a new situation which is called the synthesis. The synthesis also breaks down into its opposites - and we have a new thesis and a new antithesis. This process goes on ad infinitum.

This marxian doctrine of opposites is used to explain and justify the emergence of the socialist economic system which is seen either as a victory of the working class over the middle class or as a victory of public ownership of the means of production over private ownership. As the Christians believe that the victorious Christ shall reign for ever and ever, the marxists also believe that marxist socialism shall reign for ever and ever. Such beliefs are directly related to the logic of the conflict theory.

Finally the conflict view of life shows itself in the Western political life and organization. The so-called parliamentary

system of government is based on the conflict theory of life. Thus there is a political party called 'the party in government' and the other 'the party in opposition' and a political election is described as 'a campaign' or 'a fight'. In America the presidential primary elections are conducted 'to eliminate the weak and ensure the victory of the fittest in the struggle'. African political life on the other hand is organized on the principles of co-operation and complementarity, on balance and unity. It is ordered so as to realize the welfare of the people through co-operation, unity and harmony within the society. Party politics and economic rivalry are therefore alien to the essence of the indigenous African economic and political reality, because they are based on conflict.

To conclude, the fundamental difference between the indigenous African mode of thought and action and that of the West is not that the African is based on **I-Thou** mode of cognition and the Western on **I-It** mode, nor is it that the African employs the magical way of thinking and the Westerner the scientific one. The fundamental difference is that the indigenous Africa employs the creative harmony model and the West the conflict model of thinking and acting. One of the manifest destinies of Africa therefore is to promote the universalisation of the creative harmony model of living throughout the world. The West has plagued the world long enough with its conflict model of thinking and acting.

The indigenous African concept of community is based on its creative harmony model of reality. While the West sees society as made up of incompatible individual interests which are in a state of perpetual conflict and bargaining for the maximization of success/victory, the indigenous Africa sees society as founded on creative harmony and unity in duality. Society is thus seen as always in search of more harmony and unity through the resolution of tension that arises in the course of living in the society. The relationship between the individual and society and between an individual and his neighbour is not based on exploitation and competition but on the paradigm of sexual relationship. Mutuality of help, complementarity, co-operation and interdependence are therefore the key principles in the organization of the indigenous community. The individual therefore sees his neighbour as his other arm and not as his competitor. This sort of relationship is expressed by the proverb which says, 'The right washes the left and the left also washes the right'.

This conception of community and of human relationship is formally expressed in statements and in traditional symbols. An example of its statement form is the saying: 'We are, therefore I am, and since I am, therefore we are'. This means that the individual derives his true being from his relatedness to the group as a social unit, through creative self-transcendence and the group in turn derives its

being from the individual's sociality. Another way of saying it is: 'We harmonize therefore we are and I am'. In the thinking of the indigenous society there is therefore a delicate reciprocal and interdependent relationship between the individual and his society and each has a mutual responsibility to the other.

The indigenous view of society is further brought out vividly and graphically in two indigenous Ghanaian symbols of community. The first one is a picture of two crocodiles with two heads but only one stomach and is called Afuntummireku-Denkyemmireku (to be called Afuntum for short), (See Fig.3). The other is a symbol of a hand with out-stretched fingers called Hamenono Dzesi. (See Fig.4).

The afuntum symbol is from a proverb which is said as an admonition to members of a family not to quarrel among themselves over say a piece of property because whatever the individual member of a family has goes eventually to the family. In other words, co-operation is better than competition in satisfying individual as well as collective needs. This symbol therefore has a universal application which goes beyond the confines of the family and teaches other lessons besides the lesson of co-operation.

In this symbol the two heads of the crocodile represent individual members of society. The common stomach is the symbol of communal interest, need and weal. The two crocodiles struggle hard as individuals to get food to eat but what they eat goes into a

common stomach. In the afuntum symbol the indigenous society therefore achieves a harmonization of individual interests and welfare with that of the group by communalizing individual interests and wants. The symbol in a particular sense therefore unites and harmonizes society in an area of life that has the greatest tendency to divide and create ruptures in society. This is the area of economic interests, activity and well-being.

The second symbol of hamenono dzezi completes the first one. In this symbol the fingers represent individual members of society who are free, unique and independent, but are firmly rooted in the whole which is the hand, and derive their being and importance from their relatedness. As the community derives its being from the existence of its individual members in the afuntum symbol so the individuals derive their being from the community in the hamenono symbol. The individual in the indigenous society is therefore always aware that his well-being is in the welfare of his community. He lives for his society and his society lives for him. In African society, as Wilbur C. Harr said, "Human existence is (therefore) a responsibility and not a self-centred isolationism."¹²

¹² Pierce Beaver, Christianity and African Education (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1960) p.200.

This attitude to the relationship between the individual and society and the communalization of individual economic wants and interests and the dual nature of social organization has led rather to a unique indigenous social orientation. I call this orientation the 'we frame of orientation'. The individual in the indigenous society has the tendency to think and act from the perspective of 'we' where the 'I' and 'they' perspective may be employed. Life is essentially comprehended not from the point of view of 'I' or 'they' but from that of 'we', 'us' and 'our'. This 'we' comprehension of life is expressed in various forms of speaking, greeting, and acting. Take for example the Ewe and Akan equivalent of 'How are You?'

Ewe : 'Mile agbea?': Literally: 'Are you (plural) full of life?'

Akan : 'Mo ho te den? 'Literally: 'How are you(plural) feeling in your body?'

In the two forms of greeting the plural of the second personal pronoun is used even though a single individual is being addressed. The individual also uses the first person plural pronoun i.e. 'we' to reply to the greeting.

Reply: Ewe : 'Miele agbea': 'We are full of life'.

Akan : 'Yen ho ye': 'We are feeling well'.

The 'we' orientation appears in names and other expressions as well. Thus the personal name for the Ewe goddess of the Earth is Miano, meaning 'Our Mother'. Whenever the individual is calling his friends he uses the expression Miatowo (Ewe) or Yaanom (Akan) which translated literally means 'Our people'. Whenever you ask an Ewe 'What is your nationality?' (Afikatowonenye?) his reply will be any one of these: 'I am Ghanaians (Ghanatowomenye) or 'I am Ewes' (Eweawomenye). He will never say 'I am a Ghanaian' or 'I am an Ewe'.

There are others examples to be cited but it is enough to conclude from the examples adduced that the indigenous African society perceives life from a communalist point of view and this point of view is characterized by 'we consciousness' which is made up of 'I' and 'They' consciousness. The special use of 'we', 'us', and 'our' therefore differentiates this type of group awareness from the one in which the use of 'the people', 'the mass', 'they', 'them', 'theirs', 'I', 'me' and 'myself' is prevalent. This type of communalist point of view has been given the name legbaism

Legbaism is a word coined from the Ewe word legba which is the name for the god of collective well-being and security. He is also referred to as du legba to show that he is the custodian of the welfare and the health of the town community. He is therefore the spiritual mayor (afeto, odikro) of the town and works for the

well-being of all as well as caring for each individual in his own way. Legbaism is used as a theory of the indigenous African social organization and apprehension that is based on a 'we' sense of identity and inclusiveness. It is a group way of life in which individual and group interests and wants are harmonized and taken care of through communalization of economic and social needs and wants, of economic and social interests and activities. In legbaism the individual and his society have a reciprocal and complementary responsibility to each other and are interdependently related.

In conclusion it could be said that the indigenous Africa conceives of society as essentially **built on mutual concerns** and conjoint activities. Life in African society is perceived as the product of the co-operation and harmony that exist between the group and the individual and between individuals. In ~~such a~~ society individual ~~and group interests are not allowed to create ruptures,~~ they are harmonized and taken care of through communalization (nationalization). Through communalization of interests society is brought to work together in the satisfaction of the needs and wants of its individual members. Thus one proverb says. 'If two people carry a log it does not oppress! Legbaism is used to sum up this way of living together as individuals and as a group.

Legbaisn also makes room for individual initiative, drive and enterprise. This is represented in the anfunfun symbol by the two crocodiles reaching out for food and it is stated in several proverbs. Take for examples, the proverbs 'You do not cross a river in the name of we', this a way of saying, you must be individually responsible for your own action. Another proverb says. 'If you have a rat in your pot which is turned up side down, and you want others to help you catch it, you the owner of the pot have to lift it up before others will catch the rat for you'. This is a manner of saying, 'if others see that you take the initiative to help yourself, they will be more willing to help you'. The individual is also taught to rely on himself by such proverbs as, 'If you go about looking into other people's cooking pot you will go starving one day'. Another one says, 'You do not bank your hope on the cornflour in your neighbour's bag'. In other words, 'learn to take the initiative to feed yourself'. In Legbaisn therefore both individual and collective senses of responsibility are delicately balanced and developed in the child.

4. The Concept of Man and his Destiny

(a) The Bipolarity of Human Nature:

From the preceding discussions concerning the nature and structure of being the point has been made that man, (used in a generic sense) shares in the dual nature of the High God, that is

to say, in the fundamental structure of being. Man is therefore ontologically a being with a bipolar nature, structured as unity in duality. On the basis of his bipolar nature he has the power of reason by means of which he transcends his animal nature, his historical contingencies and himself, yet he is still rooted in nature, subjected to its laws and unable to change them. Man is a rational being but he is driven by his irrational nature. He has achieved a considerable consciousness but he is still rooted in unconsciousness. By his power of reason he creates as well as destroys. This bipolar and contrasting nature of man is well expressed in a story told about Ananse who saved the human race from a great famine and later on plunged them into pestilence. Alexander Pope described the contrasting natures of man as his grandeur and misery and went on to say: Man is "Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all; sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd." ¹³

¹³. Immortal Poems, edited by Oscar Williams, (Pocket Books, Inc., New York, 1953, p.161)

The indigenous society therefore conceives of man's nature and existence as one of conflict and harmony and the opposites of his dual nature create an existential tension which is basic to the being of man. As has been pointed out this tension is the ground of change and progress as it is resolved through creative living. The opposites also constitute a dialectic within which responsible human action takes place. That is, by nature, man is a free and decision-making being and he determines his life and that of his society by the decisions he makes. In man then creativity and destructivity, infinity and finiteness meet in a union of complementarity and balance.

On the basis of the above fundamental views of man the indigenous society has arrived at certain basic assertions about man. These assertions are (1) Human life is the greatest value, (2) Man's worth is inviolable, (3) The overall aim of human development is to realize man's humanity and selfhood through self-transcendence, (4) The solidarity of the social group is essential for the realization of man's humanity and selfhood.

(1) Human life is the greatest value:

If a hierarchy of indigenous values were to be established human life and by implication the worth of man will top the list. By human life our fathers meant life that is an active and creative power, life that is contributory and self-fulfilling

and is organized as a system of essentially human and moral, peaceful and reciprocal relationship. This is the life that is desired and cherished so much by our fathers and must be lived in creative harmony and by over-coming difficulties.

The importance of human life is expressed in such personal names as Sunkwa meaning, 'Cry (pray) for life', Agbenyefia, meaning 'Life is king', Agbenyega, meaning, 'Life is the most important thing'. The practice of having many children in the indigenous society is not just a question of lack of family planning nor is it a question of irresponsible satisfaction of sexual appetite. Many people consider having many children as a creative act by means of which they fulfill their lives. To our fathers therefore to die without having children is equivalent to not to have lived at all, because to them creative and productive life is the greatest value. The creative life is represented by the Mawu in the godhead, and so the reverence accord to Mawu is actually reverence for creative life.

2. Man's worth is inviolable:

To the indigenous way of thinking man has an infinite value because he has the life of creativity and harmony which is the very life of the High God. Man is therefore called in Ewe amegbeto i.e. 'a moulded clay with life in him'. The life that

is meant here is more than the organic life that man shares with plants and animals. It is life that is an active and creative power, which enables man to create a meaningful relationship and way of life. Because of this understanding of man, a 'useless person' is referred to in Ewe as ame ko or ame tete, meaning, 'he is just a piece of clay', i.e. there is no creative life in him.

The infinite value put on man because he has creative life in him is expressed in such names as: Amenyenu: 'Man is everything', Amenyesika: 'Man is gold.' Amenyedu: 'Men make community'.

There are therefore certain prohibitive acts called guwo in Ewe, akyide in Akan, which should not be committed against any human being. For example, a wife should not hit her husband with a broom or her brief, and a husband should not do the same thing to his wife. A man should not sleep with two women on the same bed and at the same time even if they happen to be his wives. Any such acts are believed to infringe upon the dignity and worth of the individual, and impair his creative capacity. In case of man it is always said that any such act committed against him will cause him to lose his sexual prowess which is believed to be the main source of man's creativity.

Besides the great worth put on man, the indigenous society is aware of man as having a dual nature which makes it possible for him to create as well as to destroy. The belief in the destructive nature of man is expressed in such personal names as Voe, meaning, 'Fear him,' and Sronipa, meaning, 'Fear man,' and in such popular saying as Mipa ye bad i.e. 'Man is bad'. The indigenous society therefore does not make an angel of man and does not make a devil of him either.

The most appropriate image used to represent the dual nature of man is the symbol of a cat who is a calm and domesticated animal but also a wild animal. The ideal man's nature is therefore often compared to that of the cat and is expressed in such proverb as 'The cat says, "Self-confidence is not cowardice".' (Dadi be nudodo de ame nuto nu menye vovo o.) The ideal man must therefore be both a dove and a hawk in the indigenous society.

3. The supreme aim of human development:

The question to be answered here is what is the supreme goal in the development of human nature that has dual possibilities? The indigenous society conceives of the supreme goal of human growth as the development of man's creative ability so that he will be able to cope effectively with the existential tension of his own nature and with that of his society. This

creative ability is realized through the development of the individual's humanity and selfhood. The process of realizing his humanity and selfhood are referred to in Ewe as amenyenye or amezuzu and in Akan as onipaye. The child is brought up in the indigenous society as the expression goes 'be woava zu ame', meaning 'so that he will become a person or a human being'. If the individual's upbringing is successful he is then referred to as 'ezu ame ken' - meaning, 'he has become a person or a human being in deed'. This is another way of saying that he has acquired a creative personality, and is capable of sharing and exploring with others. It is through the realization of this creative personality that the child overcomes the problems created by the existential dichotomy of man's nature.

4. The solidarity of the social group

The creative personality is constituted by its relation to the other and is therefore a product of relationship and this relationship is both personal and social. This is another way of saying that the creative personality is realized through the individual transcending himself and entering into a creative communion with others. J.S. Mbiti talking about the social dimension of the transcendental relationship said (in Africa)

"To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of the community."¹⁴ He went on to say that it is this community that makes the individual into a corporate or social being.

The personal relationship is primarily experienced at the family level. It is in the descent group that the individual primarily has his roots, realizes his belongingness and achieves his basic identity. K.A. Busia is therefore right when he said, "There can be no satisfactory or meaningful life for a man except as a member of his family".

The integrity and cohesion of the group and personal relationship are therefore considered as of supreme importance. Any act that undermines the cohesion and integrity of the group and personal relationship is therefore considered a heinous crime and is referred to in Ewe either as, afe gba nu, i.e. 'family wrecking act' or du gba nu, i.e. 'community wrecking act,' and in Akan as abofi and obonan respectively. The indigenous society therefore guards jealously the integrity and wholesomeness of the family and community because they provide the sole basis for the development of the creative personality through self transcendence.

To sum up: Man by nature is a being with opposite possibilities from among which he makes a choice which forms the

¹⁴. African Religions and Philosophy, (Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1969), p.2.

basis and essence of his existence, which because of his dual nature, is characterized by tension and decision-making. The only positive way man overcomes the existential tension of and the destructive tendency of his nature is through the realization of a creative personality which therefore has become the supreme goal of human development in the indigenous society.

5. Man's destiny:

The concept of the dual nature of man and of being has been extended to explain his fortune in this world. The doctrine of the individual's fortune in this world is termed Dzogbese in Ewe and Nkrabea in Akan. The teachings about the individual's fortune are found in creation myths, indigenous names and sayings. These sources will be used to establish the theory of man's destiny. The first source to be examined is an Ewe creation myth.

It is believed that man, (used here in its generic sense,) belongs to two worlds. The first one is man's original home where he comes from and goes back to when he leaves this world. This first world is variously called, Bome,¹⁵ Bofe, Dime, Fene, Amedzofe,

¹⁵ It is because of this belief whenever a child is not behaving 'normally', i.e. shows stupidity in his behaviour, he is referred to as "etsi bome". That is "you are still in the other world" and that is why you are not behaving as people from this world. Children especially girls are given the name Bofenya: meaning, 'the plan of life that the individual brings from Bome into this world is not a thing to be tempered with here'. If a person is thinking deeply he is referred to as 'eyi abo' i.e. 'he has gone back to Bome to fetch new thoughts: If a person has fainted this is referred to as 'eyi dime' i.e. 'he has gone back to Dime or Bome'.

Dzofe, Mafe, Mabome, by the Ewe and Asamando by the Akan.

The second world which is this world is called Kodzogbe. The person who is in charge of Bome is a woman called Bomeno i.e. 'the Mother of Bome'. Bomeno is the moulder of all the children sent into Kodzogbe and whenever a child is ready to be discharged to Kodzogbe his mother conceives him in her womb at the same time.

Even though Bomeno is presented as the moulder of children, in fact she is the High God of the Ewe also called Dada Segbo, meaning, 'the Great Mother Se'. (Se is used as another name for the Ewe High God, Mawu-Lisa.) In her work of moulding and sending children into the world Bomeno is helped by a messenger called Tatroe who reports all that people do on earth to her. The other companion of Bomeno is called Gbetsi (or Tsigbe, Fogbe, Nolimetasi). It is Gbetsi who sees the individual off to Kodzogbe.

Before the individual sets off on his journey he has to declare solemnly before Gbetsi the pattern of his life in Kodzogbe. In his declaration the individual stipulates certain fortunes that he would like to have. He may ask for riches and no children, some opt for both riches and children, others go in for happiness, good health, honour, long life, wisdom, prettiness, ugliness, peace of mind and successful marriage. In short, the declaration is the content of the individual's pattern of life in Kodzogbe. This solemn declaration is called the individual's dzogbese,

or gbetsise, (Ewe), nkrabea (Akan). Gbetsi is the one who keeps an accurate record of the individual's dzogbese in Bome and the dzogbese is believed to contain all that befalls an individual in Kodzogbe.

Since in the final analysis the individual himself is a bit of Segbo and all that he has, come from Dada Segbo, the individual's declaration (adzogbe) is Dada Segbo personalized and so it is called dzogbese or gbetsise, i.e. 'birth day individualized se or god'. The dzogbese thus assumes a personal and divine character called okra (Akan), Hawu or Aklama or simply se by the Ewe. It is this Aklama that finally accompanies the individual into this world and acts as his guardian god and the fountain of his fortunes. Whatever happens to the individual in this world either good or bad is explained in terms of his dzogbese. Let us examine the operation of dzogbese in married life.

Dzogbemetsui and Dzogbenesi:

Marriage is one area of life which is explained in terms of dzogbese. It is believed that every male boy that Bomeno moulds, she moulds a matching female partner who should be the wife of the boy in this world. The male partner is called Dzogbemetsui or Bometsui i.e. 'Bome husband,' and the female partner is called Dzogbenesi or Bomesi i.e. 'Bome wife.' The belief is that every man under normal circumstances, will be married to his dzogbenesi

and every woman to her dzogbemetsui. When it happens that the right partners meet and get married, things will go well with them; they will have children and experience marital peace, harmony and bliss. If on the other hand a person gets married to a wrong partner, there is usually no peace, and in its place there are quarrelling, ruptures, lamentation and general dissatisfaction. This is the case because such partners have not been united from Bome, i.e. they are not a true duality and cannot harmonize.

In the case of a polygynist his first wife is regarded as his Bomesi and is also called asivi. It is a taboo among the Ewe to divorce your first wife and it is believed if this happens the subsequent marriages will not be successful. Monogamy is therefore the ideal form of marriage among the Ewe and it is because of this, subsequent wives in a polygynous home are never accorded that enviable status of asivi. Any time a polygynist is going to give thanks to his Aklama, usually referred to as 'washing of one's soul', it is his asivi who fetches water for his bath and for the cooking of the purificatory meal. An asivi who is divorced and re-marries can never become asivi to the second husband. True marriage is then viewed in the indigenous Ewe society as a union of true opposites and so is indissoluble.

Is dzogbese or nkrahea a deterministic theory or not? Opinions on the true nature of the pattern of life embodied in one's dzogbese differ. The popular view is that one's fortunes in

this world have been predetermined and the individual cannot do anything to alter them. Thus the Akan saying: obiara ne ne kra (every person and his destiny). There is however a strong evidence in favour of the view that the dzogbese is amenable to change. Through one's own effort and through the help of others like medicine men it is believed that one can change one's dzogbese. The act of changing the operation of one's dzogbese is known as Setotro, gbetsidede, or nuxexe which means 'stopping or blocking the evil se from operating in one's life.' The operation of dzogbese then can be influenced by the individual through the help of others or by himself.

It is also believed that Aklama is able to change certain aspects of a person's dzogbese either for better or for worse, so that he can protect his ward and save him from misfortunes; but he can equally make his lot harder. People therefore, tend to attribute their fortunes and misfortunes to Aklama. When a person escapes an accident or death or recovers from a serious illness, the escape and recovery are attributed to ~~the work of Aklama~~. This is expressed in such common sayings like: 'Aklama di ne - i.e. 'His Aklama has done well'. The Aklama is declared useless if the person has suffered severe injuries or has been going through a protracted illness.

It is, however, believed that Aklama likes people who are cheerful, dress neatly and show a sense of gratitude. He hates

dirt and those who are always brooding over their misfortunes and poverty and therefore always dress poorly. What is implied here is that the individual must learn to accept his lot with magnanimity because life is made up of good and bad fortunes and so the individual can always hope for a better future. Therefore if a person is successful in life and or achieves certain limited goals he shows his gratitude to his Aklama (Mawu) by setting a day aside on which he openly shows his gratitude. He dresses in white and his asivi or namesake cooks a thanksgiving meal for him and his invited friends and relatives. After eating and drinking he goes round the village to greet his relatives and friends. To crown it all, he builds a hut for his Aklama and this hut is called mawukpo, and the thanksgiving ceremony is known as klatsilele or selili (Ewe), edwira (Akan).

Some people give certain names to their children to show the operation of their dzogbese. Some of the names show appreciation and others show disappointment in life. Some of the names which show gratitude are: Seyran: 'God has blessed me', Sefadzi 'God consoles the heart.' 'Senyo: 'God is good.' 'Sena': 'Gift from God'. Those that show disappointment are: Sevodzi 'A bad personal god'. Senaya: 'It is God who has been responsible for my bad lot'. Sekudi: 'My God is dirty -- unrepresentable'.

Dzogbese then is not a ~~fatalistic theory~~ for explaining individual fortunes. It can never be either one unalterable lot or the other. In common parlance, it can never be 'all bad luck' or 'all good

luck'. If it were so it would be contrary to the indigenous theory of reality which asserts that being is made up of opposites and thus there is a case for both good and bad lots. As a theory of destiny, it states that there are varieties of fortunes as there are many different individuals and each individual's fortunes are basically made up of 'good and bad lots'. Each individual therefore will experience in his life time some achievements and failures. The good fortunes are called Dzogbenyui or gbetsinyui and the bad ones, dzogbevoe or gbetsivoe. Furthermore the individual has it within his power to shape his destiny but he does so within the limit set by his dzogbese which comprises the interplay of his individual assets and liabilities and of the assets and liabilities of his environment; and the individual's response to these factors will determine the individual and the unique nature of his destiny. According to the doctrine of dzogbese every individual is unique and he must realize himself within the framework of his uniqueness.

The theory of dzogbese generates in the individual certain attitudes to life. It helps him to put up patiently with the changing fortunes of life and to keep hoping and it minimizes conflicts in society. It may make some people complacent but it helps people to do away with envy, anxiety and excessive ambition. Above all it teaches this truth that to be successful in life one

must follow one's dzogbese. One of the tasks of education therefore is to help the individual to identify his dzogbese and fulfill his life within its framework.

To conclude: Four major indigenous African concepts namely, the concept of reality, of society, of man and his destiny have been examined in this communication. The concept of reality has been influential in determining the nature of others. The essence of all these conceptual creations is their realism and positive nature. They are neither too pessemistic nor too optimistic. They present a balanced view of man, of his society and world. The greatest contribution of these concepts is that they ground being not in conflict but in unity and creative harmony. They therefore offer a real and viable alternative view on being to the world. It is in this respect that the real strength and dynamism of the Black Civilization is seen.

EWE: MAWU KO

ENG: GOD, THE DEPENDABLE

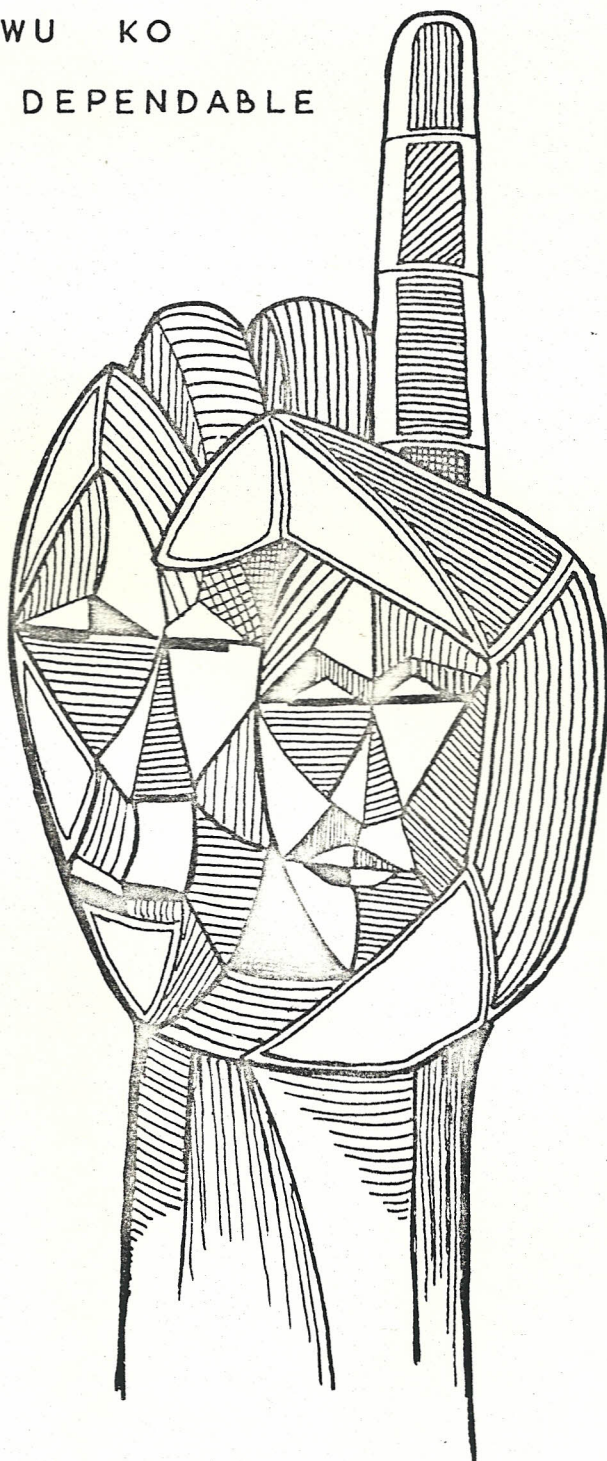
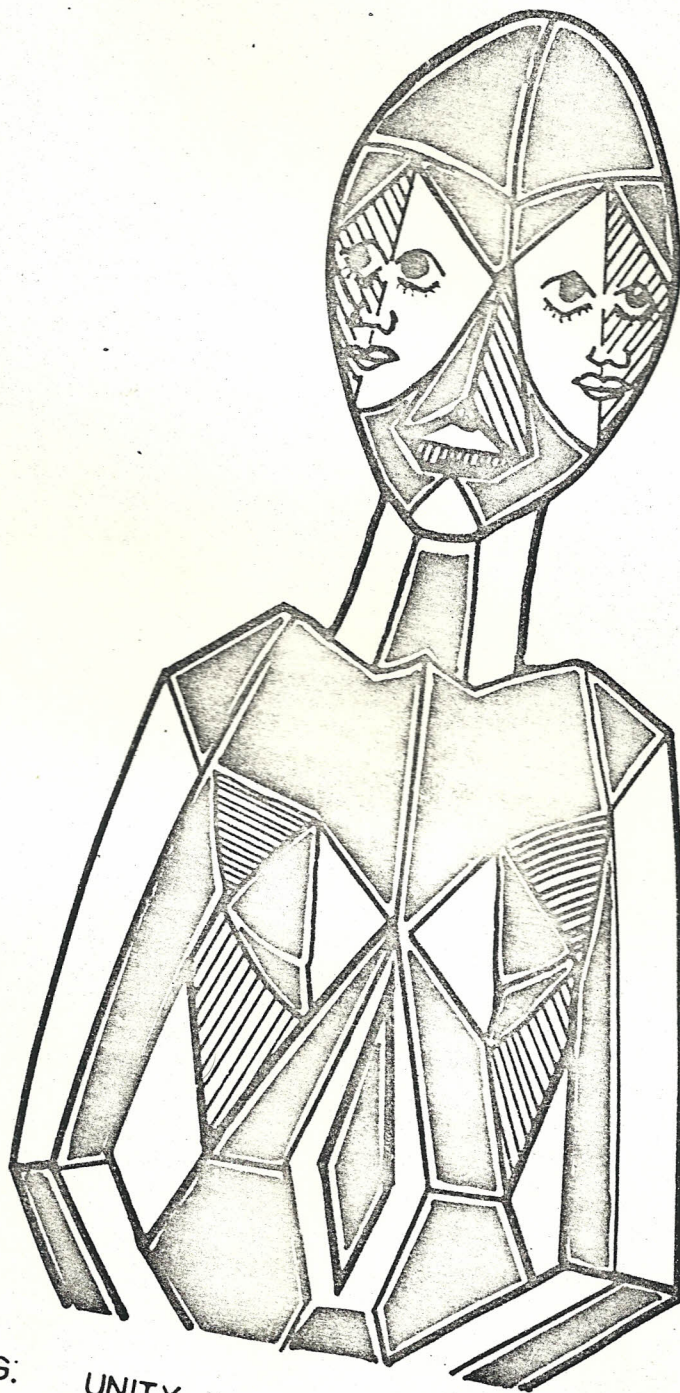
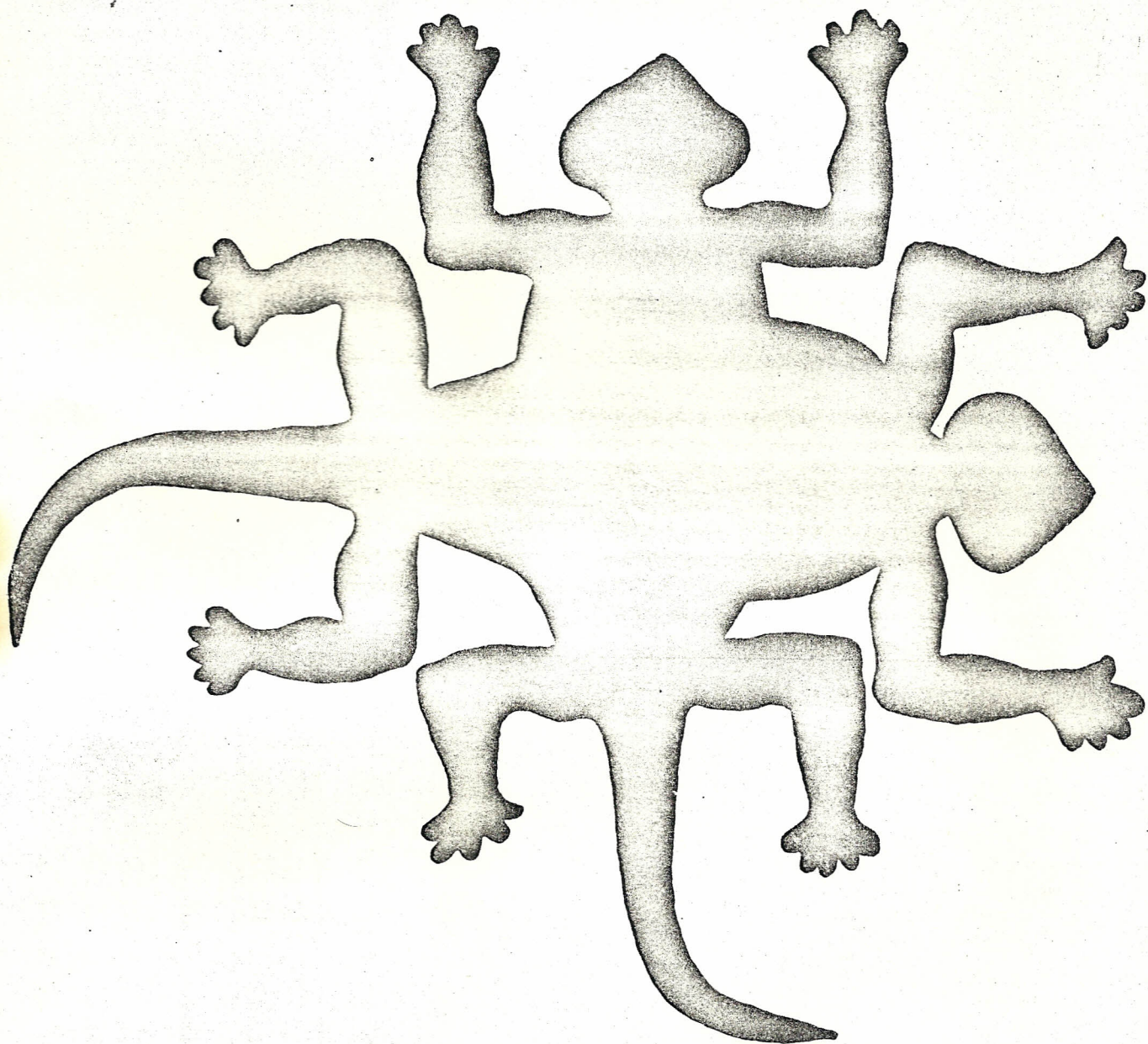


Fig. 1



ENG: UNITY IN DUALITY
EWE: EVELIANYENYE

Fig. 2



Afuntummireku - Denkyemmireku

Fig. 3



ENG : THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY
EWE : HAMENONJO

Fig. 4