

**The Quest for Communal and  
Individual Identity in  
A. La Guma's *In The Fog of the Seasons' End*  
and I. Ali's *Donqola***

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Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* and Idris Ali's *Donqola* seem to be based upon recent anthropological, scientific, philosophical and psychological studies about the degeneration and atavism of both communal and individualistic communities. Both novels show up their writers' awareness of all the anthropological dimensions given to the term 'ethnocentrism' or 'tribalism'. They, for instance, express the narrow dimension, defined by Benedict R. Anderson as the advocacy of a person to a "family, group or tribe," and the broad dimension, as his or her identification with a "nation, or ethnic group."<sup>(1)</sup> The two dimensions do not however let the term go beyond the circle which the anthropologist Ferdinand Tonnies has drawn around it : namely, "a community of intimate inter-relationships," standing in an opposition to the individualistic community, or "an impersonal connection between well distinct persons".<sup>(2)</sup> Both writers also seem to be aware of the recent conclusion that tribalism is characteristic of rural area, whereas individualism marks the urban ones. Both are to be found together, when rural people are forcibly relocated in urban or suburban regions, as is the case with the Nubians in *Donqola* and the South Africans in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*.

The narrow dimension of tribalism is partially explained in the two novels in terms of one principle — the particularization of place. In Alex La Guma's novel the South Africans are removed from their villages, which the British colonialists have turned into gold mines to separate suburbs or townships adjacent to the cities the colonialists keep for themselves. These suburbs are deliberately constructed in poor, unhealthy ways which do not help the Africans — the real owners of the land — to live as comfortably and happily as their foreign colonizers do. On his way to the place of Mr. Flotman, a school teacher and an activist comrade, a principal character named Beukes, who is an activist in the African Underground Organization of Resistance, is terribly shocked to watch the surrounding suburbs wherein he feels like “a traveller suddenly put off at a strange, half-lit town from which all humanity had mysteriously fled”.<sup>(3)</sup> Much more awful looks the frontier between the official ‘Bantu’ Township, an area stretching out awkwardly for the coloured and Asiatic races, and the White city :

A slum hung on the edge of the city suburbs like dirty plaster, cracking and crumbling, yet unwilling to fall apart. There were ruined and broken lines of gimcrack cottages where the main suburb ended and then unwinding and broken lines of dwellings with rusting walls and sagging roofs held down with stones or baling wires. In the late summer night the darkness slowly edged away the dry sandlots, the rutted lanes that passed for streets, the sagging fences that surrounded arid patches which were hopefully used as gardens, and left only the dim lights like smudged gold tinsel scattered haphazardly against a shabby cloth of smoky purple.<sup>(4)</sup>

Viewed from a room wherein Beukes meets his friend Elias, another black activist, the slums lack such beautiful scenes as abound in the cities occupied by the whites. The slums look like a waste land wherein nothing is left except a few barking dogs that are answered from a distance by some others : "Somewhere a dog barked and another gave answer", Beukes says.<sup>(5)</sup> The barking, at a certain level, stand for the black South Africans who are left in arid areas to cry and groan from hunger and pain. All the way down to the slum in which his comrade 'April' lives, Beukes is disgusted with the dirty fenced suburbs wherein "the dark- skinned children [are] staring over fences like shabby glove-puppets".<sup>(6)</sup> April is also discovered to dwell in a much worse area. The white regime is "forcing more and more [black] people out of the city and making them move here. And not enough houses. It's getting like a dumping-ground for human beings".<sup>(7)</sup> He has every reason to condemn the white regime : "He put a finger to a nostril and blew his nose into the dust of the yard. It was like a demonstration of contempt for authority".<sup>(8)</sup>

On the other side, the white colonialists enjoy a luxurious life in separate cities, designed dextrously and beautifully, where there are sumptuous open-air restaurants, "the hotels, the apartment houses, the landscaped gardens and the sundrenched beaches on Saturday afternoons, tea on a terrace or cocktails in a plastic and chrome lounge".<sup>(9)</sup> The white children are pushed in perambulators and have their diapers changed by black maids, who are deprived of everything that their masters have in these cities. It may be cruel to find that the black maid 'Bernnett', who is taking a white child in a pram to the park, is not permitted to sit on the green benches designed for the whites. The

white children are also made to attend separate schools, which are a far cry from the squalid ones reserved for coloured children.

This particularization of place, as such, is associated with racism. For being black-skinned, the South Africans are denied the right to amuse themselves, equally with the whites, even in the public circuses. When she was attending a performance in a circus, Frances asked her aunt why the actors kept "their backs to us all the time and you couldn't see anything they were doing". "It was because we were sitting in the segregated Coloured seats and the actors performed mostly for the White, even if we paid the same money", she answered.<sup>(10)</sup> Separation between people on the basis of colour is maintained by fortified barriers which cannot be crossed by the blacks "without first having permission." To move from one place to another, "to remain there, take up residence, to work, to go to work and to return from work, to walk out at certain times, and so on and so forth also requires permission" from the white authority.<sup>(11)</sup> Any violation of this mandatory law subjects its perpetrators to a severe penalty; "a Coloured man had recently been sentenced to twenty pounds or ten days for taking a short cut across a White bridge".<sup>(12)</sup> It should not surprise us in the least then that the black labourers in the white cities feel alienated. It is not surprising either that the villagers regard such unfamiliar cities as snares for the black labourers. When Beatie Adams travels to a town to work as a baby-sitter for a white family, her mother warns her : "Take care of yourself, don't trust those city people".<sup>(13)</sup>

In *Donzola* Idris Ali takes us on a tour, similar to that of Alex La Guma in South Africa, into the new Nubian homelands. Owing to the submersion of their old homeland with the completion of the Aswan

High Dam in the 1960s, the Nubians were obliged to leave for separate suburbs from Aswan to Qena (300 kilometers to the north of Aswan), which the Egyptian government had prepared for them. But a big section of the population was located in arid regions belonging to the Aswan governorate. Describing the scene, the novel's hero 'Awad Shallali' says : "beside the Sillsila [a suburb of Kom Ombo, 50 kilometers to the north of Aswan] lie the Nubian camps. These consist of flat houses, with roofs made of reinforced concrete and so absorb much of the sun's heat. Outside them sit atrophied women with sullen faces, waiting for men scattered in distant parts of the world, striving for subsistence".<sup>(14)</sup> The excessive summer heat aggravates the miseries of people in such wild suburbs : "The sky sent down its tribulations to the south. The temperature got close to 50. At noon the land turned into hell, the sand blazed, the water in the taps was boiling, and people ran with dry throats to the hot shade, trying unsuccessfully to escape the heat. It seemed as though the sun had decided to burn them alive".<sup>(15)</sup>

The Nubian suburbs are portrayed as in sharp contrast with the cities in Egypt. Cairo, for instance, is seen by Awad as the gardens of Eden of which the sermons delivered in Mosques always speak. There you may find : "Various kinds of fruit accumulated on push-carts and all sorts of meat in butchers' shops; white bread, clean water and electricity supply; white and rosy faces, fine clothes and no bare feet".<sup>(16)</sup> Such discrepancy between Nubian and Egyptian places provokes Awad's contempt (as intense as Beukes' for the British authority in South Africa) for the Egyptian authority. "How can his village, hung up the mountains plunging in darkness after sunset and with no single green leaf in winter, compare to this ?", he asks.<sup>(17)</sup> Awad becomes frantic (as do Beukes and his fellows in *In the Fog of*

*the Seasons' End*, as they cannot avail themselves of the abundant gold they dig out of their own land for the British colonialists) when he realises that "the well-being of the northern people would never be possible without the water accumulated on the old Nubian homeland for the irrigation of their lands".<sup>(18)</sup> The unjust policy of the regime makes Awad lose faith in the whole universe, including his own countrymen, whose ignorance and weakness have been behind their present predicament. Like the South Africans working in the White towns, the Nubians in the Egyptian cities feel alienated. In Cairo Awad feels he is "a stranger in a strange place." Echoing the warning by Beatie Adams' mother of townsmen, Awad's mother tells him : "Don't go to [Cairo] where the snaky woman lives".<sup>(19)</sup> The mother's reference to the northern woman as 'snaky' underlines her fear that Awad may, like his father, be entrapped in the city.

The Racism of the Egyptian regime, like that in South Africa, takes the form of discrimination between human beings on the basis of colour, regardless of cultural or moral values however noble. Because of their black colour, the South Africans are humiliated, harrassed (called 'kaffirs', 'baboons', 'niggers', 'dogs') and reduced to servants for the white masters, so are the Nubians in Egypt. In *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* Beatie Adams assures Beukes : "Because we're black they think we good enough just to change their nappies".<sup>(20)</sup> In *Donqola* most of the Nubians in Cairo work as waiters and doormen for the rich white Egyptians. If the South Africans are called 'baboons', the Nubians are looked upon as 'barbarians'. In one sense, they are not seen by the whites merely as inferior, but rather as uncivilized men. This can be seen in a reference by a policeman to Awad as "one of those Red Men [barbarian Indians], but with a black face".<sup>(21)</sup> The exclusion



of the common culture which binds the people of the North to those of the south is implied in such distinctions on the basis of colour alone. It is culture, rather than colour, that should bind or separate. Clifford Geertz states : "there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. We are, in sum, incomplete or unfinished animals who complete or finish ourselves through culture – and not through culture in general but through highly particular forms of it".<sup>(22)</sup>

Alex La Guma and Idris Ali also deal with the identification of individuals in the general context of their own community or ethnic group. Both novelists seem to establish such ethnocentricity on similar grounds. The Brutality of the white political regime in both Egypt and South Africa is seen as an attempt at the preservation of an independent national identity from dissolution. A mistaken view of culture is therefore seen to be the basis of such an ethnic approach, and both writers insist that power is perceived to be an element of the supposedly 'superior' culture of the whites (in South Africa) or the Northerners (in Egypt). The regime strives to maintain the superiority of its national culture to that of the people under its rule by degrading and humiliating them. This is met with an awareness of the identity of the ruled peoples (Nubians and South Africans), reflected in their defiance of the regime, or (as I.M. Lewis puts it) in saying "who they are not." <sup>(23)</sup> In both cases 'nationalism' gives rise to tribalism, leading to disintegration and degeneration.

In the prologue of his novel Alex La Guma refers his readers to this sort of tribalism, based on a racial tension between the British political regime and the South African activists. In a gentle but racist tone the

Major of the Central Police Station at Volkswagen starts interrogating Elias Tekwane with :

'I do not understand the ingratitude of your people. Look what we, our government, have done for your people. We have given you nice jobs, houses, education. We have allowed your people to get education, your own special schools, but you are not satisfied. No, you want more than what you get. I have heard that some of your young people even want to learn mathematics. What good is mathematics to you ? You see, you people are not the same as we are. We can understand these things, mathematics. We know the things which are best for you. We have gone far to help you. Yet you want to be like the Whites. It's impossible.'<sup>(24)</sup>

The haughtiness and blind chauvinism are only too obvious. This chauvinism does not remain long under the surface, as it is spelt out in the Major's refusal to admit equality between his people and the Africans, who are said to be inferior in mental, intellectual and cultural qualities. The British, it is suggested, deny Africans European education because of the latter's inferiority; but such inferiority is partly due to their deprivation of education. In the novel the problem appears more like a vicious circle. The British must be aware of the fact that good education is, to quote Eustace Palmer, a way for "developing the individual in accordance with his own aptitudes" and with what serves best his own community.<sup>(25)</sup> Agreeing with Palmer, Emanuel Obiechina suggests : "The acquisition of literacy opens up for the individual this new way of absorbing ideas and of broadening his mind".<sup>(26)</sup> The colonialists are afraid to allow the South Africans a better standard of

education, lest this should enable them to rise up against their oppressors. The colonialists insist on preserving their advantages.

The Major continues to justify the rule of his government in South Africa. To him the Africans, known for their savagery, are not capable of governing themselves by themselves. He gives Tekwane an example of the bloody results in Ghana and the Congo of trying to form a government: "you want to be like Ghana, the Congo. Look what they did in the Congo. You people will never be able to govern anything".<sup>(27)</sup> Trying to convince Tekwane that the British rule is for his people's good, the major says: "We have arranged for you to have the things you need, under our supervision".<sup>(28)</sup> For someone like Tekwane, who understands well the real goals of these imperialists, it is impossible to co-operate with the alien regime by telling the policeman about the members of the Underground Organization of Resistance and their whereabouts. Nothing, torture or even death, is going to make him betray his comrades or change his attitude towards the invaders who kill innocent people, tear them "from their homes," and imprison them, for nothing more than their protest "against unjust treatment" or not having their colonizers' "permission to live." An oppressed people, whose children "live in rags and die of hunger" cannot like or co-operate with their oppressors. "It is impossible," Tekwane affirms to the Major.<sup>(29)</sup> There is a strong sense of belonging to the community in Tekwane's defense to death of his own people's cause. It is his deep sense of the need to stand against the colonists, which gives him the strength to endure the torture they force him to undergo, and never co-operate with them. He is never fazed by the police's threats: "We'll make you shit", a policeman admonishes; "We'll make you piss blood, you baboon", he comes back to threaten.<sup>(30)</sup> Another policeman (the Sportsman) shouts:

“Already you people are on your knees; soon you will be on your bellies. Soon we will stamp you out altogether”.<sup>(31)</sup> Though he is beaten savagely, Tekwane never yields but rather reiterates to British authority :

‘You are going to torture me, maybe kill me. But that is the only way you and your people can rule us. You shoot and kill and torture because you cannot rule in any other way a people who reject you. You are reaching the end of the road and going downhill towards a great darkness, so you must take a lot of people with you, because you are selfish and greedy and afraid of the coming darkness’.<sup>(32)</sup>

A line based on blind nationalism is obviously drawn, as shown in Tekwane's words, between Britain and South Africa, which will never be crossed as long as the British colonists remain insensitive to the Africans' suffering and occupying a land which is not theirs. This nationalism is a focal point in the novel. In Chapter Two, for instance, La Guma writes : “Here and there the voices of defiance cried silently across the stretches of pock-marked walls : Down With Racist Tyranny; Free Our Leaders”.<sup>(33)</sup> And in Chapter Four the black activists are shown to challenge the alien regime, whatever it costs them : “The leaders and the cadres filled the prisons or retreated into exile. Behind them, all over the country, tiny groups and individuals who had escaped the net still moved like moles underground, trying to link up in the darkness of lost communications, and broken contacts”.<sup>(34)</sup> These mole-like activists often come out of their burrows to disturb the white regime with ‘handbills’ of strong resistance and defiance (see p. 58). All these are examples of the antagonism between the two peoples,

seemingly brought to a deadlock because of each people's chauvinistic nationalism, which is, after all, only tribalism on a larger scale.

This tribalism is embodied in Donqola in the same light. Egyptian identity is imposed by the political regime upon Nubian communal identity. Like the white authority in South Africa, the Egyptian police and security forces try, beyond oppressing the Nubians economically and politically, to secure their state's cultural and ethical domination over the communal values and customs of Nubians. On the other side, the Nubian activists refuse to abandon their communal identity by agreeing to define themselves through the alien social context of Egypt. A racial tension equal to that in South Africa arises between some of the Nubians and the Egyptian security men. Awad, like the black South Africans, is not allowed to move freely from one place to another : "We've had reliable reports of your moving between the Nubian villages, and sometimes to Halfa and Donqola, one of the officers in a police station interrogates him.<sup>(35)</sup> Awad reconfirms his right to do so : "all are my homelands". The officer's reaction to Awad's words resembles very closely the policeman's words to Elias Tekwane's in Alex La Guma's novel : "It's the government's fault to have opened special schools for your people. If we left you as barbarians, you would become waiters and doormen for us".<sup>(36)</sup> As Awad insists on his refusal to submit any information about other secret militant advocates in Nubia, the officer orders those under him to "pull him away and teach how to respect" authority.<sup>(37)</sup> Though torture is practised here as a means of compelling Awad, along with his comrades, to abandon his plotting against the Egyptian government, it enhances the spirit of resistance in him instead : "You've inculcated rebellion in my heart", he tells the police.<sup>(38)</sup> This rebellion cannot be appeased by the

policemen's facile justifications of their government's colonialism, for it is deeply rooted in hearts of the Nubians who appreciate how painful it is to be expelled from the home, tradition, culture and values of their ancestors. Like all village dwellers, the Nubians cherish their native land and the communal way of living, which are basic to their identity. It is hardly surprising therefore that losing the land means the loss of the communal identity. Awad tells one of the policeman in the Aswan Security Department : "We used to have an independent identity, and it was you who effaced it. I'm here to bring suit against those who built the High Dam and call for the return of my old homeland, starting from Aswan to old Donqola, to constitute a temporary government whose flag is black with an iris and a dart in the centre".<sup>(39)</sup>

From what has been mentioned so far it can be easily seen that both Alex La Guma and Idris Ali have an equal inclination towards the sort of tribalism which preserves a people's specific cultural and ethical identity. This does not mean that the novelists are racist, for all peoples of the world have an equal fervor for their nations or countries. What they are against is colonialism, merely tribalism on a larger scale, which leads to the polarization of peoples and involves them in bloody conflicts, when the colonizers come to consider themselves as superior to the countries they colonize. At this point tribalism becomes dangerous for each ethnic polity or tribal society, as each struggles to prove its superiority. Some Western writers seem to be unconscious of the dangers of this sort of tribalism, as they reveal a proclivity towards the superiority of the colonizers, who are of course their countrymen. Realising this, the African writer Chinua Achebe attacks in his essay "An Image of Africa" Joseph Conrad's racism in showing Africa in *Heart of Darkness* as a dark primitive area.<sup>(40)</sup>

The theme of destructive cultural barriers between people is one to which both Alex La Guma and Idris Ali return many times in their novels. Both novelists are aware of the physical and moral consequences of this problem. La Guma's British colonists reduce the South African citizens to 'baboons', 'kaffirs' and 'donders' – no more than animals in a jungle that urgently need to be domesticated or civilized. Commenting on the situation of the black man in South Africa, Cecil A. Abrahams writes : "The black man is humiliated by the officer's use of the derogatory connotation of 'kaffir' and by insolent and absurd interrogation".<sup>(41)</sup> Similarly, the Nubians in Idris Ali's *Dongola* are treated by the snobbish white Egyptians as inferior slaves, born to serve their white masters, the Egyptians. In their turn, both the black South Africans and Nubians react with equal scorn to whoever insults their cultural and ethical ancestry. When an Egyptian officer calls Awad's cousin, Baher Gazouli : "Son of a plate-licker", he replies : "It may be true, but the dogs of the people whose dishes my father licked, are cleaner than you".<sup>(42)</sup> The officer comes back to rail at Baher Gazouli : "Your heart's as black as your face". "My black skin has roots, but you need to ask your grandmother about the genetic source of your blue eyes", Gazouli replies.<sup>(43)</sup> Like Gazouli, Beatie Adams in Alex La Guma's novel rejects the whites' insults, only silently. If her countrymen are 'fools' and 'baboons', she muses, so are the British. Discrediting the colonists' so-called justification for discrimination, she confesses to Beukes : "We're as good or bad as they are".<sup>(44)</sup> In one sense, this means that all people are equal in their humanity, regardless of any other considerations; but this is an unattainable ideal in a world ruled by imperialism. Some may criticize La Guma's and Ali's choice to

use such offensive language and insults in their dialogue. But this

should not be taken against the writers, for it is a mark of their realism. Emanuel Ngara asserts that cultural conflicts, especially in colonized areas, determine even the language which the novelists, use to describe the attitude of one nation vis-a-vis the other.<sup>(45)</sup> More importantly, these two authors write out of their personal and national experience, which helps them put things in their novels as they really are.<sup>(46)</sup>

Since nothing in life remains constant, but (in the words of J.A. Symonds) all things 'must vary, must progress or retrograde', the seemingly solid tribal borders are shown by Alex La Guma and Idris Ali not to be exempt from this law of life.<sup>(47)</sup> This change, a feature of the modern world, challenges the Victorian anthropologists' view of the world as consisting of separate cultural or tribal homogeneities.<sup>(48)</sup> Imperialism and civilization are generally agreed upon to be two main reasons behind the breaking down of the tribal or communal structure.

Two main reasons are given in both novels for the disintegration of the tribe. In the first place, the gradual migration of Nubians and South Africans from their villages to the city breaks up the pattern of the small community whose members engage in pleasant communal rituals and help each other in times of hardship. Even worse, both peoples are subjected to oppression by their respective colonizers, and forced to adapt themselves to new ways of living and to serve the new regimes even to the detriment of their communal interests. In the second place, many of the Nubian and South African individuals deviate from the behaviour patterns of their communities for self-fulfilment or self-assertion, or both. Both novelists seem to agree with Dennis Brown's view that deviation from one's own community, under any



circumstances, is ordained to destroy the deviators, make them "so drained of all sense of self or even life".<sup>(49)</sup>

Isolating individuals is demonstrated by Alex La Guma and Idris Ali as a deliberate policy of the political regime to destroy any links to a community of persons, ethics or traditions. In La Guma's novel the black men who work in white cities are not allowed to see their families or have them live with them without written permission from the white authorities, which is virtually impossible to get. La Guma shows us this in the case of the man who "wastes a whole day" to get a paper to attend the funeral of his brother (p. 124). And if someone dares to break this rule, "the wrath of the Devil and all his minions" will be invoked against him or her.<sup>(50)</sup> No wonder therefore that Elias never regrets leading a bachelor life, though he is now over forty, which is "against nature and tradition", for he is no different from those black workers separated from their wives and children : "they were considered bachelors by the authorities and consigned to these barracks" in the Location.<sup>(51)</sup> The need for morsels of food to help them fend off starvation drives several coloured boys to accept the harsh existence imposed by the colonists, who get richer while the owners of the land get poorer. The chief clerk of the fuel-oil department hires many of the little black boys to do work such as : "serving cokes and sandwiches and washing up glasses at the company's annual outing to the Country Club" for just "Ten shillings for the day".<sup>(52)</sup> No less desperate is the condition of a mother and her child who live in tattered clothes and in "tin shacks [that later] had been replaced by rows of brick bunkers : very cold in winter, very hot in summer", and who never have enough money but live on the hope that "the father of the child would bring something sometimes, if he ever came home".<sup>(53)</sup> With these examples

La Guma shows how the black people are deprived 'by a pack of hyenas' – the colonists – of the gratification of family and communal life (p. 124).

The tribal or communal connection is broken up in other ways. The police compel many South Africans to work as spies, and dissuade the others from involving themselves in the African Underground Organization of Resistance, as "the penalty for urging the armed overthrow of the government could be death".<sup>(54)</sup> As a result, rather than working with the activists, the majority of men work for the regime's companies and establishments, and, Cecil A. Abrahams observes, "escape into their own world of cheap pleasure, fantasize about better lives that are lived in romantic worlds".<sup>(55)</sup> Arthur Bennett cannot shelter his activist friend Beukes, who is being chased by the police, in his house for just "a couple of nights", while he and his wife "are away ... at the beach", because his wife Nelly is "afraid of trouble".<sup>(56)</sup> Bennett tries to excuse his awkward situation by offering Beukes "ten bob" while glancing "back over his shoulder" and whispering : "You know how it is, Buke. Nelly's scared. She ain't mean. Just scared. People talk. They got informers everywhere. You can't even trust your best friend. It's a donation, likely".<sup>(57)</sup> Showing disappointment in him, but also in most of his countrymen as well as the regime which engenders such cowardice, Beukes refuses the donation angrily : "Keep it. You don't have to buy your way out".<sup>(58)</sup> While seeing Beukes to the door, Bennett asks : "How's boys up north doing ?" With disdain, Beukes replies : "They wiped out a bunch of soljers". But Bennett is insensitive to any insult, as long as he stays out of trouble : "You sure nobody saw you come in, Buke ?"<sup>(59)</sup> Commenting on this situation, Abrahams writes : "This is a plastic

world that Bennett's wife has wrapped herself and Bennett in and has made him an unreliable helper of the cause Beukes serves".<sup>(60)</sup> But there are many other South Africans who cloak themselves in "a cocoon of unreality and banality". For example, Abdullah (a cutter in a garment factory) is significantly portrayed as weak and artificial : "Olive-skinned, his hair black and shiny as patent leather. He had gold in his teeth too and a meaningless moustache, like an idle scrawl on a photograph".<sup>(61)</sup> The activist Flotman, a school teacher, refuses to co-operate with Beukes any more, because he does not like 'to go to jail and eat pop and lose [his] stupid job or get bashed up by the law'.<sup>(62)</sup>

It is the absence of communal values and solidarity which lead many of the activists into jails in South Africa and cause several others to leave out the country. At the end of the novel, Beukes leaves his homeland, admitting the defeat of his organization's resistance to the alien regime. But, to him, this is not the end, it "is only the lip of an iceberg of resentment against an ignoble regime".<sup>(63)</sup> Beukes leaves with the intention of attacking again from outside the country with a well-trained group of the exiled comrades : "And those who persist in hatred and humiliation must prepare. Let them prepare hard and fast – they do not have long to wait".<sup>(64)</sup> A great deal of hope is also pinned on the younger generation who are expected to accomplish what their fathers have failed to do. For example, the children of April, an activist, learn from books or stories on pirating how to be pirates themselves.

Idris Ali refers us in *Donqola* to an obvious anxiety, similar to that of Alex La Guma, over the division of his tribal community into individualistic identities, due to the same reasons mentioned in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. Inasmuch as the Egyptian political regime in

the 1960s imposed emigration on the Nubians from the 'old homeland', the land now covered by Lake Nasser, which the High Dam turned into a reservoir for the regular irrigation of the Egyptian lands to disparate plots of desert soil in Upper Egypt, it is regarded by Idris Ali as no less tyrannical than the white regime in South Africa, being the basic reason behind the disintegration of the Nubian tribal identity. The harsh life in the 'new homelands' (with no River Nile, palm-trees and cattle and sheep, staples of life in the 'old homeland') which people are obliged to lead, depending upon the small reparative sums, few and far between, paid by the Egyptian government; the struggle for survival, and the need of young people to secure a better future for themselves – all are behind the migration of able-bodied men and youths to different parts of Egypt and the world. Only children, women, the sick and the old stay in this impoverished land in the far south of Egypt. These people frequently suffer from a kind of conflict "between commitment to tribal norms and involvement in a westernized society".<sup>(65)</sup> The tension causes these individuals to go gradually downhill, because, Dathorne maintains, "The man of two worlds, uncomfortably striding both is the real displaced man".<sup>(66)</sup> Moreover, the people living in the new Nubian villages are equally lost: "Life of these people degenerates into a state of permanent waiting for the return of those men who left for different parts of the globe in search of a morsel but impossible to find here", Idris writes.<sup>(67)</sup>

There are many examples in *Donqola* of Nubians who are separated from their tribe. Awad's father, Shallali, leaves his wife pregnant with Awad to work in Cairo, but he never comes back home, as he dies there. Gazouli, Awad's uncle, loses both his sons in the north. Besides, several doormen and waiters in Cairo are depicted as

grieving, alienated and homesick : 'Uncle' Osman Al-Kenzi, a doorman, is just one example. Such people are thus given every reason to condemn the Egyptian political regime of the era, for its dictatorship and injustice.

The regime, like that of South Africa, alienates the tribal Nubians through impressing many of them to work as spies for it. The spread of talebearers everywhere in Egypt makes Awad feel as if they are "inside, at the front and the back of him".<sup>(68)</sup> The realization that many of his comrades have stripped themselves of the tribe like snakes shedding their skins, and that his fellow-tribesmen in the 'new homeland' consider him as an insane person who is going to thrust them, by his resistance to the Egyptian authority, into hell, all unite to suppress in him the old enthusiasm to serve the cause of his country, Nubia.<sup>(69)</sup> Like Beukes in Alex La Guma's novel, he escapes outside the country, but, unlike Beukes, Awad never talks about his future plans of resisting the regime. Unexpectedly, and like the other self-seeking Nubian individuals, he stays in Europe and implicates himself in alien cultural and social contexts. He lives a free life, beyond the restraining boundaries of the tribe, and falls in love with Simone, a French professor of Oriental history, whom he meets aboard the ship he works on. He nevertheless, like all deviators from their own tribe or community, feels lonely : a sign of homesickness. This is a tendency noted by psychologists. G.C. Mutiso, for example, asserts "that whenever the individual has apparently shaken the operational aspects of the communal ethic, it nevertheless returns to haunt his memory".<sup>(70)</sup>

One final reason behind the splitting up of communal or tribal societies into individuals, which bears no connection to the alien

political regime or to colonization, is the individual's revolt, overtly or covertly, against certain restraints of his or her tribe's traditions. By doing so, as Dathorne sees, the individual asserts 'himself against tribal norms'.<sup>(71)</sup> But in the gratification that comes from having things proscribed by the tribe, ironically, lies these individuals' destruction or degeneration. Mutiso reconfirms that the deviating persons, "no matter how much good they are doing, always end in a tragedy".<sup>(72)</sup> This premise is given much more prominence in *Donqola* than in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*. Though the two novels picture similar tribal communities, La Guma's primary concern is showing how the country's political situation as a whole leads to the disintegration of the nation.

In all strictly tribal communities marriage is recognised as a 'family affair', which simply means the individual (both man and woman or girl) leaves it all for the family to decide the one to marry. This sacred law of tribal tradition surely leaves no room in life for individual choice. Many modern scholars and writers, like Chinua Achebe, have come to deplore the fact that tribal men, along with several traditional male writers, "have created all kinds of myths to support the suppression of woman",<sup>(73)</sup> in seeing her tied to the house, as though were a slave whose job is to serve the family and wait on the lord of the house, thus restraining her from contributing much more effectively to developing the political and economic aspects of the community. Chinua Achebe maintains that "the time has come now to put an end to" all that enslaves woman by endowing her "with a will to resist and struggle against the condition of her [past] being".<sup>(74)</sup> Both Alex La Guma and Idris Ali seem to follow in this respect in the footsteps of these modern writers.

In *Donqola* Idris Ali presents many examples of the Nubian women who suffer from men's oppression. Awad's mother, Hushiya Al-Nour, is left in a state of abeyance after a few months of marriage, separated but never divorced, by an irresponsible man who lives with another wife in Cairo till he dies, leaving Awad for her to raise and educate, despite her poverty. She has of course wasted all her life on this son. In her turn, Halima (literally meaning 'meek') is deserted immediately after marriage by her husband Awad, Hushiya's son, who lives in an unknown place in Europe without saying when he is coming back. It has been more than three years, but he never shows up. All he does is send to her letters, with no return address, and abundant money to repair the house and serve his nagging, blind mother. Unable to stand it any more, she leaves the house and asks her father to divorce her from Awad. But what she wants is against the tribe's norms; the father blames her on the account that her husband has built her a house, "better than that of the mayor," and sent to her "money, gold and silk." Conscious of women's true needs (which are not materialistic as her father and all the tribesmen may think, but rather biological), she shouts at him : "We're not cows to spin, eat and sleep".<sup>(75)</sup> When he admonishes to cut off her throat, if she does not shut her mouth, she unabashedly condemns the tribal tradition and the imperious masculine world : "You're only good at cutting off tongues and necks, but know nothing about principles".<sup>(76)</sup> By this outrageous rebellion she tries to escape the communal ethic, but she is not permitted. Her unfeeling father forces her back into the house and the dominance of an absent husband. The failure to assert herself against the tyrannical 'other' invokes her to do it behind the tribe's back. She seduces an Upper Egyptian worker, Ma'adoul, who makes love to her in the husband's

bed, suffocates her mother-in-law when she discovers the scandal, and accuses Ma'adoul of being the killer. Her liberation from the tribal ethic comes at a terrible price. This brings to mind the Egyptian proverb "Beware the wrath of the meek", with the name "Halim" used for "meek".

The question which poses itself here is : who is to blame for Halima's fall, Awad or the tribesmen ? Actually, no blame can be put on Awad, for if Halima is a victim of rigid tribal rules, so is he. He is forced by the mother and the tribesmen to marry a girl whom he does not love and whose character is incompatible with his. Like Halima, he does what the tribe demands him to do, but satisfies his own needs behind the tribe's back, or outside its borders. He also pays, but not as heavily as Halima does, for his deviation from the communal ethic, as he is condemned to perpetual alienation in a Western community.

Alex La Guma also refers us in *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* to the despotism of the masculine world, which also drives women to deviate from the communal norms. When Beukes asks Frances, who refuses to marry, about the sort of man she wants, she ironically answers : "Maybe somebody who'll beat me all the time".<sup>(77)</sup> Frances also asserts that the masculine world is void of romance, what every woman needs but finds only in the 'love stories' shown 'on the screen'. The novelist attempts to change this old ugly picture of men held by Frances, and other women. Beukes, the 'tough' man who gives the British regime a hard time, replies affectionately : "Anybody who'd want to slap you must be crackers".<sup>(78)</sup> Not only Beukes, but all the many other male characters in the novel are shown to behave well towards women. These pleasant and human men make the male



characters in *Donqola* seem dehumanized. Besides, La Guma's women enjoy much more freedom (they smoke, drink, go out to work, and have independent opinions) than those of Idris Ali. The difference may direct our attention toward the fact that the Nubian tribal community is still more primitive and restrictive than the South African one.

To recapitulate, one can state that both Alex La Guma and Idris Ali meet at one point, travelling towards it from similar points of departure, namely that the tribal community and the individual are equally destined to degenerate. Colonization and self-seeking individuals are two basic reasons behind this. The imperialist political regimes in the two communities, cocooned in false pretensions of civilization and humanity, break down the communal ethic and culture through dislocating and separating people, and compelling them to accept ways of living alien to their past ones. The moral and cultural decadence of life outside their villages, in suburban or urban areas, stirs atavistic desires. Since the past life is abandoned in favour of the present life, which is difficult to afford and impossible to avoid, the Nubian and South African people in such a situation seem to be carried to a crossroads at which they get lost, unable to decide the right way to take. It is, in other words, an inevitable loss of communal identity. Tribal or communal borders are also broken down by some of the individuals who covertly seek to fulfil themselves either inside the tribe, or overtly, outside it. Still, the two types of individuals are equally, but in different ways, apt to degenerate. Those who deviate from communal norms while still living inside the community are plagued by guilt, while the deviating ones outside the community often feel alienated, as the restraints of their new life oblige them to look nostalgically at the past.

Thus both communal and individualistic modes of existence are areas of restraint for the individual. After all, it may not be so strange in our contemporary world, marked by polarization, fragmentation, materialism and the decadence of culture and morality to find both the individual and the community in a quest for identity, as designated by Alex La Guma and Idris Ali.

## Notes

- (1) See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991.
- (2) On tribalism and individualism, see Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community and Association* (1887), trans. C.P. Loomis (Reprinted London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955).
- (3) Alex La Guma, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, London, Heinemann, 1972, p. 84.
- (4) *Ibid.*, p. 141.
- (5) *Loc.Cit.*
- (6) *Ibid.*, p. 164.
- (7) *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- (8) *Loc.Cit.*
- (9) *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- (10) *Ibid.*, p. 40.
- (11) *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.
- (12) *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- (13) *Ibid.*, p. 10.

(١٤) إدريس على ، دنقلة ، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب ، القاهرة ، ١٩٩٣ ، ص ٣٧ .

(١٥) دنقلة ، ١٠٨ .

(١٦) دنقلة ، ص ٣٤ .

(١٧) نفس الصفحة السابقة .

(١٨) دنقلة ، ص ٣٤-٣٥ .

(١٩) دنقلة ، ص ١٨ .

(20) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 11.

(٢١) دنقلة ، ص ٢٧ .

(22) Glifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 49; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture : Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*, Cambridge, Massachussetts, Harvard Univ. Press, 1988; J. Clifford and D. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture : The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1986; Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1983.

(23) I.M. Lewis, *Social Anthropology in Perspective : The Relevance of Social Anthropology*, 1976 (Reprinted London, Penguin, 1981, p. 15. See also, Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Pantheon, 1978, and his *Culture and Imperialism*, where it is argued that tribalism is shown in people's defining themselves against the social backgrounds of others.

(24) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 4.

(25) Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel : A Critical Study of Twelve Books*, London, Heinemann, 1977, p. 65.

(26) Emanuel Obiechina, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, London & New York, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975, p. 7.

(27) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* (p. 4) Alex La Guma refers to what happened in the Congo State in the period from 1890 onwards, where 'the Congo State had been blood soaked'. For Further Information in this regard see E.D. Morel, *King Leopold's Rule in Africa* (1904), (Reprinted Westport, CT, Negro Univ. Press, 1970, p. 103). This Congo venture has also found its expression in many literary works; see, for example, Hunt Hawkins, "Joseph Conrad, Roger Casement, and the Congo Reform Movement", in *Journal of Modern Literature* 9 (1981), 65-70; M.M. Mahood, *The Colonial Encounter : A Reading of Six Novels*, London, Rex Collings, 1977.

(28) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 4.

(29) *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

(30) *Loc.Cit.*

(31) *Ibid.*, p. 5.

(32) *Ibid.*, p. 6.

(33) *Ibid.*, p. 26.

(34) *Ibid.*, p. 48.

(٣٥) دنقلة ، ص ٣٥ ، "Halfa" هي ميناء على الحدود بين مصر والسودان ،  
و"Donqola مدينة بالسودان .

(٣٦) دنقلة ، ص ٣٥-٣٦ .

(٣٧) نفس الصفحة السابقة .

(٣٨) دنقلة ، ص ١٨ .

(٣٩) دنقلة ، ص ٤٣ .

- (40) See Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa", in *Massachusetts Review*, XVIII (Winter 1977), pp. 782-94.
- (41) Cecil A. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1985, p. 102.
- (٤٢) دنقلة ، ص ٣٦ .
- (٤٣) نفس الصفحة السابقة .
- (44) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 11.
- (45) Emanuel Ngara, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*, London, Heinemann, 1985, pp. 4-5.
- (46) See Chinua Achebe, *Morning yet on Creation Day*, Essays, London, Heinemann, 1975, p. 7.
- (47) J.A. Symonds, *Stella Fregelius*, London, Macmillan, 1906, p. 289.
- (48) See Gislí Pálsson (ed.), 'Introduction', *Beyond Boundaries : Understanding Translation and Anthropological Discourse*, Oxford, Berg, 1993, p. 38; A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, London, Tavistock, 1985.
- (49) Dennis Brown, *The Modernist Self in Twentieth-Century English Literature : A Study in Self Fragmentation*, New York, St. Martin's, 1989, p. 23; Peter Claus Wolfgang Gurkind (ed.), *The Passing of Tribal Man in Africa*, Leiden, Brill, 1970; Robert H. Bates, *Ethnicity in Contemporary Africa*, Syracuse & New York, Syracuse Univ. Press, 1973; Michael Levenson, *Modernism and the Fate of Individuality : Character and Novelistic Form From Conrad to Woolf*, Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991.

- (50) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 81.
- (51) *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- (52) *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- (53) *Ibid.*, p. 123.
- (54) *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- (55) Cecil A. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, Op.Cit., p. 110.
- (56) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 21.
- (57) *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
- (58) *Loc.Cit.*
- (59) *Loc.Cit.*
- (60) Cecil A. Abrahams, *Alex La Guma*, Op.Cit., p. 110.
- (61) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, pp. 94-95.
- (62) *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- (63) *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- (64) *Ibid.*, pp. 180-81.
- (65) O.R. Dathorne, *Op.Cit.*, p. 70.
- (66) *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- (67) دنقلة ، ص ٧٧ .
- (68) دنقلة ، ص ١٤ .
- (69) دنقلة ، ص ٢١ ، ص ٥٣ .
- (70) G.C. Mutiso, *Socio-Political Thought in African Literature : Weusi ?*, Macmillan, 1974, p. 88.

(71) O.R. Dathrone, *Op.Cit.*, p. 68.

(72) G.C. Mutiso, *Op.Cit.*, p. 84-5.

(73) See Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, London & New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 159; Ifi Amadiume *Male Daughters, Female Husbands : Gender and Sex in an African Society*, London, Zed, 1987; Kwame Arkin, "The Political and Military Roles of Akan Women", in Christine Oppong (ed.), *Female and Male in West Africa*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1983, pp. 91-8.

(74) Florence Stratton, *Op.Cit.*, p. 158.

(٧٥) دنقلة ، ص ١٢٨ .

(٧٦) نفس الصفحة السابقة .

(77) *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, p. 44.

(78) *Loc.Cit.*