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Identity Quest in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels

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This Thesis is dedicated to the memory of the late Edward W. Said whose monumental work may be discussed and clarified but can never be superseded!

Abstract:

The Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah (b.1939) has developed his prose fiction into a quest for ways to postulate a satisfying concept of identity. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?* he uncovers the tenets of the present dysfunctional identity which Africa has adopted. *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* seem to attribute the present dysfunctionality to the African past. The same undertaking is repeated in the last two novels: *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT in the House of Life* (2002). In both, this writer offers a similar approach to the cultural, social and political impasse in the continent. What is new in these last two works, however, is that Armah excavates historical evidence that attaches West Africa to the land of Kemet, or ancient Egypt. For him, the revival of present day African culture cannot be achieved until African communities connect and identify with the tradition of *Ma'at* back in Kemetic times. The present malaise and passivity on the part of the African communities, in Armah's opinion, have been attributed to a long epistemic conditioning rooted in cultural imperialism via the western educational system. Persistent misinformation about African culture and a crude falsification of Africa's millennial history have paved the way to the slave trade and colonial occupation. Meanwhile, archaic forms of thinking and the institutionalization of legitimacy in tradition have caused a deep-seated self-hatred and inferiority complex on the part of the African before the non-African. In other words, the post independence period is characterized by a lack of any constructive postulation of identity; a fact that has been detrimental to, and perhaps, the principal reason for, the burgeoning of political corruption, military coups, civil wars and illegal immigration.

Still, in Armah's opinion, the sorry state of affairs in Africa can be reversed via serious considerations of the millennial past of the continent reaching to the times of ancient Egypt. According to Armah, one should reach a point where ancient Egyptian mythology, philosophy, architecture, egalitarian ethics and other civilizational additions start to be celebrated as African achievements, and thus form the basis for a true cultural renaissance in present day Africa. The deployment of the myth of Isis and Osiris in Armah's last two novelistic experiments falls in the direction of placing Africa at the heart of ancient Egyptian cosmology and worldview. The authorial intention in

Fragments, Armah's second novel, reflects a bleak worldview; a defiled set of values epistemologically rooted in ancient Greece. The switch, in his last two novels, idealising Egyptian worldview, suggests that Armah blames the Greek matrix for generating the present cultural malaise in Africa. A close reading of Armah's novels suggests that what can be called the 'Egyptian paradigm' is favoured over the Greek one, simply because this latter has spelled only patriarchy, hunger for profit and power, plus unjustifiable violence. Additionally, Armah finds the Egyptian paradigm, with its constellative trends of identity, more egalitarian, peaceful, self-enhancing and empowering.

This thesis tries to advance the argument that Armah's placement of two mutually contradicting paradigms (Greek versus *Kemetic*) can be an oversimplification of the problems facing Africa. While some elements in the Greek paradigm, like patriarchy, characterised by the hunt for profit via slavery and violence, is indeed harmful, history proves that patriarchy has not been limited only to ancient Greece. The myth of Isis and Osiris, Armah's principal myth of liberation, itself exudes patriarchal overtones. Besides, Armah's drama is more in favour of polemics where instead it should opt for analysis. Armah neither appreciates African lore as it has always been, nor does he show how western educational schooling is inhibitive when it come to Africa's cultural regeneration. Armah's identity quest is part of that school of thinking whose main problem is its inability to process and evaluate larger quantities of updates than it feels it can handle. As the novels considered in this thesis clearly illustrate, Armah can be qualified as a self-styled realist who often equates imagination with wishful thinking and sees imagination as a way to address the realities of present-day Africa.

CONTENTS:

Introduction:

The issue of identity constitutes a major space of debate in any constructive and forward-looking community, or nation. It concerns particularly members of the elite who, while sharing the group's ethics and worldview, reflect upon its past, its problematic present and envisage a better future for it. The current preoccupation about identity and self-knowledge is caused by the heritage of foreign encroachments on the African continuum, and the need to put them in perspective. Understanding the mechanisms behind the search for an identity, and working to meet the obligations of what that understanding suggests, turns out to be a challenge that some African writers have taken on. Aware of the importance of identity and the constant need to consider it in relation to changing historical and social circumstances, these African writers make it their duty to dramatise stories of individuals and communities living amidst social and cultural turmoil. One cannot overlook the shift from pre-colonial to colonial and to post-colonial times as simply a shift of political power, that is, limited to the distributions of armies and the fortunes that are either won or lost conclusively. Rather, that shift in power indicates also a shift of perceptions, priorities, interests and worldviews. Such turmoil reflects the extent to which identity issues can be important and, by implication, the need to address them with the attention they deserve. Yet amidst this turmoil some writers have made some distinctions between what is authentic and necessary and what is foreign and destructive.

Chinua Achebe, in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and his subsequent novels, locates the crisis of, perhaps, the most famous character in modern African literature, Okonkwo, as due to identity. Okonkwo's identity profile happens not to match exactly that of his Igbo peers. In the end, he could not adjust to the new identity contour, the one imposed by the coming of the missionaries and the spread of their ideals and religion in Iboland. As the story unfolds, the reader becomes increasingly aware that suicide is Okonkwo's answer to resolve at the personal level his identity crisis. Nevertheless, his uncompromising attitude towards change marks Africa's hesitation before the new waves of incidents. The Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa

Thiong'o in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), touches on this concern as he sets his story on the eve of independence. Mugo's hesitation about the place where to put his trust, and hence loyalty, gets to be indicative of the identity crisis this character faces. Similarly, Africa's Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka in *The Interpreters* (1966), as well as in his other works, deals with the modern Nigerian society's transition to modern life and the contradictions associated with this transition. Soyinka shows a world where past ways and traditions are not totally abandoned, and modern customs and habits are not full-heartedly embraced. The result is a cynical picture of a hybrid reality that shows uncertainty about where to belong. To be sure, the state of affairs in this context varies between political corruption, cultural malaise and intellectual alienation. While setting his fictional works against a similar background, Sembene Ousmane presents a different picture as he puts much confidence concerning social change in the hands of workers and the less fortunate sections of the Senegalese people.

Among these celebrated writers' positions, Armah's is outstanding in this regard, as it moves from skeptical attitudes to a more and more assertive consideration of a possible African renaissance. The purpose of this doctoral thesis is to investigate the work of this Ghanaian novelist, and comment on his treatment of identity quest as he addresses it. Ever since the publication of his first novel, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Armah has demonstrated an increasing interest in issues related to belonging and filiations. Both the man and Teacher, in that early novelistic experiment, raise important queries as to where to turn and who to trust regarding the future of their country. In reading his seven novels, it becomes clear that Armah pays special attention to the way in which intellectual characters, not common individuals, conceive of themselves as Africans working for the realization of what can be called the new African culture. Armah's novels disclose a striking authorial interest in portraying intellectual characters, thus reflecting the writers' modulated commitment and, perhaps, his intention to engage in a debate with a readership limited mainly to intellectuals. Like Soyinka's, Armah's project seems to be more intellectually-directed. It aims at a paradigmatic construction, an exercise that is rooted in historical research and more directed to the attention of the educated classes, and not so much to that of ordinary readers.

The thesis principally argues that Armah has been largely preoccupied with the pursuit of an identity quest that is defined as African both in scope and objectives. The understanding one gathers from the reading of his last two novelistic works supports this opinion. In *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT in the House of Life* (2002), Armah tills the field of historical research for the purpose of locating epistemic connections between West Africa and the land of Kemet, or Ancient Egypt. For him, the revival of present day African culture cannot be realised

until African communities connect and identify with the preachers of the tradition of *Ma'at*, back in Kemetic times. The present malaise and passivity on the part of the African communities, in Armah's opinion, are attributed to a long epistemic conditioning of African tradition through the infiltration of cultural imperialism and Orientalism. Combined all together, negative tradition becomes a practical reality that can be witnessed in terms of misinformation and crude falsification of Africa's millennial history. The result from this outlook can be felt not only when considering the Slave Trade and the colonial occupation of Africa as mere transfer of economic capital, but more dramatically in the self-hate that the new generations of Africans suffer from. In other words, in a post modern, post colonial culture, the absence of a solid and consistent sense of identity has been the detrimental element of negative tradition; such tradition accounts, from Armah's perspective, for the recourse to wide scale political corruption, military coups, civil wars and illegal immigration.

Here, the question prompted by Armah's notion of tradition (being either positive or negative) would then be the following: what is this 'tradition-based' identity? How stable are its borders, its relation to the other? Does *Ma'at* emerge simply from the willingness to extend sheer goodwill to fellow human beings? Or, is it scheduled to exclusively operate with certain bloodlines only? What are the exact conditions of its emergence? In attending to these queries one can be in a position to observe that Armah's outlook encourages intellectuals at all levels to take pride in the African self, and take part in the building of their new nations, instead of looking for remedies beyond African horizons. Such a project can only be manifested through a careful examination of African achievements in history, a point which will be developed along the lines of this study. For Armah, it would be desirable to reach a point where ancient Egyptian mythology, philosophy, architecture, egalitarian ethics and other civilizational additions could be regarded primarily as African achievements, and thus to consider them as a cluster of values to be used for a true cultural renaissance in present day Africa. The deployment of the myth of Isis and Osiris in Armah's last two novelistic experiments falls in the direction of placing Africa at the heart of ancient Egyptian cosmology and worldview. Knowing that the thrust of the argument in *Fragments* (1970), Armah's second novel, contains a worldview that is essentially defined as Greek (because of its incidental association with Greek mythology), the switch in his last two novels to Egypt, signals a paradigmatic shift. A comprehensive reading of Armah's novels suggests that what can be called the 'Egyptian paradigm' is favoured over the Greek one, simply because allegedly this latter has spelled only patriarchy, hunger for power and unlimited violence. Additionally, Armah finds the Egyptian paradigm more egalitarian, peaceful, self-enhancing and empowering. When compared with other literary writers, Armah's identity quest can be qualified as more daring, more informed and perhaps philosophically more compelling.

As noted earlier, the present thesis revolves around a central issue of Armah's quest of identity in his seven novels. The five chapters are divided into three major parts: Context, Content, and Critique. The first chapter falls under the heading of Context. The second, the third and the fourth offer mainly content. As it assesses the entire project, the fifth chapter presents a critique. In this way, the first chapter is devoted to the context. It offers brief biographical notes and describes Armah's novels with on going research about issues related to identity construction. Towards the end of this first chapter, there is an approximate outline of Armah's philosophical program. The second, the third and the fourth chapters constitute the cornerstone of Armah's vision. His choice of Matriarchy instead of Patriarchy is investigated and discussed. This proposes highlighting the premises of that choice and the way the writer handles it as drama in fiction, that is, through carefully chosen allusions, metaphors and symbols. Meanwhile this chapter also uncovers the social, political, and historical underpinnings of his idea of artistic truth in shaping a practical and workable identity for Africa. The fifth chapter combines Armah's choice of aesthetics with his theme of identity formation. It examines the way he situates art in society, politics, and history. The same chapter evaluates Armah's emphasis on education as a remedy to the African predicament by confronting this emphasis with the critiques of various theorists and readers.

In the conclusion, I review the findings of each chapter. As will be shown, Armah's project and contribution to the topic of identity quest is situated in its larger theoretical and philosophical perspective. Our discussion will be, all along, evaluating Armah's attempt at breaking the meta-narratives and the potentials of the worldview he calls for. The vision Armah provides is found in the end to be articulate, codified and sophisticated. Nevertheless and like every human venture, it still discloses some recourse to generalizations and mythmaking. In some instances, one can even find Armah sacrificing objective analysis for the adoption of an emotive discourse based on crude essentialism.

Chapter One: The Driving Force of Armah's Novels and the Fate of Africa

A part of something is for the foreseeable future going to be better than all of it. Fragments over wholes. Restless nomadic activity over the settlement of held territory. Criticism over resignation. The Palestinian as self-consciousness in a barren plain of investments and consumer appetites. The heroism of anger over the begging bowel, limited independence over the status of clients. Attention, alertness, focus. To do as others do, but somehow to stand apart. To tell your story in pieces, as *it is*.

Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky*. (2000) (Italics in the original)

Identity is about efficient group cooperation, without which no society prospers. The behaviour of work groups and sports teams provides useful indications about the uses of identity. Identity creates a basis for long-term cooperative action of a routine sort, the kind of sharp, well-thought-out reflexes that professional trainers refers to as automatism…

Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. 2006

1- Armah's Project: The Search for Cultural Paradigms

In this age of globalization, terms like 'structural readjustment' and 'cultural rehabilitation' can be synonymous with drastic changes to take place within communities. This situation might induce the question of how one can attain and acquire modernity without being totally consumed by it. This is related to the fundamental problem of what to do with local traditions, knowing that these traditions bear in varying degrees one's own defining features. As a result, doubts about where and how to belong are more than likely to arise. The Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah meticulously attends to, and with particular intensity, treats in all his seven novels, issues relating to African identity and self. Whether to consider tradition as a fossilized and largely inhibitive entity or, on the contrary, as an inspiring and progressive fund of knowledge is one major on-going subject of reflection for the writer. Armah is then particularly concerned with Africa's apprehension of European Modernity and its Cartesian premises. For nearly four decades of a mostly successful novelistic experience, Armah has created a body of fiction that, while entirely devoted to the major issues faced by Africa, cannot be totally immune from ambiguity and equivocalness.

I try in this thesis to consider the scope of Armah's fiction within the paradigms of what constitutes one's understanding of reality. In other words, I intend to go through an intellectual process that could help us distinguish between genuine and illusory forms of self-knowledge. Armah is one of the few African novelists who consciously write fiction while dealing with issues related to the coexistence of European Modernity and African local traditions in African countries. No less important in that fiction is the impact of such a drive for an overall project leading toward an African renaissance. His seven novels, written over a period of thirty five years, consistently focus on the question of how to define these communities' distinguishing features. For Antonio Gramsci, a solid and enduring critical mechanism has to start with "the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing himself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in

[him] an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."[1] With some reservations of his own, Armah's latest novel *KMT: in the House of Life* (2002) confirms this continuous trend of interest about such 'an infinity of [genuine] traces'; traces which we hope to make the central object of our discussion in this thesis. Despite their varied techniques, it ought to be recalled that Armah's seven novels remain intently focused on the possibility of finding ways out of the present general listlessness in the African continent. Such listlessness actually reflects a troubled self that is uncertain where and how to belong. Albert Memmi observes that:

> La colonisation fausse les rapports humains, détruit ou sclérose les institutions, et corrompt les hommes, colonisateurs et colonisés. Pour vivre, le colonisé a besoin de supprimer la colonisation. Mais pour devenir un homme, il doit supprimer le colonisé qu'il est devenu. Si l'Européen doit annihiler en lui le colonisateur, le colonisé doit dépasser le colonisé.[2]

This remark is insightful for understanding the full scale of the drama between the major players in the colonial relationship. Instead of finding cure for this troubled self, Somali novelist, Nuruddine Farah, with his reference to 'uncertainty' examines live instances about the aggravations of this colonial drama of self and identity in the neocolonial period[3]. The heroes we read of in Armah's *oeuvre* are, likewise, intellectuals who while they endure the present problem of identity are bent on a quest for means and ways to resolve it.

Debarred from assuming direct action and responsibility by long decades of colonialism and its aftermath, African local cultures have been severely impaired, and in some cases defaced. If we consider Albert Memmi's position about the evils of colonialism, then we will not miss the fact that the planned and lengthy distancing of the African self from the management of daily domestic affairs has resulted in blurred perceptions about both self and other. Africans according to Memmi were forced out of history once they became passive agents of their own lives. Their embrace of past traditions is understood as an illusory refuge consisting in routinely, yet ineffectively perpetuating token activities of

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[1] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. ed., & trans., Quintin Hoare & Goffery Nowell Smith. London & New York. Lawrence and Wishart, and International Publishers, (1971), p. 324. Armah might not agree with Gramsci about the absence of "an inventory"; at least, his early fiction is all about finding the genesis of the African mind.

[2] Albert Memmi, *Portrait du colonisé*. (1957), Gallimard, (1985), p. 125

[3] "A neocolonial subject is born into uncertainty, lives in uncertainty, dies in uncertainty and operates on the frontiers of uncertainty,… A neocolonial subject is a person who is told, 'You are not who you are.'… As a result, neocolonial subjects cannot tell their own tales, because neocolonial subjects are trapped in cultural narratives that are not theirs […] they must step outside themselves in order to speak." "There is a continuous borrowing from the future. You borrow from the future because today is not certain." Lisa Meyer, "A Fragmented Homeland, a Vocal Critic", http://articles.latimes.com/1999/mar/15/news/cl-17404 March 15, 1999

an erstwhile dynamic culture. Consequently, yesterday's traditions could not provide self-satisfaction or supply harmony inside the long-abused African self. Calls for assimilation and hence immersion in European Modernity might have brought forth some kind of 'foreseen' happiness but they were flawed by the doublespeak of colonialism. It seems that Armah's novels embody the opinion that there is a long way to go before the picture of the colonized African fades out. His call for *Ma'at* in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, even his emphasis on 'our way, the way" in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is an interesting landmark where the reader can assess how far the traditional lore can be either progressive or inhibitive. Beyond that, the interest of reading Armah's novels lies in the conviction that deeper questions have to be addressed, probably about what to read and to learn from the story of Africa (traditions) and in what way the imposed modernity (the western world) can serve to further this pursuit. A lucid treatment of the question could instead lead the paralysed African to break these manacles and factually achieve a decolonization of the mind.

Our interest in Armah, hence, comes as a result of observing in his work a perceptive search for possible constituents and helpful epistemic paradigms away from the present impasse. Indeed, and as far as this thesis is concerned, Armah is perhaps one among several African writers whose fiction taken as a whole embodies and dramatizes such a problematic. Rather than portraying his intellectuals as being entrapped *solely* within the limitations of a highly demanding, yet, sometimes awe-inspiring, opaque and most of the time ahistorical reasoning characteristic of some African traditions (the way many other African writers usually prefer to do), Armah devotes much space and time to exploring the premises and discourses which traditions can contain. In addition, he criticises widely disseminated ideas about the possibility of the European model of enlightenment as healthy alternatives. In other words, Armah's protagonists do not only seek to break free from the grips of certain unprogressive ideas in their societal inherited approaches to life. The same protagonists also have to face and grapple with some patterns of thought in Western modernity because in the end this modernity is not concerned about, or attends very little to, some of Africa's historical peculiarities. Remarkable about Armah's protagonists is their varied but nevertheless restless struggles to gather knowledge about self and other different from both the ontological one inherited from long established local traditions, *and again* careful not to fall victim of widely propagated ideals of progress, development and mutual help as they are generally attributable to Modernity. Most of the time, we read inside

Armah's protagonists' minds that eagerly and sincerely wish to break away from the established *status quo* by relying on metaphysics but at the same time, being careful not to hold onto Western claims of humanism. Indeed, we observe a cast of mind struggling against these two principal constraints. Armah's rendering of his intellectuals' mind during the time when they are being initiated, trained and given culture, gives us rare material to assess whether such casts of mind are really genuine or just sham models combining historicist attitudes and lines of thoughts in relation to self and other.

To start with, as Albert Memmi clarifies, "le rôle de l'écrivain colonisé est trop difficile à soutenir: il incarne toutes les ambiguïtés, toutes les impossibilités du colonisé, portées à l'etrême degré."[4] Armah, a writer in the postcolonial situation, may not be therefore an exception. While he happens to point in his novels at the challenge of reconciling local traditions with European instituted Modernity, he also along the way exposes contradictions, fissures of thought and sometimes downright ambiguities regarding his final opinion about modernity and tradition. Armah opines that these ambiguities are logical consequences of deeper anxieties about the perception of the repressed self and the role of such like repressions in giving birth to 'negative' or inhibited individuals. This negativity is not all that unjustified. Such individuals, like Armah, are willing to trust neither post-independence nationalisms nor past ways and customs. But if traditional ways and practices are belated and archaic (the way tradition is expressively attacked in *The Beautyful One Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*), why does Armah prefer to return to the same store of ancient lore in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*? Readers are perhaps likely to justify this "swing of the pendulum" by stating that the writer in question is rather uncertain about which way to go, and not accepting that some medicine cannot work for the present disease. Again, and in case modernity is categorically evil and the Cartesian premises are fatality personified, why do the protagonists of both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* project their remedies from nationalistic universities and promote their ideas by making use of existing institutions? Does Armah finally succumb to the belief that Modernity is a card that must be tried and actually can be played to advantage, otherwise one is at odds with historical realities? In case Modernity can be used to advantage (a project totally ruled out if we take *The Healers* as Armah's *magnum opus*), how can a reader have faith again in a writer who keeps radically and somehow unexpectedly changing his

[4] Albert Memmi, *Op.cit.*, p. 127.

outlooks? Most important of all, what does this radical change imply, particularly when we take the outspoken objectives of the writer? Again how does Armah consider the role of culture, the university and the elites in any struggle to rebuild an African identity? In short, we can pursue in Armah's discourse cases of discrepancy that can be vindicated on the ground of his continuous quest for a constructive conception of identity within the context of rapidly changing modernity.

2 - A Historical Review of the Issue: Identity Expressed through Violence

Some inherited ways and practices together with repressive, self-serving nationalisms that prevailed during the post-independence period have resulted in a context totally infected with traditionality. The qualifier "infected" is intentionally preferred here to denote what is later explained as the crippling conditions caused by traditionality. Under such a context, the absence of freedom can be seen as the first capital sin. Yet this lack of freedom comes without some of its opposite intentions. One of the protagonists of Nuruddin Farah in *Close Sesame* (the third novel in a trilogy entitled: *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*) avows: "…that confinement in prison opened to Deeriye a vista of a wider, larger world: detention compelled him to think of the history and contradictions which the neo-colonial person lives in; detention forced to see himself not only as a spokesman of a clan, but made it obvious to him that he was a member of a world's oppressed."[5] Here the experience of prison, violent as it is, helps Deeriye bridge with his reasoning of identity from being *traditionally* limited by clan and blood to a larger and more enclosing one, based on coalitions of oppressor versus oppressed. Generally considered, present-day Africans no longer trust their own neocolonial institutions. As a result, those Africans who are not as 'privileged' as Farah's protagonist with the mind-opening experience of confinement show cases where they prove to be still overwhelmed with troubles inside their selves. And similarly to the protagonists of Armah's first three novels, these African individuals live under a seemingly permanent self-exile. Hence they cannot be expected to serve positively their states. They are characterized by stasis and lack of

[5] Nuruddin Farah, *Close Sesame*. (1983) Graywolf Press, Saint Paul, Minnesota (1992), p.113

engagement when it comes to widely-acclaimed projects regarding genuine development. Half a century or so of neocolonial rule preceded by decades of colonialism have produced a patent lack of trust in institutions, whatever the ideals these institutions may claim to offer[6]. But more central than just the disappointment is the general unwillingness to believe in any rebirth or regeneration. Despite their intellectual aptitude, Teacher and Modin, in particular, seem to take Africa's plight as some fact of nature rather than an unfortunate historical failure. In one word, Armah's first three novels embody just the nature of wounds inflicted on individuals and communities they represent. The remaining four books, however, are more or less successfully dealing with possible remedies which the troubled soul of Africa may opt. In the following parts of this chapter, there is an attempt to contextualize Armah's view in the larger theoretical debate concerning the same issue of identity quest.

Before delving into these theoretical considerations regarding Armah's quest for identity, however, it would be of relevance to give a fairly round picture of how violence committed against the individual's self during the post-colonial period and before has materially threatened positive constructions of the Self in Africa. In this regard, it is important to take the state of affairs of Ghana, Armah's own country as a case supporting this emphasis on the interplay between violence and identity formations. Even before the appearance of the European interests in the Gold Coast there existed a deep disharmony between hunting Ewe tribes and relatively sophisticated Akan farming communities. Slave trade and later colonial rule intensified this disharmony. The result is that after the official demise of the Asantehene in 1901, chiefs became more visible and chieftaincy as a shadow institution funded by colonial administrations started to be more and more powerful. It was for stipended-chiefs that domestic matters like the collection of taxes, jurisdiction, order and the regulation of other aspects of life were left. It was not easy for various ethnic-based movements to lead the struggle for self rule and later total independence simply because of the divisions fuelled by those traditional chiefs. In those circumstances (in the late 1940's) Kwame Nkrumah's call for unity under the banner of the new idea of nationalism was successful to bring forth independence but only for a time. Soon the old disputes rose up again. Nkrumah banished his former political allies (K. M. Busia was ousted and Joseph B.

[6] Cases about the loss of hope and negativity on the part of the African populace at large can be witnessed in the political studies like: Trevor Jones, *Ghana's First Republic 1960-1966*. London: Methuen, (1970) This one evolves on the theme of corruption in politics, notably in Ghana.

Danquah was put in a top security prison where he finally died). The military coup that removed Nkrumah from office was not a surprise since it just gave voice to this deeply rooted distrust in anti-traditionalistic brand of rule. Before long, Busia (Nkrumah's former ally and later staunch enemy) was handed power in 1969, hypothetically at least, to "readjust" Nkrumah's ideological deviations. Between 1966 and 1982, Ghana witnessed four successful coups (other three unsuccessful ones took place during Rawlings' first two years only![7]) in which the intervention of the military was often violent, not to say, bloody. Ghana was thus split between two main political ideologies: on the one hand, we have the legacy of traditionalists or the Busia-Danquah style of thinking, and the nationalists or Nkrumahists on the other. In this respect, Lieutenant—General Jerry Rawlings (and here one can mark the hijacking of African polity by military men and what this implies in terms of violence and retardation of nation-building) found it almost impossible to break away from the influence of these two political mantles which, for him, seemed to ruin any prospects of moving ahead with progress in Ghana. Despite his peaceful stepping out of power in 2001 (through democratically organized elections), Rawlings is often remembered, if only in the western media, as a brutal dictator who executed three former heads of state[8].

More adequately, political violence in Ghana only epitomizes the culture of violence instituted in the contemporary African self as a result of, what I call below, Traditionality. Suffice it to know that like anywhere else in Africa "party supporters [in Ghana] are motivated by ethnic considerations rather than by true and sophisticated ideology. The same source reports that today's Ghana is still swarmed with "over 100 chieftaincy disputes […], several of which have been complicated when politicians and political parties have supported one or other faction."[9] Still again, religious and ethnic differences continue to ignite resentment between police and communities and even between football teams' supporters. More recently, Ghanaian stadiums have become places where North-South hostile sentiments are violently expressed. On the face of it,

[7] Yvonne M. Tsikata, "Successful Reformers". Economic and Social Research Foundation, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, p. 91

[8] In a television programme for the BBC *Hard Talk*, Jerry Rawlings once accounted for this execution as a necessary measure for saving the unity of the nation of which he is responsible. Given the entire circumstances of his rule together with the legacy of the violent history of Ghana (not necessarily the political only), Rawlings' deeds may look quite justified since there was no other way whereby a central and powerful government can make itself respected. Jerry Rawlings, "Democracy in Africa", *Hard Talk*. BBC World September 22nd, 2005. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsa/n5ctrl/progs/05/hardtalk/rawlings_21sep.ram>

[9] Dzodzi Tsikata & Wayo Seini, "Identities, Inequalities and Conflicts in Ghana", *CRISE*, University of Oxford, (2004) p. 25.

there is probably a long way to go before identity in Ghana, and perhaps in all Africa, can be apprehended along more positive lines than those of ethnicity, religion or geographical distribution of populations. Such a sorry state of affairs may be due more to a failure of approximations and theorizations which, in their scarcity or impracticality, have given excuse to political, ethnic, religious and sectarian manifestations of violence. Similarly, Nigeria, Congo, and other parts of the continent have rarely escaped the same unhappy states of affairs. Observing multiple state-collapsed situations in the continent, Eghosa E. Osaghae offers nearly the same remark: "[I]ssues of contested identity, autonomy, citizenship, equity, power sharing and rights loomed larger than ever before, thanks to the contradictions of globalisation, democratization, liberalization and other simultaneous economic and social processes that gave vent and legitimacy to non-state and anti-state claims and demands."[10] This reveals the endurance and depth of the issue of identity and its centrality in the search for ways to sort out the ills of the continent.

Overwhelmed with the reduction of identity to expressions of violence by politicians, Armah vows his disbelief in politicians and politics to find solutions for what he assesses as a cultural crisis of identity. He even goes as far as to strip them from their African identity. In *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006), his autobiography, Armah declares:

> Our problem is that we think our politicians can lead us, *but politicians cannot be Africans*—yet. An African identity is not a five-year plan. It is a long-range necessity, requiring sustained, intelligent, determined planning. That is work for cultural workers, the kind of intellectuals who can spend twenty, forty years working on a problem, so systematically that after they die, their colleagues can continue the same work, at higher levels.[11]

In reading this fairly recent statement by Armah, the reader realizes how the writer keeps his position about positive change in Africa consistent with his earlier assertions. For this statement exactly echoes what master healer, Damfo, in *The Healers* (1979) suggests to his trainee, Densu, when he intimates: "A healer needs to see beyond the present and tomorrow. He needs to see years and decades ahead. Because healers work

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[10] Eghosa E. Osaghae, "Federalism and the Management of Diversity in Africa" in: *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Vol. 5, Nos.1 & 2, 2004, p. 164. For his part, too, political scientist Adebayo Olukoshi has remarked that: "Prolonged military rule in West Africa has not only generated deep-seated political instability, it has also fanned a growing culture of militarism which has combined with other factors, not least among them deep-seated economic decline and widespread youth disaffection, to propel several countries in the sub-region into full-scale war." Adebayo Olukoshi, *West Africa's Political Economy in the Next Millennium: Retrospect and Prospect*. CODESRIA Monograph Series. (2001), p.1

[11] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. Per Ankh Publishers, Popenguine. Senegal. (2006), p. 238. (Italics in the original), Subsequent page references are to this edition.

for results so firm they may not be wholly visible till centuries have flowed into millennia."[12] True and progressive debates over identity have to find home among cultural workers or 'healers', not politicians. For, as Armah convincingly argues, "One root of our current structural and identity problems in Africa is that the continent entered a highly active phase of political agitations with very little time for cultural workers to do the necessary preparatory work." (*KMT*, p. 238) In this respect, the need for a 'preparatory work' that may stretch up to centuries in scope and as expressed by a group of dedicated intellectuals or, more specifically, 'cultural workers', as Armah prefers to call them, is neither illusory nor a way to obscure African realities. Concepts and principles which would shape the profile of a new African society to come are vital, as those who cared to write books on this subject here show.

3 - Modernity and Traditionality: Working out the Concepts

Kwame Anthony Appiah has articulated a constructive understanding of identity. For him identity "is a coalescence of mutually responsive (if sometimes conflicting) modes of conduct, habits of thoughts, and patterns of evaluation; in short, a coherent kind of human social psychology."[13] As a result Appiah does not formulate the idea of a single African identity. Rather, he only discusses diverse and multiple African identities "to recall the variety of precolonial cultures" and the "differences in colonial experience". It is only after doing away with the effects of colonialism, Appiah says, that there can be a debate over an emerging African identity not yet fully apparent or tied as when it comes to the way in which it is composed. But certainly "race, a common historical experience, a shared metaphysics, …[even] false presuppositions [like] errors and inaccuracies that courtesy calls 'myth', 'religion', 'heresy' and science 'magic'"[14] can be included. In short, identity for Appiah is an amalgam of both rational and irrational considerations. That is what makes it always theoretically fraught with uncertainties and in the African case somewhat more challenging since, after all, it is yet to be formed. At the

[12] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd (1979), p.84 Subsequent page references are to this edition.
[13] Kwame Anthony Appiah, "African Identities" in: *Social Postmodernism: Beyond Identity Politics*. eds, Linda J. Nicholas, Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander. Cambridge University Press, (1996), p. 105.
[14] Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ibid., p. 105.

present moment as well as formerly, there have been cases of varied identities and what shapes this embryonic unifying picture that is emerging is perhaps more and more the swaying attitude of modernity of which colonialism, orientalism and imperialism are its best manifestations[15]. In this regard we cannot adequately debate Africa's quest for identity without serious attendance to the conditions of the possibility of this emerging identity, if only to invoke Michel Foucault's ideas about episteme formations[16].

Yet before underlining the conditions of possibility for this unique African experience, it is interesting to review some dissenting voices, thinkers who argue in favour of multiple African identities. For Kadiatu Kanneh, "it is vital to resist formulations of a holistic African world, culture or world-view which can be discovered, recovered or re-appropriated." For Kanneh, it is important to note that "Africa, with its plural cultures and influences has no paradigm and cannot be reduced to a single political aspiration or spiritual unity."[17] While there may exist some relevance to this stand (for the book is extensively documented), one can still detect some postmodernist cases of de-centering narratives, additional fragmentations of meaning together with the erection of multiple truths. This suspicion is particularly valid when given the unilateral western power and domination all over the world. Even if there might have never been a single African identity, Armah's call to set up one is understood as one necessary step in an enduring project to resist self-suppressing trends of globlisation.

Perhaps what makes Kanneh's position regarding the existence of multiple identities in the case of Africa unwelcome is the context which is rife with dark realities and gloomy prospects in the continent. In case there is a serious intention to alleviate the present condition, Africans have to launch one efficient identity. "Africa today", in Armah's assessment,

> is a field of numerous identities with a demonstrated capacity to generate serial catastrophes. There are reasons for this state of affairs, the most relevant being that we did not create the identities we stagger around

[15] In this regard I, perhaps, cannot advance my argument without the original remarks advanced by Edward Said whose *Culture and Imperialism* is fundamentally based on the idea that imperialism as a system and practice "integrated and fused things within it, and taken together it […] made the world one." Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, (1994), p. 6.

[16] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith. London: Tavostock, (1972)

[17] Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities, Race, Nation and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism and Black Literatures*. Routledge, London and New York (1998), p. 43 In Kanneh's assessment, one single unitary African identity has been a European invention tailored to meet these latters' exploitative interests. For it is "The movements between African and European contexts reveals how Africa and its identities have been crucially informed by the impact of knowledges and interests from *outside* the continent.", p. 1 (Emphasis in the Original)

> under today, like so many drunks and drug-addicts. We know where these murderous identities came from. (*The Eloquence of the Scribes*, p. 235)

And in support of this style of thinking, there is the argument of a renowned-communication theorist, Manuel Castell. Castell defines identity "as socially constructed, dependent on context, historic and otherwise, and asserts that it is "people's source of meaning and experience"[18] Castell explains further:

> Identity, opposed to role, is internalized, based on cultural attributes, and can be individual or collective. Its main function is to explain the purpose of one's actions; its content depends on who does the constructing, for what purposes, in what context, and within what power structure.
>
> 1. *Legitimizing identity/civil society*. Rationalizing the status quo
> 2. *Resistance identity/communes.* In response to, and resisting the status quo, but defensively, by "excluding the excluders"
> 3. *Project identity/"subjects"* In response to, and resisting the status quo, but offensively, seeking to transform society through a collective, not individual, "subject"[19]

It would be very useful for readers of Armah's *oeuvre* to process his novelistic experiments as an effort that is directed toward the project of transforming multiple African societies into one. This transformation, as shown in the upcoming chapters, appears to be very pressing in Armah's thinking to the extent that it is processed as the only guarantee of the Africans' rights in the world at large.

Other thinkers, however, are not at ease with these conditions regarding the theorization of the concept of Identity. Perhaps Appiah's previous idea regarding this *emergent* African identity is after all profitless since in the end one has to do with what there is rather than what would exist. It is true that Appiah's designation can be more an "imagined"[20] generalization fitting into a certain conciliatory tone only because one has got tired of the nowadays militant language, prevailing almost everywhere. Very possibly, not only the generalization that is thorny but, more deeply, the intellectual machinery that produces it reveals a certain predisposition in the Africanist academic discourse of postcoloniality that should not escape scrutiny, too. For D. A. Masolo, the very tendency

[18] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*. Blackwell Publishers: Malden (Mass) and Oxford. (1997), p.6

[19] Manuel Castells, *Ibid*., p. 9 When coming to the third category, or "project identities" Castell adds: "…the building of identity is a project of a different life, perhaps on the basis of an oppressed identity, but expanding toward the transformation of society as the prolongation of this project of identity." *Ibid*., p. 10

[20] The word "Imagined" is used here in tone with Benedict Anderson's concept of "Imagined Communities" made clairvoyantly explicit in his *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, London, 1983)

to generalize and come out with wide claims *on* and *about* identity reveals a worldview made essentially possible by the politics of representation. Such a case could not take place without the postulation of some false presumptions that "the universals (subjects or citizen of the world) exist" and deceptive presuppositions detailing that "individual unity [is] the centerpiece of the idea of progress."[21] Reducing individual differences through disseminated notions about the well-being of certain idealistic opinions *vis-à-vis* individuality and subjecthood discloses a mind that still cannot break free from the shackles of Cartesianism. According to D. A. Masolo, Cartesianism as a philosophical school is methodologically unsafe (not to say, unsound) if only because it neither questions nor doubts "first person beliefs about the way things seem as the foundation of knowledge."[22] What suited Descartes some five hundred years ago and made him come out with personal views or remarks about his own European crisis then, might not be necessarily suitable for contemporary Africans. Therefore, identities are contextually-conditioned. More specifically, identities vary simply because the individuals who seek them "are regulated by the range of their interactive relations. […] Identities change – because focus on them changes – as the individuals constantly move back and forth between multiple congregational communities in which such individuals participate regularly."[23] Masolo's perspective is perhaps more compelling since it enables us to investigate into the components of one's background without being affected and negatively influenced by the tribulations of another's.

Following this line of approach, it goes without saying that in the African case one constituent piece of identity is, of course, "Tradition". I begin with it because tradition has always been there, part of the self both in the metaphysical (ontological) and cultural sense. To start with, I mean by tradition several cultural elements, and all of them, in my opinion, are interdependent. Perhaps the most readily accepted definition is the etymological one '*traditio*'. Derived from Latin, the word stands for "delivery, surrender, a handing down". Little wonder, then, if it has been used in almost all languages as "a doublet of treason"[24] very possibly because it has to do with the 'untouchables' of a

[21] D. A. Masolo, "African Philosophy and the Postcolonial: Some Misleading Abstractions about 'Identity'", in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *Post Colonial African Philosophy, a Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p. 293-294.
[22] D. A. Masolo, "Ibid." p. 295.
[23] D. A. Masolo, "Ibid." p. 297.
[24] Douglas Harper, *On Line Etymology Dictionary*. (2001) <http://www.etymonline.com/idex.php?term=tradition>

community. Even academically, the word suffers from vagueness when compared with words like 'culture' or 'knowledge'. In the modern usage of the term, the cultural Marxist critic Raymond Williams admits that "tradition in its most general modern sense is a particularly difficult word."[25] He observes that the word's meaning "tends to move towards *age-old* and towards ceremony, duty and respect. Considering only how much has been handed down to us, and how various it actually is, this, in its own way, is both betrayal and surrender."[26] As a matter of a fact, this feeling of betrayal and surrender generated from tradition and motivated by some tradition-apologetics is responsible for the creation of a traditionalist's mind set. According to Williams, such a reaction develops very often into a tacit or hidden ideology called 'traditionalism' which "seems to be becoming specialized to a description of habits or beliefs inconvenient to virtually any innovation, and **traditionalist** is almost dismissive."[27] Having stated that, however, we do not mean to overlook the progressivist and scientific premises of Williams from which he bases his definition and which I think is both firm and relevant to my study.

Edward Shils in a compelling sociological study entitled *Tradition* (1981) distinguishes between two types of tradition. For him there exists one that "influence[s] the production of works of intellect, imagination, and expression" and which Shils assesses as "acknowledged and [its] results appreciated." The second type, however, establishes "normative models of action and belief" and which is often seen as "useless and burdensome"[28] The first type Edward Shils labels "Tradition of Change or of Reason", the second as "Tradition of Traditionality."[29] As the word comes in my thesis, Shils' second definition can best qualify what Armah associates with 'the traditionalist mind', whereas his first type meets the criteria Armah appropriates for 'the historicist, or critical mind'. According to the griot Djiely Hor, in *KMT*, there exist two types of tradition, the shallow and the deep. 'Shallow tradition' almost always tries to cast a shadow on what he calls 'deep tradition'. And traditionalists themselves are subsequently divided along these two definitions of the same word, tradition. The difference is not just a matter of length in time: shallow versus deep. Shallow traditionalists are the ones who "are trained to say things

[25] Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Fontana (1976), p. 318.
[26] Raymond Williams, *Ibid*., p. 319. (Italics in the original)
[27] Raymond Williams, *Ibid*., pp. 319-320. (emphasis in the original)
[28] Edward Shils, *Tradition*. The University of Chicago Press (1981), p. 3.
[29] Edward Shils, *Ibid*., p. 4.

they cannot explain. They also keep quiet about some things they could explain." In other words, they are "the presenters, those who can be depended to tell the people only that small part that is not forbidden to reveal."[30] Similarly, what can be called 'deeper' traditionalists are those people whose memory can dig into the "point where stories stop talking about ancestors, and call them gods, spirits." (*KMT*, p. 163)

For Armah, the extent to which a traditionalist is able to dig into the past and share that past with fellow community members in terms other than a mystery, determine whether that traditionalist is authentic or fake. In this regard and as to how tradition can be crucial for shaping the present state of affairs, Armah sides with Willie Abraham when this latter proclaims: "[U]nless traditional cultures, which continue to be effective, can be accommodated as steadying influences, progress, instead of being continuous and rational, will be gibbous."[31] The negative or at least the useless parts of tradition have to be dispensed with before an enhancing culture can be launched and development started. Quite understandably, the way Djiely Hor conceives of tradition in *KMT* is never naïve as it may appear at first. To him, the incapacity or just sheer unwillingness to go deep with the work of memory draws the line between the two kinds of traditionalists. For "[O]ur own tradition had also been made to disappear. The disappearing act was a piece of fraud." Therefore, cutting the link with that deep tradition is a conscious act and has never been an unfortunate accident of history. And as Astw, Djiely Hor's wife, explains, the real issue, as well as all the hope is centred on revealing that "secret tradition" or "the unspoken narrative".

Included in the second type mentioned before are 'tradition apologists', those people who are motivated by the fear of uprootedness due to what they think as 'overdoses of modernity'. But these people, while conscious of the importance of their efforts, can be considered gullible and passive agents living in a timeless and mythical Eden. In this study, this category of people cannot be considered as being on the side of 'the critical mind'. For they do not possess a potential for a full critical attitude and analysis. Furthermore, we could consider to advantage Shils' conceptualization of both 'historical' and 'traditional' as two opposite reactions to the concept of 'Tradition' with all

[30] Ai Kwei Armah, *KMT in the House of Life*. Per Ankh Publishers, Popenguine. Senegal. (2002), p.162. Subsequent page references are to this edition.
[31] W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (1962), p. 161

that this idea entails in terms of beliefs, customs and modes of action. Again, if tradition is that lore which is handed down from one generation to the next, then we are left actually with two sorts of convictions. One is to consider that traditionalists transmit their teachings (traditional materials) as they think they received them, insisting on these teachings' 'abiding purity and quasi-piestic relevance'; the other is to think that they simply try to view the same teachings quite objectively as aspects of human experience, which are perhaps edifying, yet not necessarily free from reproach and criticism. The task of a student of tradition can be narrowly limited to the drawing of clear-cut distinctions between on the one hand, 'genuine', 'ratiocinated' traditions or habits of the mind, and by contrast, 'crippling', 'fossilized' and 'inhibitive' rites and practices.

In order to distinguish between the two parts of traditions in relation to Armah's works, negative aspects of tradition, as discussed within the content of this thesis, are narrowed to the term of traditionality. Traditionality, hence, implies those grim conditions which fashion very crippling situations of ordinary life. Protagonists are, therefore, meant to suffer paralytic, helpless and unprogressive attitudes of mind in their milieu. We mean by traditionality that cast of mind that is dominantly mythical and hopelessly unprepared for rational appliance of the mind. In a sense, this case escalates to the extent that it can be qualified as ahistorical. Traditionality is most of the time in favour of expecting phenomena to take place, preferring to stay an object instead of acting as a subject. The individual, within such a system, is always helpless before the forces which he assumes are controlling him. For he can neither shape his own destiny nor anticipate it to fit into some rewarding outcome. In addition, Traditionality, when considered in depth, takes ahistoricity to the extreme till in the end it becomes anti-historical, absolute, frozen, totally inoperative and incapable of establishing links with its historical context except in the negative. In the end this traditional thinking (that is a person with such an inhibitive cast of mind) becomes incapable to discriminate between what is progressive and constructive and what is inhibitive and destructive. Eventually, he or she can be examined with a pathological, perhaps unconscious drive to deny the value of human experience. This rejection of human experience is often justified on mythical grounds about the greatness and uniqueness of one's past and the 'fabulous' achievements of the forefathers, hence the *raison d'être* of one's identity. In one word, despite the fact that traditionality is very much dependent on history, because indeed it has a history, it is nevertheless not

historical, that is critical and self-questioning. It is only the result of some unconscious selective accumulation of past ways and inconsistent behaviours that produce a questionable ethos.

In tune with our understanding of tradition and traditionalist outlooks is Jean-Marie Makang's categorization of two inhibitive understandings of tradition as they are carried out: the first during and the second after colonialism. Placide Tempels' glorification, not to say glamorization, of ancient Bantu customs comes as a case in point. For Makang, Tempels' whole project is devious since for him tradition "asserts itself as nostalgia for the past or for the lost paradise, and as avoidance of the present."[32] Sheer silence on present realities indicates that Tempels' opinions can be directly advantageous to Belgian colonial interests of subjugation. Senghor's stress on the particularity of African life made prevalent in his version of the philosophy of Negritude is equally spurious. J. M. Makang thinks that Senghor's appeal was "meant to cover the problem of political oppression and of economic injustice perpetuated by autocratic African regimes."[33] In both examples, tradition is reduced to an Egyptian Mummy; a fossilized or better still, a "museumised" entity that constitutes a value in itself rather than for itself. Again, by stressing some historical facts as unique, traditionalism becomes a value only in the sense that it starts to be a means of getting the contemporary African individual out of history by hideously and deliberately eliminating his or her interest in the present and future affairs.

Once more traditionality or more precisely the 'traditional mind' becomes interesting and directly substantial as a subject of study when touching on the question of its relation with 'culture.' Indeed an intangible topic like tradition can become more concrete when set within an archeological debate on culture. We can adopt Merlin Donald's cognitive approach: "[C]ultures [that] restructure the mind, no only in terms of its specific contents, which are obviously culture-bound, but also in terms of its fundamental

[32] Jean-Marie Makang, "Of the Good Use of Tradition: Keeping the Critical Perspective in African Philosophy" in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *Post Colonial African Philosophy, a Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p, 329

[33] Jean-Marie Makang, "Ibid.", p. 331. Interestingly, recently Albert Memmi draws exactly the same point considering heads of states who ill-intentionally advocate a return to a mythic past in the history of a nation. Quoting Memmi: "The shortcomings of intellectuals, whether characterized as resignation or betrayal, play a part in national cultural lethargy, even though it can be partly justified and merely reflects a more general problem. For it leaves the field open for those who opt for mystic effusion in place of rationality, the straitjacket of strict membership to the openness of universalism; to those who, in place of a depressing or humiliating present, can dream only of a return to a golden age, a renewed fusion, the only productive kind in their view, of religion, culture, and politics, where the splendours of the past will flourish again in some new Andalusia, a renascent caliphate similar to that of Baghdad, where tolerance, justice, and prosperity will reign." Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. (2006), pp.40-41

neurological organization…Culture can literally reconfigure the use patterns of the brain."[34] Here it seems that we are drawn to questions about the meaning of culture. Indeed if we turn to the German school[35] regarding culture, we will find that tradition and culture arrive at a stage when they can become interchangeable, almost as two facets of the same coin. Theoretically, the coin can be rendered useful; hence society grows to be ideal, only if neither side overshadows the other.

Trusting his own observations as a colonized himself, Albert Memmi reaches almost the same conclusion. His distinction between dominating and dominated cultures is again helpful in the understanding of tradition and how traditional minds function. His thesis is that because dominated people have generally no living culture (this is due to the oppression of colonialism, whose impact on Africans extends to decades after decolinization[36]), the only refuge left for its people is tradition[37]. Because this is generally the case in most of Africa, Memmi warns, "tradition is dangerous when it stands alone. The culture of the dominated group is affected and its tradition is maladjusted."[38] Despite being more theoretical, the answer, according to the same thinker, has to be handled through the creation of a living culture. At the same time tradition need not to be used as a substitute for action[39].

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[34] Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition*. Harvard University Press, (1991), p. 14.

[35] Adam Cooper distinguishes between three traditions of European model regarding the concept of culture: first, the French model which equate culture almost mechanically with scientific improvement and progress establishing thus a Civilization; second, the English model which that of Matthew Arnold that "is the best that is thought and said."; third, the German model which associated with humanity but with specific people. So each people had its culture and this culture was associated with spiritual rather than material values, that is language, achievements in art. What is remarkable about this model is that the truths about culture are local truth, not universal. Hence culture lives constantly in fear of being overrun by material civilization. For its own defense, culture looks backward to past ways of life and compromised by following and borrowing. Cooper, Adam. "A Question of Culture: Europe and Islam". An Audio Lecture Sponsored by the British Academy, (2005)

[36] Memmi's attack on colonialism is incarnated so vibrantly and powerfully in his *Portrait du colonisé* . He thinks: "Tout se passe, enfin, comme si la colonisation contemporaine était un raté de l'histoire. Par sa fatalité propre et par égoïsme, elle aura en tout échoué, pollué tout ce qu'elle aura touché. Elle aura pourri le colonisateur et détruit le colonisé." Albert Memmi, *Portrait de colonisé*. (1957) Gallimard (1985), p. 130.

[37] Memmi believes: "Cut off from cultural effectiveness, he [the colonized] takes refuge in his past because he is sure of it, he knows it, he possesses it." Albert Memmi, "Culture and Tradition", *African Culture,* Algiers Symposium (1969), p. 262.

[38] Memmi, "Ibid.", p. 262

[39] According to Memmi, the solution out of this deadened-alley caused by tradition in Islamic North African societies is more and more secularism taking form of a rupture with an inhibitive past. In a recent interview following his latest : *Portrait de décolonisé* éd. Gallimard (2005), he assumes that: "…le lien entre la religion et la société est ancré dans les mentalités et l'inconscient arabes. C'est une philosophie dans laquelle le religieux et le profane coïncident, ce qui s'oppose de l'esprit critique. Sans esprit critique, vous nous ne pouvez pas avoir devant la nature la liberté de pensée indispensable pour pouvoir la maîtriser…C'est pourquoi il faut défendre la laïcité avec ferveur. Non pas parce qu'elle représente une valeur en soi, mais parce qu'elle est la seule manière de sépare les activités politique, intellectuelles et scientifiques des croyances religieuses." Albert Memmi,<http : //livres.l'express.fr/ecrivains/default.asp/idR=s>

Standing against Albert Memmi's thesis about the death of culture and its replacement by the colonized peoples with tradition is James Clifford's. This latter argues that it is almost beyond logic to have a death of culture. On the contrary, for him, oppressed people's cultures[40] always survive in some other new forms. These new manifestations may look for people with a more traditionalist-oriented approach that the old forms have been annihilated from existence, hence the *raison d'être* for their activity. According to Clifford, all communities that have undertaken cultural surgery have come to know new forms of manifestation not necessarily in old forms. The result of such dissolving is that the recipient culture (that of Modernity) into which the local or 'subjugated' culture is associated to comes to escape its first purity and start to combine new entities wherein these latter oppressed can shape new visions and have their own say side by side with other protesters inside literary Modernism[41].

Perhaps a more impartial and relevant[42] view between Memmi and Clifford is the middle position proposed by Homi Bhabha. Local cultures, for Bhabha, may at a certain historical moment witness some kind of vagueness as a result of their encounter with the metropolitan culture. Such vagueness or rather 'ambivalence' can only be explained by the ideological ambivalence stemming from the contradictions inherent in the concept of 'Nationalism'. For Bhabha, the espousal of nationalism as an ideological model after independence could not take place without the internalization of the Enlightenment as a universal project with almost a total discount of non-European experiences[43]. Bhabha understands this disregard as an ill-attendance to "the temporality" dimension in the life of the nation. Culturally speaking, such ill-attendance is witnessed ever more closely in "the production of the nation as a narration." For there is always "a split between the continuist, accumulative, temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative." Consequently, Bhabha arrives at his definition of

[40] As a case study Clifford takes the tribe of Mashpee in the area of Massachusetts.

[41] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Harvard University Press, (1988).

[42] Relevant because this approach adheres to realities found not in the mega polis (the case of minority-groups in the Center) but to different communities in Africa and peripheral localities since these communities remain relatively in tact and conserve their collective distinctness from colonial occupiers.

[43] Bhabha refers for the universalisation of the Enlightenment as "the spatialization of historical time, 'a creative humanization' of this locality which transforms a part of terrestrial space into a place for historical life for people." Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, (1994), excerpts: <http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lectureres/bhabha/biblio. html>

'ambivalence' when saying that: "[I]t is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing* the nation."[44]

Taking a more cognitive approach to the phenomena of 'ambivalent cultures', Merlin Donald pushes his 'action thesis' as *sine qua non*. For him whether a culture evolves or not is largely due to whether its people are active participants or passive recipients of the environmental forces around them. It is "the variability of action [which] is every bit as unique to humans as human language, and logical prior, since it is the precondition of any voluntary communication system."[45] Again, 'action' for Merlin Donald must be "rehearsable and autocubale." We understand therefore that action is perceived essentially as a work at the level of memory. Memory in this context provides an image that is no more than a model or pattern for action. Donald Merlin then presses forward by advancing that if any group of people does not move the premises of their actions from an 'image-based' into a rather complex 'metaphor-based' (a rather more complex proposition), these people risk making culture mimetic, dependent and relatively inferior[46].

In more practical terms, it is only when African communities start to fashion their everyday actions with symbols selectively amassed from their pasts that one can talk of an effective strategy for the shaping of an authentic identity drawn from a happy marriage between a live culture and its critical view of tradition. This same critical interest, according to Jean-Marie Makang, would be accountable for the derivation of "an ideology [that] makes a group of people a community of destiny…"[47] While waiting for this happy metamorphosis to take shape, we can still notice the centrality of tradition both as a field of investigation and a discourse both *of* and *about* the perception of human knowledge in general and therefore a basis for a theory of action. Traditionality, in the entire web of relationships it draws and gets people involved in it, justifies our choice of the topic of this thesis and to a large extent explains the force of Armah's fiction as a framework of writing

[44] Homi Bhabha, *Ibid.* (Italics in the original). In a paragraph that comes just afterward, Bhabha explains that "The tension between the pedagogical and the performative that I have identified in the narrative address of the nation, turns the reference to a 'people' – from whatever political or cultural position it is made – into a problem of knowledge that haunts the symbolic formation of modern authority." Bhabha, *Ibid.*

[45] Merlin Donald, "The Mind Considered from a Historical Perspective" in: *The Future of Cognitive Revolution*. Eds. David Martel Johnson & Christina E. Erneling. Oxford University Press, (1997), p. 360.

[46] Donald defines Mimesis as "a predominant skill underlying dance, simple form of songs, acting and transmissions of non-verbal acts and crafts." Merlin Donald, Ibid,. p.361. Perhaps, this is what explains Oyo and her mother together with Koomson's attachment to consumer culture in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

[47] Jean-Marie Makang, "Opcit.", p. 336.

with a plenty of signs, meanings and anxieties that are not easy to overlook or escape. Indeed, no sound study can afford to consciously disregard the factor of tradition that, if only ironically (that is, without willing it) "enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence."[48] The history that Armah tries to uphold and give voice to in his seven novels is equal to the fierce and uncompromising passion with which he approaches Traditionality. His emphasis on *Ma'at*, not only as Africa's moral value, but as a viable ideology for an African renaissance in the last two novels (*Osiris Rising* and *KMT*), knowing that *Ma'at* is part of the Egyptian lore, is a case where the archaic and the traditional tries to assume the position of a medicine. Nevertheless, the irony about Armah's work is that despite his appeal for reason, he does not see any harm in deploying some elements deemed initially as Traditionality to help find a cure for contemporary Africa's abject backwardness.

As to who can perform this shift or 'externalization of memory', Donald Merlin presumes that it is some "individual minds" with a certain 'brain-plasticity' who are able to "to carry the burden of serving as a link between the external infrastructure of representation and the real world knowledge that only brains seem (so far) capable of acquiring."[49] These minds, however, have to adapt to the continually changing structures of a culture (due to its existence among historically vulnerable forces like, in our example, slave trade, colonialism and globalization). In more precise terms, these minds have to find always 'new patternings' or models so that their culture escapes fossilization by the uncritical attitude of traditionality. Such understanding is more objective in its reflection of social reality because "certain major cultural shifts can 'invade' the brain and impose major structural change down to the level of fundamental representational architecture, suggests that cognitive fundamentals are not always universals in the biological sense."[50] It follows therefore that the presence of a systematic and analytical mind would save a community from an uncritical attachment to a dubious or fallacious or disserviceable image (that could be either a glamorous version of a certain unfounded past, or a shining yet dependent fashioning of the present) and invoke rather the symbology of the metaphor.

[48] Michel Faucault, *Op.cit*., p. 23.
[49] Merlin Donald, *Op.cit.*, p. 363.
[50] Merlin Donald, *Ibid*., p. 364.

In the same line, too, we mean by 'historicist' that cast of mind which enjoys an ability to distinguish fact from illusion; perceive, understand and later react to human realities originally while being aware of situations that could look real but are not in actual fact. In other words, historicity as a concept would and should result always in a critical understanding of the lived historical moment. It can be realised by ascribing to what Merlin Donald calls the symbology of the metaphor rather than mere or rudimentary adherence to simple imageries. Authenticity of judgment should be in effect the equivalent word for historicity. In actual terms, historicity would result in minds, or rather intellectuals, who have, as Gramsci suggests, "critical self consciousness" striving from their positions as organic or 'traditionally-anchored' intellectuals in their traditionalist background to establish ideological hegemony:

> Critical self-consciousness means historically and politically, the creation of an *élite* of intellectuals. A human mass does not "distinguish" itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is without organisers and leaders, in other words without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of people "specialised" in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas. But the process of creating intellectuals is long, difficult, full of contradictions, advances and retreats, dispersals and regroupings, in which the loyalty of the masses is often sorely tried. (And one must not forget that at this early stage loyalty and discipline are the ways in which the masses participate and collaborate in the development of the cultural movement as a whole.)[51]

In case we query why Gramsci's intellectuals' path is "long, difficult, full of contradictions", we are to think obviously of the traditionalist's resistance; a resistance which is often manifested in forms of suspicions or simply uneasiness about change. As far as Armah's novels go, one direct implication of the competition between *historicist* and *traditionalist* minds is, perhaps, more than a simple game or fantasy (that could have been the result of an unjustified curiosity) for complexity *per se*. There exists sufficient evidence to suggest that such mind patterns are actually at the heart of Armah's conception of characters. For Armah, there has been recently a debilitating effect of the traditionalist and the static whenever the historicist attempts to emerge and find power. Often the historicist, or rather, the would be historicist, that is Armah's protagonists, are handicapped from

[51] Antonio Gramsci, *Op.cit.*, p. 333.

getting insights or adequate awareness of their situations due to the exigencies, the whims or simply the anti-historicity of the more 'retarded' characters living with these protagonists. For in the end, these two casts of mind live in the same world and pursue their activities from fairly the same physical space. Little wonder then that they both exercise a mutual influence on each other. While the historicist looks ahead, progressively and actively, the traditionalist lays obstacles in the historicist's path and sets him into the world of utopia. Almost always the traditionalist looks down on the historicist; he inwardly derides him, makes him feel pitiable or out of time. In short, Traditionality creates a space that is locked and prison-like for the historicist. Therefore, the traditionalist's incapacity to look and behave otherwise with the historicist shocks the latter and pushes him further into an unhealthy dissent. One concrete example of this situation is that the historicist often retreats or withdraws into himself; he isolates himself in order to find his peace and sense of being.

What is more damaging for the historicist as a result of Traditionality is the latter's blurring of priorities and agendas. Aimé Césaire defines an intellectual as "the conscience of [his] community". Part of standing to the obligations of having been his community's 'conscience', for Césaire, is the necessity to attend both to the 'universal' and the 'particular'. But this involves the historicist automatically in an identity emergency: how can this historicist come to make his community stand to advantage in the struggle between the universal and the particular? This is not easy knowing that "…we must be lucid: select what we need and follow out own road…To seek a particular African path, at the same time taking advantage of the contributions of the other worlds, but well knowing, fully realizing that in reality no body has thought for us or can think for us."[52] This is fine rhetoric that recalls Gramsci's, too. When it comes to practice, the historicist working in traditionalism-infected environment does not actually have the opportunity to enjoy the luxury of these noble thoughts. Torn between the fact of being a late comer in the orientalist discourse he is never responsible for its creation in the first place, and largely inhibitive traditionalities, the historicist may not have the freedom of being 'lucid'

That is why Frantz Fanon in his *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) comes to acknowledge the difficulty caused by traditionalist minds disabled from transcending the

[52] Aimé Césaire, "The Essential and the Fundamental". Interview by E. J. Maunick, *Africa Development: A Quarterly Journal*. Vol. II, N° 4, (1977), pp.45-46

simple image of colonialism as essentially wrong, hence not yet ready to capture the meaning of the metaphor of nationalism. Fanon devotes one central chapter in the book to traditionality: "Grandeur et faiblesses de la spontanéité". He deplores in many ways the debilitating effects resulting from the ill-attendance of some nationalist parties to the problem of inadequate and feudally organized masses in the rural areas with modern views and ways of those living in big towns and cities. Between the two sections of the same people there exists a deeply rooted 'distrust'[53]. Fanon's projection of a solution was made in the form of a suggestion. The nationalist parties have to transcend their difficulties with the traditional authorities remaining back in the rural areas. Only such transcendence, itself a result of a deep historical understanding or pacifying as to the well-being of the community as a state, could awaken the rural inhabitants to their role in the liberation of the country and ignite the necessary action in the form of violence.[54] Interestingly, Fanon in another context had already acknowledged the debilitating effects resulting from the absence of ideology[55]. Tribal loyalty, Dzodzi Tsikata and Wayo Seini[56] note, rather than merits based on national affiliations still has the upper hand in deciding who wins electoral constituencies in Ghana. The presence of chiefs and the disputes they still create question the stick-in-the-mud condition consequential from Traditionality and its capacity to be renewed even in a context that looks at first sight accountable only by Modernity: parliamentary rule, electoral system, representative governments…etc! Traditionality seems

[53] The English equivalent to the French word used repeatedly by Fanon himself: "méfiance". The origins of this distrust Fanon explains is due to the fact that "la jeune bourgeoisie nationale, commerçante surtout, va entrer en compétition avec ces seigneurs féodaux dans ses secteurs multiples: marabouts et sorciers qui barrent la route aux malades qui pourraient consulter le médecin, djemaas qui jugent, rendent inutiles les avocats, caïds qui utilisent leurs puissance politique et administrative pour lancer un commerce ou une ligne de transports, … » Frantz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre*. (1961) Edition Gallimard, (1991), p.148.

[54] Yet despite the fact of being exact and authoritative, Fanon's analysis has been overtaken by neo-colonial realities. His revelation as to the survival of the distrust between the historical nationalists and the feudal traditionalists needs further revisions and considerations. The projection of the nation in the international context today reveals new factors and new power-forces that have to be counted, too. Even Fanon's trust in nationalism (shown in his choice of language: nationalist parties, trade union, working classes, rural classes) uncovers a mind-set made essentially possible by Colonialism; something which is not all safe to abide oneself with. Lewis R. Gordon shares some of these reservations about Fanon's very premises of thinking. In a recent article, he observes that "[T]he metatextual Fanon stood in a special relation to the intertextual Fanon's naïve investment in the epistemic and political promises of European society." Lewis R. Gordon, "Fanon and Development: A Philosophical Look", *Africa Development*, Vol. XXIX, N° 01, (2004), p. 75.

[55] He expresses this more clearly in Pour la revolution africaine where he notes: "Pour ma part plus je pénètre les cultures et les cercles politiques plus la certitude s'impose à moi que le grand danger qui menace l'Afrique est l'absence d'idéologie. La vieille Europe a peiné des siècles avant de parfaire l'unité nationale des Etats." Frantz Fanon, *Pour la révolution africaine*, Librairie François Maspero. (1969) p. 184.

[56] See infra. Dzodzi Tsikita & Wayo Seini, p. 17 of this first chapter.

to be lucky in penetrating even the stiffest of Modernity's measures and impose itself despite all the good will or high ideals of some African politicians[57].

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, in a study that has become a watershed for students of tradition, distinguishes between "old" and "invented" traditions of governance. They discuss the old as "specific and strongly binding social practices, the latter [that is the invented] tended to be quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate…"[58] Of interest to us is the fact that Hobsbawm presupposes the existence of fixed, never changing variations of tradition, old and invented. Little is actually said about the natural consequences of this division. In other terms what makes some practices unchangeable, that is argumentatively untouchable, and others justifiably transformative is never addressed as a problematic. All through the introduction and Chapter Six: "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa", we are told how the second type of traditions keeps being invented so as to meet the whims and plans of policy makers, colonial administrators and power groups. Yet it is implicit from Hobsbawn's analysis that Africans have developed what we may call a 'tradition of ungovernance', chaos or the institutionalization of disorder; itself an expression of bottomless complications and deep misconceptions about self and others. With the installation of colonialism, Africans were distanced from the ongoing arguments concerning them directly. If we agree with Fanon about how emerging nationalists were suspiciously regarded in the country, then one possible explanation is that traditionalists regarded modern politics as categorically evil; a factor that 'decent people' should not be involved in or else be 'tarnished' with.

Most inhibiting about traditionalists is the fact that their making of knowledge and the process through which they formulate judgements result almost mechanically in irrational derisions and groundless conclusions. One can witness such

[57] In Ghana, the idea of the state, not as a governing institution with managerial responsibilities towards its subjects, but essentially as a "mere provider" of consumer durables is fostered by Yvonne M. Tsikata. The scholar discusses the idea of heads of state being reputed with self-flattering luminary names, of which Nkrumah's "Osagyefo" is one example, has been detrimental in setting up the traditionality that has been embraced almost with a religious fever, that of a state which has a natural duty of providing goods and luxuries. Tsikata finds: "[f]rom the time of Ghana's independence until the 1981 coup d'état, the state (and by extension the politicians who ruled the state) was viewed as a provider … There was a general expectation that the state would provide jobs directly, provide subsidies for enterprises or even provide free social services", with a head of a state often approached as 'a provider-in-chief' or "*Kalabule*" in Akan. Similarly, the same scholar discusses how Jerry Rawlings found fairly difficult to break this mantel among Ghanaians long reared and victimized in their gullibility to this traditionality. Yvonne M. Tsikata. Op.cit., p. 20

[58] Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Tradition" in: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press. (1983), p. 10.

derisions when this traditionalist mind is confronted with vestiges or finished products of European modernity. People with a traditionalist outlook seem always to fail to make just comparisons about how and why Europeans supersede Africans in this or that regard. Indeed, they never address the right questions; often they fail to put in any thoughtful questions. Their concerns remain to enjoy consumer products and how to make the most of one's time regardless of the means (Koomson, in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, stands as a striking example). In this respect, we observe in them a suspicion – if not indeed, outright – hatred of the African self, sometimes a quasi-religious belief that little worthy or positive can that self bring forth[59]. Koomson's case invokes the role of Western knowledge (precisely: Orientalism, Africanism, African studies) in the African's self-debasement and self-recrimination which plays no small role in the configuration of this largely inhibiting traditionality. Under this logic, our understanding of traditionality and traditionalist minds takes a different way. Instead of treating European-oriented Modernity as a break from another entity competing with local African traditionality, I am rather considering that this aspect of Modernity adds to the legacy of traditionality and solidifies it.

Part of what this study is trying to approximate (traditionalists versus historicists) may seem in tone with Kwasi Wiredu's differentiations between traditionalists and modernists[60]. Not to fall into an unwelcome confusion, I hasten to clarify that what is said above should have made it clear that Wiredu's classification does not directly fit the preoccupations of this study. As a philosopher, Wiredu is concerned with traditionalists only in the sense that they are the proponents of a so called "ethno-philosophy" making a case against those "modernists", precisely those Africans trained in the Western academy and adhering to western postulations of philosophical thinking. For me Wiredu's traditionalists are interesting simply because their perspective does not fall behind the line of reason. At least these traditionalists carry as their project the objective of an African renaissance. His reference to the sage-philosopher is central to the representation of such a

[59] In his *Peau noire masques blancs* Frantz Fanon devotes a chapter that fits Modin's case in *Why Are We So Blest?* The chapter is entitled: "L'homme de couleur et la Blanche". Fanon notices that for the men of color who virtually kept no contact with their mother country, they seek mental balance with white women in a sort of an illusionary compensation. Fanon remarks that these people are characterized with: "Attitude de récrimination envers le passé, non-valorisation de soi, impossibilité d'être compris comme il le voudrait." Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, Editions du Seuil (1952) p. 60. Fanon develops at some length each of these three characteristics. His subject of study is Jean Veneuse, the protagonist of René Maran's novel: *Un homme pareil aux autres.*

[60] Kwasi Wiredu. "Decolonization, Multilingualism, and African Languages in the Making of African Philosophy". *Issues in Contemporary Aesthetics*. Vol. 5 (1997) < http://them.polylog.org/2/dwk-en.htm>

renaissance and Damfo's project in *The Healers* can be taken as an active experimentation in the direction of toppling the negative aspects of Modernity.

It is fitting now to clarify what is meant by modernity in the ever changing African context. Modernity, according to Peter A. Redpath, is "[a] mythic tale of reason, a tale which hides the will to power, inaugurated the modern period and furnished it with the mental habits that form the attitudes and outlook called modernity." Such a myth has had an accumulative legacy (a history without being historical) that resulted in the essentialization of certain paths of inquiry at the expense of dashing for good genuine others. In addition, "[t]hese habits of mind and heart turn not only away from but aggressively against objective reality, whether as nature, science, or history, and posit the introspective self's reflexive subjectivity as nothing less but the very fountain of truth."[61] It is understood then that in order to escape the chaos of his times (Medieval religious wars), Descartes had had to transcend in the manner of ancient medieval sophists both the burgeoning practices of humanism (started in Italy and France with Petrach, Dante, Machiavelli, Rabelais and other humanists) and the ideas of religious Reformation. What is problematic with the Cartesian premises can be located in what had been at first intended to be as an attempt to bring peace to a war-torn Europe through compromises was later adopted as *a modus operandi* to solve all coming crises of humanity, with an obstinate disregard to other peoples' histories and contexts. Being historically imperfect, European Modernity for Armah, however, cannot adequately account for non-European or non-Western realities[62]. If only for undeniable historical reasons, Armah's Afro-centric inclination cannot be totally disjointed from post-colonialists and postmodernists' streams of thought. Such perspective may give us food for thought as to the possibility that the

[61] Peter A. Redpath, *Cartesian Nightmare*. Value Inquiry Book Series, Amsterdam – Atlanta, GA, (1997), p. 151

[62] This opinion is partly a synthesis of what various post-modernists, post-structuarlists and post-colonial thinkers have in various ways, debated, approved of and argued for. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha, Robert Young, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Valentin Mudimbe, to name only a few all agree in one way or an other to look beyond the present dead lock of Western epistemology and its long heralded assumptions being universal truths and norms. Spivak in particular holds firm that Modernity has been "a certain kind of epistemic violence … [since it has lead to no solutions but only] crisis management." Gayatri Spivak, in : Sarah Harasym, "Practical Politics of the Open End, An Interview with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak", *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. XII, N°1-2 (1988), pp. 59-60. Malek Bennabi hits at the same point, too. He argues: "[L]e cartésianisme a mis à la culture une œillère – la causalité – qui l 'empêche de voir toute la perspective métaphysique de la finalité de l'homme : engendrant ainsi l'homme-outil ou le robot-savant. D'autre part, le colonialisme lui a mis une autre œillère, celle-ci masquant la dignité de l'homme, dans lequel on ne voit plus que 'l'indigène', et empêchant, en conséquence, de voir l'unité organique de monde actuel issue de deux guerres qui ont enfanté le 'mondialisme' dont l'ONU n'est qu'une modeste préfiguration. Et les deux causes se conjuguent pour en faire **une culture d'Empire** plutôt qu'une **culture de civilisation**…" Malek Bennabi, "A la veille d'une civilisation humaine ?" (1951). Abderrahman Benamara, ed. *Mondialisme*. Dar el hadhara. (2004), p. 54. (emphasis in the original)

historicist project of awakening[63] has been innately infiltrated by Modernity and globalisation. Perhaps what is more persisting is the former statement: in case literary Modernism, rather than just berating certain unwelcome situations, attempts seriously to bring down the living conditions of Modernity through literature and culture, why has it not been successful so far? Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt come with the opinion that by some ironical twist Modernists are defeating their own purposes. They actually give credence and legitimacy to modernity by their refusal to recognize that:

> …modernity should be understood not as uniform and homogenous, but rather as constituted by at least two distinct and conflicting traditions. The fist tradition is that initiated by the revolution of the Renaissance humanism,…, with the discovery of the place of immanence and the celebration of singularity and difference. The second tradition, the Thermidor of the Renaissance revolution, seeks to control the utopian forces of the first through the construction and mediation of dualisms, and arrives finally at the concept of modern sovereignty as provisional solution[64].

Thus for Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "…postmodernist theories focus their attention so resolutely on the old forms of power they are running from, with their heads turned backwards, they tumble unwittingly into the welcoming arms of the new power."[65] Empire for both Negri and Hardt does not content itself with old forms of power. It continuously keeps changing its facets in its search for new effective forms pressing permanently for hegemony. By their insistence on the necessity of thinking beyond the paradigms of modern sovereignty as put by Modernity, modernists risk pressing through their efforts the ultimate emergence of Empire as a viable alternative. Armah's shift into the mythico-fantastic reserve of the black continent (the part of Isis-Osiris myth of the Kemetic pantheon and as accompanied with the ethics of *Ma'at*) very possibly risks looking "appealing" for modernity to adjust its blunders and consider other options that may facilitate the passage of local cultures towards Empire[66].

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[63] Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening." Video Lecture at Berkeley University (1990), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related

[64] Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt, *Empire*. Harvard University Press, (2001), p. 140.

[65] Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt, *Ibid.*, p. 142. Postmodernism is defined according to Jean Francois Lyotard as state before not after modernity. For him: "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant." Jean-Francois Lyotard, "Note on the Meaning of 'Post-'." (1985). Docherty, Thomas, ed. *Postmodernism: A Reader.* New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, (1985), p. 46.

[66] Antonio Negri & Michael Hardt, *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Taken from another perspective and bearing in mind Armah's fiction, W.L. van der Merwe's categorization of European Modernity can be helpful for getting at Bhabha's earlier concept of ambivalence. According to Merwe, the attempt of European Modernity at universalizing its ethics and values worldwide through market economy runs contrary to its projected goal in the sense that rather than diminishing attachment with culture-specific values, such attachments are heightened and solidified. The result is that "[t]he process of globalization is not a process of cultural homogenization, but of increasing fragmentation and pluralization." Merwe argues:

> […] as a global world culture modernity does not eradicate cultural differences, but creates an existential vacuum which can only be covered by a falling back onto specific forms of collective identity and cultural attachment. The expansion of the cultural "forms of life" of modernity is therefore not a process of transcultural unification, but the global extension of the conditions which make it possible to affirm cultural differences and claim public recognition for and protection of culture-specific values. Accordingly, the revival on a worldwide scale of ethnicity, nationalisms and other forms of cultural particularism, or the emergence of new ones, should not be understood as the last convulsions of almost bygone premodern attitudes and tendencies, nor as shortlived counter-reactions to the globalisation of modernity. It is simply the vital supplement of modernity, the inevitable shadows of the universalised values of the Enlightenment.[67]

In the face of such blurred conditions, one may confuse reasons with possible results. One's astuteness ought not to overlook that 'existential vacuum' inherent in the universalizing project, if only that vacuum is capable of some ironic, and totally unexpected, reprisals: that of switching to extreme opposites from the objectives set out at first. It looks as if all of a sudden, the foreseen 'ideal citizen of the world' starts to feel a hunger still unsatisfied with the universalizing posters; perhaps he is likely to have started decrying uprootedness and as a consequence becomes a cost of Modernity by embracing seemingly premodern values and patterns of behaviours (myths can be one) in order to assert his identity. In Armah's first two novels, this idea of 'existential vacuum' might be answerable to Baako's mother and the man's wife's identification with demands of the market economy (consumption) on the one hand, and their insistence on fulfilling birth ceremonies, receptions even if not

[67] W.L. van der Merwe, "'African Philosophy' and the Contextualisation of Philosophy in a Multicultural Society", *Forum for Intercultural Philosophy*, 1 (2000). <http://them.polyog.org/1/amw-en.htm>

totally in line with the traditional way, on the other. In *Osiris Rising*, the DDS' state-of-the-art security building with which he boasts of in front of the newly arrived Ast, and Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano, the presumed Ethiopian prince who finds African food too far below his appetite and orders American dishes for his meals, are two good cases about excessive African consumerism. Despite indulging in what the capitalistic economy can offer, these same characters still cherish old practices and go about them not only to maintain their claims in the new world but also to hold some satisfying ontological balance inside their shattered selves. Even the man, Baako, Solo and Modin's reactions (in short, all of Armah's would be historicists) can be questioned and investigated whether they really go with some strategic demands of their historical moments or they simply slip into some further incoherence and imbalance.

Having advanced this opinion regarding Modernity, now we come to Modernity's cultural reaction or expression, generally known as literary Modernism. For his part, Theodore Adorno judges this latter as "a reaction against the 'commodified' and packaged mass culture and the brutality of state bureaucracies; an attempt to create a space for the self outside power in which the relation of the aesthetic sphere to history is perforce, a negative one."[68] Modernism, thus, is not only a 'simple' literary school with its own justificatory set of arguments and devices. For besides being a serious critique leveled against the phenomenon of Modernity, we are liable to understand that literary Modernism has tried to and often succeeded in creating a life of its own; a life in the books that it recreates the modern condition that it decries. Often writers attempt to gather the fragmented lives they narrate in their stories and give it unity; shape almost all its distinctive qualities in their *oeuvre*. Hence, besides the thematic and formal deconstructions of the conditions of modernity, the writing of the book becomes a value in itself since it provides a space wherein that repressive self can voice its story. The epigraph written by Edward Said illuminates this Modernist insistence on the telling of one's narrative where the very composition of this narrative scores a promise for future self's integration against the shattering of an unwelcome present. Perhaps in the absence of a convenient formula at hand (as a result of what Bhabha calls 'ambivalence'), a Modernist, while himself being confused, or in a hurry, often hangs his redemption on some supernatural or metaphysical

[68] Reported by Tim Armstrong in: *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*. Cambridge University Press, (2004), p. 4.

force. He keeps expecting this 'unmodern' force to come to his rescue. That is, perhaps, what explains the Modernist's often resorting to myths.

Afrocentrism, as defined by Molefi Kete Asante, is the major mood which Armah adopts after *Why Are We So Blest?* in order to express his anti-modernistic views. But first, to equalize the evocation of myths with factual history may sound an undue degradation of the serious, and in Armah's case, most enduring task of self definition and identity. In addition, to define oneself appropriately, it is often presumed that one needs more than fictive means. One has to be, perhaps, fanatically committed to factual history. Yet the uncritical assumption about factual history being ideologically unbiased and scientifically value-free is also an important part of the modern crisis of epistemology. With modernists, it is neither a secret nor an embarrassment to say that in the best of cases, factual history "reste prisonnier de cadres idéologiques et mentaux qui limitent sans recours sa vision.[69] Rather than being an objective recording, factual history, again, contributes more or less towards what can be labeled "ego-history". Perhaps most damaging to objectivity is the fact that other means of representation are considered of lesser value beside factual history. Yet when knowing that "Le mythe n'est pas simple construction imaginaire, le mythe est récit, récit à valeur symbolique, récit possédant en quelque sorte une force efficiente, sacramentelle,"[70] a completely different, but potentially rewarding means for recording a much disputed history needs to be considered. Yet the question that forces itself is the following: to what extent has a given writer successfully or not articulate his people's aspirations for a constructive idea of identity?

4 - Armah's Literary Reception: Conflicting Views

Armah's unabating concern about identity as dramatized in his seven novels has thus escaped the attention of many readers and commentators. Ama Ata Aidoo, Armah's compatriot and a novelist opened the debate of what can be described as the problematic critical reception of Armah's novels. In her introduction to the American

[69] Daniel Madelénat, "Biographie et mythographie aujourd'hui", *Le mythe en Littérature*. Chevrel Yves & Dumoulié Camille. Eds. Presses Universitaires de France. (2000), p. 75.
[70] Béatrice Didier, "Le mythe musical dans le texte littéraire des Lumières au Romantisme: du mythe de la musique au mythe du musicien", *Le mythe en Littérature*. Chevrel Yves & Dumoulié Camille. Eds. Presses Universitaires de France. (2000), p. 82.

edition of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Aidoo was irritated at what appeared to her the "hopeless despair" overwhelming his vision.[71] Generations of readers afterwards, rarely escaped her innocent and, perhaps, unconscious canonization of Armah. Almost forty years afterwards, Armah's fiction is rarely received beyond the critical echoes of Aidoo's first interpretation. Aidoo sees him as a writer who "explores the psychological and social consequences of fetishism both as an objective economic process and a subjective psychological one…"[72] Overall, Armah is still charged by some critics with pessimism and fetishism. Those critics who are little sensitive to the writer's historical and cultural concerns imply that "pessimism and fetishism" are Armah's main obsession or at least a domain where he excels most.

In C. Nnolim's essay[73] entitled just "Dialectic as Form: Pejorism in the Novels of Armah" one can witness some unconstructive remarks resulting from the influence made by first reviewers. With all fairness, such critical works run the risk of being only elaborate mis-readings of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. This critic goes as far as to say that "Armah is a writer whose creative vision reveals a delight with scenes of defeat, frustration, disappointment, loss. He is a writer whose philosophical pessimism is undisguised in each work."[74] One wonders how Nnolim can read the man's consistency in being morally intact and his wife's subsequent admiration for him at the end other than an expression of optimism. Nnolim, in the way he writes, shows little concern about the world of post-independence Ghana, otherwise how could the realities reflected, however ugly and unpalatable, have astonished him that much? Further, Nnolim cites Achebe's famous remark on Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* being "a sick book; sick, not with sickness of Ghana but with the sickness of the *human condition*."[75] – in the hope of validating his claims, using Achebe's name for support.

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[71] Quoted in: Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*, Ohio State University, (2000), p. 1. In a footnote, Ogede laments at how negatively critics are influenced by opinions made by first reviewers and critics. In the case of Armah such remarks have grown into "trade-marks" of all his books.

[72] John Lutz, "Pessimism, Autonomy, and Commodity Fetishism in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*", *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 34, N°2, Summer 2003, p. 96.

[73] Charles E. Nnolim, "Dialectic as Form: Pejorism in the Novels of Armah" in: *African Literature Today, 10 Retrospect & Prospect*. Ed: Eldered Durosimi Jones, Heinemann Educational books. (1979)

[74] Charles E. Nnolim, "Ibid", p. 207

[75] Quoted in Charles E. Nnolim, "Dialectic as Form: Pejorism in the Novels of Armah" in: *African Literature Today, 10 Retrospect & Prospect*. Ed: Eldered Durosimi Jones, Heinemann Educational books. (1979) (Emphasis in the original)

Simon Gikandi, in his book, *Reading the African Novel*[76], writes two essays on Armah. Of direct interest to us is the fact that Gikandi reads *Two Thousand Seasons* as a sequel to *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*. He stresses the consciousness of failure and despair "characteristic of the fallen man in modernist fiction."[77] When reviewing *The Healers* and *Two Thousand Seasons* in another essay entitled "The Parabolical Narrative", Gikandi implicitly charges Armah with plunging into a kind of exaggerated wishful thinking, saying: "the narrative moves from a distant ideal, through a contemporary state of fragmentation, towards a future recapitulation of the first ideal"[78] While I happen to agree with Gikandi's conclusion, I meanwhile don't share his way of arriving at it. One would expect him to specify in what ways exactly the reader's first expectations were so surprisingly shattered. In addition, what does this 'failure' to stand up to 'the first ideal' indicate about Armah's long standing novelistic experience? And, is Armah's case unique or is it a common feature in post-colonial African fiction? Again, how and why? None of these legitimate queries are attended to by Simon Gikandi.

In his *Art and Ideology in the African Novel* (1985), Emmanuel Ngara tries to situate Armah in a Marxist framework. He stresses that "Armah can easily be labeled 'Marxist' because of his militancy."[79] Ngara advances his own militant Marxist views in order to offer an idiosyncratic reading of *Two Thousand Seasons*. He gives instances such as Armah's stress on "the rejection of monarchy and of the feudal relations and practices" and, "the acceptance of the guerilla welfare as the most effective method of ending Africa's political ills." It is only a few pages later that Ngara states Armah's satirical rejection of Marxism so obviously put in *Why Are We So Blest?*, again only to further his claim that Armah is staunchly Marxist, and so the argument for this remains uncertain. Nevertheless, Ngara is one of those few critics who recognize the centrality and depth of *Why Are We So Blest?* in Armah's visionary program against the neo-colonialist *status quo*. He argues "for here Armah has discovered the imperialist machinations behind what might be called 'the African disease' exposed in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*"[80] Ngara rightly refers to Modin's realization that it is 'Harvard training' that stands behind

[76] Simon Gikandi, *Reading the African Novel*. Hienmann, Kenya (1988)
[77] Simon Gikandi, *Ibid,*. p. 93
[78] Simon Gikandi, *Ibid.*, p. 31
[79] Emmanuel Ngara, *Art and Ideology in the African Novel*. London, Heinemann (1985) p. 51
[80] Emmanuel Ngara, *Ibid.*, p. 52

Africa's present sorry state of affairs. Ngara's fascination with Marxism does not allow him to elaborate upon what he thinks is Modin's own elucidations as to the corruptibility and destructiveness inherent in Western knowledge with regard to Africa. Ngara does not extend his argument beyond that of Modin's awakening to the fact that his education is directed towards supporting the imperialists' subjugation of the African peoples, hence responsible for unhealthy traditions both in polity and governance. It seems that Ngara has missed the point that the issue of education for Modin goes much deeper than mere reception of the Western (learning and training) but roots itself in the creation of a body of knowledge that actually extends Western subjugation, while keeping Africans in general hallucinating in a sophisticated *odium theologicum* about ethnic pride and ancestral heritage.

Broadly speaking, most critics seem mainly preoccupied with Armah's novels individually, overlooking the creative thread that ties them together. Others are spell-bound by the loud echoes the first novel *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* made, and go on reading the later novels with the prejudice of the critical assessments this first book received. They did a disservice to Armah's other works and to their readership, too, by refusing to appreciate the works on their own terms. What is remarkable is the fact that Armah's critics rarely go beyond the length of essays in edited books or literary periodicals. Books that are wholly devoted to Armah's works are strikingly scarce, particularly when compared to studies and monographs on Soyinka, Achebe or Ngugi.

Very recently, some new critics seem to break first reviewers' resistance and to value Armah's novels without biases or prejudices. What is remarkable, too, is the fact that studies have started to take the form of books and doctoral theses. For in a study by T. L. Jackson, entitled *Ayi Kwei Armah and French Existentialism*[81], one can follow the existential overtones of the man, Baako and Modin. The author stresses the man's, Baako's and Modin's disillusionment and read it in parallel with Meursault's and other

[81] Tommie L. Jackson, *Ayi Kwei Armah and French Existentialism*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Nebraska (1985) Later Jackson published this thesis in a book form under the title: *Existential Fiction of Ayi Kwei Armah, Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre*. University Press of America, (1996) In order to indicate how little relevant some parts of Jackson's study can be, one has to consider the choice of titles to his chapters: the first chapter is entitled: "The Absurd in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*". The second chapter entitled: "The Other in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*". "Self-Flagellation and Narcissism of the Intellectual Hero in *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*" is his third chapter and "Revolution versus Revolt in *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Two Thousand Seasons*". The study further acknowledges its scope limits by announcing: "In the interest of thematic consistency, aesthetic judgments will be largely foregone. Instead, I will focus on the existential motifs as they exist in the novels by Armah and as they reflect the author's unique historical vision of contemporary Ghana", p.4

existential protagonists' revulsion of life. The author makes his point by overlooking the fact that the man's, Baako's and Modin's angst is the result of a peculiar historical situation, namely: their respective agonies from very uncritical and non-analytic traditionality, and not just an unfathomable or absurd wish to be at variance with the world. Seeking Camusian or Sartrian correlations in African writing and in Armah's in particular by stressing the philosophic concept of the absurdity of the human condition is perhaps a circuitous way of diluting the impact of traditional ways and customs as they meet pressing needs in contemporary Africa.

In another thesis that seeks a road contrary to what Jackson takes, the argument runs that Armah's novelistic experience is similar to writers of the famous May Fourth Generation of China. These people "wrote during a period of war and revolutionary upheaval (1919-1949) which was fraught with disappointments and defeats." Like their literature, the study acknowledges that "Armah's work bears witness to the chaos and confusion of his times and in artistic and ideological terms he points to Africa's communal traditions as a source of inspiration for confronting the harsh reality of the contemporary period," It soon reiterates this position by advancing: "…but unlike the radical generation in China he [Armah] has not been able to identify except in oblique terms the social groups and forces which might reverse Africa's drift towards self-annihilation." In the final analysis, "Armah's work lags behind the writing of Ousmane Sembene, Ngugi Wa Thing'o and Alex La Guma which openly champions the cause of urban workers and peasants and promote revolutionary change."[82] Instead of investigating the degree of 'political consciousness and commitment', it would have been more fitting to examine what initially motivates Armah to write, and the ways in which his writing matches with that primary motivation. Political consciousness might be one aspect *inter alia* in the highway aiming for 'revers[ing] Africa's drift towards self-annihilation'. Self-annihilation as it coordinated and configured with self-assertion should have been the starting point of a sound debate, not political consciousness. In other words, identity is the core of Armah's preoccupations in his novels and it is this quest for identity that is the focus in this present study.

[82] Spencer Norman Albritton, *Political Consciousness and Commitment in Modern African Literature: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah.* State University of New York at Stony Brook. P.hD. Thesis (1985), p.14

For his part, the Nigerian scholar Ode Ogede genuinely sets out to do justice to Armah's fiction. His book *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast*[83] highlights Armah's fiction as a "call for a total liberation of Africa" and a "venture to create a new creation myth for Africa."[84] Including Armah's penultimate novel, *Osiris Rising* (1995) in his corpus, Ogede's book remains a collection of distinct appreciations of each novel. It is only in the conclusion that Ogede seems to link his findings and offer a sort of final synthesis. Moreover, Ogede's central thesis seems to be motivated by a concern to revalue Armah and his writing and to reinstate him in the proper academic debate. Here, Ogede perhaps unconsciously eulogizes more than enters into a dialogue with previous critics. Armah and his art, for me, should be read with full appreciation of earlier interpretations; again it can be reasonably considered as part of the on-going debate of the imaginary battle over Africa. In this connection Armah has *only* his say about present realities. Like all other human efforts, it is liable to appraisal, criticism or both.

A more recent book on Armah, Tsegaye Wodajo's *Hope in the Midst of Despair: A Novelist's Cures for Africa* (2005), emphasises Armah's reaction in all his novels to the paralyzing cultural *status quo*; one that is marred by political corruption and irresponsible political elites together with these elites' international backers. By his reading of Armah's works, Tsegaye Wodajo follows these ideologies and argues that they were behind the creation of largely inhibitive traditions and unsound cultures[85]. Wodajo's insights are in many ways in line with the goals of his thesis. Nevertheless, the outline of his chapters into two main sections underscores the scope of Armah's message: in structuring his book under two rigid divisions, one 'diagnostic' novels and, second 'curative' ones, Wadajo could not cover important issues in Armah's works that do not fall essentially under these two headings. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* together with *Fragments* are incorporated in the 'diagnostic novels' chapter. *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising* however are subsumed under the 'curative works' chapter. As a result, he nowhere treats *Why Are We So Blest?*, knowing that he claims that he discusses all Armah's novels up to

[83] Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*. Ohio University Press. (2000)

[84] Quoted in: <http://www.complete-review.com/reviews/ghana/armahak.htm>

[85] Tsegaye Wodajo, *Hope in the Midst of Despair: A Novelist's Cures for Africa*. Trenton, (N.J.): Africa World Press, (2005) What is interesting is that the writer claims: "In all his work, Armah is engaged with finding solutions to Africa's postcolonial economic, cultural and political dependency on the West.", p.17

Osiris Rising. Because of this simplistic outline, Wadajo is uncertain where to place *Why Are We So Blest?* in the narrow confines of such an outlook.

Taking a predominantly formal approach, B. Riche submits that Armah's narratives combine a school that is properly his.[86] Such a school, Professor Riche finds, is nurtured by both Western and African roots. Western modernism, Fanonism, local African orature and African-American referents are variously assorted together so as to compose the bulk of Armah's literary inspiration. The concern in this thesis is not specifically to investigate the epistemological and hence the political significance of Armah's works. I am by contrast interested in such aspects, and intend to argue that literary stimulations are neither composed of value-free choices nor of random origins; often, if not always, they indicate the ideological convictions, aspirations and world-views the writer provides as alternatives for present situations. In other words, if Armah's prose is Fanonian or Senghorian, anti-Achebean or of any other nature, then his fiction actively participates (and this is what is for me interesting along with other writers' not necessarily erudite ones), in a philosophical deliberation of concerns relating to self and other.

This predominantly constructive picture provided by the above-mentioned scholars can possibly be understood as a reaction to earlier 'article-limited' studies. Tsegaye Wodajo, Ode Ogede, or Tommie L. Jackson might have been initially motivated by an attempt to give Armah the credit which they think he deserves, particularly after the early negative reviews. Both camps have produced interesting insights into the sources[87] as well as the central questions Armah addresses. To the exception of B. Riche who draws on Akan Folklore, both camps tend also to overlook the richness of the culture and context from which Armah nourishes his fiction. They have done this perhaps in their belief that Armah-the-man is what is or should be interesting. I argue that it is his fiction rather which should be abiding as it gives us materials for studying Africa's present.[88] With a systematic following of his novels, as they come in their chronological order, we can trace the impact of traditionality and its cast of mind on critical minds trying their best to rid Africa of the

[86] Boutheldja Riche, *The Signifying Ananse and the Quest for Literary Tradition in Ayi Kwei Armah's Fiction*, Doctorat d'Etat Thesis. Department of English, University of Algiers, (1998).

[87] I have in mind here Boutheldja Riche's thesis whose contribution emphasizes the impact of traditional lore on Armah's creative work.

[88] This opinion is shared too by Johnathan Bryan Fenderson who thinks that Armah's critics, have tended to "continue to do Armah a great disservice when they read each work apart from the rest, essentially interrupting and limiting his intellectual development." Johnathan Bryan Fenderson, *Writing the Beautiful Struggle: Literary Culture of Agency and the Resistance in the Works of Ayi Kwei Armah*, Ph.D. Thesis. Cornell University (2005)

post-colonial mimetic and ambivalent cultures. The emergence of the critical minds working together for the continent's awakening cannot take place without learning who "we are"[89].

Such an understanding has been characteristic of Armah's thinking ever since the publication of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*. "Traditionalist" characters can be the loved ones, indeed those mostly affected by the craze for the Cargo-cult of western-like consumerism. They close the circle of European industrialism made possible by modernity. They can be, too, the fake nationalists of *Why Are We So Blest?*, swallowing half-understood Modern assumptions about nationhood and nation-building *vis-à-vis* society's organization and structuring. They are again the askaris working as soldiers for either the Arabs or Whites in *Two Thousand Seasons* hence reaping profits from selling their brethren into chattel slavery; this was all unimaginable without the modern system of European Mercantilism that provided the framework for such activities to take place. In the same line, they can be the decadent Ashanti royals and their associates in *The Healers*. They are either in the sphere of the Dutch (the case of the Ashanti) or that of the British (as it was the case with the Fante). Again, they can be the likes of Ras Jomo Cinque in *Osiris Rising*. Cinque is a former New York gangster with an appalling criminal record, but goes on a romantic journey in Africa to find out his illusory associations (ancestry) with ancient Ethiopian nobles. The traditionalists can be, like in *KMT*, apartheid officials blocking the doors of learning before young ones like Stephen Biko. Because in allowing them to learn who in fact they are, these officials will lose their privileged positions and will be forced to step out of power. Nevertheless, one wonders what indeed apartheid is made of, if not of remnants and loose ends of the seventeenth century Boer arrogance, racism and fears about unjustifiable positions. Protagonists, on the other side, do often find a way to appear less different, but almost always, remain helpless and puzzled before the traditionalist majority facing them. Such would be historicists types are disabled from pursuing strategies that would make sense of the lived experience.

This thesis is, thus, meant to uncover with the aid of relevant examples – the efficiency as well as the constraints of Armah's style, and to determine therefore the

[89] In "Our Awakening", Armah stresses the need of learning "'who in fact are we? What is our situation? What is our real history? What do our present prospects look like? What are our resources, natural and material, intellectual and spiritual? And how can we claim these resources?" He later says: "to the question, 'who are we?', Chiekh Anta Diop answers: 'we are Africans'. That seems like an obvious answer, but it is not that simple."

role and place of this writer in his approach to the history of Africa from the angle of literature. Unlike a host of other African writers, like say, Achebe, Ngugi, Okara, Ben Okri, Sembene or Aidoo—Armah's writings almost right from the beginning show a feverish ambition for an overall epistemic design that would rather obliterate the painful present and set a healthy, hopeful one in its stead. This is not to say that other African writers do not attend to, or are insensitive to, this overriding concern. Nevertheless, Armah's texts are to a large extent some of the rare texts in modern African literature that courageously name and tackle the issue[90]. Much of what Armah's first critics remark about *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* (the same remarks have been extended later to *Why Are We So Blest?*) , i.e. being 'gloomy, full of a paralyzing loss of hope' is overtly and partially true. What is rather fallacious, however, is that tendency to generalize those findings on almost any piece of work Armah has written since then or before. We argue, in this thesis, that these critics are only partially justified in thinking so. While they base their evaluative judgments on readings to some selected scenes from the text they have read, they are nevertheless liable to obscure facts with fiction, rhetoric with prose and intentions with possible misapprehensions due to generalizations.

Indeed, while being attentive to what these authorities assume, I would hasten to observe that by virtue of their self-protective readings – readings that say a great deal about the readers themselves rather than the works they are presumably considering – these early commentators see only half of what Armah is actually invoking and stressing. The other half, however, appeals to a different set of readers; readers who can look critically beyond the apparently deep-seated 'gloominess and hopelessness'. Beyond, I think, there exists an anxiety unparalleled elsewhere with other writers over the uncertain status of the present and the absence of any positive vision for future healthy self-knowledge. Anxiety, uncertainty and the absence of a vision – when examined in earnest – can only be considered as a sum of epistemic reactions from Armah's intellectual and historicists or "activists" who despite the harshness of this reality, being itself the result of their compatriots' undesirable attitudes, did their best to express courageous opinions and act in order to improve their compatriots' conditions. When checked against strict rational

[90] Commenting on Armah's sixth novel, *Osiris Rising*, Ode Ogede writes: "While countless different novels written by Africans had attempted to capture some of this degenerating moral, economic, and sociopolitical climate with dreadful realism, this is the first time all these issues have featured in a single novel written by an African. How Armah interweaves all these topics without reducing any one of them to a bland cliché is the mark of his achievement." Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*. Athens, Ohio University Press. (2000), p. 132.

measures, such courageous outlooks do not necessarily carry seals of validity, since right from the beginning we assume that they can possibly be counter-productive to both common sense and genuine knowledge. In Armah's first two novels (although we can extend our remarks to the third one) we meet hermetically sealed or closed passages, which keep us from understanding the narrator's aspirations. Hence possibilities for genuine knowledge and understanding stay blocked and remain insufficiently identified. Despite their honesty and good-heartedness, the early heroes remain constantly incapacitated to overcome the present evils, and primarily unable to achieve an understanding of their immediate presence; they powerlessly ruminate over their undefinable nature, and are assaulted by depression.

5- Style, Form and Language

As a matter of fact, a debate on the deployment of literary modernism by Armah cannot afford not to shed light on irony. One of irony's simplest and basic functions is to shake understanding of a particular text without visible side pressures from anyone beyond the reader. It leaves the reader in constructive self-doubt so that he may not easily succumb to euphemisms[91]. With passing time, irony as Socrates shows, contradicts simply not only our expectations as readers of a particular sequence of events, but also, the grand claims of certain traditionalists of whom both Teacher and Koomson are glaring examples in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Therefore, we learn a great deal about issues of direct relevance to us without what can be called the 'usual ways' of learning. Almost like the famous Socratic questions themselves, Armah's irony simultaneously helps and discourages one's convictions. But irony does this only through one's own shortfalls and past experience. For if corrupt ways survive even after the coup, at least the man without staining his conscience, and without prior planning, wins his wife's respect. The implication for the future is that they will live together in the style of the would be 'beautiful', thus, in contrast to Teacher's dismissive and cynical insertions about present day life in Ghana, and at the same time demonstrating (like Socrates) that life in the end is

[91] Technically speaking, here is the opinion of one master ironist, Wayne C. Booth. His opinion amounts to the distinction between two kinds of irony, so that "Irony is usually seen as something that undermines clarities, opens up vistas of chaos, and either liberates by destroying all dogma or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of every affirmation." Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony*. The University of Chicago Press (1974), p. ix

ethical and existence in a clean state is worthwhile. *Why Are We So Blest?*, too, is all about addressing similar questions and assessing, in this fashion, almost 150 years of what can be called "Western intellectual conditioning in Africa" starting from the early days of Blyden and Horton. Despite his analysis that sometimes does not pay full attention to the background, the very fact that Armah addresses questions begging for answers about a new vision as a necessary prerequisite to move from the land of damnation to the land of the blest is both provocative and interesting[92]. Similarly in *Two Thousand Seasons*, it is ironically inside the slave ship – not in African territory– that the various captives start being conscious of themselves as Africans, as a collective and coherent entity rather than hordes of captives. Hence, the ship becomes a place of union signifying that an all-African identity can be formed.

In this respect, too, the present study examines Armah's recourse to myth-making and the impact of this choice in the constitution of his historicist's awareness of the genuine rather than the rhetorical or imaginary fund of knowledge about Africa. Armah's recourse to myth in *Two Thousand Seasons* is to be studied along these lines[93]. The serenity of the tone in *The Healers* is also indicative of certain affiliations the novelist is trying to ascertain. Is he seeking now ways into mysticism? In relation to this, and knowing that mysticism is reflected against the Cartesian *Cogito*, to what extent does that same mysticism grow to be an expression of concrete will-power and knowledge rather than a naive dilettantism? The blending of the ironic stance and mythopoeia results in an interesting combination which again reveals Armah's place in the world of African letters.

Indeed, it would be very interesting to know about Armah's real contributions to his historicists' projection of self-discovery and awakening. In this first chapter, I have been trying to define the relationship between modernity and Traditionality. All the while, I have been endeavouring to shed light on the influence of both (Traditionality and modernity) on Armah's intellectual heroes. This stems from the firm conviction that both modernity and Traditionality do create a reality for such intellectuals with which they need

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[92] In this connection, one critic praises Armah's deployment of irony as he finds that: "The Lasting value of *Why Are We So Blest?* is that it captures aesthetically the thought processes and intellectual conflicts of its protagonist and in doing so it identifies societal forces which have conditioned the lives of individual characters as well as Third World people in general." Norman Albriton Spencer, *Political Consciousness and Commitment in Modern African Literature: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah.* State University of New York at Stony Brook. P.hD. Thesis (1985), pp. 223-4

[93] Armah's mythmaking, I think, shares Soyinka's emphasis on locating the need for "analysis of myth and ritual self-apprehension of the African world." Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge University Press (1976).

to come to terms. Perhaps more than anything else, his choice of language develops into a search for unexplored freedoms but we would like to see whether that choice is indeed genuine or only a fake promise for regeneration and renewal. The toning of the English language into an orality similar in many ways to that of West African griots enhances the writer's skill but also links him with a heritage deeply rooted in the past of the continent. According to Armah, Grioticism as an oral cast and vocation, not a system of writing, is preferable if only because, as E. Biakolo thinks, "writing is at a second remove from truth and being, a copy of the copy"[94] lacking the spiritual touch of the original. Thus, grioticism can be renewed or rejuvenated simply by transmuting the English language to the oral reserves of the continent. Abiola Irele marks the importance of such kind of connections between poets and praise singers in ancient lore and modern day writers when suggesting the:

> Compelling significance which the image of traditional life and culture—along with the forms of orality associated with them—has retrospectively assumed for modern African expression, the way its global configuration in African minds has come to serve as a reference for an antecedent order of life and thus come to represent for the modern African writer an original paradigm of African being and consciousness.[95]

In this regard, too, Armah's historicists seem to reason as follows: if traditionalists are consciously trying to abuse us with their language, then we will flee with the very means which they are deploying against us: language. Very possibly the historicist, then, is not refusing his mission but rejecting the deadening language his people define and configure themselves with. The choice of the foreign language can be explained then in the fact that it promises a free space far more healthy for the historical mind to function. Nevertheless and even when resorting to an escape into language, this historicist mind is not safe. For it is accused very often of selling out to the enemies, that is, the former

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[94] Emevwo Biakolo, "Orality, Philosophy and African Identity", <http://www.adobe.com/rdrmessage_review4_ENU>, p. 6. Interesting is the fact that Biakolo's thesis in this article comes principally against Ong's argument made clairvoyantly in his by now famous: *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, London: Methuen, (1982), where this latter thinks that: " since primary oral cultures have no fixed (i.e. written) texts, they organize and transmit knowledge in ways designed to facilitate the labor of human memory. As a result of this mnemonic necessity, whatever is conceptualized tends to be formalized or institutionalized in existential terms: skills and information are acquired by personal contact and personal instruction or example. Thus oral cultures and their discourses are traditionalist, conservative (they conserve what they have) and communal (knowledge and life skills have to be shared to survive). A different situation obtains in literate cultures. Since they have no fear of losing what has been created or conceived, writing being in itself a palpable storage system, literate cultures are innovative, inventive, and individualistic (writing is a solipsistic activity and reading, even public reading is always by one person at a time)" Reported by Emevwo Biakolo in the same source, p. 8.

[95] Abiola Irele, "Narrative, History and the African Imagination", *Narrative* 1(2), 1993, p. 167

colonizers[96]. This further alienates the historical and in case he remains exiled, the historicist risks switching to ahistoricity himself under the illusion of historicity. In this regard, Kwame Anthony Appiah cautions from the fact that writers and intellectuals in Africa risk becoming "Otherness-machines"[97]. The historicist in this context starts unwittingly to play the dubious game of language which actually hinders rather than genuinely encourages attendance to the crisis of one's community.

In trying to stress the interpretive connections and connotations between form and content, Abiola Irele prefaces his work, *The African Imagination* (2001) with the following note:

> It hardly needs to be stated that a thematic approach does not imply a simple subordination of the textual and aesthetic values evinced by the literature to purely historical and sociological considerations. I hope it will be clear that while these essays acknowledge the primacy of content, they do not neglect the necessary constraints of form that arise from the process of signification central to the shaping and direction of imaginative discourse.[98]

With regard to Armah's work, as it is the case with any serious artistic work, one has to indicate that not only authorial outbursts are the statements worth noting in reviewing Armah's identity quest.

6 - Evolution of Armah's Project: From Modernism to Historicism

Armah's cultural project, when carefully examined, aims at carrying further Edward Said and V.Y. Mudimbe's thesis concerning Western Orientalism being the

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[96] Witness in this regard the way in which so many Nigerians receive the news of Wole Soyinka's winning of the Nobel Prize for literature. An *haloblo* of very conflicting and ambivalent responses were and are still making the news. While some take the writer as 'our Bernard Shaw' and 'our Shakespeare', others do consider him as "un-African as a writer" while still others question his integerety and virtually excommunicated him from the bosom of Mother Africa as a renegade." Willfried F. Feuser, "Wole Soyinka: The Problem of Authenticity", *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Wole Soyinka Issue, Part 1 (Autumn, 1988) , pp. 555-575

[97] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, (1992), p. 157. Appiah is conscious of the crisis resulting from the naming of the African intellectual as either post colonial or postmodernist. Albert Memmi avows that "…le rôle de l'ecrivain colonisé est trop difficile à soutenir: il incarne toutes les ambiguïtés, toutes les impossibilités du colonisé, portées à l'extrême degré." Memmi, *Portrait de colonisé*. Gallimard (1985), p. 127. Following Memmi, I press forward that this problem cannot take place without the language issue. Appiah advances that "If there is no way out for the post-colonial intellectual…, it is, I suspect, because as intellectuals—a category instituted in black Africa by colonialism—we are always at risk of becoming Otherness machines. It risks becoming our principal role. Our only distinction in the world of texts to which we are latecomers is that we can mediate it to our fellows." Appiah, *Opcit.*, p.157.

[98] F. Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination*. Oxford University Press, (2001), p. x

mother source behind Africa's cultural malaise[99]. "Enough is enough", Armah powerfully seems to argue, of victimology![100] Indeed, the force of Armah's literary works resides in the fact that they promise to provide the epistemic space whereby the reader can actually investigate the damage that has been inflicted on African cultures not only at the hands of Western Orientalists but also by following traditionalist modes of perceptions, reasoning and behaviour. Indeed, Armah vigorously reminds his reader of the damage that Africans unconsciously and *traditionally* fall into, that of "self-censorship"[101] of the imagination. Indeed modern day Africans could not escape the fact that they have deliberately come to 'self-Africanise' themselves and their respective cultures by continuously condemning Others (Arabs and Westerners) for the historical wrongs these others committed against them while absentmindedly forgetting or belittling the wrongs Africans themselves have done against their own history. An African's own knowledge about the world he lives in has long ceased to be of any practical use for him. As Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* straightforwardly demonstrates, one's knowledge of oneself has turned to mean one's own destruction and complete annihilation and this is simply because of the sickening and unhealthy conditions nourished and fed by traditionalists.

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[99] In *The Question of Palestine*, Said presents his people's case to the world, but nowhere does he address the issue of traditionality. As an intellectual, his long stay in the West, very possibly, cut him off from the immediate context he powerfully defended and committed himself for. Similarly, S. Y. Mudimbe's intellectual vigour is not to be taken for granted. One need only read the preface of his *The Idea of Africa*, "This book is about an idea, the idea of «Africa.» What is it and how is it related to contemporary literature? In returning to this question, I forced myself to face a simple issue: *what kind of stories should I tell my two «Americanized» children about Africa?*" V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*. Indiana University Press, James Curry London, (1994), p. xi. (Italics are mine) This is not to minimize the value of their works but I stress at this level the idea that both thinkers do attend only to half of what constitute a reality, which is the part dealing with the impact of Western modernity on Africa in the various historical stages this modernity knew (mercantilism and slave trade colonialism and globalization). Remarkable, though, is the fact that both of them take Michel Foucault's idea of language representation and otherness and forget about the share of the largely inhibitive traditionalities, thus themselves being responsible (in varying degrees) of creating unhealthy channels of analysis and discourse. Simon Gikandi also hits on the same point. He laments the fact that Africanity is uncritically perceived after the concept of Otherness. For him "…the structure of alterity [is] so embedded in the imagination of Africa in the Western tradition, that theories of difference [are] part of the problem rather than the solution." Simon Gikandi, "Theory, Literature and Moral Considerations", *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32 N° 4, (2001). <http://iupjournals.org/ral/ral32-4.html>

[100] This idea of Armah rejecting victimology as a basis for his thinking is shared too by Bernth Lindfors. Commenting on Armah's Harvard writings, Lindfors finds that Armah's early fiction is mostly occupied with "the maiming of the young by the old, the vulnerable by the powerful, the child by the parent or by those who serve *in loco parentis*. This generational struggle … may have less to do with colonialism and class than it does with betrayals of blood and kinship." Bernth Lindfors, "Armah's Harvard Writing" in: Bernth Lindfors, *African Textualities: Texts, Pretexts and the Contexts of African Literature*. Trenton, M.J. Africa World Press, (1997), p. 77. (italics in the original).

[101] The idea of "auto-censure" or "self-censorship" is brilliantly advanced and put by Rachid Boudjedra in an article of his. He observes that «censure» is not only imposed by some archaic and traditionalist approaches of life but also it is sometimes self-imposed. He calls this latter "self-censorship", and it functions simply because it is not "l'emnation d'une société qui, y compris en Occident, privilégie encore le non-dit, la fausse pudeur et l'hypocrisie…Du coup, cette coupure entre la mentalité morale et sociale profondément retardataire et le projet artistique profondément avancé tout cela fait que l'autocensure s'infiltre en nous, rend opaques nos conceptions de ce que nous voulons faire et de ce que nous somme…Au fond, si la censure et l'autocensure fonctionnent si bien, c'est parce que nous sommes un pays, un Etat et une société en transition dont l'inconscient collectif reste profondément archaïque et donc agressif et capable d'une violence autodestructrice, terrifiante." Rachid Boudjedra, "Censure et autocensure" *El Watan*, Jeudi 26 mai (2005), pp. 22-23

Translated into political agendas, this failure of presuppositions and priorities (the result of mistaking European modernity for all of Africa's ills) can be witnessed again in the creation of largely *traditional* and unhealthy ideologies, which for the writer, delayed and stalled promotion and growth. The idea of African Socialism, as celebrated by Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, Julius Nyerere and other African leaders during much of the 1960s and 1970s, suffered from over simplicity and ill-attendance to respective African realities. We read in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* Armah's advanced critique of Nkrumah's blind trust in the party men. As a matter of fact, Armah shares the opinion that "[r]ather than stressing the values of diversity and complexity, the Ghanaian leader upholds the need for simple structures. He opposes the complicated system of checks and balances."[102] This simplicity of analysis is what explains the seemingly endless scenarios of *Coups d'Etats*, civil wars, corruption on the part of the leadership and elites. Conversely, people wonder helplessly and pathetically in western-like consumption of ideas and more excessive drives towards the westernization of their own ethics and aspirations. Again, because of the deficiency of an intellectual labour that practically (not only rhetorically) attends to the historical needs of the populace, this latter become unconscious day-dreamers, sometimes even fanatic backers of soulless and mindless dictatorships.

Conscious of the urgent need for an unconventional political vision that stems from the pre-colonial heritage of Africa itself, Armah delves into African history. His disbelief in a totally scientific projection of an ideology like that of Nkrumah or Touré (in their case, it is African Socialism) amounts to a mockery. One could remember that powerful image in *Why Are We So Blest?* where Solo satirizes the black lecturer, Earl Lynch, whose dream is to become 'a full time Harvard professor in twenty years time' by upholding subserviently that 'mysterious' library full of Marxist volumes. For according to Armah, Africa has been heartlessly severed from its soul and spirit by adhering to the cult of scientism, particularly during colonial occupation and postcolonial times. For him, again, it is high time to give back Africa its fundamental spiritual dimension that has longed defined it. The exploration of this anti-Cartesian store, Armah thinks, can result in a workable ideology that can possibly regenerate the black continent anew. One has to bear in mind that the heritage of the griots of West Africa constitutes what Waciny Laredj calls:

[102] Charles F. Andrain, "Democracy and Socialism: Ideologies of African Leaders", in: David E. Apter, *Ideology and Discontent*. Ed. The Free Press of Glencoe, (1964), p. 162

"the African Unconscious"[103] which is "une déraison par rapport à la logique cartésienne". For the African American Alex Haley "griots symbolize how all human ancestry goes back to some place, and some time, where there was no writing. Then the memories and the mouths of the ancient elders was the only way that early histories of mankind got passed along…for all of us today to know who we are."[104] Both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* indulge in this issue, yet they do no necessarily share this exact opinion. The interesting point, nevertheless, is that Armah envisages with a combination of myth, legend, spiritualism and historical fact that are deeply rooted in the black continent but not at all unquestionable particularly when contrasting results with *bona fide* intentions. All his novels after *Why Are We So Blest?* borrow from this rich reserve. By staging such dramas, Armah seems to probe into the genesis of the African mind. Again these particular four novels can be taxed as experimental, particularly when knowing that Armah did some non-fiction work in this direction. He published two studies, the first one on Niane's "Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali" (1974) and the second on Thomas Mofolo's "Chaka" (1975), reprinted a year later as "The Definitive Chaka" (1976).

7 - Armah and the Land of the "Beautyful"

As mentioned, at the beginning of this chapter, Armah's discourse, like every other human activity, contains some ambiguities and imbalances. This is so because Armah traces traditionality's role in the identity formation for a future Africa. Traditionality as has been developed earlier can consist of either past colonial policies that are still enduring or purely local practices or customs that are re-styled to cohere with the impact of European Modernity on African life. But rather than blaming Armah for the inadequacies with which he imagines the characterization of his historicist heroes, it would be possible to turn to Albert Memmi, who writes: "Au lieu de s'irriter des propos des écrivains, et de les accuser de vouloir créer le désordre, qu'ils ne font que décrire et

[103] The idea runs that "tradition orale est la force motrice de toute l'entreprise littéraire africaine moderne, son vrai mythe fondateur. Ce substrat est la partie silencieuse dans cette œuvre monumentale […] ; il est aussi l'inconscient africain qui ce cache entre les mots blessés par des siècles de servitude, la parole juste dans son état premier avec tout l'arsenal des viei lles croyance […] l'éducation de la transmission a fait de cette littérature un lieu inépuisable de conn aissance et de découvertes. Elle a donné à la notion de continuité, dans l'espace et dans le temps, toue sa dimension civilisationnelle et accumaltive." Waciny Laredj, "L'esthétique de la déraison: le substrat populaire de l'imaginaire Africain" *El Watan*, jeudi 16 juin (2005), p. 25

[104] Alex Haley, *Roots*. Doubleday New York and London, (1976), p. viii.

annoncer, on ferait mieux de les écouter plus attentivement et de prendre plus au sérieux leurs avertissements prémonitoires."[105] Indeed, it would be adequate to say, at least, that Armah decries the mistaken readings of his works which point to an alleged hollowness, fragility because of his evocation of miserable living conditions of Africans who keep to the traditional modes of perceptions. Once more, the idealistic picture with which some readers are to associate *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* cannot be the final say of all of what Armah intends to say. Even *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* should not be presumed to be his final attempt. Whether one adheres to Armah's style and objectives or not, one can still distinguish, as early as in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, that Armah envisions pathways and workable strategies in his very persistence in raising unasked questions, solving intricate dilemmas – and most important of all – offering the inspiration as well as the hope that Africa, despite all the wrongs done to her by history, has the resilience and strength to survive. Under these circumstances, one can think of T. S. Eliot's idea that, it is the task of "Second-Order Minds"[106], critics and students alike, to proceed with the assignment of drawing the contours of the long sought-after African renaissance.

This study is to be carried out in the light of what scholars (whether African or Western) have reflected upon in respect of the desired reinstatement of Africa as a place of civilization. Armah at many junctures seems to write in order to follow a path taken by these scholars, whether historians, sociologists or philosophers. While undertaking this study, I am conscious that readers of Foucault, Said and Mudimbe might misinterpret Armah's case against the negative role of Traditionality in his identity quest as a plea for westernization and the perpetuation of western hegemony. The call for a critical understanding, and hence accepting the truth that during moments in their history Africans' deeds in regard to fellow Africans was not as perfect or exemplary as it should have been, comes at the core of this thesis.

Once more, and as this study hopefully shows, there has been no intention, on the part of Armah, to be of the same mind as Orientalists and imperialists when it comes to the belatedness of some habits and ways in African traditions. Coincidences, if any, are rare. Rather the real concern has been, and still is, to show alternative ways and methods

[105] Albert Memmi, *Op.cit.*, p. 20.

[106] Eliot explains : "When one creative mind is better than another, the reason often is that the better is the more critical. But the great bulk of the work of criticism could e done by minds of the second order, and it is just these minds of the second order that are difficult to find. They are necessary for the rapid circulation of ideas." T. S. Eliot, "The Second-Order Mind". *The Dial Vol. 69*, (1920), pp. 586-589 <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng/modeng0.browse.html>

by which Africans can positively identify themselves with the time and space they presently occupy. Contrary to the Kantian presumptions intrinsic in European Modernity, and which Tsenay Serequeberhan makes explicit, Armah's motive has never been to argue that "the non-European world is incapable of engaging in the self reflexive and self reflective project of enlightenment on its own terms, since it is beyond the *pale* of reason…"[107] More exactly, the core of the thesis has been to discuss how the non European world, particularly the African, 'could start becoming' engaged in this self reflexive and self reflective project. The neocolonial world we live in today is enmeshed in contradictions matching what can be adequately qualified as the reality of unreality or, to borrow from the twelfth century Andalusian Averroes, a descent into the incoherence of incoherence. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze qualifies such a self-defeating case as "the inflammation of the social imagery" where "[t]he transpositions of the actuality of our tortured and contorted existence and humanity to the plane of mythical enchantment and disenchantments […] inevitably lead down a certain [inflammation]."[108] There is a vast operation of brain-drain and public alienation which Armah thinks could only come from inflammations and bleeding fissures inside the self. Perhaps it is not news that freedom is central to engagement and positivist thinking on the part of all human beings, Africans included. Before starting such a promising debate, to be developed in the upcoming chapters, there remains a final plea, that of taking the questions rather than the certainties of Armah as his central achievement. Only further approximations, examinations and re-immersions can crystallize such a better future Africans all look forward to. Armah's novels are ample ground for assessing how much has been achieved and what remains to be done.

[107] Tsenay Serequeberhan, "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy", in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *Post Colonial African Philosophy, a Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p. 151 (Italics in the Original)
[108] Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "Toward a Critical Theory of Postcolonial African Identities", in: Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, (ed.) *Post Colonial African Philosophy, a Critical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, (1997), p. 343.

Chapter Two:
The Matriarchal Principle and Armah's Projection of his African Worldview

> The condition of women in a nation is the real measure of its progress. You imprison a woman and you have imprisoned a nation, we sang in a song of celebration.
> Ngugi wa Thing'o, *Wizard of the Crow*. Pantheon Books, New York, (2006), p. 253

This chapter engages with Armah's preoccupation with desire as a factor in the cultural poetics of present day African literature. At this stage of analysis, identity seems to be regarded by the writer as initially a form of desire encompassing, not only individuals but also certain mores and customs. In Armah's opinion, African individuals and communities, with no awareness of the diametrically opposed essences of Europe and Africa, are doomed to experience loss and confusion. What feeds Africa's present cultural malaise, according to the writer, is the history of the continent's unconscious exposure to Greek perceptions of desire; first among them is patriarchy. Greek desire, the way Armah formulates it, is not only responsible for the exploitation of African resources for the benefits of non-Africans and the retardation of genuine development in the continent; it has also generated values of maximum profit and competition. It has been blamed for its irremediably destructive nature, as it has caused violence, genocides and imperial conquests. Beginning with *Why Are We So Blest?* Armah shows how inadequate the Greek paradigm of culture can be self-suppressing and suicidal. All of Armah's novels that follow *Why Are We So Blest?* are attempts at setting a healthy and regenerative paradigm; the one that is to be based on balance, justice, reciprocity, moving in the last two novels to *Ma'at*, the term used by ancient Egyptians and enclosing all these positive

values. Armah traces the history of each paradigm alone, only to validate and to opt for the African paradigm while pointing at the catastrophes generated by the Greek one. The degree of validity of the image thus projected by Armah will be assessed in the next chapter.

At present, the thesis of African matriarchy shown here as the core of Africa's glorious past and which Armah champions as his project for a redemptive egalitarian society, is investigated here. The present chapter attempts to underscore the details of Armah's understanding of the ways in which a coherent and morally sound civilization was lost following the dramatic and violent events which characterised the slave trade and colonisation. By tracing desire as a central issue in Armah's *imaginaire*, one can be in a position to signal the very presuppositions making his ideology for a major African renaissance. This concern runs parallel to the author's attempt at stripping bare the preoccupations and misconceptions of cultural imperialism on Africa. Much of his prose fiction reflects his opinion that the intellectual dependency of Africa on foreign sources continues, even after decades of political independence. And unless this intellectual dependency is countered, Africa will remain short of any mechanisms that would bring about a positive change. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah evokes the 'rule of women', which according to him, was marked by peace and prosperity when compared to the rule of men, that which had been swallowed in violence and chaos. In *The Healers*, Ajoa and Araba Jesiwa seem to have some magical and lasting impact on Densu. Astw in *KMT* raises some queries: "[W]hy some men can have four wives, meaning each wife has to make do with just a piece of a man. Why women can't lead prayers…" (*KMT*, p.167) While Ast saves Jacqueline from the fate of being a fourth wife in *Osiris Rising*, the boisterous Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano says "[W]hy do you want each woman to have a man all to herself? Africans have always been polygamous." (*Osiris Rising*, p.153)

Ode Ogede aptly detects the primacy of desire in Armah's fiction by noting that the context of this fiction is aggravated by "[T]he hardship suffered by women in Africa [that] predated colonialism and yet, despite the fact that many women fought alongside their male counterparts in the decolonization struggle, their marginalization has continued in many independent African countries." Therefore, any liberating ideology has to include and celebrate women as real partners and this is exactly what Ogede praises Armah for: "[S]ince the tradition of African women's active participation in liberation movements goes back to the time when the first shots were fired, it would have been authentically inappropriate if Armah had failed to give it due recognition in a novel whose agenda is to trace the roots of African resistance to

colonial rule."[1] Ogede's focus was on *The Healers* but given the fact that *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* were still unpublished by the time Ogede raised this point, the same remark can be extended to these last two novels.

In short, the thrust of the argument in the present chapter amounts to identifying and discussing the far-reaching implications of Armah's cultural choices through an examination of his cultural poetics of desire. Indeed, what are the ways in which desire can trace a line of an effectively constructive ideology instead of the blind alley that characterizes Africa's present condition? Such cultural choices are shown in his experimentation with the interplay between matriarchal and patriarchal schemes for a future African society. Back in 1990 and in a lecture at the University of Berkeley entitled "Our Awakening", Armah views that one condition before Africa's revival is the "need to cultivate healing values that could help remake ourselves and then remake the universe." As to how this can be achieved, Armah considers "analyzing and seeing through the false values directed against us. After that, we also need to identify the generative patterns and put them at the center of our conversations, behaviour and institutions."[2] This statement illustrates how articulate Armah is when it comes to identifying the problems inherent in African cultures today and, similarly, the possible ways with which they can be effectively solved. For the sake of consistency, the object at this stage is, only identifying that desire and the way Armah deals with it in all his seven novels, to disclose certain ideological perspectives. The upcoming chapters, will examine more closely the extent to which Armah's political significance and ideological aspirations could be aligned with the aesthetics framing of his texts.

1. Orientalism, Gender and Politics

In his seminal work, *The Idea of Africa* (1994), often approached as a sequel to The *Invention of Africa* (1988), V. Y. Mudimbe, in a section entitled, "The Power of the Greek Paradigm," refers to the origins of the negative approaches of the early Greek geographers and travelers to the land of 'Libyans', 'Ethiopians' and other black Africans. Mudimbe quotes from, and reports on, Herodotus saying that "[T]he inhabitants [meaning African groups] do have

[1] Ode Ogede, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in Armah's *The Healers*: Form as Experience", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 36, N° 1 (Apr., 1993), p. 52.
[2] Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening". Video Lecture at Berkeley University (1990), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related

some curious practices, such as burning the veins of the scalps or temples of their four-year-old children with grease of sheep's wool. They also use goat's urine to heal burns."[3] These strange manners, casually observed by Herodotus and a circle of geographers like him, were to feed the modern European *imaginaire* on the communities inhabiting these non-European territories. According to the same source, soon afterward, this *imaginaire* was reproduced and widely circulated in the literature about inferiority and superiority of races. In other words, the Greeks' early negative perceptions of Africa and Africans, in Mudimbe's opinion, have been digested as scientific truth and were uncritically reproduced by Enlightenment thinkers explaining the superiority factor inherent in European culture today. Likewise, Mudimbe notes that the Greeks' celebration of their own superiority was accompanied by a denigration of their southern neighbours, particularly if these neighbours happen to have dark skins or their manners look unfamiliar. For Mudimbe, such an attitude constitutes an overconfident perspective of the world. He names the enduring impact of such a perspective: "the power of the Greek paradigm". The premises of this paradigm were embraced as scientific truths by European explorers during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and their opinions paved the way for the heyday of imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth.

Similarly, Molefi Kete Asante, the founder of the Afrocentric school, has been motivated with founding an interpretive apparatus that is both scientific and unbiased to European stereotypical representations of Africa and Africans. For Asante Afrocentrism is justified because of the Eurocentric dishonesty and racial and unscientific attitudes of studying data; attitudes that can be traced all the way back to ancient Greece. Greek negative notions *vis-à-vis* Africa and Africans form a paradigm that is responsible for providing the moral and ethical justifications for European exploitations of African resources. In this line, Asante warns against uncritically subscribing to the European critical agenda:

> Casting Greece or what European writers have done as the categorical standard is assuming a pre-eminence in the interpretation and history that has neither been properly earned nor is rightly deserved given the numerous self serving and racist explanations of ancient history that one finds in Eurocentric histories.[4]

In this chapter, the spirit rather than the letter of Mudimbe and Asante's works is evoked. In doing this, the study only gives credence to, rather than deviates from, these two theorists' theses concerning the power of the Greek paradigm the way Armah considers it. Although the present chapter looks into paths not taken by him, his ideas provide useful

[3] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*. Indiana University Press, (1994), p. 76.

[4] Molefi Kete Asante, "Locating the Eurocentric Assumptions about African History" in: Molefi Kete Asante and Ama Mazama (eds.) *Egypt Vs Greece and the American Academy.* Images, Chicago, Illinois (2002), pp. 17-18

theoretical background for the argument presented here. This argument holds that, in most of his fiction beginning with *Why Are We So Blest?* onwards, Armah compares between Greek notions relating to desire under patriarchal social structures with what he presumes to be African matriarchal images. The comparison argues in favour of convincing readers about African values of reciprocity and *Ma'at*, as these values work for a just and egalitarian community. Armah sees Africa as essentially different from Europe in the sense that the Greek heritage of violence and maximum profit, and which defines modern Europe, forms the eternal rift between Africa and Europe. And in carrying this opinion, Armah is not alone. Molefi Kete Asante and W. Abraham are but two names that concur with the same Afro-centric vision and worldview that Armah carries.

In this connection, the love scenes between Modin and Aimée cannot make sense without being contrasted with those between Isanusi and Abena in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Densu and Ajoa in *The Healers*, Ast and Asar in *Osiris Rising* and finally, Astw and Djiely Hor in *KMT*. This tendency to indicate political dimensions through seemingly casual and sometimes even daring love scenes by Armah seems to have occurred in earlier works. Baako's love-making with the Puerto Rican Juana seems to hold him intact, that is in full control of his mental capacities, if only for a while. For it is in Juana's absence that Baako finally succumbs to the shattering vertigo he used to complain of. Differently put, Armah's literary expression of desire aims at attributing an ideological background to love and love-making. Such a background is as central as to constitute the foundations of the writer's imaginative blueprints for the African society he foresees. The Greek paradigm of love together with its accompanying approach to the relationship between man and woman and the role of each sex in society at large, Armah seems to imply, lies at the heart of his novelistic project for Africa.

For this purpose, one needs to be clear about the vocabulary employed. By patriarchal modes of social organizations, one has in mind more than patrilineal conceptions of family. 'Patrilliny' simply refers to the practice that once born, children get identified and are named after their father's names. Issues related to inheritance, marriage and child rearing follow practices in favour of fathers rather than mothers. This does not ensure that these practices are nurtured necessarily along patriarchal lines. Meanwhile, matrilineal modes of organization within some societies show merely that "the means of livelihood rest in women's hand". Matriarchal systems are thus those which characterize "the deep structure" of a given society; that is, "the way it affects all levels of society as well as economic, social, political, and spiritual context." The ideal for this approach is that matriarchies "will be shown to the

economically balanced, egalitarian in the relationship between the genders and generations and as a-consensus-based societies in their politics."[5]

If this distinction is accepted, one can synthesize that under patriarchal modes of social organization, the distribution of social power and privileges inside the household serve men more than women. The system devises "exclusive authority in fathers and fosters a social organizational scheme that treats men-as-a-group as having power and rights over women as groups." Moreover, Nkiru Nzegwu adds that "[U]nder patriarchy, women's sexual and reproductive capacities are commodified and controlled by men, and whatever privileges or power women have is dependent on their singular attachments to men."[6] More egalitarian systems for women, it is deduced, are the reverse of patriarchal organizations. Matriarchy can be then the practice of positing the locus of power and the structuring of privileges in the hands of women but without abuse on their part. Honouring feminity and seeking oneness with the masculine part might constitute in broad terms Armah's project in celebrating the leading role women play in his identity quest all through his novels.

Despite the fact that there is but a faint reference to physical love or sex in Nzegwu's explanations, the core of her argument for the lost African matriarchy, like Armah's, is sharpened by the physical meaning of love or mating. More egalitarian conceptions amount to having intimate relationship with women as partners, instead of subjects. Such understanding looks after the establishment of the blissful state of harmony, balance and non-duality that had been taking place, according to Nzegwu, before patriarchy. Linda Hron argues that "[I]n order for this sense of harmony to be felt, it is believed that the masculine and feminine energies must be brought into the state of balance where duality ceases to exist."[7] In support of such claims, Hron cites two scholars who endorse the idea of the spirituality dimension experienced in desire as precondition for healthy and symmetrical society. These two scholars see that much of

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[5] Heide Goettner-Abendroth, "Matriarchal Societies and Modern Research on Matriarchy" in: *Societies of Peace*, 2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Studies. San Marcos and Austin USA. Sept. 29/30---Oct.1/2, 2005. <http://www.second-congress-matriarchal-studies.com/lectures.html> The same opinion is voiced by Ian Markham who thinks that: "[T]he key lies in the nature of patriarchy as a system of inequitable power relations valorizing domination and built upon hierarchal dualism. And, if we examine these dualism, all the qualities associated with the ruling male are assigned to the positive role. Thus for example, male, mind, intellect, white, spirit, culture are held to be superior to female, body, emotion, black, matter, nature." Ian S. Markham, *A Theology of Engagement*. Blackwell Publishing L. td. (2003), p. 94.

[6] Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. State University of New York Press, (2006), pp. 26-27.

[7] Linda L. Hron, *Spirituality, Clinical Sexology and Sex Therapy: A Therapeutic Matrix for the New Millennium*. American Academy of Clinical Sexologists at Maimonides University. PhD Thesis, (2003), p. 187. Hron quotes Singer who contends that: "There were no wars for a thousand years. There was an ordered pattern to society. There were no human or animal sacrifices. Vegetarianism prevailed, for domestic animals were kept for milk and wool-not for meat. There is no evidence of violent death… Above all, the supreme deity in all the temples was a goddess." June Singer, *Boundaries of the Soul; The Practice of Jung's Psychology*. New York, New York. Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc. (1972). Quoted in: Linda L. Hron, *Ibid.*, p. 187.

the antagonism that poisons gender relationships in modern life can be explained in that helpless inability to see sex other than in terms of biology or some physical investment empty of any tender spiritual experience that looks for completeness, thus oneness[8]. Sex in some ancient cults had been looked at as a sacred ritual leading up to the divine and the experience of uniting with God. The emotional sides of love as well as the physical had been viewed essentially as one, since there was no attempt at separating the two from each other, as it is often the case today. Such understanding teaches reciprocal respect and consciousness with the need for the other gender as part and parcel for genuine self-definition and self-perception. These insights, for Armah, can be an interesting starting point for restoring humane African values as these values spring from the matriarchal worldview.

2. The Greco-Roman Paradigm of Desire in Africa or "Patriarchy Exported":

It is quite interesting in this regard to observe that Ast's and Lindella's rediscovery of ancient Egyptians scripts in Armah's last two novels translates the writer's purpose to acquaint the reader with the principle of ancient Egyptian justice or *Ma'at*. Pharaonic Egyptians had a goddess whose function was to instruct people with the love of justice[9]. The principle of *Ma'at* can be encapsulated, for the sake of review, in the maxim of loving one's neighour! Contrary to kemetic (ancient Egyptian) understanding and according to one scholar, Biko Agozino, "[…] the ancient Greeks chose to de-emphasize love because they saw it only in terms of erotic love or Eros, ignoring the love of justice and the love in justice which the Egyptians saw as natural and divine."[10] The narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* praises African women for being the guarding pillars of society. "The women were maintainers, the women were their own protectresses, finders and growers both." (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.10) Only the mere

[8] Sjoo and Mor advocate the idea that: "Biology is a spiritual process – and that spirit is a biological process. Spiritual energy fuels our biological organisms, and biological energy fuels our spiritual experiences. Biology and spirituality, sexuality and spirituality, cannot be separated without destroying the living holism. Women originally knew this, as did men throughout tens of thousands of years of biological/spiritual experiences of the primal earth as a reciprocal Mother. Spirit and sex were not separate, dualized, or antagonistic, but experienced as twin serpents or energy flows, interlocked and spiraling around one another. When women knew this, men knew it too. It was experienced as an ontological reality." Monica Sjoo and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*. New York, NY. Harper and Row, Publishers. (1987) Cited in: Linda L. Hron, *Ibid.*, p. 188.

[9] Maulana Karenga, *Maat, The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*. Routledge, New York & London (2004)

[10] Biko Agozino also adds that "The only thing the Greeks learned was the love of wisdom while they dismissed the wisdom of loving people as sentimental madness. They borrowed the idea that justice is a goddess from the Egyptians but due to their sexism, they insisted on blindfolding the goddess." Biko Agozino, "Criminology as Lovemaking: An African Centered Theory of Justice", *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, Vol. 1, N° 1: April, 2005, p. 14.

appearance of Nandi could have stopped the fratricidal waste issuing from the cruel end of the Arabs' dynasty, a rule which had been marked by their sexual ogres. Armah never misses that "[O]ur women the predators from the desert turned them into playthings, for their decayed pleasure. And our women, they endured, acquiesced in the predators' orgies so uncomplainingly…" (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.19) Ironically it is in the midst of their incestuous pleasure that the likes of Hussein, Faisal, Mohammed and Hassan find their 'just' retribution. While lustily devouring Azania's, Sekela's, and other pleasure-giving African women's bodies, the so called predators meet their cruel ends. The rule of women that followed was more humane and prosperous. "Fertile had been the rule of women…" (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 26), the narrator so judges it.

The Healers, too, marks Armah's concerns with love as a resource base capable of shaping results of much wider and positive significance. Without Densu's longing desire for Ajoa, Damfo's own daughter, the drama cannot follow the captivating course it takes. It would have been too dull and consequently too abstract and idealistic without what can be termed as the 'Ajoa factor' in *The Healers*. The narrator leaves little doubt as to the impact of Ajoa on Densu:

> [I]t was this power of Ajoa's over his spirit, this attraction against which he neither needed nor wanted to struggle, that had brought Densu close to Ajoa's father, Damfo. The more Densu tried to understand this the more he found it strange—that his relationship with Damfo had begun through Ajoa, and in such an accidental way. Yet sometimes he could see the accident was only on the surface. Deeper than the surface he could see connections; he could see natural links between his love for Ajoa and his long search for understanding and knowledge, the search that brought him all alive with conscious purpose, to Damfo. (*The Healers*, p. 66)

What looks like as a casual or immature fondness at first turns out to be a life vocation for the understanding and healing vocation. Ajoa's feminine radiance, beauty and good humour, exceeds physical attraction or erotic desire to display serious commitments. It is indeed Ajoa who helps Densu embrace certain political choices he would have found difficult or impossible to adopt otherwise. For it is partly her support that induces Densu to turn down Ababio's offer to him to join a political faction campaigning for Esuano's principality. In other words, Densu declines the possibility of being a king as a result of his love relationship with Ajoa, the healer's daughter. In the same vein, Araba Jesiwa's first barrenness and subsequent suffering could not have taken place without favouring (one form of desire) at first Prince Bedu Addo over the craftsman Kofi Entsua. The fact of neglecting Kofi Entusa, her first and genuine love, had had disastrous effects on her sense of who she is as a woman (because of desire impaired). In the

end only her rejection of the prince and her reunion (desire amended) with a life-long lover can make her want to beget a child. Her securing divorce from the prince happens to be matched with gaining her sense of identity. She later recalls to Densu that what she had to do was "… to accept the desires of my own soul and to know they were not wrong just because others might disagree with them. I had to do what was natural to me, and leave others to do what was natural to them." (*The Healers*, p. 79 Emphasis added). The rediscovery of her authentic self, as implicated in the novel's drama, is again an act not totally devoid of political implications. "…, Araba Jesiwa's soul began to dread annihilation, to fear the reduction of herself to nothingness equal to her husband's royal emptiness." (*The Healers*, p. 75) Here one cannot miss Armah's fusing of a woman's barrenness with political barrenness and failure; the first sterility implies the second. All these carefully detailed readings can be squarely called: the poetics of desire. For after Jesiwa's implied rejection and subsequent divorce, Bedu Addo soon leaves royalty together with all his possessions behind in Esuano, suggesting power vacuum, and joins his friends in the Cape Coast. Feeling impotent, or unwanted, as he cannot give Jesiwa the child she so much desires, he finds no reason to stay at Esuano! And here love, or better still, desire, or the absence of it, makes and unmakes certain political choices. Indeed, it is the murder of Araba's much desired child, prince Appiah, that actually triggers radical alterations in Esuano's, and the Gold Coast's entire social and political mapping, a fact which no reader can deny.[11]

Similarly and by making their way through the hieroglyphic texts, the heroines in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* find it logical to reconnect their own personal love and passions for the dead Asar and Biko with the deep wish to rid modern day Africa of its pitiable state of affair. If Osiris' mythical vigour can be of any practical use, then it is none but his lover's collective regenerating task of unearthing, reconnecting and knowing that disproves Seth Spencer Soja's malicious claims. For at the deeper level, the drama in *Osiris Rising*, the way Armah structures it, can be said to be centered just on Ast. Ast's physical beauty is but one side of her superior moral character and elevated ideals. Seth, like the mythical Seth, that is, Osiris' jealous bother, is driven to his vile deeds simply as a result of Ast's rejection of his proclaimed love. His sexual impotency (inability to attract her attention while she was his classmate back in America and

[11] In a careful reading of *The Healers,* Boutheldja Riche observes that Armah's portrayal of the advance of the British Army on Kumasi and the Ashanti resistance uncovers his approach to African identity in terms of the poetics of desire of Africa versus Europe. Such a portrayal "…personifies Africa and its people as essentially female deserving protection when they are obedient, and repression when they are rebellious, and the European conquerors as virile males…" Hence "T[he advance of Wolseley's army is depicted in highly sexual terms. The words 'press on', 'push on', and 'penetrate' verbs implying physical force recur when Armah describes Wolsely's incursion to Kumasi. Even Asamoa Nkwanta's defensive strategy is suggestively called 'the net'… however, by making Wolseley a cripple, Armah satirizes the colonial virility myth, and endows the white conquerors with sexual vacuity which triggers off their compensatory aggressiveness on the African people." Boutheldja Riche, *Myth in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels: Use and Abuse*. Magister Dissertation. University of Algiers, (1988), pp. 230-1

unsuccessful attempt at raping her later in Hapa) can be another way of explaining his deep-seated hatred of Asar, the modern Osiris, and his final plotting against him. The Nigerian critic, Gbemisola Adeoti, observes that in the novel "Seth is made to be sexually inadequate. In his failed bid to rape Ast, his sexual organ is deformed and impotent. In fact, the "thick yellow pus" oozing from the Deputy Director's limp organ inspires as much disgust in the reader,…"[12]

The shift from personal commitment on the part of Ast, or the modern Isis, (desire even with the cost of a tragically lost lover) to the political stage in the two dramas of both stories is very convincing. Had there been political stability (despotic military regime in Ast's case and the nefarious apartheid in Lindela's), the two women would not have lost their dear and much cherished lovers! The loss of the ethics of the *Ma'at*, equivalent in many ways to the love of one's neighbour, is then made responsible for the discord among Africans; some are in the paid service of foreign masters while others are trying to readjust and awaken the rest of the people to the need for self-respect. As with Abena and Nandi in *Two Thousand Seasons* and Ajoa and Araba Jesiwa in *The Healers*, Ast, Lindela and Astw hold the promise of an Africa regenerated principally by dedicated women. Their love or attachment to their lovers keeps politics and political contests a heated arena between the well-wishing and malicious forces in Africa. After all it is their love (desire) or the absence of it that shapes the struggle in these dramas.

Although it is provoking and sometimes very sensitive, the idea of desire having political implications after all is neither original nor ground-breaking. Ways and guidelines in sexual practices are part and parcel of all human cultures. Their manifestations and functions, though they vary from one cultural community to another, are indicative of people's perceptions of their own identities. Specialising in sexual habits in cultures, the historian, Gordon Rattray Taylor sees that people's sexual attitudes reflect their own notions about themselves, both at the personal and collective levels. The way any culture approaches sex, through religious laws, symbols or taboos, can be a rich source of examining gender relationship ordering their lives and the exactions of power within them as either healthy or not[13]. In terms of cultural politics, the late Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994)

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[12] Gbemisola Adeoti, "The Re-making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Alter) Native Route to Development." *Africa Media Review*, Volume 13, Number 2, (2005) p.10

[13] Gordon Taylor observes that: "[B]ut no type of attitude is more fundamental and more indicative of the trend of Personality than are attitudes to sexual matters**…**Hence the study of the changes in sexual attitudes is the very first step, the 'sine qua non', of all coherent historical research." Gordon Rattary Taylor, *Sex in History*. (1954), <http://www.ourcivilization.com/smartboard/shop/taylor/sexhst/foreword/htm> In a first chapter entitled: "Eros and Thanatos" Gordon Taylor emphasizes the role of sexual attitudes in cultural identity constructions. He says: "[E]ros and Thanatos permeate every compartment of human activity, and a history which attempts to ignore this fact is not merely emasculated but unintelligible. The first purpose of this book is to demonstrate how closely attitudes to sexual matters

discusses the relationship between the Orient and the Occident in terms of over-use and abuse of sex that recalls the post-modernist theories relating to sexual politics. With the triumph of western values and ethics, Africa and the Orient in general have been treated as a subdued feminine body at the mercy of its aggressor, Western masculinity. The issuing violence of imperial conquests and colonial wars has been only a perpetuation of a certain male paradigm that believes in domination and subjugation over all that is feminine, womanly and can easily be pacified, underprivileged and almost perpetually kept in *statu pupillari.*

Therefore, the gender role of African men and Western women comes often to be reversed or not as commonly understood, because of what can be termed as 'the colonization factor'. Upon Aimée's and Modin's arrival in Congheria's UPC bureau in Laccryville (Algiers), Solo notices that while Modin carries his suitcases with delicacy, Aimée is rougher and is the one in control of the situation. Solo is left confused as to who is the male and the female among the two. The implication of this scene on the reader is that both Modin and Aimée are engaged in acts of transgression or mutual exchange of traditional and usually fixed gender roles.[14]

In fact, these same cultural sensibilities, with implications reflecting undesirable African realities, are voiced by the Nigerian feminist scholar, Nkiru Nzegwu. With direct reference to her Igbo background, she observes that "…the emergence of a healthy Igbo culture and political philosophy will require breaking down reactionary dogmas that have arisen in response to the colonially imposed patriarchal structure." For her the postcolonial experiment has been a failure because models of perceptions of gender roles have barely changed since colonial times. Therefore, at the level of power structure little progress is expected before

> …an imaginatively rethinking of the very foundations of society, and ridding it of fictive traditions and ideologies that forced women to adopt a diminished worldview. [O]nce we know that fictive traditions reinforced the prevailing anti-female ideology in the culture, we need not hold onto reactionary principles and specious traditions.[15]

Nzegwu acknowledges the setbacks of African tradition; a conclusion which Armah rarely reaches since he seems to frequently blame the negative part of tradition on some non-Africans' coercions and desire for exploitation of Africans. Armah, at least with the publications of his

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interlock with other social attitudes and even dictate them." Gordon Rattary Taylor, *Sex in History*. (1954), <http://www.ourcivilization.com/smartboard/shop/taylor/sexhst/chap1.htm>

[14] Michel Foucault has named this case. His word is "sexual inverts" where the female acts as male and the male female. Yet Foucault's explanation cannot be used as an interpretive tool in our discussion because Foucault does not contrast the cultural values of Europe with non-Europeans. He contrasts only European middle class' sexuality with that of other section of society. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*. Vol. 2 *The Use of Pleasure*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books, (1990)

[15] Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu, *Family Matters: Feminist Concepts in African Philosophy of Culture*. State University of New York Press, (2006), pp. 20-21.

last two novels, seems determined to give African women the central place Nzegwu and her class of feminist activists' claims to have existed in Africa's millennial past. Kwame Ayivor, in his critique of *Osiris Rising*, notes that Armah's Kemetic choice of names for his principal characters (Isis/Ast and Osiris/Asar) indicates his "ideological fleshing out of the whitewashed Greek influence from African classical civilizations and African-traditionalizing the Greek-imposed version of Isis-Osiris myth…"[16] And debunking the Greek myth and its ideological matrix implies debunking the corner stones upon which this matrix is based. The kind of male-female relationship determines, as explained below, which matrix one ascribes to and identifies with. Seeking true egalitarian ends with both sexes can be said to be Armah's main emphasis about what best distinguishes the African matrix from its Greek counterpart. The narrators of both *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* are women (Ast and Lindela, respectively) propagating their own remedying ideologies. They assume central roles in the unfolding of the drama. This fact shows the extent to which Armah, too, is conscious about the gender side of the battle as a major part in Africa's quest for a constructive African identity. Even before these last two works, Araba Jesiwa and Abena together with a host of other women perform very active roles along with their male counterparts of pathfinders and healers in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*.

While being conscious of the depth of his drama, Armah goes on validating Cheikh Anta Diop's thesis which bears that Africa has always been predisposed to matriarchy, whereas Europe is more in favour of patriarchy[17]. Perhaps Armah's thesis is more ambitious than just providing illustrations. He seems to advocate the opinion that multicultural dialogues and approaches are doomed to failure since despite all the good-will of Humanism, people across the colonial divide cannot contradict the essences of the cultures to which they belong. While Europe and the west in general is bent on standardizing its Greek patriarchal notions of beauty and pleasure, Africans ascribing to the same notions are only defeating their purposes in seeking European approval. Carrying on along Diop's idea, Greg Thomas opines that "…it is merely 'masculine imperialism' which claims superiority for patriarchy while assigning a wild erotic inferiority to matriarchy." Greg follows: "This sexual imperialism is fundamentally

[16] Kwame Ayivor, "'The Beautyful Ones Were Born and Murdered': Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of African History and the Pan-Africanist Dream in *Osiris Rising*", *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2003; 38; 37, p. 54

[17] Diop maintains: "Negro matriarchy is as alive today as it was during antiquity. In regions where the matriarchal system has not been altered by external influences (Islam, etc.) it is the woman who transmits political rights. This derives from the general idea that heredity is effective only through matrilineally" Chiekh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. Trans. Mercer Cook. Laurence Hill Books, (1974) p.143 Furthermore, he adds "… the dichotomy between the patriarchal North and the matriarchal South. The Osiris-Isis-Horus myth reflects the virtues of familial harmony and of fertility in which the woman enjoys due respect and pride of place. But Indo-European culture as a culture which had systematically subjugated womanhood, had troubles coming to terms with that positive image of the myth." Reported by Isidore Okpewho in: Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge University Press, (1983), p. 241.

racial, for matriarchy is not viewed as a conscious systematic choice by a given society; it is pictured as an uncivilized precursor of today's modern, white patriarchal west."[18]

To illustrate the idea of sexual imperialism as being firmly anchored to the Greek paradigm, Armah suggests that Modin's matriarchal dispositions make him easily abused by the more patriarchally-predisposed Aimée. Thus Modin is warned by his African American friend: "Blue eyes gon eat you, brother. Blue eyes gon eat you for soul food. That's all she is looking for. Soul food. Things her people threw and wouldn't eat." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 200) Consequently, Modin keeps only subserviently tied, unaware of the schemes of what he innocently thinks 'his American girl-friend'. The violent ending at the end of the novel reflects Armah's thesis about the futility of Humanism as an ideology. Armah at the end of drama shows how Aimée has been right from the start ready, because, predisposed, if not actually trained, to practice violence. For her the pain she suffers at the hands of the French soldiers in the Algerian desert is processed and taken as part of some 'necessary catharsis'. Life for her, Armah seems to imply, is more like a Greek tragedy where tears and inflicted pain are part of the ordinary and the norm. Meanwhile, Modin bleeds to death, that is, not reaching any possible redemption, because essentially he never processes pain as catharsis. For in the end, Armah suggests that there is no factor called African catharsis. Likewise, captured slaves in the infamous triangular trade are victims of an alien culture that is ready to thingify human beings and no amounts of catharsis can minimize or hide such atrocities.

With the related scene of Aimée reporting to what seems to be her superior, that is, Jorge Manuel's mistress[19], Armah might be making a case that Aimée is only reactivating her Amazonian heritage. The image of the woman-warrior and "male-hating females"[20], who finds it quite easy to ride horses, is again Greek, and Armah can be said to be debunking the Greek myth of Amazonian women by dramatizing such a myth as simply a reaction to the Greeks' patriarchal attitudes. Armah's reading seems to indicate that in order for the Greeks to

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[18] Thomas Greg, *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power*. Indiana University Press, (2007), p. 16 Greg similarly maintains: "Engaging Cheikh Anta Diop and Ifi Amadiume's writing s on matriarchy and patriarchy enables a radical, categorical challenge to sexual imperialism in the name of Pan-Africanism, grassroots Pan-Africansim worldwide.", p. 22

[19] Where the reader makes sure that Jorge Manuel's mistress, with whom he has drinks at the bar, is Aimée's immediate superior in the secret hierarchy. For this same mistress comes with Aimée the next day to Solo's lodgings and asks to recover the notebooks. Upon his refusal to give the notebooks, Solo never misses how the mistress "was angrier than the girl" and the manner in which she bursts at Aimée saying: "Child, let's go out of here … Why'd you give them to him in the first place?" (1972: 271)

[20] This is one explanation enhanced by Vicki Noble who also thinks that: "[W]hen patriarchal tribes entered territories occupied by matriarchal peoples, the lack of obvious roles for husbands and fathers was a glaring difference that distinguished them from their neighbors. The Scythians, for instance, lived next door to the matriarchal Sarmatians among whose women were warriors and priestesses, and even ordinary women were buried at the center of their kurgans in honor of their centrality within the community. The Scythians would have no doubt named the Sarmatians "Amazons," meaning, "no-husband-ones." Vicki Noble, "Those without Husbands: How the Amazons Got their Name" in: *Societies of Peace*, 2nd World Congress on Matriarchal Studies. San Marcos and Austin USA. Sept. 29/30---Oct.1/2, 2005. <http://www.second-congress-matriarchal-studies.com/lectures.html>

subjugate women and attribute subservient, and sometimes even demeaning, roles to women, the Greeks had to create the image of negative Amazons who upset the norms of Greek domesticity, mode of delicacy, tenderness, affectionate child-bearing and caring. By 'othering' Amazons, ancient Greeks felt free to perpetuate male dominance and patriarchy. The white woman in the slave ship in *Two Thousand Seasons* is one clear example of Armah's understanding of this Amazonian past. Witness the narrator's description:

> Now from the gate to the falling came first an apparition exactly like a ghost: a pale white woman in white clothes moving with a disjointed, severe, jerky walk, like a profoundly discontented walker, but an angry beginner. Her face was squeezed in a severe frown that had formed three permanent vertical creases on her lower forehead in a space between her eyes. She had no eyebrows. Eyelashes she had, but they were hard to discern, being white and therefore merging into the pallor of her face. (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p. 119)

The white woman, Armah portrays, stands out of place with the geography surrounding her. The vertical creases, the unusual space between her eyes, and the absence of the eyebrows are all othering features that further alienate this white woman in the African jungle. Her slaving activities, as Armah shows, contradict the human norm and the beauty of the place where she performs her nefarious work. She is a true "Amazon", very faithful to her roots in the steeps of ancient Greece.

3. On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Greek Violent Past: Matriarchy Suppressed

The Greek historian, Herodotus reports that there lived during the sixth century BC in a place beyond the Black Sea (probably modern day Kazakhstan) some nomadic societies composed mainly of women that were known as Amazons. These fantastic tribes of women got intermarried with Scythians and they together fought king Darius I of Persia. Amazons, it needs to be stressed, had intercourse with Scythians just for the sake of succession. They used to kill their male babies and rear only the female ones. On account of how Scythians and Amazonians met, Herodotus reports that during one of his many travels, Hercules came to rest in their country and fell asleep. On his awakening he did not find his horse and thus he was lured to search inside a nearby forest. There, "he found in a cave a strange being, between a maiden and a serpent, whose form from the waist upwards was like that of a woman, while all

below was like a snake."[21] By way of exchange, the Amazon woman proposed that in order to get his mare and luggage back, Hercules had to take her as a mistress first. The result of this brief meeting was three sons, the third of whom, Scythia, became the founder of a warrior race with whom the Amazons allied in their war against the Greeks. Once captured and taken prisoner, Amazons revolted and killed all their Greek enslavers at sea. With little knowledge of seafaring and uncertain of any destination whatsoever, Amazons sailed near the land of Scythians. Some further versions of the myth add that in order to shoot the bows more accurately, Amazons used to cut off one breast. After a brief interval of conflict, they got married to Scythians. Amazons proved to be authoritarian wives and they refused the traditional roles of child-caring and motherhood. They suggested going back to their former nomadic wildlife, back from where they were taken first as prisoners, north of the land Tanais. With Scythian men packing their wives' belonging for the journey ends Herodotus' account. A version of Homer's *Iliad* indicates that Achilles once fell in love with the Amazon Penthesilea who came to help the Trojans during their war against the Greeks. While she was dying, Achilles bowed down before the fierce warrior he had just slain, wishing she were still alive[22].

According to Joshua S. Goldstein, Amazon women always feed into the current image of Greece's uncivilized other. The contrast usually defines the settled, 'tamed' and civilized Greek girl who holds on to ‘normal’ gender positions in Greek society. Her image is opposed to that of the ruthless and ungovernable savage of the Black Sea hinterland. For only within this perspective, "[T]he Greek Amazons – always imagined as somewhere outside the civilizing sphere of Greek conquest – represented a symbolic place for Greek heroes to subdue the barbarians on their periphery."[23] King Theseus is said to have raped Hippolyta, the Amazonian Queen's own sister. While subject to rape and male violence, Amazons, it can be said, can only disprove and defeat their own purpose in keeping their autonomy. Their subsequent defeats before the Greeks only reinforce their exotic status of being deviations from what is normal and civilizational. Greek culture indicates that Amazons were even unable to procure their own food. For the Greeks, this is further evidence that women should always be kept in check, implying that their matriarchal system as reactionary and non-operative.

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[21] Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus*. (Book IV), 440 B.C.E, trans. George Rawlinson <http://classics.mit.edu//Herodotus/history.6.vi.html>

[22] In *The Iliad*, Homer portrays the Amazons as "a horde of warrior-women who strive against men, and with whom conflict is dangerous even to the bravest of heroes" (Bennette, 2).

[23] Goldstein concludes his understanding about the Greeks' conception of gender roles with the belief that: "[T]hese mythical women warrior societies represent a foreign, topsy–turvy world. Representing women in this way reinforced men’s construction of their own patriarchal societies as orderly and natural. Although some feminists embrace Amazon myths, the various representations of Amazons through history have carried a mixed message because men use those myths to reinforce their own masculinity." Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender: How Gender Shapes the War System and Vice Versa***.** Cambridge University Press, (2001), p. 35.

What is certain is that catharsis is of Greek origin, and concerning the cultural poetics of desire, it constitutes one component in the paradigm that is from first to last Greek and Western, and which, in Armah's novels, competes with the African one. But before shedding light on the idea of catharsis, and for the objective of understanding the full scope of this presumed Greek paradigm, let us clarify that desire, as outlined by Armah in his books, starting with *Why Are We So Blest?*, is approached as an issue that is highly indicative of the interlink existing between culture and politics. Such an interlink actually distinguishes and later determines the boundaries between two worldviews, cultural approaches and systems of knowledge. Desire is Armah's preoccupation with instances where manifestations of the erotic hang upon and mark what is primarily cultural. Aimée's displeasure with patriarchal modes of organization makes her prone to unconscious revenge. One can easily notice how capitalistic modes of production (as they are based on maximum profit reaching high levels of exploitation and violence) leave her with no choice but to adopt Amazon-like postures. That patriarchal violence that is exercised on her is reproduced or encoded again in her relation with Modin. This latter is not yet fully adjusted to patriarchal norms. Better than Modin in this regard we have Dr. Longai whose remark, when meeting Aimée who visited Vilima City of the Kanasa state as part of her training program for the African Summer, has to be carefully read. Aimée asks Joromi Longai: "It doesn't interest you whether you satisfy me?", meaning sexually. Her interlocutor answers: "I'm not a fool, to try and satisfy a white woman. You want me to fetch water in a basket. "(*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 144) The image of water being carried in a basket can be indicative of the extent to which Aimée is past Longai's power for satisfaction. And given his matriarchal dispositions, Modin becomes necessarily Aimée's victim since he tries to satisfy what Longai takes as an unsatisfiable and reactionary Amazon. Armah dramatizes Modin's initial unawareness of the exclusiveness of both patriarchy and matriarchy as a mortal handicap.

Eva C. Keuls in her study, *The Reign of the Phallus* (1985), suggests that patriarchal attitudes in Western cultures today can be traced to Athenians' celebration of what can be called 'phallocracy', or the reign of the phallus. By phallocracy she means not only: "male dominance solely within private sphere of sexual activity." Much wider than this limited definition, 'phallocracy' can be:

> …a concept [that] denotes a successful claim by a male elite to general power, buttressed by a display of the phallus less as an organ of union or mutual pleasure than as a kind of weapon: a spear or a war club, and a specter of sovereignty. In sexual terms, phallocracy takes such forms as rape, disregard of sexual satisfaction of women, and access to the bodies of prostitutes who are literally enslaved or allowed no other means of support.

> In the political sphere, *it spells imperialism and patriarchal behavior in civic affairs*[24].

Limiting her focus to visual arts like vase painting, Keuls concludes that early Greeks had very negative notions about feminity. For purposes of attaining uncontested power, Athenians, as well as their neighbours in other city-states, had been active in the production of a series of mental images that reduce, devalue or trivialise the role of women into positions that could not endanger male supremacy. Interesting though is Keuls' principal thesis which is centered more on a modern Western perpetuation of that old Greek understanding. Not only there exists in Western culture today, Keuls argues, a perpetuation of this Greek paradigm vis-à-vis women, but there is also an attempt at suppressing the origins of it. "The story of the phallic rule at the root of Western civilization" she adds, "has been suppressed, as a result of a near-monopoly that men have held in the Classics, by neglect of rich pictorial evidence, by prudery and censorship, and by a misguided desire to protect an idealized image of Athens."[25] Very frequently, we find images portraying the female body as obscene, with a marked absence of the phallus, and hence showing men denying women any intellectual capacities. In fact, it is not only in painting that the Greeks' debasement of women can be witnessed. Their famous literary texts, Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, reveal the same demeaning thoughts about the other sex.

The link between Athenians of yore and modern day Americans is also spotted by Armah's Modin, who in conversation with Mike, the fascist, at the Thanksgiving Day, derides and belittles Odyssey's role. Putting the violent suppression of the Indians as an argument approving of the state of "the blest", Mike answers: "…we took their savage paradise and made it complex. It has two poles now, and many gradations and permutations in between. It's got heavens and hells, as you say—built into it. After all it wouldn't be Graeco-Christian if it didn't." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 100) It is true that Mike refers in this context to the

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[24] Eva C. Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus* (1985), University of California Press, (1993), pp. 2-3. (Emphasis mine). In this regard, there is an opinion that Europeans, while at the height of their New World discoveries, had actually 'exported' their patriarchal presumptions to other races (American Aboriginals, African slaves, mulattoes and so on) by simply mistreating these subjects. Hence, we can talk about the gradual diffusion of the Greek patriarchal paradigm within peoples other than Europeans. "The white colonists provided important role models to other males. And what was the model? A virile, *macho* figure, sexually rapacious, and domineering in relation with women. On the plantations, the haciendas, and the ranches, popular sexual experience had seldom been far from rape and the whip, and the Creole world tended to leave a heritage of sex and violence. The white-set racial hierarchy was pursued by mestizos and mulattoes in their relations to Indians and blacks." Göran Therborn, *Between Sex and Power*. Routledge, London, (2004), p. 159. For her part, Keuls, in fact, begs the readers to consider that" [I]n the case of a society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to the male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, create a mythology of rape and engage in rampant saber-rattling, it is not inappropriate to refer to a reign of the phallus. Classical Athens was such a society. " Eva C. Keuls, *Opcit.*, p. 1

[25] Eva C. Keuls, *Ibid.*, p. 1

configuration of modern capitalistic society: elites as well as lower social strata "There's Olympus. Below that there are the plains of mediocrity. Then, Tartarus." Nevertheless, this division of people into elites and crowds cannot take place without the debasement of women in the first place, and the suppression of the American Indians' matriarchal culture on the ground of its primitiveness. Mike concludes his side of the argument with: "You agree that's a much superior arrangement to just a simple primitive paradise." It is true that by comparing the Indians' paradise with modern America, Modin as well as Mike do verbally state matriarchal dispositions in competition with patriarchy. Yet suggesting the name of Odyssey can be sufficient proof that both Modin and Mike are having matriarchy and patriarchy dichotomy in mind.

The reduction of the Odyssey's mythical and symbolic weight to matriarchal and patriarchal understanding only in the argument here looks quite unjustified but the weight of evidence is no less heavy too. Walter Copland Perry, in a study entitled *The Women of Homer* (1898), has noted that Homer portrays women as entirely dependent on men. This gives experts of culture a good instance of how Greeks used to treat feminity. Telemachos, Odysseus' son, has full power to bestow his mother Penelope's hand in marriage. Women were even offered as prizes to victors in Athletic contests. A woman captured in war, however high her rank, becomes the slave of her captor; we have the case of Achilles who takes possession of Briseis. In addition, the way women are represented in the Greek scheme of things makes it easy to blame them as perpetuators of violence since it is their infidelity, lust, plotting, inadequacy of mind or mere jealousy (in short, often 'maladjusted' desire) that ignites revenge and wars. Their ‘inferior’ minds seem to be always hiding troubles which men, in the end, have to pay for and set right. Goddess Hera's opposition to consort Zeus (which is a result of jealousy from Zeus' other matches), makes her convincing when she says she is going to give victory to the Greeks and lures Zeus into sleep. Zeus' fury on awakening is made to appear as a result of her initial mischief[26]. Athena, Goddess of war, reflection and prudence, attacks and beats Aphrodite, but she too loves (desires) the prudent and cunning Odysseus who has many wives[27]. And even in the rare cases where women happen to be virtuous and loyal, they, albeit unwillingly, trigger violence and bloodshed. This view can be easily characterized as a dead-end; this is in line with patriarchal understanding, and to which the Greeks are zealous adherents. In the end, men generally engage in battles about honour and heroism just to give the impression or feed that strange vanity of having to fight and risk one's life in the highway of gallantry in order to

[26] Walter Copland Perry, *The Women of Homer* (1898), Kessinger Publishing, (2004), pp. 96-103.
[27] Walter Copland Perry, *Ibid.*, pp. 107-113.

deserve or claim one's woman. Faithful and long suffering Penelope has had to prove her worth against the wishes of the numerous suitors during Odysseus' long absence. His return is bloody simply because his wife has remained faithful, in opposition to many 'ordinary' women.[28]

According to Hugh Lloyd-Jones these constant conflicts and antagonisms so common in ancient Greek life prove advantageous since it is thanks to these values, well-ingrained in the Greeks, that their society lacks the Christian doctrine of Original sin. Since gods and goddesses themselves provide imperfect images and actually err and cause real material and spiritual damage, people naturally expect and acknowledge each others' human limitations and shortcomings. Reality for the early Greeks allows colours and contradictory views, and teaches these contradictions as part of a necessary didactics that helps fashion so-called democratic society with a healthy civil life.[29] Nevertheless, Lloyd-Jones does not appear to have given second thoughts about celebrated Athenian democracy. If indeed, early Athenians were exemplary citizens and understood the ethics from the constantly fighting deities, then that proclaimed 'model society' establishes peace with itself only at the cost of mistaking, if not really debasing, its feminine half. Most of the time, love for them is defined as defilement and rape. For this reason, one wonders why nearly all the negative images arising from the constantly warring deities were involved or associated with women, and why it is, most of the time, men, not women, who have the capacity to restore order.

Both in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, and even earlier in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, Armah honours women with the enduring task of keeping order in Africa. His switch to the concept of the ancient Egyptian justice of *Ma'at* falls within his purpose of disapproving of the Greeks' smear campaign against women. Their paradigm is placed in Armah's imagination as mutually exclusive with the principle of sacred feminity prevailing during Pharonic Egypt. The heliographs which Ast and Lindela search for and discover are meant to downplay the effects of what can be called the Greek matrix of desire! In the old scripts, Lindela learns the secrets that built up the humane civilization of ancient Egypt. Meanwhile, they discover also the reasons why it fell down. Changing perspectives over the status of women from participants and partners to objects-like commodities brought ruin to that civilization. Put differently, when desire is perverted and starts favouring one sex over the

[28] Walter Copland Perry, *Ibid.*, pp. 176-190.
[29] Hugh Lloyd-Jones observes that Euripides' play *Hippolytus*: "He[Dionysus] was the child not of the mortal princess Semele, but of Demeter's daughter Persephone by her father Zeus, and was captured and devoured by evil deities belonging to an earlier generation of the gods, the Titans. But his heart was rescued by Athena and brought to Zeus, who finally gave Dionysus a second birth through Semele. The Titans were consumed by fire, and men sprang from their ashes; they were thus a mixture of the evil nature of the Titans and the divine nature of Dionysus." Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Ancient Greek Religion", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 145, N° 4, December 2001, p. 459.

other, the end can be expected. Astw tells Lindela: "Once I asked why some men have their mother's names as their middle names. I was informed that there was a time, long ago, when it was our custom for boys to be given the names of their mothers as last names, and girls to take their fathers'. The clan name came last." In the end, the present patriarchal codes (of which naming is one) are late novelties, not to say perversions, instead of the norm and original rule. To the griot's wife, Astw, "That was encouraging, knowing that my ideas were not idle dreams, and that others had known them, even lived them." (*KMT*, p. 167)

In this regard, it is therefore quite important to note that the Greeks were far from any egalitarian projections of society, not even in parallel with the Egyptian model and its scope. Their frame of mind, as perceived from their mythology and history, reinforces this patriarchal debasement of women. Hence, this understanding only escalates the conflict in gender relation and gives birth to Amazonian kinds of illusory sets of self-esteem for women. Following the same Greek attitudes, and in order for Rome to keep its hegemony over Europe, patriarchal mindsets were deemed necessary for the purpose. Monica Sjoo articulates the Roman case as:

> The patriarchal machine, set in place by Roman conquest and well-oiled Christian ideology, ruled Europe by a threefold subjugation of mind, spirit and body. It took the raw resources of land, existing cultural customs and inventions, human energy and labor capacity (including female reproductive capacities) and ran these through the intellectual, religious and social-processing gears of state control, patri-focal class systems, and ontological theories of "earthly evil" meant to rationalize the very new and manmade evil of imperial domination. Rome could not control Europe forever by armed force; it had to control European mind and spirit – to condition the pagan people to exploit and police themselves. Christianity was a tool of this conditioning[30].

According to Sjoo, the adoption of Christianity as a state religion for imperial Rome inaugurates unprecedented levels of hostile attitudes against feminity and women. Woman, the Bible suggests, becomes responsible of luring Adam out of Heaven, hence the idea of original sin. Desire has been, ever since the advent of Christianity, equated with a form of perversion and slipping out of the Godly and heavenly norm. Sjoo contends that Christianity offered the Roman policy makers the best of all indoctrination policies to set their claims over the wide European territory. With the decline of the Roman Empire and the descent to the Dark Middle Ages the same negative outlooks vis-à-vis women and feminity were preserved by the petty

[30] Monica Sjoo, and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother*. New York, NY. Harper and Row Publishers. (1987) Cited in: Linda L. Hron, *Spirituality, Clinical Sexology and Sex Therapy: A Therapeutic Matrix for the New Millennium*. American Academy of Clinical Sexologists at Maimonides University. PhD Thesis, (2003), p. 77.

warring kingdoms. As a result, the modern nation-state is conditioned with these same uncompromising reserves of "sin, guilt and punishment…", where interests and sometimes even the future of this modern nation state automatically depended (not just colluded with) on the Church categorizations and definitions of what is the norm. Nearly all that becomes now secular needed the paradigms that have already been deployed from the spiritual authority, or church, in order to endure. Hence the reasons why the terminology bearing terms like 'heretic' and 'blasphemer' were slightly and very slowly modulated into 'troublemaker'[31]. And this is, too, the reason why Modin derides and refutes Mike's explanation of the idea of the blest America. For Modin, without the accumulations or the multiplications of the Greek and Christian violence effected through the centuries to sacred feminity, America cannot enjoy its 'blest haven' status, a position that justifies its modern superiority.

Interesting, however, is the idea that "[A]gainst the background of pagan Greek and Roman culture, which incorporated temple prostitutes into worship activities," Philip Yancey observes, "the early church went through a period of purging."[32] Purging in this context is a form of surgery affecting a Roman cover-up of their real desire in maintaining political power firmly in hand. Every form of sexuality out of wedlock or channeled to other purposes than reproduction is judged obscene, vile and bestial. Indeed, it is Christianity's very shrewdness at engineering its own norms and values that form the contempt of most of its critics. For Philip Jenkins, the criticism of Christianity is narrowed to Catholicism, which he finds it "a puerile religion" since it has been logically inconsistent by its hatred of women and prohibition of sexuality. The irony of it is that priests, those who are supposed to be the representatives and defenders of the faith, commit blatant crimes ranging from sexual harassment to homosexuality. Such a faith, according to the same opinion, has so far survived thanks only to the stupefying ideology practiced on women and poor people. Without the appeal it made to these wretched sections of society, Catholicism would have been long dead[33]. In trying to express its moral convictions regarding premarital and marital sexuality, marriage and sexual life in general, Christianity, according to Joseph Monti, mistakes 'passionate moral persuasions and rules of behavior' with 'the foundational and post- or meta-ethical imagination'. In other words, in order to pass final and, at the same time, just opinions on people's moral choices, or

[31] Monica Sjoo, *Ibid.*, p. 78.

[32] Yancey accounts that in the Christian early era, that is, during and after Saint Augustine and Jerome "…church authorities issued edicts forbidding sex on Thursdays, the day of Christ's arrest; on Fridays, the day of his death; on Saturdays, in honor of the Blessed Virgin; and on Sundays in honor of the departed saints. Wednesdays sometimes made the list too, as did the 40-day fast periods before Easter, Christmas, and Pentecost, and also feast days and days of the Apostles, as well as the days of female impurity. The list escalated until, as John Boswell has estimated, only 44 days a year remained available for marital sex." Philip Yancey, *Christianity Today*. Vol. 47, No. 10, October 2003, p. 46

[33] Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*. Oxford University Press, (2003), p. 112.

whether to say they are ethical or not, Christianity should have thought initially from beyond its own ethical stores and normative models. The real question is not whether to condemn Christianity for its preaching of sexual repression and hatred of women, but, more importantly, to question the very basis of how it formulates judgments[34]. In this regard, it is worth considering that St. Augustine's role in shaping western norms and mores are still in practice up to now. This one single priest has greatly shaped that attitude of "eroticism-hating sexual dualism that continues to be perpetuated by authoritarian-oriented [patriarchal] Christian dogma…" and based initially on the contradiction of simultaneous self-negation and self-affirmation. "From a stance of self-affirmation, desire is not a sin. On the contrary, sin is the refusal to desire growth or to exercise one's capacity for it: sin is the refusal to believe in oneself. Sexuality is the crucible of faith in which each of us struggles with the vision of our basic nature."[35]

What is remarkable though is that patriarchy can generate negative repercussions that are not limited only to women. If ever women switch to the Amazonian model by retrieving, if only unconsciously, egalitarian social ethics, men can be subject to women's Amazonian violence! One departure from the norm, that is when the Matriarchal matrix is deflected to the Amazonian one because of patriarchal pressures, involves a second deviation affecting men. Solo observes the delicacy with which Modin conducts himself when first arriving in Laccryville: "The girl [Aimée] strode into the interior of the Bureau with long, loping strides. Her black companion walked more diffidently, looking ill at ease. His movement, quiet and catlike, had an almost effeminate smoothness, and made unnerving contrast with the girl's

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[34] Joseph Monti, *Arguing about Sex: The Rhetoric of Christian Sexual Morality*. State University of New York Press, (1995), pp. 143-144. Monti advances that it befits the Christianity critics well if they can investigate the premises of Christianity's "…normative models and related images that inform principles of such specious ethical arguments…" For "[I]n discursive situations, such as these, it is the foundational and post-ethical imagination and confession that are directly at issue rather than the requirements of substantive ethical theory and argument." Joseph Monti, *Ibid.*, p. 143.

[35] Linda L. Hron, *Spirituality, Clinical Sexology and Sex Therapy: A Therapeutic Matrix for the New Millennium*. American Academy of Clinical Sexologists at Maimonides University. PhD Thesis, (2003), p. 200. Most recently, Dan Brown, author of the Bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) makes public of the Vatican's attempts at hiding from public attention the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Biblical scripts that preach differently from the official bible. The theory goes that there is a conspiracy that runs for centuries in the past that burned, killed and tortured every group that tries to present Jesus as an ordinary human being, who though mystic and committed, was not divine. Dan Brown believes that "establishing Christ's divinity was critical to the further unification of the Roman empire and to the new Vatican power base. By officially endorsing Jesus as a Son of God, Constantine turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable." And "because Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus' death, thousands of documents existed chronicling His life as a *mortal* man. To rewrite the history books, Constantine knew he would need a bold stroke… Constantine commissioned a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up and burned." Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*. Corgi Books (2004) Italics in the original. It is clear, then, that like any other man, Jesus fell in love with his female companion, and used to be madly in love with her. Some even add that he conceived a daughter from this wife who once had been a whore. To some of these Gnostic tradition Jesus' real life on earth is simply fashioned along that of Osiris, Isis and Seth and Horus.

awkward angularity." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 57) And it is here that the problem of political desire uncovers identity issues of the deepest kind. Aimée, the "Amazon", hankers after Modin only because she is the victim of the patriarchally capitalistic ethics of hard work, persistence and perseverance. The heavy toll of work has made her insensitive to her feminity and these ethics are read by Armah as some form of self-denial, or further, self-suppression that involves one in a serious case of identity quest. She genuinely gives this assessment: "God, I never thought I'd beg anyone to stop exciting me. This was just dead tissue before." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 95). One can still advance that patriarchy, as practiced through the harsh capitalist modes of production, 'unfeminises' her. Therefore, her turn to Modin, or desire for him, like the old "Amazon" tribes that Herodotus mentions, is only for mating purposes.

But Modin should not have expected a return for his love gifts. The need to awaken a dead tissue and feel her feminity back overrides and seriously challenges a normal love relation based on equal needs and respect or reciprocity! However, notwithstanding that Modin is bleeding and actually dying, at the very end of *Why Are We So Blest?*, Aimée meekly kisses him and asks him: "Do you love me?"/ "Say you love me, Modin, please." Aimée's insistence on hearing Modin's acknowledgment of her love and in these condition shows that she is as avaricious as any of the French tormenting soldiers. She is so selfish as to ask confirmations of love without ever caring to match the love she asks for with dividends from her. Like some voracious animal, she even drinks his blood: 'his blood filled my mouth. I swallowed it." And true to the Amazonians' reactionary principle, with his productive organ gone, Aimée has no use whatsoever for Modin. Thus ends Aimée's narrative: "We left him there in the desert… The little policeman here still doesn't understand. He brought some people to ask me about 'my friend in the desert,' and they smiled at everything I said." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 288) No less important is Modin's mistaking of this Amazonian factor in his relationship with Aimée, that keeps him undecided about how to face and assess his relation with this presumed lover[36].

Due to the widely-circulating images of masculinity and what it is supposed to involve, man too has experienced "a bewildering ordeal". Under patriarchal standards, men almost always are expected to suppress emotions, never express intimate affinities as these latter are considered to be the ordinary feminine signs of weakness. The result is a delusion on the part of the modern man where centuries of patriarchal 'conditioning' leave him vulnerable to

[36] Linda L. Hron, *Ibid.*, p. 85.

suicide, violence and further abuse of women. Hron concurs with the idea of the male's delusion and loss of the sense of who he is:

> Despite the confinement and rigidity of the traditional male role, at least in the past men seemed to have an identity that was acknowledged and accepted by both men and women. Now even that has eroded, leaving men with a profound loss of identity. Then, adding insult to injury, just as men began to emerge from the nightmare of patriarchy, women found themselves conflicted and confused by their own unconscious patriarchal conditioning dictating what a real man should be[37].

Hron cites Kingma in order to render the full purports of this 'patriarchal conditioning' on men.

> In our quickness to focus on our own deprivation, what we have overlooked is that men are as oppressed by the male role as we have always been by women's. Men aren't being the way they are simply to frustrate or negate us. They, too, behave according to the expectations of society, which, since time immemorial has divided up social obligations along lines predicated by the dictates of gender and the inexorable demands of the forward movement of human civilization.[38]

The problem of duality inside the patriarchally-subjected consciousness is witnessed here down to its marrow. According to both scholars cited above, neither man nor woman in the modern condition are left with a clear boundary that adequately sets the definition of who they are. If women are drawn to violence that violence reflects but reactionary expressions that defy their abuse by patriarchy. Similarly and simultaneously, when men seem to acknowledge such an abuse and refrain from their sins of the past or even when they intensify this abuse, women are just driven to further abuse and reaction! Eventually the case becomes like a descent into the incoherence of incoherence where the human balance, or matriarchy, is twice suppressed.

The scene where Modin is castrated and left to bleed to death by French soldiers in the Algerian desert is full of images reflecting Christian prohibitions and floggings before sex. Armah's choice of the circumstances and place of the final scene in *Why Are We So Blest?* shows his own interpretation of the West's religious circular reasoning and a rare craftsmanship in designing an antidote. To start with, castration had been the practice of the early Christian fathers who sought relief from any lascivious sexual thoughts through castration. These fathers prefer the life of hardship away from any touches of civilization, which is usually interpreted as temptation and can be found usually near the wild desert. With the elimination of what they considered the impure reproductive faculty, the believers felt free to worship their religion and

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[37] Linda L. Hron, *Ibid.*, p. 85.

[38] D.R. Kingma, *The Men We Never Knew; How to Deepen Your Relationship with the Man You Love*. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press. (1993) Cited in: Linda L. Hron, *Spirituality, Clinical Sexology and Sex Therapy: A Therapeutic Matrix for the New Millennium*. PhD Thesis, (2003), p. 86.

experience Christ's final suffering. Sharing grounds with serpents and scorpions is a torture which a Christian father takes with pride. Yet, even under these unsolicited conditions, the thought of the lustful alternative rarely leaves the devout Christian mystic. Thus Jerome admits:

> How often when I was living in the desert which affords to hermits a savage dwelling place, parched by a burning sun, did I fancy myself amid the pleasures of Rome. I sought solitude because I was filled with bitterness.... I, who from the fear of hell had consigned myself to that prison where scorpions and wild beasts were my companions, fancied myself among bevies of young girls. My face was pale and my frame chilled from fasting, yet my mind was burning with the cravings of desire, and the fires of lust flared up from my flesh that was as that of a corpse. I do not blush to avow my abject misery[39].

Back in his mind, Jerome cannot shake himself totally free from what he flees and perhaps fruitlessly tries to hide. He is frank enough to admit that the raison d'être for his flight to the wild desert. The escape in his case is an attempt to curb the temptation of lust and sex. Like the modern French soldiers at the end of Armah's third novel, Jerome is doubtful of his sexual identity. To insist on considering himself as exempt from sex is to persist in a lie about chastity and purity that is causing him 'abject misery'. Hence, because they are castrated or, at least, identified with the castration past of their Christian fathers, the French soldiers do not allow Modin to keep in connection with Aimée as he is not castrated. In their incapacity (impotency) to arouse Aimée, the four French soldiers used Modin against Aimée for the purpose of getting him ready for casteration. "They used me to get Modin hard" (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 288) Aimée reports, but it is very likely that the purpose from Modin's torture was their inability to make Aimée yield, too. Done brutally and left bleeding to death, Armah wants to say, the kind of life sanctified by the new identity of sexless austerity and permanent penance, the way the soldiers themselves live, can be equivalent to death. Neither Modin nor the French soldiers can survive such an approach to life. Excessive sexual mores in his case and Spartan fare in theirs do not ensure a healthy relation in between. In other words, the French soldiers cannot allow Modin to keep company with Aimée while they themselves are starving (desiring) for sex. We observed earlier that with Aimée, Modin is still uncertain who he is. But so are the French soldiers in the desert when they see the couple. Had they been able to enjoy (to desire) the company of some women of theirs, they would not have resorted to their awful deed at the end. Modin finally comes to confirm his earlier suspicions that he had been just "another rare

[39] Quoted in: Gordon Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History*. (1954), <http://www.ourcivilization.com/smartboard/shop/taylor/sexhst/chap19.htm>

creature, an African vehicle to help them [white women] the strange destination of their soul." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 157)

4. Desire & Violence: Patriarchy as it Grips over the Ethical Field

The debate over the roots and implications of violence when placed in the context of the politics of desire needs to be discussed. Perhaps the most fitting definition of that phenomenon is what Richard Jackson provides in his book *(Re) Constructing Cultures of Violence and Peace* (2004). Violence for him is multilayered. At its top, there stands one form which Jackson calls "Structural Violence" or "institutionalized violence". This form

> …refers to the injury and harm—physical and psychological—that results from exploitative or unjust social, political and economic systems. Most often, violence of this kind is the result of the hierarchal ordering of categories of people within society. In other words, it is indirect and lacks an identifiable or individual perpetrator. Structural violence almost always occurs in the context of establishing, maintaining, extending, or challenging the hierarchal orderings of society—class, caste, or racial structures. Economic globalization, for example has created zones of low wage factory production where young women find themselves victimised by violent forms of patriarchal capitalism. The violence is embedded into economic, social, and political systems of those regions, but its effects are no less damaging to the lives and life chances of these young women than the effects of direct physical violence.[40]

Armah portrays Aimée, and Western women in general, as victims of this 'structural violence'. The economic system in which she is employed and paid, makes her depend on its hierarchal structure. During the training she took as part of the requirement for her Ph.D., Aimée voices these snub remarks: "I can't stand this place. Second year was supposed to get better, but everything's been pallid, boring, lifeless. My transcript says I'm doing fine. That's a lie. The whole thing is childish." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 143)

The final scene in *Why Are We So Blest?* brings us to the understanding that modern-day colonial soldiers, like the Christian fathers of yore, do lead a double life that is the result of false postulations and presumptions. In the same scene, we see violence and pain being processed as some inescapable part of life. In order to desire some perverse pleasure, both Aimée and her tormentors have had to maim Modin and sacrifice him as a useless bull.

[40] Richard Jackson, *(Re) Constructing Cultures of Violence and Peace*. Amsterdam—New York. N.Y. Rodopi B. V., (2004), p. 4.

Perhaps Aristotle does not mention catharsis directly in relation to desire or the pain inflicted from desire. It is true that he keeps on the subject of pain in very general and abstract manner. Eurydice, American novelist of Greek origin and author of the bestseller *F/32* (1992), talks in an interview about catharsis in the context of pain inflicted from sexual abuse[41]. Her comments draw excellent parallels with Aimée in Armah's third novel:

> I think that violence is cathartic and I think it has been so since the time Medea killed her children, and Clytemnestra killed her husband. There's something very cleansing about it, and clarifying. It creates a density and a lucidity that life, in its tepid dailyness does not provide. Violence provides intensity, and I think that balance in written or reproduced form is very sexy...I think that there's something liberating in the fantasy of violence. Actually, rape is the most common fantasy among women….It's my understanding that it's not because women want to be raped at all, but it provides them with a freedom from responsibility.[42]

For catharsis, she seems to articulate, preserves the sense of who this abused woman want to be but without caring to focus on who she actually is. This initial contradiction is what keeps people uneasy about catharsis as a regenerating and reinventing force in the Greek paradigm of desire. For this woman writer, there is no trouble in tracing such a history of violence in catharsis up to ancient Greece. Violence, according to Eurydice's male-dominated (patriarchal) culture, is constitutional of identity. Once more, violence, and as Eurydice conceives of it, feeds into the main current of what ancient Greeks and today's Westerners actively perceive about themselves as 'balanced' individuals and productive members in society. Violence, particularly sexual violence which goes initially with little respect of feminity, becomes constitutional to modern day Westerners. Without the purging impact that is subsequent to violence, so we are led to think, man or woman cannot function constructively. Eurydice does not hide it that she is for rape since women, according to her, do appreciate the violent way in which it is done. This violence is presumed to immune raped women from complaining about it. It frees them from responsibility and care, while fantasy, which might be a little variation from carelessness or abject and self-suppressing wish for forgetfulness, provides pleasure and assures avenues for satisfying inadequate desire. Therefore, women as well as men are supposed to integrate their identity along cathartic lines where violence is not only frequent and intrusive but actually the norm and the law.

The same fantasy and absence of a sustainable sense of logic in catharsis is observed by Tommie Lee Jackson when he says:

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[41] Eurydice, *F/32*. Fiction Collective 1992.
[42] Alexander Laurence, "An Interview with Eurydice", (1994) (Emphasis added) <http://www.altx.com/int2/eurudice.html>

> Modin had been made aware through Aimée herself of the perverse nature of their relationship. In a moment of passion, Aimée has made it clear that her responses to Modin were predicated on Fantasy, on whether she could sustain the illusion of Modin as the slave boy Nwangi caught up in a web of deceit, desire and danger manipulated by her and her settler husband.[43]

Fantasy, as it issues from catharsis, comes as a result for some justification. Aimée's justifies taking Modin for herself in terms other than partnership and mutual sexual gratification. For her, Modin is less artificial than the stimulating machine she used to test when they first met in the lab. Jackson draws the parallel between Aimée and her settler ancestral past where conquered people matter only in how far they gratify the need of the presumed superior settlers. This leaves the impression that desire for Aimée and her likes has been severely perverted.

In order to account for such perverted desire characteristic of western societies, Armah prefers to delve into sources prevailing before the rise of the Judeo-Christian restrictions. In order to do so, he has had first to explore the character of Aimée in her relationship with Modin. After that, and through Aimée's domineering attitude vis-à-vis Modin, Armah looks ready to go on with netting his thesis which amounts in the end to the idea that human races function constructively when they keep apart. The claim of a multicultural community with peaceful and harmonious attachments to one another is simply refuted in *Why Are We So Blest?* Although provocative and sometimes downright shocking, Armah's stand on the subject is not at all unjustified. Modin dies simply because as an African he cannot go on in life and live, like Aimée or the French soldiers, with the catharsis cost. If Aimée seems to extend her love and understanding just because she finally comes at odds (becoming sexually frigid) with the mechanistic drives of her society and its freezing and emotionally repressive regulations, then that extension cannot be innocent or genuine. Catharsis makes her a hypocrite and never a genuine lover. She is caught up in a vertigo of contradictions about self, love and sex that leave her psychologically unsettled, if not totally shattered, to the extent that in the end one wonders how she can pretend to offer honest care and love. In fact the reason why reference is made to Eurudice's *F/32* is that its heroine shows a lot of affinities with Aimée in Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* While all by herself and without being obliged to share her narrative with other characters as well, Ela uncovers a lot about her conscious life. Like Aimée, the name Ela is richly suggestive; it is "a pseudonym meaning orgasm". The blurb of the book reads: "[T]he sight of Ela stops all hearts. Ela is an expert on love. No matter how many people love her, she daily inspires more. She spends half her life avoiding the people who love her, and the other half making them love her. She is mind-blowing."[44]

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[43] Tommie Lee Jackson, *Ayi Kwei Armah and French Existentialism*. PhD Thesis, University of Nebraska (1985), p.124
[44] <http://nupress.northwestern.edu/title_f/32?ISBN=0-932511-38-4>

5. The African Feminine: Myth and Metaphor

Armah wraps his enquiry for the lost African matriarchy in a plethora of symbols carrying his philosophy of desire as a healing force. In Armah's last two novels, the ankh, the symbol unearthed by Lindela in her search for authenticity is actually the very one chosen by Armah to be the logo and the name of his publishing company, *Per Ankh*. Ast informs the cynical Afro-American Artist, Bailey, that Ankh is the "Sign of life. That was the ancient Egyptian word. *Ankh*. Life. Regeneration." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 131) According to the Dictionary of the Tarot, the Ankh stands for "[the] symbol of life, associated with the Phallus… Formed from the male (Osiris) and female (Isis) symbols. Union of heaven and earth, masculine and feminine [and] a key for unlocking the mysteries of life and death."[45] In Kemetic mythology, the goddess Isis casts all human females with divine attributions rendering them life-givers and therefore, sacred. Learning this fact helps Lindela and Ast to be more conscious with who they are; that is about their continental identity. They keep on searching for it, because they project their single efforts with Isis' efforts to rescue Osiris, searching for his body, giving him a proper burial and later searching again and recovering his mutilated parts just to honor him and preserve his creative life passion. Actually, Isis breathed life into the dead Osiris' body long enough to conceive the hawk-headed, mangod of courage, Horus. However, notwithstanding Asar's and Biko's fate that differ only in details from that of mythical Osiris, still the analogy of Osiris' metaphor holds firm. Both of them are assassinated because of the loving ideals they stand for. Like Osiris' duel with Seth, Asar and Biko simply refuse to play modest about what they regard as necessary for self-definition, their dire wish to find their authentic identity and genuine self-esteem. The two heroines conceive of their late lovers not just in terms of individual desire and limited commitment. Rather, it is Asar's and Jengo's enduring regenerative task of commitment and activism for Africa that keep Ast's and Lindela's fire (desire) alive for their late companions. Ast, for one, passionately informs Asar in their first reunion:

> […] there are things I know about you. They attract me. I'm not talking infatuation. And I'm not interested in infallibility. What drew me when we met was what you were about. The direction you were giving your life. That's the key to your attraction: the clean sense of direction. It is the way I plan to live…" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 111, Italics added)

[45] Bill Butler, *Dictionary of the Tarot.* http://www.themysticeye.com/info/tarotsymbols.htm .

Here desire transcends individual and seemingly ordinary attachment into a force aiming for the regeneration of an entire continent. In another intimate instance, Ast does not miss to voice her burning desire for Asar, for she proclaims: "Sometimes, even as I hold you, Asar, I miss you." (*Osiris Rising*, p.166) Interestingly, such a forceful passion inside the two heroines' hearts could not germinate into life without a similar passion going in parallel. Once warned by Ast to the SSS's capital threats against his life, Asar's passion for social change does not weaken. His answer is more reasonable than just rhetorical:

> I can't structure my life around the paranoid fears of a security boss. What we are doing is only a beginning. I'm not indispensable. There are several of us working toward the future. We can leave personal security obsessions to the other side. (*Osiris Rising*, p.165)

The official website of Armah's *Per Ankh* publishing company indicates by itself interesting symbols. It has several olive green circles over orange. According to Bill Butler, colour orange stands for "strength, success, joy, ambition, intelligence and earthly desires combined." Simultaneously, olive green refers to "envy and cunning."[46] By fusing the two colours together and in such a way, we can make sense of what Armah tries to convey through his display of colours. It is the forces of goodness, and earthly desires that are besieged (because encircled) by the forces of 'envy and cunning'. When Ast meets Asar in Manda, the latter is in the library holding orange notebook as part of his preparation for the coming academic year: "Unamazed, he watched her fix the orange slip in its precise slot on the chart. He pushed the stacked cards against the green notebook, picked up the basket of slips and placed it on the table." (*Osiris Rising*, p.101) However casual the scene may look, Asar's choice of slips shows the extent to which he is careful not to miss the significance of the colours. For it is the orange instead of the olive green (Seth Spencer Soja's green military clothes) that links Asar to his job as a school teacher or modern day healer and distinguishes him from his enemies! In order to make the argument stand, Asar and Isis, the combatants on behalf of 'strength, success, joy, etc…' do not face forces of higher strength, ambition or intelligence. On the contrary, apart from honoring the authentic self, there cannot possibly be any higher strength, ambition and intelligence. Matters become relatively clear as the symbols subsequently enfold their meaning. Only envy and cunning, revealing an abject absence of creativity and denying any possibility of life-regeneration, face and challenge the powers of intelligence and ambition. Armah succeeds to install in the reader's mind the following dictum, anyone loosening grips over who he or she

[46] Bill Butler, *Ibid.*,

is will be more likely to attract automatically viciousness and envy. Already above there is reference to the core reason behind Seth's fury against Asar. Seth's failed advances (desires) for Ast drive him mad with jealousy of Asar. The fact that he accuses him of masterminding an assassination attempt on President Christian Ahmed Utombo only hides his inability to seduce Ast. Seth's sense of who he is collapses, revealing to him his own hollowness and barrenness. Matters are aggravated in him when he finds that Asar naturally and without any constrains or pretensions mates with Ast, as she eventually conceives a child from him. Their union may symbolize the fusion of the natural with the spiritual.

In this connection, *Per Ankh's* website exhibits a photo which reveals Armah's interest to fuse the spiritual with the natural landscape. The symbol of the Ankh is engraved on the ground exhibiting a long and beautiful artificial lake in the form of the symbol that faces the ocean. The lake is open from the base allowing water to be naturally (not mechanically) renewed directly from the ocean. Surrounded by palm trees, the place stands rich with cosmic references. Water can be "[the] astral fluid, universal substance, sub-consciousness, cleansing, emotions, the reservoir of cosmic mind stuff that can be stirred into vibration by meditation"[47] Residing in that superb natural setting, Armah very possibly agrees with the suggestion that "[t]he water habitat symbolizes the fluid nature of female sexuality,…", an opinion that does not contradict with:

> …, the leap into the sea, more than any other physical event, awakens echoes of a dangerous and hostile initiation. It is the only, exact, reasonable image, the only image that can be experienced of a leap into the unknown. It is in the sea, the womb, and the grave all places of birth, rebirth and regeneration where the enigma of transformation is concealed. The danger and seduction of the sea becomes a metaphor for the womb, the grave, and the dangers of the feminine realm.[48]

It needs to be emphasized that Armah's reverence for the female principle has been always with the purpose of delving into the essences of the African Man's primordial and immemorial past. Egara Kabaji reports that nearly the entire personnel that operates the Per Ankh publishing company is populated by women[49]. Again, palm trees have the advantage of radiating in the mind the qualities of "healing, victory and help"[50], which sets the overriding objectives of this African Man. Thus, by surrounding his leading publishing project with such decorum both

[47] Bill Butler, *Ibid.*,
[48] Bachelard quoted in: Meri Lao, *Sirens – Symbols of Seduction.* Park Street Press, Rochester, Vermont, (1998), p. 34.
[49] Egara Kabaji, "Ayi Kwei Armah: His passions and disappointments". *The Sunday Standard*. Sunday September 4, 2005 http://www.eastandard.net/archives/sunday/hm_news/news.php?articleid=28347. In the same articles, Egara Kabaji cites Armah saying that "If an association has to succeed, then women must be the majority…"
[50] Bill Butler, *Opcit.*,

natural and man-made, Armah simply pays tribute to sacred feminity as it is all encrypted in the persona of the goddess, Isis. Osiris rises, as the title of his sixth novel indicates, first and foremost thanks to Isis' extra human efforts in nursing him to life just to recreate him in the form of her baby. Her divinity does not exempt her from the suffering of leaving her homeland (Egypt) to search for Osiris' coffin, disguised as a servant in Byblos' royal palace (in Lebanon) in order to recover it and carry it back home through the sea. Even when brought back by Isis, Seth mutilates his brother's remains and scatters his parts throughout the vast landscape of Egypt. Isis never tires and subsequently recovers all parts of her lover's from scores of the Nile rivulets[51]. Therefore, it is hard to miss the fact that Osiris' first task of setting justice is carried on by his lover, sister, wife, mistress and his son's mother. All that can be womanly for Osiris is entrusted to Isis. Here, Isis values Osiris by keeping the memory of his justice and ideals ever alive after his passing away.

In this regard, there is another detail worth mentioning here. Armah presents the objectives of his leading publishing project in Per Ankh electronic site with a note of welcome outlining not only his admiration but adoption of the ancient Egyptian concept of justice or *Ma'at* as a workable ideology for his healing intentions of today's Africa. The note reads:

> The vision driving PER ANKH focuses on a movement, necessarily slow because it is generational toward a model of social construction in which power is sought for sharing, knowledge for transmission, and the purpose of work is the peaceful exchange of knowledge and wealth in an egalitarian society. In the writings of the ancient tradition, this slower ethos working against chaos is called Maât. It implies a commitment to justice, reciprocity and the peaceful, intelligent sharing of resources. Our challenge is to find ways of working to these values[52].

What is noticeable here is the importance of Egyptology in the dramatization of Armah's novels[53]. But first, *Per Ankh* is the hieroglyphics equivalent to "The House of Life", a temple similar to a large library where scribes used to be archived, checked and written. According to Mark Andrews, "[T]he institution associated with the ancient temples and known to the Egyptians as per ankh, or 'house of life', were nothing less than the forerunners of our modern

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[51] Bill Butler, *Ibid.*,

[52] As to the objectives, the same site reads: "**OUR AIM:** is not to recreate the ancient Egyptian House of Life, an institution of royal, priestly privilege. We plan to focus on intellectual cooperation and the egalitarian sharing of its fruit, prosperity. We hope to work to the ancient principles of justice, truth and balance, symbolized by the iconic figures of our house of life, the intellectual companions MAAT and JEHWTY"

[53] Egara Kabaji reports on Armah's choice of his Senegal as his place of residence saying: "I depend heavily on Egyptology, culture, history, anthropology and philosophy for my creative writing. Those scholars seriously studying these disciplines can only be found in Senegal. It is at the University of Dakar where you will find Egyptologists and not anywhere else in Africa. When I talk about historians I am not referring to those bigoted historians who specialise in studying tribes." Egara Kabaji, "Ayi Kwei Armah: His passions and disappointments". *The Sunday Standard*. Sunday September 4, 2005 http://www.eastandard.net/archives/sunday/hm_news/news.php?articleid=28347

universities,…"[54] Armah, particularly through his last novel subtitled 'in The House of Life', presumes that there lies buried secret plots of the ways in which the *Ma'at* was neutralized and distanced. His theory, nevertheless, is that a very old and quite forgotten understanding can keenly be modeled and adopted to fit into the ideological needs of the present. By working on this presumably egalitarian program, Armah expresses his prime concern with identity as a problem that has to be addressed in case one is really serious about making a difference in present-day African reality. For *Ma'at* is not some dead end or unfortunate romantic idealization. On the contrary, this *Ma'at* can be a fully-fledged philosophy that attends primarily to the single individual's as well as the community's spiritual needs[55]. Its grassroots ethos can be tested in the procession of love and inner spiritual balance inside this individual as values marking the entire society. Paying more attention to its details, Linda Tylor thinks that the objectives of *Ma'at* can be summarized in the following three points:

> 1) To promote Awareness, Consciousness & Realization of the true nature of All That Is & Who We Are;
> 2) To offer to all those who seek: the training, guidance, support and assistance toward this ultimate Aim;
>
> 3) To serve, uphold and teach in the highest vibrational frequencies of Love at all times.[56]

These are, by no means, simple or short-term objectives. The mind that instituted these ethics and inaugurated them as law must have thought over many alternatives before this setting of the *Ma'at*. Even the one who sets them as ultimate ends reveals his superior thinking power. Knowledge of oneself entails responsibility that is translated into some purposeful actions on the part of this self, fitting and fulfilling its definition. Beginning with such an understanding, there lies love or simply desire for well-being for all people around. This desire for a better a place to live in is constantly reflected in the ethics of *Ma'at* that essentially start by defining its peace-loving Man as the epicenter of that superior love. The social construction of such a Man is the

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[54] Mark Andrews, "Ancient Egyptian Temple Element", http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/templesanctuary.htm

[55] Ifwe take John Warren's definition, "Ma'at was the ethical conceptions of "truth", "order" and "cosmic balance". These principals were also personified in a goddess named Ma'at. This goddess represented the divine harmony and balance of the universe, which was thought to affect every aspect of the ancient land of Egypt. Particularly in the most ancient of times, it should be noted that the people of Egypt had an obligation to uphold ma'at through obedience to the king, which doubtless added in the formation of the early state.
The ideals [whose manifestations] including justice, honesty, fairness, mercy, kindness and generosity, reflect the central concept of *ma'at*, the cosmic and social order of the universe as established by the creator god. … Though the concept of ma'at underwent some modifications over time, the same ethical and moral values expressed in the Old Kingdom texts continue to appear in later autobiographies and other texts." John Warren, "The Ethics and Morality of the Ancient Egyptians" <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/egypt> (2005)

[56] Linda Tylor, "*Per Ma'at*: Ancient Egyptian Spiritual Training, Initiation, and Light Activations": http://www.permaat.com/aboutpermaat.htm

focus of all, for unless this Man extends his/her humanity to an unlimited number of others, he/she risks staying short of this ideal which is also his/her definition. Being true to oneself involves one in sticking to the understanding that fellow humans' welfare are part of what makes him/her what he/she is. Hence, this is the reason why one, under the principles of *Ma'at*, moves from self-realization to taking active part in others' well-being. Realization implies action, not just retrograded self-satisfaction. For in the end, that single subject cannot match the meaning of who he/she is unless he/she takes action to find out the same self-realization in others. Striving after this collective understanding is what makes a just, loving and egalitarian society. And again, it is this understanding that induces both Asar and Biko, Armah's modern Osiris figures, to take action and dedicate themselves to the values they take as important as themselves.

Following this understanding of *Ma'at*, it becomes valid that in mythology at least, it is Isis (a female figure) that defines Osiris and makes his work on earth known to the rest of the world. Equally valid, however and without intending to be ambiguous, it is Osiris who defines Isis and gives her work a field of being and direction. Without his exemplariness in striving to set the egalitarian basis for his society, the wife would neither feel obliged to leave his memory to posterity, nor desire a child from him. There is a kind of mutual self definition in the mythology of Isis—Osiris. Only by exteriorising themselves (getting out of themselves or freeing themselves from the egotism and pettiness of their little individual selves) by leaving to work for the well-being of others can any of them win the identity and knowledge we still cast on them today. Important, though, is the element of mutual completion and need for the other. It is easy to observe that without anyone of the two, none would be possible. Neither Osiris would be known to ancient Egyptians and modern readers, nor Isis would be found serviceable to any high and worthy aim. In the end, the didactics of the myth aims at the following objectives. First, he wins Osiris' status and glamour only he who has in his feminine companion Isis' qualities of love, reverence and commitment. Second, without Isis' unassailable will power, dedication and patience, Osiris' first task, though splendid and outstanding, would be easily forgotten. Hence why the need for intellectuals—healers and pathfinders to join forces and forget about petty battles over prestige. Only in this way can Osiris keep alive by being born again and again thanks to Isis, Ast and Lindela. Searching in her late companion's study, Ast finds an article written long ago by Asar entitled: "Who We Are and Why" Without this passion, one cannot imagine the reason that fuels Ast to leave for good her prestigious teaching position at Emerson University (back in the United States), to settle down in Hapa despite all the risks and hardships. Here we are induced to think that Asar's message and example helps

her to trust in herself and to set about with a mission that would promote her accomplishment. Perhaps without their intention, they are only reactivating the ethics of reciprocity as captured in the *Ma'at*. Asar's physical elimination by Seth cannot obscure his achievements. Meantime, Ast's desire for him keeps him born and reborn ever after. In fact, she already bears his baby, which is the promise of a new Asar—Osiris and she, too, is part of the group of intellectuals that work for the same objective.

In this context, water (of the Mediterranean and the Nile) bears resemblance to similar watery fluids flowing from the womb at the time of birth, re-birth, recreation and rising to consciousness from all restrictions. At the end of each single stage in life and before moving to the next, water stands as a symbol for the ritual of passage. Water serves as a marker indicating the shift from one identity to another, as man keeps changing constantly moving with his domestic and public roles in life. Open to wider surfaces and freely running waters refer to the ideas that there are no limitations or restrictions of what man can be. He/she can shape his/her self in a variety of ways and options. In this sense, after realizing the need to extend goodness to others, one is before the option of crossing the limitations of his/her petty self of some unwelcome and unfotunate past. Switching to the more constructive side of one's identity means being wholly absorbed in helping others, to the extent of being able to initiate similar positive understanding everywhere around. By reexamining the symbolgy of water as categorically limitless, the reader is induced to witness an instance of one's loss or transcendence of his individual identity for the purpose of regaining a more collectively productive identity afterward. Both in kemetic Egyptian mythology and Armah's narrative, water helps signing in this shift to the next stage in one's identity. Asar is murdered while sailing (not driving a car) home toward Manda. By having his body parts scattered in the water (the explosion of the bomb planted by Seth), Asar reaches Osiris' mythical heights because Ast keeps his memory alive ever after.

In her grieving over Asar, Ast demonstrates her feminine worth. She is to perpetuate Asar's solidarity with his fellow citizens and to carry on his task on earth, so that Armah bases the couple’s militancy on their mutual love. The salt in Ast's tears, as she cries over her dead lover, evokes the salt of seawater all over Asar's drowned body. Salty water then ushers in the new identity each of the two lovers is forced to embrace. After the pain and the despairing dread of the moment, Asar becomes a life-generating symbol while Ast, the woman, works for the fulfillment of that symbol by providing credence and authenticity so that symbol can genuinely stand. But without feminine tears, a result of compassion and genuine love, the symbol does not logically stand. This is the reason why African women are sacred and

approached as such in Armah's fiction. While learning to live without Asar, (the reason for her coming to Hapa state in the first place), she adequately switches to the next phase of her quest for identity. She makes Asar occupy a permanent place in her memory, so that he becomes a symbol and moral guide. This quality in Ast seems to reflect Armah's admiration for women's resilience. In this regard, one ought to recall Netta's warning of Ast from the consequences of uniting with Asar, even before meeting him: "You're asking to have your heart to be smashed if you fall for a fellow so busy working for justice in the future he's started at the odds of his getting killed in the present…" (*Osiris Rising*, p.72) Ast's passion in this context is understood as the element that echoes the flowing of water. For Armah, it is clear that African women's passion for social unity makes the matriarchal factor a viable option for the construction of modern day Africa.

This position does not detract from our understanding of the mythology forming the background in Armah's last two novels. The water element in Egyptian mythology involves the tears of Isis while she mourns Osiris' death. Salty tears resemble the taste of the water she traveled on. Change in the taste of water speaks of the change in the water each baby tastes while journeying from the womb to the outside world. Water is the element through which the greatest transformations occur. Therefore water stands for man's yearning to understand the human condition. Since a change of place of navigation from the Mediterranean to the Nile waters involves a change in the taste of the water, then one naturally should be ready for the transformation of the self which the place and time dictate. However, the hunt for her lover's remains is still a hunt, whether in the Mediterranean or in the Nile, as Osiris undergoes a transformation in the water he is thrown in. His identity keeps changing as the water beneath him keeps changing, too. Healing is essential and naturally needed, but it seems there cannot be a genuine healing without transcending individual desire, by getting rid of personal and petty ambitions (revenge on Ast's part), to a collective or communal desire, that of restoring balance and working out logical plans aimed at making the world a better place to live for all.

At the beginning of *KMT*, Lindela's indecision as to how to recapture some peace of mind after losing Biko with her burning love for him and his memory is identical to Ast's case in *Osiris Rising*. All that the heroine tries to do in "The Abattoir of Minds" chapter is an attempt at addressing both the nature and the dynamics of the system that wants to eliminate all the Bikos of Africa. Her lover's 'rustication', as the authorities professionally actually speak of their crime, sends a clear message of warning to anyone who has Biko's agenda in mind.

> Thinking back, I've found it hard to understand the way I reacted to my friend's destruction. Something protective inside me, I suppose, paralyzed me that day. I do not know I felt something stronger than shame. Self-

> blame. As if I could have, should have defended him. The whole class should have. But we sat, passive spectators in the unfolding drama at the center of our lives. (*KMT*, pp. 54-55)

Without having finally realized what Biko fought and stood for, Lindela could not have regretted her lover's loss. More than intimacy or sheer yearning for an exotic fantasy of some romantic past days of a first love drama, Lindela realises the difference about who she is now and who she might be, had she chosen to help Biko in the open on that fateful day. Her self-blame is only the fruit of ascribing to Biko all the first-rate qualities that she wishes to be identified with. In his failed attempt to make some vital connection between modern day Africans and ancient Egyptians, a connection so vital to his self-definition, Biko was trespassing onto some formerly forbidden zones and as a consequence lifting Africans from "the subordinate stations in the hierarchy". Biko, the student, refuses to remain where his "betters" want him to be with "[the] status of apprentice(s) in that middle position". To challenge that system of education, he is obliged to found avenues of thinking, yet these avenues could not be realised without taking risks. For these avenues define him in the eyes of the apartheid regime as subversive and trouble maker. He sacrifices himself for the world and for Lindela as someone attached to the cause for justice.

Actually, all that Lindela does afterwards is pay tribute to his taking risks and being bold enough to present himself in the only way he sees decent and fitting for his own self-respect. Though not simultaneously, both of them are flooded, if not actually overwhelmed, by the risks of accepting to be defined primarily by their oppressors. The daily grind of lectures, research, library indexes does not necessarily make each of them unhappy. Nevertheless, that grind turns both of their lives empty and without a centre. This is how Biko opts for activism and Lindela after him to further his mission. For after his 'rustication', Lindela's only means of staying active as before is to carry on the work of Biko. Though partly unaware of the inward drama going on, her taking Biko's passion for knowledge (his inclinations towards Egyptology induces her afterwards to be an expert in reading heliographic writings) is the only way open for Lindela to stay connected and thus feeling protected. She experiences that uplifting feeling when she together with her new life companion, Professor Jengo, proceeds with the griot—traditionalist, Djiely Hor's help, to read the secrets of the heliographic letters. Only then is she able to link Biko with the camp of those Egyptians of yore, the companions of the house of life, who sought the sphere (a form with neither top nor bottom) as their symbol against those who preferred pyramids. Perhaps, only by reconnecting her lover’s actions to other members of the secret societies of a millennium ago can Lindela understand that fate takes with one hand but gives

back with the other. The real Biko, his spiritual continuum and the very element that she admires in him and appreciates most, she meets in the colleague professor and heliography she has spent some valuable time while training to read. The search and the discovery are double. First, in Biko's elimination, there is regression into pessimism. Yet in Lindela's friendship with Jengo, with all that friendship involves, there is a reversal of that earlier pessimism and a reactivation of Biko's final course of action and his ultimate self-definition. Finally, she finds the aspect she has been searching in Biko, both the lover and the mystic protector. Although dead, Biko leaves Lindela to be the active, studious, zealous and tireless militant.

Emphasis of this kind on water as a transcending, hence a healing force, brings us to study Densu's own experience in *The Healers*. But before doing just this, one needs to bring attention to the fact that Armah's interest in water is part of his philosophy of healing which extends even to space. Esuano is initially defined earlier in the novel not by its mountains and forests but rather by its rivers and streams. "Have you told the listener that of the sacred rivers of our land, the closest to Esuano was the Pra?" Esuano, we read, physically lies north of the confluence of the Nsu Ber, the female river and Nsu Nyin, the male river. "The female river had a more consistent course. It flowed steadily north-west, to meet the male river just past Esuano, a good morning's walking distance before the greater confluence with the [sacred] Pra." (*The Healers*, p.3) Situated amidst this abundance of cultural connotations, Armah suggests, people in the town of Esuano have in the end either to stick to their own matrix or else get destroyed. Even with diseased traditions, the reader still can observe, the river Pra is still held sacred since it is the place where human sacrifices are made and the guilt of nations and empires is purged. To these spiritual bearings and legacy the group of Damfo and Densu try to remain faithful.

Densu's final exercise before becoming finally a healer has to be initiated through water, too. "He ate nothing the whole day. He stayed indoors, gazing into the water in a wide clay bowl placed before him by Damfo." (*The Healers*, p.228) After many unsuccessful attempts, Densu is able to distinguish an image in it:

> …the vagueness of the water image didn't matter to him. He looked steadily at the image. The image looked back at him. Then the sight of the image dissolved and became thoughts, and it was as if water in the bowl were no longer stagnant, but flowing. He was not sure now if he was seeing images, or just giving images to his thoughts.
> He saw a person in the water, not just a face at first. The person was not a whole, and he seemed to be searching for completion. Others passed by him in the water. They beckoned him, invited him into spaces they had prepared for him. But it seems he knew the kind of space he needed, and he could not find it among any of those offered him. The still water threw up a question in Desnu's mind: what was this space he was looking for? Why a specific space?

> An answer came: the search could not end until the need was stilled. And the need was not for just any relationships with others. It was for a definite kind of relationship that would be possible only with people moving in the same direction. There was a strong urge to examine the difference between the people actually available for relationships and those the seeker sought. A vague fear said the people in the seeker's mind did not exist, but Densu thought of his own reality, and the fear lost potency at once. There was Ajoa. There was Damfo. There had been Anan. They were not an absence, a hope only.
> The others available were many, of course. The impression they gave of something stable, undisturbed, came from accepting the existing world as satisfactory. But what deep-eating blindness could make any soul see its satisfaction in such warped realities? The only problem the others saw were two: to find a personal place in the given world; and having found that space, to keep it. But this need was for relationships with people for whom the existing world was not perfect, not even satisfactory. These would be people whose place in the world was something yet to be created because their real world was not yet entirely present. People to work with. (*The Healers*, p.229)

Here Densu does not run after or welcome any connection he finds. Unlike romantic heroes one finds when reading Hawthorne or Poe, Densu is a boy who could become either a saint or a king, practically anyone he wished to be. More interesting than in Lindela's or Ast's cases, Densu, particularly at the start of the story, is not hard-pressed by circumstances that would dictate to him his course of action. He initially has the choice. He belongs to one of the few princely houses in Esuano, therefore his decision to join the healers' camp to become an initiated healer has to be carefully reviewed. The image of the water in the bowl can be a symbol connoting himself at the beginning of the drama. Orphaned in both parents, trusted to the power-mad Ababio and completely immature, Densu could have answered Ababio's call for joining the latter's political faction quite easily. The stagnant water again stands for the conflict inside Densu's mind between Ababio's attempt at manipulating him and his inner natural inclinations towards free thinking and love for peace. Seeking the camp of the healers instead of the manipulators' allows Densu to reconnect with the important value of having neither of the two camps destroying his inward self, suppressing thereby the essence of his character. He is a man who, in the end, cherishes first and foremost freedom and dedication to any work that involves his responsibility. To dictate on him, although not necessarily in a direct way, is to rob him of his personality. This is why Damfo at first sends him off from the eastern forest in a 'leave-taking time' of one year. Contrary to what Densu might have understood on the spot, Damfo's logic explains that this 'leave-taking time' is

> …not rejection. You've reached a generous decision... There's something strange about generous decisions. They ought to be the best kinds of decisions, but they aren't. A generous decision often lacks strength,

> firmness…A decision to be a healer must be firmer than any other decision. It shouldn't be made out of the generosity of a young spirit alone. (*The Healers*, pp.100-101)

While Damfo explains the practicality of sending him back to Esuano, Densu, quite expectedly, feels rejected. As readers we might feel pity for him. Yet what Damfo does is to sensitize Densu to all the possible consequences, reminding him of all the options open before him should he finally choose the eastern forest over Esuano's palace. Damfo, and amidst grueling times facing Densu (Appiah's murder and Ababio's plotting and accusation), insists on this young man having this one year to think. He rejects Densu but in the only way he might genuinely win him back later, and for good. In this context, water inside the bowl flows freely in the direction of the only people Densu loves and identifies most with, Ajoa, Damfo and Anan. All his former wishes and beautiful dreams are matched with these people's dreams and wishes. A better and more fertile vision of the Akan people and Africa is what consumed his childhood days. Paul Petrie thinks that Densu, after his return for the second time to the Eastern forest, has won the title only of 'a refugee'[57]. In fact there exists substantial evidence that Densu is not accepted this time as a would-be healer, as he and we expect; he is rather won to the healing vocation in new and unprecedented ways. The healing vocation is honoured by Densu in the sense that Densu finally becomes the regenerating member of the cast of healing. This is so because he mediates between a too idealistic perspective of society and the crude, if not greed-inspired, applications of political power. What Densu does with General Nkwanta, together with his leading role in bringing Ababio to justice in the final episode, overshadow Damfo and nearly all of Damfo's public achievements.

6. African Desire as Healing, a Transcending Force:

Regardless of what takes place at the end of the novel, one should again not miss the role of women in Densu's self-engineering. It is true that the hero was born with natural inclinations for unity and peace. He dismisses competition and ritualistic celebrations as ends in themselves instead of practical remembrances preserving knowledge about the African self. But despite all the inclinations and the goodwill he starts with, he could not have made it to the eastern forest and with such aptitudes without Araba Jesiwa's narrative. If one should scrutinize the image of the water inside the bowl again, it is this woman's relaxed, open and intimate

[57] Paul R. Petrie, "The Politics of Inspiration in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*", *Critique*; Summer 1997, Vol. 38, N°. 4, p. 286.

character that inspires to Densu the understanding of who he really is. It is true that without his inner curiosity for knowledge he should find Araba's story of 'gaping emptiness' and subsequent fertility and later feminine 'fullness' one more boring fairy tale he used to hear all around him as a child. But it is also Araba's flowing spirit and ensuing success (love and fruitful reunion with Kofi Entusa) that solidifies Densu's belief in the morality of his childhood wishes and ideals and gives him trust to keep following and insisting on healing as a choice and definition for himself. The reader should not downplay the alternation of the events in the novel; for while Araba used to narrate, Ababio used to seduce. Ode Ogede agrees to this marking distinction of Araba Jesiwa and her lasting impact on the boy. He aptly observes:

> Once the healers recover her, Araba Jesiwa is ready to participate in propagating their ministry, thus, disclosing the community-centeredness of the healers' work. She can then be viewed as a figurative representation of the African woman-battered, long-suffering, and debased—whose retrieval by the healers from her tormentors and the killers of her son Prince Appiah can also be viewed in allegorical terms as representing the much needed act of regeneration – social, political, moral, and spiritual – that Armah envisages.[58]

If we accept what Ogede advances afterwards, that Araba has that magical influence of "anchor[ing] Armah's idea of re-Africanization", already launched in the ideology of 'our way, the way' of *Two Thousand Seasons*, then Densu's success and glamour is due to this woman's influence. Because she has been able to get over two dire catastrophes – her initial barrenness and her only son's subsequent and brutal murder – Araba stands as a symbol for an ever-enduring Africa. Her capacity to process mentally the full weight of the tragedy lies principally in her ability to define herself and her status. She is finally healed because she is able to cut the umbilical cord that presents her to the world solely as Prince Appiah's mother. She knows besides that she is the object of the playful spirit of her childhood days, Kofu Entusa's unthoughtful admirer, as well as Prince Bedu Addo's despaired wife and again Kofu Entusa's companion and Appiah's mother. And it is those different roles involving as many identities that can make her recover from the loss of her only son. That knowledge involves the necessity for her to use those roles alternately, depending on circumstances. Thus, Araba's knowledge of oneself indeed comes from her natural readiness to face challenges. Because it invites for reflection and understanding, this attitude shapes Densu's authenticating and healing attributes and defines him to the world as such. Furthermore, one should mention that what triggers Densu’s acquaintance with Araba is Ajoa. Ajoa's physical beauty transcends Araba Jesiwa's

[58] Ode Ogede, "Opcit.,", p. 54

mind-blowing journey of search and discovery of the authentic self. These two women are again a reflection of Damfo's ability to appreciate and preserve beauty:

> The second day of Ajoa's stay in Esuano Densu had gone to her and offered her a gift. It was a guava nearing ripeness, a little thing quite perfect in its oval shape.
> Ajoa had not accepted Densu's offering of the fruit. She had run away from him, not like one afraid, but like a veritable woman-child overwhelmed by her own shyness. She had run till she reached her father. Then hiding behind him as if he were no mortal man but some huge, safe wall, she had peered from between his legs at the uncertain Densu holding his gift in silence. Those eyes of hers had such strong clarity. Whether for rejection or for pulling the admiring onlooker, those were always powerful eyes. She had run from him, but a power in her eyes beckoned to him with a strength whose source he felt within himself. (*The Healers*, p.63)

Ironically, the eastern forest where Ajoa fled from Densu as a child is the very one that defines Densu and marks him for ever afterwards as a true and dedicated healer. If we keep in mind Ababio's promises and declared intentions *vis-à-vis* Esuano's principality, Densu's choice of the eastern forest is nothing short of attempting suicide. But up to then still, the eastern forest for him is only the place where Ajoa, the child, fled from him and from where Damfo brought her home after the third morning. For, as a matter of fact, "the child had gone off alone, into the eastern forest, searching for her father." (*The Healers*, p.64) Her natural inclinations that led her to the eastern forest involve a twisted search for the genuine father, away from the stepfather, Esuman the manipulator, and an early quest for a true and lasting identity. In other words, her search later becomes Densu's own search, but more on the metaphorical level. When Densu chooses Ajoa's companionship, therefore, he naturally seeks Ajoa's father for fulfilling that companionship. Densu takes Ajoa's father as his own father, if only by vocation. Perhaps this is just his inarticulate way of saying that he wishes to be identified with the healer more than with his own guardian. One can witness how his identity is assailed by his being pointed at as Appiah's murderer by Ababio. He for his part considers himself as Damfo's disciple; another complication is his assessment by Damfo as a would-be healer, but in need of more wisdom and experience before reaching the status of healer.

Through this searching time, Ajoa's love for him is primordial and enlightening for his pursuits and aspirations. To Damfo's experienced mind, Densu, though zealous and honest, has just youth and unchecked energy for an asset, not knowing how best to go about his future healing activities. Only the help of a woman (Ajoa), supported by another woman (Araba Jesiwa) can ensure that he is saved from a mental breakdown. On his way back to Esuano, which he never longs for, and from the eastern forest which is still denied to him, and when he

seems to have lost it all, he is finally given the opportunity to define himself in the only way that is befitting him. Both as a captive and runner inside the water with Anan, and then again riding on unusual roads to the eastern forest, Densu is ultimately able to discover who he really is. He wins both Ajoa's heart and Damfo's respect but without being slavishly tied to anyone.

In *KMT*, the sentence "In the House of Life" serves as a subtitle. The term refers to an institution or a healing place similar to the eastern forest in *The Healers*[59]. Knowledge in this context is most often approached as secret. Secret societies along Africa's millennial past, as Armah shows, build a fascinating world all to themselves. The rationale for this forced secrecy is that the dangers of dispersing knowledge unwisely would be detrimental to the well-being of the African self. The choice of the name Asar for Ast's companion instead of the well-known, Osiris, derives from this background of secrecy.[60] Similarly, we read in *KMT*, Mamadou Kouyate's cautioning Djiely Hor about the oath of secrecy. Both people are griots but they have opposing goals since they are originally loyal to different schools: Niani's versus Yarw's. In fact, Niani and Yarw are two different traditionalist villages: the former siding with the royalists for they are court traditionalists, whereas the latter are, as Astw explains to Lindela, "traditionalists who refuse to live at the royal court." (*KMT*, p.147) In the end and as Djiely Hor clarifies, these two schools are but modern manifestations of the old schools standing for the people of the pyramid against the people of the sphere: "The people of the pyramid were for setting up a kingdom, with nobles and priests and commoners and slaves. The people of the sphere said the system of royalty had brought us incalculable ruin and would bring us more in the future if we did not bury it." (*KMT*, p.154)

In *Two Thousand Seasons* we have pathfinders instead of healers. Right from the choice of the word, we detect an inability to trace the correct path, and Armah makes certain that this loss is indicative of spiritual loss, too. Lost among many and conflicting definitions, the community keeps oscillating between different identities. Each definition is a projection of a society with direct political, economic and strategic implications. What makes Armah's Africans deserve their Africanity is how they commit their efforts to the preservation of "our way, the way." This philosophy of "our way, the way" is defined first and foremost with its mark of respect and regard for the feminine gender. Two of four main pathfinders during the crossing of the bog land were women, and after the doubt eating over pathfinders' hearts and minds and the

[59] According to Michal Brass: "The House of Life was a scriptorium annexed to a temple". More or less it is a place similar to a library where scribes are stored and trusted but also where investigators, often approached as some dedicated priests in ancient Egyptian civilization performed their search and secret missions." Michael Brass, "How can we Attempt to Assess what Real Power the Scribes of Ancient Egypt Wielded?", pp. 11-12.

[60] For some scholars, at least, the name Asar is the occult name for Osiris. Jacq Christian & Cathrine Berthier, *Fascinating Heliographics: Discovering, Decoding and Understanding the Ancient Art*. Sterling Pub Co. Inc. (1997)

subsequent fratricide, Noliwe and Ningome, two women, rise as new pathfinders. They lead the community out to safety and just after making it to a welcome harbour, Noliwe pronounces her warning:

> The violence we had left behind… The fraud of the white predators from the desert, this was not all. The sand had brought us woe. Water, this same living, flowing water of the river itself, water would bring worse deaths to us. We who had fallen victim to our own abundant generosity even in their drier land close to the desert, now we had reached this new place that itself gave us surroundings answering the generosity within, the inner abundance we had found no way to curb. Such uncanny unison—the effortless flowing together, of inner and surrounding generosity—would in time put to sleep even the wariest of minds, and it was not our nature to beware our giving: a fatal, headless generosity. (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.58)

Here again, water stands as a frontier line that marks the African community shift from one identity to the next. Here there is warning from what the abundance of water, as its absence before, may hide and bring forth. Water here refers to the sea from where the white predators first appeared. It also stands for that kind of abundance that can seduce the community to slip into 'headless generosity'. This 'headless generosity' does not match the requirement of 'our way, the way' simply because it tries to anticipate the warning of Noliwe, the woman pathfinder. Noliwe's word of alarm, as the violators of her word very well understand, is a whole and consistent ideology and course of action. That is why the violators start merely by "[t]he suppression of women first, in the reduction of all the females to things—things for pleasure, things for use, things in the hands of men—the admirers of the white predators' road saw a potent source of strength for men." These violators know that the reciprocity which Noliwe preaches must be broken by the reduction of women to mere possessions in order to pursue their individually short-sighted, not communal aims. Their achievement, as the drama reveals, is in obtaining prominent positions rather than just ousting women's privileged positions of caretakers. Their eyes turned to gaining political power for mean and selfish purposes. The narrator adds:

> In the subjugation of producers to the parasites—amazing senseless somersaults—those fascinated with the white destroyers' road heard the promise of power unlimited. And at the peak of their enthusiasm, they urged on us the setting up of a king from among the parasites, producers, women, children in the condescension of the white destroyers' road—would be bound in unthinking, unquestioning allegiance. In such arrangements the admirers saw the roots of the white predators' power. Along that road they urged our going (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.59)

The suppression of women as caretakers, as it is understood here is not just an isolated incident devoid of any further significance. On the contrary, the thingification of women is but a preparation for the thingification of the whole African community, as it was illustrated in the experience of three centuries of slave trade. In this way, Ngugi's remark in the epigraph to this chapter becomes pertinent. Indeed, reducing African women to the role of pleasure toys was right from the start a major incentive of those who undertook to deny the humanity of Africans. This reduction implies the replacement of matriarchy with patriarchy with all that patriarchy suggests in terms of centuries of slave trade, decades of colonial muddle and hopeless state collapse status in the neo-colonial condition. In this context, Armah's concern about the consequences issuing from this substitution drives him to project each as having contradictory views over political mapping, social structure, economic regulations and further still, the cosmic balance and spiritual harmony of the African Man. By historicizing *Two Thousand Seasons* through providing two different approaches of societal organizations, Armah outlines his blueprints for his future African society, that is, a society one he perceives as essentially matriarchal, hence peaceful, and ethically sound.

Further along, we read that the white destroyers' way leads to the institutions of kings as a major form of societal organization. With only one (crippled) man at the top and the rest of the community underneath, the hierarchy of the pyramid-as-metaphor is reactivated. This, for Armah, is simply against the reciprocity advocated by the pathfinders and healers. These latter identify more with the metaphor of the sphere that connotes taking and giving and 'our way, the way'. He also finds this system of kingship against the ethics of what defines this African Man; a system Armah essentially presents as futile and wasteful because it is led by 'a cripple', someone

> …on whom the unconnected eye can find no withered faculty. With these too the distancing is there, a distancing not physical, but spiritual. It is the feelings that recoil, the nerves that turn back into themselves. That the recoiling is not overt and physical does not make the hurt of distance less. The crippled soul can be contained in a body surrounded, touched, pressed in upon by a thousand other bodies. Still, between those other contained souls and the crippled one there is no touching. Each healthy soul prefers to hover at a height that is its own, some soaring into dizzying spaces, most floating at their easy, normal level. All leave the cripple crawling on the ground. (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.62)

Kingship, as a system of governance, is condemned by him because it condemns African Man to the rule of essentially 'alienated' crippled souls. The pyramidal structure is perceived by the writer as alien to the spiritual dimension of the community. More exactly it separates the ruler from the ruled and creates a relationship that is understood by Armah as unhealthy for the

community's well-being. Under this system, there is an absence of identification. The ruled simply starts to fantasize about the privileges and towering heights the ruler enjoys as a result of his climbing on their shoulders. There is no trust and hence no love in the form of a genuine desire, speak not of faith, in the work that the "crippled" orders to be done. One devastating effect of adopting kings is that the cripple king unconsciously creates other crippled souls competing for the privilege of sitting on people's shoulders. Rather than being a means to a noble end, power, according to Armah, becomes a mere disability aiming at the appropriation of undeserved privileges and rights by placing a small group in command while the multitudes remain down at the base. As a result, the line in the number of the injustices, confusions and agonies comes to be unlimited. But, as Armah emphasizes, this swelling line could not have begun without the suppression of women as equal partners in the configuration of power within society.

Armah has meticulously woven symbols related to women into his three other novels to express his reverence towards African women. In the same line of thought, he regards Western women as reactionary Amazons and the logical victims of centuries of patriarchal conditioning. Therefore, any relationship that involves an African man with an American woman, like that of Modin and Aimée, is doomed and cannot be other than destructive. All the likes of Aimée can do is to smoke out the dignity of this African man and rob him of what defines him as an African. By introducing his readers into the intricacies enfolded in the symbols of the African past and the meaning they carry up to the present, Armah introduces us to what can be approximated as Africa's ancestral epistemology competing with the orthodoxy and polemics of Orientalism. Meanwhile Armah comes with his own answer to the roots behind the negative western perceptions of Africa. Lindela's search and subsequent translation of the lost papyrus scrolls testifies to the emphasis Armah puts on the balance between masculine and feminine, the good and evil in mankind and Isis' importance as the emissary of Africa. As with Ast, Densu, Abena, Isanusi and Noliwe, seeking inner knowledge and self development, bear the fruits of facing a more constructive African identity than what Africans traditionally understand themselves to be.

Egyptian hieroglyphs, like the griots' memory, seem to hold out the promise of offering a different story that would help Africans to come to terms with their present needs and by learning about who they really are. The scripts also promise to attend to the intellectuals' necessity of keeping vigilante in order to accompany that self-absorption to changing times. By knowing that they are conceived out of the struggle between the forces of good and evil, Osiris and Seth, Africans can simply free themselves from Orientalism and from the obsessive feeling

that they ought to get Americanized in order to feel being part of the modern world. Goodness prevails and Osiris rises when Africans allow harmony to flow freely between their masculine and feminine attributions. Characteristically, Armah's heroes and heroines seem to incite Africans to lay the emphasis on the 'spirit within' and the strongly anti-authoritarian, pro-feminine that existed and was purposefully marginalized and shoved aside as heresy by history's 'winners'. In this sense, the reader still can notice that Armah's politics of desire is more like Molife Asante's plea for an Afrocentric perspective; that kind of "analysis [that] reestablishes the centrality of ancient *Kemetic* (Egyptian) civilization and the Nile Valley cultural complex as points of reference for an African perspective in much the same way that Greece and Rome serve as reference points for the European world."[61]

In any interpretation of the stories of Armah, there should be no chasm separating the African man from his god(s). With Armah, it is not incongruous to have a god as a man and a man as a god, the identities of both being interchangeable. The African god lives inside man who thinks and acts according to god's wishes and desire for positive change. Self-knowledge simply implies the knowledge of the god one invokes. Osiris, Seth, Isis and Horus simply are humanised gods because the self and the divine are interrelated. Densu's and Anan's experiences during the events leading to Appiah's murder tell only of illusion and enlightenment, confusion and search for firm understanding. Unlike the western duality of sin and repentance that produced later the formula of civilized and barbaric, Armah advances the point that the African duality of illusion and enlightenment is much more constructive and helpful for the achievement of balanced identities. Like Densu, one strives and suffers, both physically and mentally, to make sense of one's life and to be serviceable to the world at large. Densu's confusion and subsequent knowledge is carefully mapped out in order to suggest that the metaphoric value of Densu's career is valid for every well-wishing and would-be healer. Rather than a redeemer whose role is to root out sin, yet to leave his subjects in a *status quo*, Armah's healer is always someone who guides a would-be healer's access to understanding. The healing influence implies that both the healer and the one subject to healing are engaged in a mutual cognitive journey to clarity and enlightenment. Once that disciple is finally initiated, the two have become equally ready to heal other souls.

There is no fixed formula detailing how healing should be conducted. But still there is a warning that "It will take ages for the kind of power healers want to grow against what is there now. The worst kinds of power grow most easily." (1979:94) All of Damfo's visions are

[61] Molefi Kofi Asanti, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Temple University Press, (1998), p. 10.

trusted to the future. Like Armah's other protagonists, including Asar and Lindela, he is designed to provide an ideal model of the African: peace-loving, zealous, active and ever ready to start new venture despite all the odds of history. These are indeed the main qualities that would define this African man. There is no place in such an African image for ignorant or, say, ordinary people with no impulse to undertake journeys of initiation. It is important to realise that by insisting on the destructive drive of the Greek matrix, Armah seeks to (re-)construct his own, based primarily on intellectuals that are conscious about the nature of the adverse system they oppose. In other words, what defines Africa and its people can be said to be not some elements from the inside, but initially the combined qualities of non-Africans.

That is, perhaps, why Armah's identity is always futuristic, that is, anticipating the positive. Aggressive forms in today's cultural imperialism justify for Armah the categorical separation between what is African and what is not. However, this is only partly in tune with what Wole Soyinka thinks. The African social vision is essentially composed of "a cohesive understanding of irreducible truths." And unlike the European worldview, "whose creative impulses are directed by period dialects"[62], and as a result generates violence and profit, the African one knows only reciprocity, egalitarianism and order. Knowing that this latter is not the one that runs the world today, nevertheless both Armah and Soyinka, along with many others, argue that this beautiful and just worldview had existed at some point(s) in the African past and are worth recalling. Working for its recovery is what justifies the identity of the people claiming to be conscious with its need. Nevertheless, recovering the beautiful past does not imply that there were not other negative aspects of that past, as Soyinka carefully suggests and Armah seems always to deny or minimize. The next chapter will attend to Armah's search for the components of culture and society needed for the recovery of this African worldview.

[62] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge University Press, (1976), p. 38

Chapter Three:

From Symbol to Meaning: Armah's Reference to African Metaphysics and Philosophy of Power

> …the central myth of mankind is the myth of lost identity: the goal of all reason, courage and vision is the regaining of identity. The recovery of identity is not the feeling that I am myself and not another, but the realization that there is only one man, one mind, and one world, and that all walls of partition have been broken down forever.
>
> Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective*. (1965: 143)

> I believe that signs, symbols, rituals and ceremonies are useful for societies, and furthermore, I accept that societies are held together or disintegrated on the basis of symbols. We go to war over symbols, we fight over proper rituals of respect, and we find our lives enriched by the memories of those who have achieved heroic stature by standing for what we stand for…We are victimized in the West by systems of thinking, structures of knowledge, ways of being, that take our Africanity as an indication of inferiority, something to be overcome. I see this position as questioning the humanity and the dignity of African people.
>
> Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity: Toward a New Understanding of African Thought in the World"

In this chapter, I attempt to explore further Armah's idea of power sharing. Here there is an intention to study the writer's novels as these novels call for adopting matriarchal values channeled towards purposes that are related with the initiation of transformatory cultural tradition. I believe that Armah's quest for identity cannot be based on a naive presumption of recovering some nativistic and long lost ethics of Kemetic *Ma'at* for its own sake. In addition, I assume that the means which lead to the egalitarian basis of society, the

one which Armah envisages, is much more articulate than often acknowledged. It is sophisticated to the extent that we can observe in it several components. Each one can be seen to articulate certain metaphysics aimed at coming to terms with the kind of society the writer projects. This chapter is therefore intended to pursue the debate raised in the previous one concerning the interaction of symbol, myth and metaphor and to relate it to the most pressing aspects of the actual and the ethical. Looking for the long lost authentic African self, by referring to Africa's matriarchal and egalitarian past, involves a particular examination of the journey a symbol takes from its perceived metaphoricity to its practical translation on ground. If the previous chapter stops at shedding light on the role of desire (expressed mostly through symbol) in Armah's novels, making two different brands of politics, one harmful the other constructive, then this one tells how this constructive form of desire can form the core of an all-liberating policy for Africa.

In this respect, it is interesting to observe that Northrop Frye maintains the following connection: "mythological thinking cannot be superseded because it forms the framework and the context for all thinking."[1] In his more recent work, *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "The Bible and Literature"* (1990), Frye ascribes to mythical language the fourth and most superior use in his classification of language usage. The idea which he champions is that in "mythology and literature there is no dividing line between emotion and intellect, between subjective reality of the mind and the objective world of facts."[2] Symbols and images loom large in every culture and weave a certain ethos that allows identification, hence the reason why there is a need for archetypal readings to a given work of art. Such a reading strives to go back with literature to the very four moods that feed human life; most evident among them is the alternation of the four seasons: comedy with spring, romance with summer, tragedy with autumn, and satire with winter. It is this cyclic cross-connection between words and nature through metaphor that gives the creative impulse the opportunity to appear. Metaphor is also responsible for that mystical immersion of words and the human imagination into cyclical time and the creative forces in the universe. It also ensures the blurring of the barriers previously set between the mundane and the anagogic.

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[1] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, (1957), p. xvi

[2] Steven Marks, "Northrop Frye's Bible: *Words with Power: Being a Second Study of "the Bible and Literature""*. Book Review in: *The Journal of the American Academy for Religion (JAAR)* Winter 1994.

The concerns of the present chapter can be summarised in the following question: how does Armah's clustering of symbols and myths channel a philosophical outlook? How, ideed, can Armah's myth-making postulate a course of action viable for present day Africa? By tracing it as an issue, one hopes to gain a fairly round understanding of Armah's ontological foundations of his thought. Whether he derives it from Akan ontology, ancient Kemetic culture, or whether he himself has tailored what he thinks necessary and practical from different other sources is also what this chapter attempts to find out. The point we try to make is not to view how desire can be a transcending force. Rather it is to trace the foundational ethos that allows Armah's desire to be transcendental and thus empowered with the healing quantum needed. In this sense, Armah's efforts are very much similar to what Molefi Kete Asante, in the African American situation calls: winning that kind of "centeredness" or "regaining our own platforms, standing on our own cultural spaces…, we will achieve the kind of transformation that we need to participate fully in a multiculturalist society."[3] In the same article from which the second epigraph is extracted, Asante states the following elements as quintessence for the re-centering of the African subject along healthier lines that would make him/her an active participant, instead of an alienated ghost, in the world around:

- Cosmology-- nature of beingness, Ontology, Mythology;
- Axiology--nature of ethical values;
- Epistemology--nature of knowledge, proofs, methods; and
- Aesthetics--nature of creative and economic motifs.[4]

These elements are helpful points of departure for our investigation in the seven novels, and for the assessment of Armah's *imaginaire* and societal visions. These elements can be modulated as *de facto* titles for the various sections inside the present chapter. The first and the second elements in Asante's proposal can be synthesized in a single section entitled: "Images of Transcendental Love: Armah's Concept of the Deity Needed". After gaining sufficient theoretical understanding of the African Man's place in the universe, Armah moves, as we argue in the second section, to shed light on the concept of beauty as a creative spark that guarantees the fusing of African cosmology with a practical ideology necessary for

[3] Molefi Kete Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea*. Temple University Press, p. 8.
[4] Molefi Kete Asante, "Afrocentricity: Toward a New Understanding of African Thought in the World" http://www.asante.net/articles/5/afrocentricity-toward-a-new-understanding-of-african-thought-in-the-world/

the re-generational *desideratum*. Since it is the presence of beauty or its absence that actually tests the worth of the combined forces governing African man's beliefs and myths. This part is entitled: "The Meaning of Beauty: Armah's Aesthetics of the Renaissance". The third section, however, is designated "Creative Inspiration: Education as an Ideology for Future African Renaissance". It seems that unless one takes the trouble of identifying each of these elements as factors in Armah's novelistic scheme, one misses out on the message(s) and implication(s) of his fiction. Without anticipating a conclusion, one can safely advance that in his seven novels, Armah reveals an original and complex mythological system of a very prophetic and profound nature. Unfortunately, and when his novels were studied individually, such an accent has until recently been misconstrued and deemed by critics as pessimistic and quixotic.

Armah's imagination is at heart approached as mainly mythical. Some critics find these mythical foundations and implications intriguing. For instance, after praising him for highlighting African feminity, Ode Ogde soon taxes Armah's vision as mythical and eventually, though not explicitly, as unpractical. Because "[i]f examined with the laws of realistic fiction, the concept of the revolution in *The Healers* would collapse entirely." According to this critic, the writer's entire project is "simply romantic and idealistic"[5]. Similarly, Bernth Linfors openly attacks this fourth novel as a "xenophobic oversimplification used to be found in B-grade films manufactured in Hollywood during the Second World War, in which fanatical kamikaze pilots and fat, stupid, goose-stepping German generals represented all that was reprehensible in the world."[7] If one adds the mythical horizons of *KMT* and *Osiris Rising*, one is induced to take seriously these critics' attacks. Mythical predispositions seem to be not a very interesting or popular starting point.

Given Isidore Okpewho's cautious stand *vis à vis* myth, these critics might seem justified in their attack against what they think is the heavy mythical dimension in Armah's project. Nevertheless, Okpewho defines myth primarily as "simply that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative power of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity."[8] Such creative degrees that Okpewho refers to directly depend on whether the writing is undertaken in the realistic, naturalistic, modernist or postmodernist brand. When

[5] Ode S. Ogede, "The Rhetoric of Revolution in Armah's *The Healers*: Form as Experience." *African Studies Review*, Vol. 36, N°1 (Apr., 1993), p. 55

[7] Bernth Lindfors, "Armah's Histories", *Critical Perspective on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Ed, Derek Wright. Three Continents Press (1992) p. 271.

[8] Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1983), p. 69

it comes to the mythical lore of *Two Thousand Seasons*, Okpewho praises it by saying that Armah "has taken leave of the old tales and the prejudices they embody, thus bestowing on the new myth a character as prospective as the old myth was wistful."[9] Furthermore, Okpewho embraces the idea which refers to Armah as a sort of an African Faulkner who takes his stance from his inherited tradition, looks at it critically and re-appropriates it to serve some pressing present demands. Similarly and in his MA dissertation, Bouteldja Riche finds that "no other African writer seems more preoccupied with the dismantling of myths, either colonial or (degenerated) African myths, and the elaboration of a new mythology in their stead than the Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah."[10] Riche's study considers all the first five novels "as a totality where [Armah's] mythmaking first verges increasingly towards metaphoric realism in his earliest work, then moves into modernism before finally passing into subtler blend of post-modernism and griot story-telling art."[11] In support of the mythical exploitations, as expressed by Armah, Kwame Ayivor finds that "[A]ny analysis of *Osiris Rising* which fails to examine how Armah excavates historical, cultural, ritualistic, mythical and iconic sources and magically transmutes them into a multi-dimensional African and Diasporic vision, can only be superficial."[12] Already there are conflicting views about the deployment of myth in Armah's story-telling.

A deeper reading into the myths and symbols infused by Armah in his writing suggests that he is concerned with far broader issues than simply stating single moments of glory or paying tribute to a certain community and neglecting another. Whether or not one appreciates Armah's myths and symbols, we argue in this chapter that these elements take us into the realm of his own metaphysics. And it is this metaphysics that strives to bridge over the chasm of the political impasse suffered in present day Africa. In a recent article, Isidore Okpewho, argues that one has to observe carefully what myths have to teach. Beneath stultifying and sometimes vapid stories of the heroes' flights and battles won, there often lie lessons calling for the reinstatement of communal identities to heal societies from their ill-apprehended post-independence freedom. With a keen eye on the trauma of the civil war of his native country Nigeria, Okpewho warns against the "hegemonist paradigm, not only in

[9] Isidore Okpewho, *Ibid.*, p. 69
[10] Bouteldja Riche, *Myth in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels: Use and Abuse*. Magister Dissertation, University of Algiers, (1988), p. 19
[11] Boutheldja Riche, *Ibid.,* p. 24
[12] Kwame Ayivor, "'The Beautyful Ones were Born and Murdered': Armah's visionary Reconstruction of African History and the Pan-Africanist Dream in *Osiris Rising*". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2003; 38; 37, p. 46

showcasing cultural traditions he thought competed favorably with the best anywhere in the world, but in setting the structures for its post-independence governance."[13] By weaving his own myths and adopting his own symbols for his readings of the past, Armah demonstrates his committed concern with the production of meaning. By constantly trying to defy the official (often imperial or local arcane) versions of the past, one just wonders how Armah can be oversimplified and downplayed as romantic.

The forming sections of the 'bridging argument', if so one may call it, undertake a closer examination of Armah's own views regarding the meaning of love and/ desire. It is in fact, this love/desire factor which ensures continuity between god and the African Man and a certain identification of this African Man with his universe. For purposes of self-transformation to this planned symmetrical, balanced state, and which cannot be but beautiful, Armah has to match his understanding with the kind of education desired, detailed roles for a committed African elite, together with the healing and the inner mutations necessary on the part of civil society and the people in general. Damfo right from the beginning explains to Densu that there are two kinds of social power: one inspirational, the other manipulative. The first entails awe and respect, the second control and domination. Inspirational power installs harmony, self-balance and peace with the surrounding universe. It is undeniable that there lies in Armah's quest for identity a mystical line which if followed will reveal interesting connections. Paul Petrie maintains that *The Healers*: "…is founded upon Armah's realization of a paradox: any social movement, if it is to result in anything more than mere exchange of one regime of manipulation for another, must begin at the level of ideals, even though full achievement of those ideals in sociopolitical terms is impossible."[14] Far from being a useless mystique, Densu and Damfo's enterprise is essential for self-definition and positive change. The mystique defines Man as part of an ordered cosmic universe in which he is such an important element to the extent that he either transmutes these cosmic demands inside himself or else he perishes. In addition, manipulative power breeds violence, war and alienates man from his environment. The first kind of power is taken from the rich celestial reserve. Below are the details of the engineering process of this inspirational power.

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[13] Isidore Okpewho, "African Mythology and Africa's Political Impasse", *Research in African Literatures* Volume 29, Number 1 (Spring 1999) <http://www.iupress.indiana.edu/journals/ral/ratoc.html>

[14] Paul R. Petrie, "The Politics of Inspiration in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*". *Critique*, Summer 1997, 38, 4, p. 279

1. Images of Transcendental Love: Armah's Concept of the Deity

Before starting on the debate outlined above, there is a need to specify that by 'love', Armah almost always has in mind positive aspects of desire. When traced to its most philosophical components, the concept of love, according to the author's frame of reference, forms the basis for a matriarchal ideology which can be a promise for a way out of the present African crisis. In the previous chapter, there has been a concern with showing that desire bears two possible meanings: one positive, the other not. Here and as part of his philosophy of inspirational power, Armah credits love with a corner stone section for his metaphysical ontology of creative power. As desire has been the starting point for either positive or negative postulations of two contradictory social visions, love, here, is the starting point for Armah's entire philosophy of regeneration and renaissance for Africa. Extending on Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes, Bouteldja Riche finds that Armah refers to certain elements like "river", "forest", "bogland" and "mountain" with the purpose of setting up "the symbolic intent of the passages dealing with migration…"[15] If followed closely and with the import of Armah's last two novels, one can add among the former elements other ones as well, like "pyramid" for the Keepers of knowledge on the one hand, and the "sphere", emblem for the Sharers of knowledge on the other. And instead of reading these archetypes as symbols limited only to the community's odyssey through time, or reflecting Armah's mythical constructs that compares with the Biblical millenary vision, it would behoove readers well if they can observe these constructs as part of a deeper design or "a unifying principle"[16] whereby Armah highlights his metaphysics; the one he sees serviceable for his version of Africa.

In this connection, Lindela Imana, the heroine of *KMT*, comes to discover in her translations of the heliographic inscriptions a special attendance on "the nature of being, the spirit of becoming, the movement out of one into the other, the cause of inertial despair, and the source of energy of creativity" (*KMT*, p. 216). One admits that by the sheer details found

[15] Boutheldja Riche, *Opcit.,* pp. 182-183.

[16] This phrase is Frye's. He also insists on reading the bible as "a body of concrete images: city, mountain, river, garden, tree, oil, fountain … and many others, which recur so often that they clearly indicate some kind of unifying principle." Northrop Frye, *The Great Code*. p. (xiii)

in this novel, the writer actually tries to answer the criticism leveled against him, and which extends to *The Healers*. Some readers think that apart from some nihilistic atheism, he, after all, has no articulate philosophy of being[17]. Armah assigns to love first and foremost the basis of his ontology; he calls it "the nature of being".

> Potential, because raw as it [energy] is, it holds in itself everything required for growth: growth from the apparent senselessness of brute being to awareness; growth from mute awareness to tentative utterance; growth from utterance to attraction, from attraction to union, from the union of formless love to organization, from organization to shared design, from design to creation—the whole flow from being to becoming. In the union of our companionship we contemplated potential and gave it an ancestral name, Nwn. The name signified brute being, heavy with despair of the ignorant moment. Inertia in Nwn is entrapment in confusion, but possibility begins in movement out of Nwn. To the motive force inspiring movement from Nwn to creativity we gave the name of Kheper. Informed with Kheper, intelligence trapped in potential utters its loneliness in the primal pain of genius unconnected. Hearing succors genius. Connecting intelligence with intelligence, it helps the lonely spirit understand it need not to be alone.
> Understanding sharpens desire. Desire calls for union. In union begins cooperation, and cooperation is mother to creativity. To each spring flowing to make the river of life we gave the ancestral name of netcher. We named each netcher according to its place, its action and its quality. But we have never called for belief in any netcher as living substance. We know the meaning of the netchers: they are the shapes we give to our understanding of the universe, our best ideas and hopes, also our fears and our despair, because one of the gifts left us by ancestors is the knowledge that creation comes not from contemplation alone but from contemplation coupled with the energy of love. (*KMT*, pp.216-7)

One finds this passage quite heavy with ontological foundations. To start with, despair, a state of feeling that marks the man, Teacher, Baako and Modin of the early three novels, is approached like some raw material in need of certain processes that would bring in the end a constructive habit of mind. With time, despair gives way to desire, which is a form of energy that Armah calls 'the potential'. After several mechanisms that 'potential' yields creation or "the whole flow from being to becoming". Armah implicitly puts it that one cannot hold firm to who he/she is, unless s/he moves to the realization or the shaping of his/her destiny. In this logic, the individual is the very one responsible for drawing the limitations of his

[17] I raised this point in my Magister Dissertation. There, the point runs that Armah does not postulate automatically Akan ontology because comparison with various Akan ontology material reveals that there are some improvisations Armah did on his own. Mami Fouad, *Western Knowledge and The African Intellectual in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels: Why Are We So Blest?; Two Thousand Seasons; The Healers*. Unpublished Magister Thesis, University of Algiers, 2004, p. 122.

becoming. Identity cannot be mapped by overpowering gods and essences. Instead there is an internal chemistry which, if well observed and followed, consigns to the African man his/her own definition. Instead of gods and deities calling for worship and classical reverence, Armah is more for the imitation of the "netchers" which are roughly copies or manifestations of the potential and the prime energy that moves man from the entrapments of despair to creativity.

Another scribe cautions from the dangers of assuming the *netchers* as gods endowed with an august and swaying command enfolding an impressive record that is all beyond the reach of the humans. This detail decides a *de facto* split between the Sharers and Keepers: "Some companions were for continuing to explain the *netchers* as images made to help us in our thinking. Some favoured the new craze: turning *netchers* into divinities." (*KMT*, p. 277) On the contrary, Armah views this traditional conception of the deity as part of the vicious drama that was meant to keep Africans always entrapped inside the tricks of the mysterious and the paralyzing confusion, denying them access to explanation and comprehension[18]. In fact what might be viewed as an original approach in *KMT* is not really new. Armah has entertained this idea ever since *The Healers*. Densu's interest in joining the healing vocation reflects this view while still nascent: "I have no god to call upon" and "faith I have and belief but not in gods" (*The Healers*, p. 93). What the reader gathers from Armah's novels, however, is quite a fluid theorization to the conception of deity. Gods are not separate and overpowering entities, entrapping the creatures through fear from their awesome and retributive power. Instead, real gods are the potentials and energies of love that function within the human being and help him stay constructively involved and creative in the universe at large. Instead of presenting Gods as awe-inspiring creators, Armah incites African individuals to master their own fate.

Such a process is similar to an evolution of the self from the state of self-pity to a more optimistic one. This operation involves a conscious awareness of the fluidity of the self

[18] In fact this opinion is shared by one major Egyptologist, Zahi Hawass, who thinks that most of ancient Egyptian kings from the period of the Old Kingdom on built pyramids with the intention of imitating the gods, if not right away competing with them. Hawass comments that as he was having"[h]is pyramid […] rising rapidly, reaching to the sky [Khufu was] ensuring his eternal life as a god...." In another instance in the book, Hawass finds "The king stood between the terrestrial realm and the celestial one and interceded with the gods on behalf of his subjects. Temple ritual was an important tool for the maintenance of ma'at. The king was, in theory, the chief priest in all of the temples; in a nation with no real division of church and state, this was not a small task. All his official activities, from military campaigns to building projects to holding court and carrying out ceremonies of various sorts, were in some way part of his effort to maintain the order of the universe. The name Sneferu took upon his ascension to the throne, Nebma'at, or Lord of *Ma'at*, reflects his concern with maintaining the proper order of the cosmos." Zahi Hawass, *Mountains of the Pharaohs: The Untold Story of the Pyramid Builders.* American Library Association

as it is constantly moving. Hence, there is no point in trying to freeze states of progress through words. Indeed words are limited to providing only approximations of an identity. Words, in the end, can confuse or blur the real concept of deity as meant by the ancients. Such attempts to ascribe fixed states of being are often approached by the guardians of the House of Life as illusory forms of knowledge. And as entrusted and encrypted inside the House of Life, knowledge of God, the self—both, male and female and the divine are all identical. These unearthings make Lindela more enthusiastic to learn but meanwhile they upset her picture of the present. The House of Life, like the eastern forest and the seventh grove in Armah's former novels, simply forms the intellectual infrastructure for a fully prosperous Africa. For Armah, it is always the meaning of the myth, not the persons responsible for these institutions, that matters. His understanding amounts to the fact that the destruction of the feminine side of the African continuum had been a devastating departure from the collective African unconscious and its collective past, an unfortunate incident which led to the miscarriage of justice as formerly crowned in *Ma'at*.

In the face of the abject Traditionality entrapping the modern African man today, Armah's postulations concerning the deities needed for the African renaissance are more than just positive. Apart from his blatant attack on Islam and Christianity on the ground of their enslaving habits of the African mind, the way Armah reads history, his fluid vision of the gods amounts to seeing the gods inside Man, working for Man's betterment and ultimate happiness. The gods, or the potentials inside Man, work for releasing the resourceful energies in order to make the earth, the African man's earth, a better place to live in and manifest one's humanity in its outward design.

*** Images of the Tree, River, Mountain: The Authentic African Space**

> And then came the gods and kings, the secret guardians of the Universe whose brothers were the Bird, the Tree, the Mountain, the River and the Ocean. They flew like the wind on galloping horses across the valley, cried like the howling thunder, destroyer and unifier.[20]

[20] Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor, *Comes the Voyager at Last*. Africa World Press, Trenton New Jersey, (1992), pp.137-8

The above epigraph to this section is taken from Kofi Awoonor's novel, *Comes the Voyager at Last* (1992). Reference to Awoonor is not haphazard if only because he is Armah's fellow country man. And being Armah's country man involves sharing the same mythical and emblematic frame of mind when it comes to trees, mountains and watery spaces. To the various Akan communities, these spaces are multiple manifestations of cosmic dimension, uncovering a divine design that can only be African. Deeper knowledge of trees, mountains, rivers and oceans results in knowing their governing parallels which can be gods and kings. Armah perhaps has a quite different interpretation of these natural elements of the African space, but he nevertheless does not shun the cosmic bearings regarding these same features. For we find in his fiction many references, seemingly loose but actually very articulate, about all these elements. In *Osiris Rising*, the DD is certain that trees have to go in order to build a presidential palace and the neighbouring security complex. When Ast complained about the cutting of the trees, the DD minimizes her remark and says: "It is the job of a security service to eliminate potential hazards" (*Osiris Rising*, p.38) So even before experiencing how it feels to be ruled by a neocolonial state, Ast has the impression that it is alien, hence, unethical because it did not accustom itself to its natural surrounding.

To The Heinemann Educational Books edition of *The Healers*, cover designer B. B. Omondi paints a giant tree with tall branches and myriad leaves at the time of dusk on the front cover of the novel. The connotation of the end of the day (any day!) with the fall of Kumase, the capital of the Ashanti, still lingers and finds its way through the reader's mind. Armah in the novel retells an ancient myth (a myth cast as an omen) that identifies the city of Kumase with its own tree. "It happened plainly for all to see, so that there was not the slightest possibility of doubt. The kum tree, planted at the nation's birth, a tree supposed unshakable, huge giant of trees, the kum tree fell." (*The Healers*, p.250) The fallen kum tree, the text adds, stood for centuries as the "symbol of the mighty Ashanti family with its wide spreading branches." For before the foundation of Kumase as the capital, two trees were planted. In the place where one died only a small and insignificant village grew. But the location where the second rose and the city was built and prospered. A prophecy spread that the end of the tree would mean the end of the Ashanti empire. One usual day and all of a sudden the giant tree fell, ushering in the British take-over of 1874.

The interjection of the following condition "Even if all the stories of omens and portents reaching Kumase were false…" *a priori*, shows Armah's wish to draw distances from

omens, prophecies and old fables. But at the same time, such an insertion also reveals Armah's interest to base his vision on the founding ontology he is mostly in need to foster. Trees, according to J. H. Philpot, bear a collection of different metaphors[21]. If looked at extensively, Armah actually presses with all these tree metaphors. For apart from its figurativeness as the city of Kumase, the tree imagery still can refer to the tree that falls on the skillful carver, Kofi Entusa, the lover/artist (wooden carver, or Prince Appiah's father) and sends him to the world of the ancestors away from the materially-driven culture prevalent, by then, in Esuano. Still, the image might reflect the hurriedly-carved trees made into shaking canoes for both the Ashanti and Fanti armies with which they attempt to cross the river Pra. The sliding tree/canoe here is turned into a means for the destruction of the foolishly fratricidal battalions. Soldiers lead a life devoid of contemplation, which is why they meet their cruel ends at the bottom of the river.

Two tree images, however, which really bear ambivalent interpretations (both positive and negative), are those of the bamboo tube and "the tree roots on the river bed" (*The Healers*, p.125). Like the tree, the bamboo tubes used under water provide life by allowing air to stream down to the escapees (Anan and Densu in Densu's flight from Ababio's vengeful verdict) while the area of the tree roots offers a fugitive place shielding from Ababio's soldiers' killing bullets. Once more the figure of the tree refers to that large odan tree whose natural hollowness (its trunk), Damfo hides bone-broken Araba Jesiwa after the brutal murder of her own son, prince Appiah. The tree here is a hiding place without which Damfo would find it impossible to carry the poor woman later to safety in the healers' village. Still with the positive connotation of the tree imagery, we note the healing herb whose unusual energy is used by Damfo for medicinal purposes. The irony of it all is that Damfo's love and dedication to the healing vocation (as he was searching this vital herb), lead him to find out about the fate of the poor Araba Jesiwa.

One can hardly miss that in the scene which involves Densu and Anan in their hiding place in the bottom of the female river, or the *Nsu Ber*, only Densu is destined to survive. Here the river emerges as a symbol of both life and death. Like any ritual passage in

[21] Observing a number of ancient cultures, J. H. Philpot finds: "Sometimes, it [the tree] was represented as the source from which human race originally sprang, conversely as the object into which the soul might retreat after death, or into which an individual might be transmuted, body and soul, by some miraculous agency. In other cases the life of a particular tree was held to be bound up with that of an individual or community, and lastly, in a still larger conception, the tree came to be very widely regarded as the embodiment of the spirit of fertility, the especial patron of the field and flock." J. H. Philpot, *The Sacred Tree in Religion and Myth*. Courier Dover Publications, (2004), p. 72

Akan ontology, one either survives or dies after the period of one week from birth. The river actually ushers in a new identity. Densu finally wins his ticket to the world of the healing and this time without any reservations from the Eastern Forest. Anan, however, chooses to go back to the world of the spirits and the ancestors! B. Riche pertinently observes that bamboo tubes can be similar to the umbilical cords inside the *Nsu Ber*, suggesting that the image of both Anan and Densu while diving inside the female "evokes the image of a foetus swimming in a womb"[22]. Both Anan and Densu are, seen from this perspective, still suckling embryos that need to stay inside the motherly recess of the river bed, deep in the female river, in order to mature and get ushered in to the world. Losing grip over the tree roots and the bamboo tubes (images of authenticity), even for a little while instantly spells death and a journey back to the world of the spirits. So are the victims sacrificed by the Fanti Confederation Armies as well as the Ashanti soldiers as they stay without the adequate wooden equipment to making the crossing of the sacred Pra river.

A close examination at the cover of *KMT*, (probably designed by Armah himself) will make the reader note an insistence on the use of natural elements. The cover exhibits a natural setting where the blue sky meets the border line of a forest, a mountain, a river fall and a sea estuary. From this rich natural surrounding comes the subtitle: "an epistemic novel", in an attempt to indicate that the natural space forms a certain philosophy and a workable ideology that defines the African Man living in this rich locale. In addition, there is a subsection in *KMT* under the name: the river of time. The metaphoricity of the river expands to capture and enclose time. With the recovery of the lost justice twisted in *Ma'àt* and *Jehwty* by Lindela, the reader is certain that the companionship of the forty-two is a secret society that survives almost six millennia. The companionship of the Sharers forms an occult tradition based on the principle of knowledge because it conceives of knowledge in the image of blood. Djiely Hor explains this metaphor by claiming that "To do its work, blood needs to move everywhere in the body if the body is to stay healthy. Stop it in one part, and

[22] Boutheldja Riche, *Opcit.*, p. 218. Riche adds an observation made at the beginning of the novel by Anan while introducing the bamboo tubes first to Densu: "If I were more than eight days old, I'd shed tears." (1979, 20). This shrewdly refers to the Akan rite of passage and the necessity of waiting for eight days before a baby can finally be given a name. The one week period in Akan ontology indicates a period where a new born is neither with the world of the living nor with that of the spirits. Surviving till the eighth morning is a token suggesting that the baby is finally released by the cosmic power to the world of the living. Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls: Notes on Translating Akan Culture", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. XIV, N° 2, pp. 85-114 <http://www.scn.org/rid/kw-3so.htm>

disease strikes that part through bloating, and strikes every other part through the death of living water." (*KMT*, p.183) It is this image of blood sharing (itself an extension to the image of the water sharing imagery) that royalists or Keepers stand for. With one man at the top of the social hierarchy, they attempt to construct a pyramidal vision based on substituting the reasoning mind of the multitudes with the mysteries and magic of one superhuman king or god. Armah sets forth this second understanding as a rift cutting into the edge of what constitutes the happiness and well being of the African man because it comes in contradiction with his self-disposition for sharing which is, in the final analysis, none but this African man's nature.

Similarly and according to one positive approach to the pyramid, and which Armah certainly does not share, is that the flooding of the Nile waters each year allows for the formation of Gargantuan lakes. Meanwhile, the receding water gives ground to fertile land and possible farming activities. In this connection, the river becomes the condensation of a new life each year reactivated. According to Alan Winston, the idea behind the pyramids is evoked in the mounting blotches of sand left from the receding Nile waters. Since it is these mounting blotches, in the form of mounds, that rise first from the face of the earth when the water retreats[23]. These mounds are the first spots to emerge from the flood, hence they are symbols of the new life and the new year. They are sacred because they complete the circle of death and life. Before becoming the god of the underworld, Osiris had been the god of fertility. Osiris is said to watch over the well-being of dead kings buried in the pyramids and prepares them for the afterlife.

In this regard love still entails a rich resource with which we can understand this ontology. For instead of being just indicative of some brand of politics, love can be reflective of a belief in a deity, the afterlife, commitment to goodness, and therefore, the necessity of implementing a positive social change. In a lecture titled: "Love and its Meaning in the World", the celebrated German philosopher Rudolf Steiner observes that in genuine love,

[23] Alan Winston argues that "… The earliest such mounds may have been a small hill of earth or sand, but the icon eventually took the form of a small pyramid carved from a single block of stone, known as a *bnbn* (*benben*). This name comes from the root, bn, which means to "sell up" or "swell forth". The *benben* also, because of the sun's part in creation, came to be an icon of both the primeval mound as well as the sun which rose from it. In fact, the Egyptian word for the rising sun is wbn, which comes from the same root as *benben*. " Alan Winston, "Why the Ancient Egyptians Built Pyramids" <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/pyramidreligion.htm> (2005)

there is always a kind of mutual self-definition between Man and his universe. This is what he states:

> Love arises for something that is contained within ourselves. Man passes through the gate and the spiritual core of being in its process of ripening is the seed of the next life…. This is the interpretation of it because it goes against the grain for Man to acknowledge that this spirit-seed is nothing but his own self. Men feel instinctively that they may expect nothing of their "I" in the future from their deeds of love. An advanced stage of development must have been reached before the soul can experience joy in performing deeds of love from which there is nothing to be gained of itself. The impulse for this is not strong in humanity… Love mediated by way of the senses is the wellspring of creative power, of what is coming into being. Without sense-born love, nothing material would exist in the world; without spiritual love, nothing spiritual can arise in evolution. When we practice love, cultivate love, creative forces pour into the world.[24]

What can be deduced from this excerpt is that in its more articulated stages, love does not beg for its exchange value. It cannot be conceived as goods, although it is under the prevalence of the ethics of the modern market economy. Steiner insists that great love is some kind of speculation whose fruits depends on how much one is willing to invest in it. The currency, however, is not hard cash. It is rather the foundation of the reign of the beautiful. Although Steiner does not pronounce it, beauty can be the only price for the celestial kind of love he indicates. The facets of that beauty enfold both individual inspiration and commitment to social transformation. Armah's reference to Densu's commitment to social change and his spying activities at the end of the novel could not take place without the transcendence of his immediate love for the healing vocation. He does not seek to be personally rewarded for his risky involvement between warring parties and armies. Asar similarly risks his own individual life all for the sake of establishing the reign of healthy ethics and customs as well as democracy and literacy. It is on his fiery love for these values, and on his belief that love is based on a clear and well-processed notion of the deity, that Armah relies to make him a worthy protagonist. Love entails beauty, which in its turn enfolds identification and the inspiration to dig and bring forth the better part of oneself.

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[24] Rudolf Steiner, *Love and its Meaning in the World*. (1912), Trans. D. S. 0. & E. F. and S. Derry (1972), <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/LovWld_index.html#Lecture>

2. The Meaning of Beauty: Armah's Aesthetics of the Renaissance Desired

By expanding on the concept of beauty in this second section, we hope to shed light will be shed on Armah's reason(s) for his insistence on the harmony existing in the traditional African universe. For him, an understanding of space *ipso facto* paves the way for a mutual identification of the African man with his milieu. At its best, this milieu only incarnates and reflects the cosmic design of its deities and gods. In the face of Africa's present day predicament, that understanding would install hope, peace and numerous other positive qualities which can be summed up in one word, beauty, and which can be again discerned in the following statement by Dostoyevsky: "If ugliness has the capacity to destroy life, so beauty has the power to save the world."[25] Beauty, the way Dostoyevsky puts it, comes as an antidote to filthiness, both literal and metaphoric. Hence, beauty is a concept that perfectly attends to the identity quest Armah pursues. Beautiful surroundings involve beautiful configurations of self and others, a harmonious situation where mentally healthy individuals project their needs and hopes as part of communal projects. But for this to happen, beauty should be located in the very process where the individual seeks and craves after the realization of his egalitarian principles and desires.

In a recent study entitled *Beautiful Ugly: African Diaspora Aesthetics*[26], Sarah Nuttal sheds light on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. For her, in order "to rekindle a politics of hope and anticipation in Africa and elsewhere in the South, there's no better starting point than taking beauty seriously." What Nuttal has in mind is the idea of beauty that is not only an abstraction of some fancy, that is, some bourgeois class luxury which has little or no direct touch with the African man's daily concern. On the contrary, her understanding of the concept of beauty, very much like Armah's, starts with concrete visualizations as to the necessity of a healthy notion of beauty, as well as its alternative, ugliness. Defining each one would be a first step towards sustaining an identifiable and productive life in the continent. One can even go further by claiming that almost all of the Africans' misfortunes commenced the moment African communities became unable to conceive of beauty as a value, no less than, say, honour, hospitality or respect for the elders;

[25] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*. (London: Heinemann, 1968), p. 103
[26] Sarah Nuttal, *Beautiful Ugly: African and Diaspora Aesthetics*. Duke University Press, (2005)

a value that merits defense and care. Self-abuse, which can be easily detected in the individuals' low self-esteem and the unfulfilled lives they lead as a consequence, is a major, not to say, the main reason for the sovereignty of the ugly over the sense of the beautiful and the refined.

But first, beauty, from a purely theoretical point of view, is defined by John Ruskin as:

> …either the record of conscience, written in things Sought, or it is the symbolizing of Divine attributes in matter, or it is the felicity of living things, or the perfect fulfillment of their duties and functions. In all cases it is something Divine; either the approving voice of God, the glorious symbol of Him, the evidence of His kind presence, or the obedience to His will by Him induced and supported (4.210)[27].

One is likely to find out from Ruskin's definition that considerations about beauty are concomitant with one's retrospections over the concept of deity. One's efforts in striving after the beautiful reveals the extent to which one is devoted to his or her God, gods or divinities. Breath taking beauty denotes an aesthetics that springs from a particular conceptualization of the holy beings and their attributes. Similarly, because the deities are articulated to be powerful and all-embracing, the locale which they entrust to man has to be beautiful. Beauty, in this sense, can be translated into an environmental situation which provides the ethical basis for a sound judicial system. The physical beauty of the African setting, as illustrated by Armah, is only a symbol that tells of the African man's optimal position in his environment and in his relation to the others around him. Said differently, physical beauty, as it is enfolded in the mountains, rivers and other sceneries, can be approximated as a motif that induces African man for working out his destiny and the betterment of his daily living conditions. Hence, the natural beauty of the surrounding can be best articulated as nothing but a metaphor of the people's inner beauty; an incentive towards positive action.

To make his reader understand how he distinguishes the more obvious forms of beauty (physical tidiness as enfolded in African nature) from the more elevated and sophisticated ones (spiritual), the ones that are contained in people's refined ethics and values, Armah actually has had to rely on metaphor. It is mostly at times of crisis that

[27] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*. Quoted in George P. Landow, "Ruskin's Theory of Typical Beauty" <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/ruskin/atheories/1.3.html> (2005)

Armah's metaphors of place play their role of reflective self-correction and transcendence. This is in line with what Jennifer McMahan thinks:

> Perhaps when the principles are invoked in any way which is likely to draw our attention from straight-forward object recognition to the process of perception [of beauty] as a solution to the problem, then we are experiencing beauty. That is, when it is as if the very process of perception itself is experienced as a resolution of the tensions, or a solution to the problem of constructing a coherent form from an array of primitives, then we experience beauty.[28]

Natural beauty, in this context, becomes a vehicle connoting not only an abstract kind of freedom but an obligation to resist impetuous drives and instead involve oneself in actions aiming for human freedom. In other words, beauty opens doors for needful instances of reflection over the causes of ugliness surrounding human experience and practical means of overcoming those instances. The flight of the community into safety through the bog land in *Two Thousand Seasons* is full of significance to the group of the legendary pathfinders. True, the journey was 'a horrid nightmare' and no one denies that what they were looking for was some promised and beautiful land, very much like the one found in the biblical prophecies. Yet, what the pathfinders realize is that this African 'promised' and beautiful land may exist only when instilled doubt and trickery are left behind. The beautiful land cannot be reduced to a material object to look at. At long last, the community attains this beautiful land, but primarily, only when they get rid of the ugliness of betrayal and trickery amidst some of them. It is only when they found the beauty inside themselves and started to practice mutual assistance that they could feel they were nearing freedom. This metaphor remains valid all the time, since whenever the community turns away from the beauty of its values of solidarity and unselfish commitments, it soon falls down in the pit of slavery and colonization. The same value can be traced in *The Healers*. In withdrawing from wrestling, where Anan nearly meets his end and is saved only by Densu's intervention, they withdraw into themselves from the crowds of thoughtless celebrators into the shade of the trees. They take short dives in the river and reflect on its beauty. This withdrawal and subsequent reflection come as part of their cure from the load of the competitive turn of the games that are initially celebrated for purposes of remembrance. It is the competitive and violent turn that they condemn as too ugly to be pursued and cannot captivate their innocent interest.

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[28] Jennifer A. Mc. Mahon, "Towards a Unified Theory of Beauty". *Literature and Aesthetics*. October, Vol. 9, 1999, p. 13.

One can spot such reflective and transcendental instances of beauty in nearly all the dramas of Armah's seven novels. To mention them all is both unpractical and unnecessary but the two examples mentioned below are quite representative of their iconic significance. What is interesting in particular is that the writer's general perspective leads him to the realization that beautiful sceneries and natural settings are activated as principal vehicles ripe with meaning. Eventually, they are more than just passive decorations in the dramas of the stories or helpless elements in the reader's minds. While it invokes the justice of the deity and its divine intentions, the beauty of the scenery in which the African man lives, begs to seek similar beautiful relationships inside the African community and beyond. Thus, Armah breaks away from the transcendentally idealistic philosophy that places emphasis on the regeneration of the subject alone. Like Adorno[29], and as he abandons the pessimistic stance taken in his first novels, Armah prioritizes the object (beauty of the physical scenery) as both a motive and means for the renewal and transformation desired. In other words, Armah looks forward to the moment when his readers, and hopefully all Africans, move from appreciation of natural beauty to making this beauty a defining aspect in their culture. Both kinds of beauty, then, will be encrypted and made manifest in the physical and metaphysical inscription. For in the end, this mediation on what is natural and what is cultural takes the metaphor of deity's ultimate design or painting.

Similarly, ugliness, as it comes in the section below, deserves retrospection. It is a moment to ferret out a lost beauty. Both subject and objects (perpetuator and victim) are abused and the result is a scatological setting which Armah succeeds in making look like coming straight from hell. Unless there is a reassessment of both object and the object's relation with the subject, little change is expected. When the gleam of easy success is mistaken for the true expression of natural beauty, ugliness settles in as a result. *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* can be a very good example for this idea, since Armah has made it his ultimate preoccupation (it is heralded in the very title of his first artistic production) to look for and investigate the possibility of regenerating Africa through aesthetics. Instead of any other concept or credo, African regeneration is Armah's fight that is claimed in the name of beauty, a call that is both simple and deep.

[29] Callaghan thinks that: "Whereas Kant conceives of beauty as a subjective experience, Adorno suggests that beauty mediates between subject and object. Beauty is contained in the cognitive or truth-content of works of art. As Adorno writes in *Aesthetic Theory*: 'All beauty reveals itself to persistent analysis' (69)." Jennefer Callaghan, "Theodore Adorno", <http://www.english .emory.edu/Bahri/Adorno.html> Spring 2000

Scatology and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born***:**

The choice of Armah's first novel for the illustration of Armah's aesthetic formula is meant to underline his early but mature concern with beauty as a concept and device. I focus here on *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, even though *Fragments* or *Osiris Rising* are no less useful and fitting for the point expanded below in this section. Beauty, to start with, is a concept that carries the writer's collection of ideas and thoughts regarding Africa's regeneration. When taken to the extreme, that collection of ideas and thoughts amounts to the understanding that in the absence of the beautiful ones, only ghosts roam Africa. This present is actually processed by the writer as an arid desert where the excreta, putrefaction and ugliness reveal a world order that spells political corruption and lack of active participation from the population. All through that first novel we read about the man's deep distrust in any widely publicized ideal because from first to last, it seems that there is no ideal worth looking for. In this novel, there are only excrements and bad smells, indicating not only a bleak worldview but a certain deadening metaphysics. A particularly perceptive critic of Armah, Joshua D. Esty, has seen the point behind Armah's images of excreta and waste.

> In Armah's novel—as in other post colonial texts—excrement assumes a variety of figurative guises and narrative functions: shit acts as a material sign of underdevelopment; as a symbol of excessive consumption; as an image of wasted political energies; and as the mark of the comprador's residual, alien status[30].

Esty follows his remarks by claiming that in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born***,** Armah reveals an unusual fascination with all that is related to death and disintegration. Corrupt political choices in the early independence period are the ones behind this kind of fascination by the writer. And this portrayal uncovers Armah's way of discrediting comprador nationalism which, according to him, ruins the country and shatters rosy hopes

[30] Joshua D. Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism", *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 40, N° 1 (Spring, 1999), p. 34

which came with the dawn of independence. Indeed, the same fascination reveals more ethical and existential concerns of the writer that go hand in hand with the political framework under which Ghana was run with at the time. For Armah, the absence of beauty must not be disjointed from the absence of a political vision that is capable of bringing forward hope to the general populace.

In this direction, one has to observe that Armah is not as iconoclastic as some of his critics have observed. The German art theorist, Theodore Adorno, has keenly noted art's need "to make use of the ugly in order to denounce the world which creates and recreates ugliness in its own image."[31] Indeed, in his way of stressing his alarms over the absence of beauty and the consequences related with this absence, Armah translates this very understanding artistically at the level of the symbolic dimensions of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Tsegaye Wodajo has noted the deployment of corruption as an icon, that is, as part of the novelist's design of stating his ideas. However, Wodajo has neither traced nor carried out an analysis relating his symbols to his overall project. In the novel, Wodajo's analysis of corruption as a symbol does not go beyond stating "Armah's exposure" to "Ghana's social and political ills from the lowest to the highest level."[32] In fact, our concern in this section is to see how corruption as an emblem is actually deployed by the novelist as part of his strategy of outlining a certain aesthetic that fits in with his definition of the African world view and metaphysics. Armah's aesthetics of the renaissance he projects *inter alia* is examined in terms of beauty and the sublime. In fact, some are examined in previous sections, some are yet to come, but they all form one piece of argument about the need for sustaining beauty.

As the chapters of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* follow one another, the narrative starts to operate less figuratively and more literally. The story first starts with the famous bus scene in which the conductor embezzles money from the tickets he sells. The sleeping protagonist, the man, or the watcher as the conductor calls him, assumes the position of a god since he is the only one who eyes the conductor's misconduct.

> The watcher only continued to stare. He did not need to hurl any accusations. In the conductor's mind everything was already too loudly and too completely said.
> 'I have seen you. You have been seen. We have seen all.' It was not the voice of the watcher. It could not be the voice of any human being the

[31] Theodore Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), p.72
[32] Tsegaye Wodajo, *Hope in the Midst of Despair: A Novelist's Cure for Africa*. Africa World Press, Inc. (2004), p.88

> conductor knew. It was a large voice rolling down and everywhere covering empty spaces in the mind and really never stopping anywhere at all. (*The Beautyful Ones*, p. 4)

In italics that may stand as an excerpt from some ancient scripture, the narrator reads: "*And so words and phrases so often thrown away as jokes reveal their true meaning. And Jesus wept. Aha, Jesus wept."* Armah implies that his protagonist has been there and has been a witness to all perversions. In other words, like a god, the man has seen it all! If only figuratively, this watcher acting god seems to be the one who appropriates justice in his hands. The same narrator reacts with his response, 'spittle' that is body vermin that goes with the moral one just taking place: "…a stream of the man's spittle. Oozing freely, the oil like liquid first entangled itself in the fingers of the watcher's left hand…" (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.5) The way the narration is devised leaves the reader with little doubt as to the unethicality of the whole drama going on outside. In case Jesus wept for some committed wrongdoing, as the interjection in italics claims, "…the conductor [quite astonishingly] did not weep." The bottom line from this scene is that because the man in the story is delineated as a god in a godless universe, his only means of calling for justice is to reflect that injustice and consider the stealing of resources of the nation as a filthy practice. This first scene in particular is premonitory through the fact that it announces the shape of immorality in independent Ghana throughout the novel. The man here typifies any man, representing the helpless population standing in judgment over ruthless public servants. Armah's imitation of the Scriptures is effected with the purpose of heightening the sense of urgency, as the absence of morality highlights the gravity of the African condition after independence.

In moving from the literal to the symbolic levels of the novel, the conductor can be approximated as the cabinet minister Koomson, while the driver seems to be paralleled with President Nkrumah. And again the man is like a God (or Jesus) who keeps faithful with his first symbol as a god who forgives and handles justice on his own terms. He, after *the coup* helps the 'fugitive minister' to hide and escape to safety in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. True, the ex-minister has cheated him and deceived his wife and mother-in-law in the shipping project they were supposed to get, using his influence as a senior public officer. Nevertheless, the man finds no reason why he should not save that corrupt minister from the jaws of no less myopic new leaders. The man seems to reason that since the fate of

Ghana is to exchange hands between old embezzlers and new ones, why should he hand Koomson in a game of revenge? "But for the nation itself there would only be a change of embezzlers and a change of the hunters and the hunted." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.162) To help Koomson find his way to Abidjan does not mean he is, after all, forgiven and his nasty career simply overlooked[33]. Faithful to his god imagery, Armah here, as in the entire final scenes, leaves no doubt that Koomson, very much like his driver or the former Ghanaian premier, Nkrumah, have to be spared until the day comes when the beautiful ones are born and justice can be done. On his way back home after putting Koomson on a boat bound for exile, the man witnesses a scene that reconfirms his belief that the regime which has recently seized power is as corrupt and "ill-smelling" as the old one. A bus driver handing his license folder to a policeman has slid cedi notes in it. And again the man reclaims his god-like stature, for "The driver must have seen the silent watcher by the roadside, for, as the bus started up the road and out of the town, he smiled and waved to the man." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.183). The man, the reader understands, is left to conclude that the filth the first rulers have caused and the stench they brought cannot possibly be cleaned, and justice established, by a new military regime which is as corrupt as the previous one, if not more.

Soon after the conductor is through with the man, the driver clears his throat and aims his blob that contains a hoarse growl at the man with the stomach to repeat the same action again. The spittle of the conductor itself connotes filth. In addition to showing that this driver has no respect or esteem for ordinary people walking down the street, the same behaviour illustrates that the driver and conductor are both complicit in the nasty game. Meanwhile, such metaphor permeates power functioning in the newly independent Ghana. Elevated to the driving position, the driver uses a privilege that recalls that of a head of state presiding over the people in order to humiliate them, not to serve them. Both misconducts, embezzling state money and spitting on common people are deliberate actions of will instead of accidental coincidences. Indeed, it is in the symbolic bearings of the drama of driver-conductor that the reader is encouraged to see the parallel with the Koomson-Nkrumah and fully explore it in the rest of the novel. Switching from seemingly trivial and inconsequential little filthiness, that of the driver and his conductor, to wider

[33] According to Wodajo, in helping Joe Koomson escape the country, the man "seems to have become a participant in the evil acts of corruption he has so despised in others." I think that Wodajo here simply overlooks the protagonist's choice to help Koomson escape. Tsegaye Wodajo, *Ibid.*, p. 68.

taints and slovenliness, like that of the president and his cabinet ministers, is Armah's way of recording the implications issuing from the lack of beauty in independent Ghana. Such a way is found by one critic to be overwhelmingly mythical[34], which further supports the point introduced here.

Reflecting on the direct or literal reasons behind Armah's stand *vis-à-vis* fictional Koomson and factual senior officers, one could find Armah quite eccentric, as many of his harsh critics often see him. But it is only in investigating the rationale of his symbolic and mythic framework in this novel and the way it is channeled to feed into beautiful, egalitarian and serious visions of Africa that we might be ready to acknowledge his efforts and place them in their exact historical situation. Socialism and African nationalism, from Armah's viewpoint, are promises not kept, and Africans have only the gleam instead of actual beauty.

> Having the whiteness of the stolen bungalows and the shine of the stolen cars flowing past him, he could think of reasons, of the probability that without the belittling power of things like these we would all continue to sit underneath old trees and weave palm wine dreams of beauty and happiness in our amazed heads. And so the gleam of all this property would have the power to make us work harder, would come between ourselves and our desires for rest, so that through wanting the things our own souls crave we would end up moving a whole people forward. At such times the man was ready to embrace envy itself as a force, a terrible force out of which something good might be born, and he could see around close corners in the labyrinth of his mind, new lives for Oyo; for the children with their averted eyes; for himself also. Then in the morning the thick words staring stupidly out from the newspapers, about hard work and honesty and integrity, words written by men caring nothing at all about what they wrote, all this would come to mean something.
> But then in the office it is hard work not to see that even this little peace of mind is an illusion. Hard work. As if any amount of hard work could ever at this rate bring the self and the loved ones closer to the gleam. How much hard work before a month's pay would last till the end of the month? (*The Beautyful Ones*, pp.94-5)

The gleam, as this excerpt clearly adds, sets a trick before the amazed wonderers in search for the promised wealth. Armah's idea here is that no matter how hard one tries to work, there is something in the logic of the gleam that does not end up in a situation where one can attain

[34] The critic is Ben Obumselu and he writes that: "*The Beautyful Ones* is best read as myth. Its treatment of the corruption of power, of the contradictions inherent in the idea of benevolent autocrat of the oppression of social and political experience, as patterns which repeat themselves suggests that the operative imaginative form is that of myth." Ben Obumselu, "Marx, Politics and the African Novel" *Twentieth Century Studies*, 10 Dec., 1973, p. 112

satisfaction. Stolen wealth justifies itself in newspapers by preaching demagogical slogans like 'hard work' and 'keep your city clean'. Meanwhile, the man survives only from payslip to payslip. No amount of saving and planning can help the man satisfy the basic needs of his loved ones, Oyo and the children. Yet it is these loved ones that are mostly driven by the misguided slogan of the "gleam". Indeed, and as he acknowledges to Teacher, the man is horrified at the loved ones' inability to understand this 'trick' of the gleam. He makes it clear that "I cannot sit and watch Oyo and her mother getting fooled by this Koomson." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.57) When he faces both Oyo and his mother-in-law with the fact that Koomson is actually a thief and as corrupt as hell, he finds that no one is ready to listen to him. Oyo starts explaining her philosophy of justification: "…long roads and short roads…", whereas her mother simply stops listening to him and leaves.

Koomson's gleam, when considered in its mythical proportions, seriously threatens the man's value of honesty and moral integrity. The man's immediate family sees him essentially as an incorrigible failure. Still Armah's focus is not on the subject, that is, the man's agony, but on the object which is the gleam and the absence of real and lasting beauty. Koomson, by contrast, is looked at by the man's loved ones as some prophet of a mythical *eldorado* profiting from the chances open before him. As a result of such a reversed worldview, home stops being the comforting home that the man used to seek after work. Emotionally, he is separated from his wife by an ocean of contrary aspirations and identifications albeit they live in the same house. Loneliness and domestic insults take the better of his manhood. On the day he takes his children to their grandmother, the old woman greets him with wailings and a warning addressed to his own son: [do]"not grow up to be a useless nobody [unlike the man, his father], that he would be a big man when he grew up." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.124) The scene where Oyo's mother warns her grandchildren against adopting their father's ethos comes after her successive disappointments in his restrained attitude. If the man's moral choices have only resulted in destitution and distress, then for Oyo and her mother, it is a better choice to trade ethical standards for the spoils of the 'national game'. If the man's own boy is pushed not to embrace his father's ethical choices and moral values, then certainly Armah has captured the very essence of the modern identity crisis in postcolonial Africa. The gleam, which is again,

only a shortcut of a stolen beauty, is a symbol of bastardization, a severe identity crisis. The gleam, thus, serves to justify inauthentic and unrepresentative political choices[35].

Ironically, exactly as Teacher predicts, only time shows them how naïve they were in expecting the minister's loyalty by being his associates. Koomson finally deceives them into signing the application forms, gets the bank loan and buys the fishing boat for himself. He christens the boat PRINCESS, in honour of his own daughter, which is his way of stamping his footprint of selfishness and mockery on the boat. What adds insult to injury is that they are sent the crambs of the fraud, some baskets of fish from the boat that was supposed to be theirs in the first place. In the end then, Oyo and her mother get the truth about Koomson. The fact is that he is none but a callous cheater, someone whom the man has been alerting them against for years. But it is until the *coup* occurs that the man regains his wife's trust and true esteem. That day and while the man is on duty, Koomson comes to hide at Oyo's. Only that day does Oyo start feeling "…a deep kind of love, a great respect" for the man, her former *chichi dodo* husband. Caught by the sway of his former gleam, Oyo could not think of Koomson's exact identity until the day when she has been able to contrast his former lavish life with the bad smell and "the corrosive gas, already half liquid" that "had filled the whole room, irritating not only the nostrils, but also the inside, of eyes, ears, mouth, throat." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.161) Later, the narrator adds that whenever Koomson speaks, his mouth "…had the rich stench of rotten menstrual blood. The man held his breath until the new smell had gone down in the mixture with the liquid atmosphere of the Party man's farts filling the room." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.163)

In portraying Koomson's fall as self-suppressive and annihilative, Armah casts the whole final episode of the minister's career a grotesque dimension. His purpose, however, is matching Oyo's need for self-apprehension. Intentionally, Armah credits Oyo with examining the circumstances arising from her ex-'brother Joe's' abject and humiliating fall. Her early confusion and shock were necessary and helpful means of reconciliation with her husband, and by extension, with his ideals of moral beauty, not just the shining gleam. Similarly, the same shock is indispensable for her to realize that the foul smell which the minister causes

[35] In reference to the power to the captivating radiance of the gleam in Armah's *The Beautyful*, one has to take in consideration de Gruchy's observations that "…art in its endeavor to help us see differently, is often iconoclastic, reacting against images and symbols associated with de-humanising ideologies and powers." John W. de Gruchy, "Holy Beauty: A Reformed perspective on Aesthetics within a World of Unjust Ugliness." http://livedtheology.org/pdfs/deGruchy.pdf, p.7 One such reflective image in the novel is the gleam which derives its force from borrowed time from the future. Since no matter how hard you work no one can possibly amass such wealth, brilliance and glamour and stay at the same time morally and ethically clean.

inside her own bedroom have been the insides of his gleam, derision and stolen glamour. Still she has learnt that these demeaning characteristics have been essentially there with Koomson all his life. Seen in its true light, the *coup* frees Oyo's sense of beauty from what de Gruchy calls "…the tyranny of superficial and facile images of the beautiful [to the extent that she] can begin to understand the beauty of God and its redemptive power amidst the harsh reality of the world."[36] In other words, witnessing the irony of fate in Koomson has shattered Oyo's sense of a disrupted orientation towards the gleam, and finally rectifies her own definition of beauty and self. The result is that she renews her trust in the man's ethical choices and embraces his moral cleanliness as her own.

What Oyo learns that day is by no means simple. In fact, her realization of her husband's true worth strikes a very special chord on the entire bearing of Armah's objective in the novel. True, corruption wins the day since the *coup* ushers in just other embezzlers, but for the man, at least, home has been regained as home in the spiritual sense once more. Oyo's commentary: "How he smells!", in reference to Koomson, sums up the beautiful transformation in her. She soon adds: "I am glad you never became like him." The narrator notes the change with this comment: "In Oyo's eyes there was now real gratitude. Perhaps for the first time in their married life the man could believe that she was glad to have him the way he was." (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.165) In order to appreciate this change, one has to contrast this dénouement with her former disappointments in the man's moral choices.

As it happens, Oyo's ultimate identification with the man's moral choices can be traced in the novel as some switching in her symbolic conception of Koomson. The image of the Minister, as it constantly crosses her mind, used to offer her the promise of the gleam. His fat, perfumed and soft body had long hurt her, as long as she used to contrast that wealth with her humble condition. When the Koomsons visit them for talks about the boat deal, she feels hurt for not wearing the same diamond ring as the one worn by Estella. The goods and the furniture she wondered about in the Koomsons' reception room had a bewitching power over her composure, values and moral choices. That gleam nourishes a set of standards amounting to a fantastic world where she cannot accept less than those standards. In embracing those standards, Oyo had presupposed that there would be no shadow cast on that gleam. Indeed, it is the boundaries between the real and the unreal that have been erased. To have her talk on 'long roads and short roads' while her mother openly insults the man for his ethical values

[36] John W. de Gruchy, "opcit.", p.9

meant the end of all things beautiful. Without the lessons of the *coup*, the world would have kept the man in a marginalized position. The *coup* in Armah's dramatic design restores some equilibrium in the world and reveals to anyone that there are cosmic laws that preserve beauty by giving the world some sense of order.

With the coming of the *coup*, it is not Oyo that hankers after the gleam. On the contrary, it is the gleam, or fake beauty, that seeks refuge in her bed room. This time the gleam comes to her naked, revealing its true identity: fright and ghastly smell! Because down at the bottom, the gleam is what the man has always told her: 'public theft' and 'stealing by means of employment'. Since her husband gives up his own meal to feed the hungry Koomson, Oyo finally but also ironically experiences the gleam's true story by herself. In the image of the man passing his meal over to Koomson, this latter stands faithful to the man's former portrayal of him about 'public theft', that is Koomson as 'a taker', 'consumer of what there is' and never a producer or originator. This, indeed, opens her eyes to some truth and deepens her trust in her husband's assessments and moral choices. Only this time Oyo is able to process the features of the gleam logically and in context. Instead of comparing Koomson's glamour with the meager conditions of her husband, Oyo compares the same past glamour with the source of the poisoned air deep in the darkness inside her bedroom. She is finally able to discover the seamy side of that glamour. Because in the end, that gleam is sown to be the identical twin of this poisoned air which she cannot smell, and this dénouement indicates that Oyo has sensed the immorality of the enterprise through the very fact that she has been swindled by her "benefactor".

One indeed ought not to diminish Oyo's transformation and the circumstances leading towards that transformation. A cursory look reveals that the melodramatic developments of the story stress the positive shift which has taken place and which has not been simple or possible without some compelling and inspiring qualities of the man[37]. The man is indeed idealised as an individual without ill feelings, and bearing a grudge against those who were unfair to him. What matters for him is that order is restored. The beauty in that family's renewed harmony at the end of the novel reveals the overall beautiful picture of people reunited. The reader is offered two final scenes actually. On the one hand there is the

[37] In a very interesting paper, Richard Priebe finds: "… the novel [*The Beautyful Ones*] is a powerful and eloquent thematic elaboration and exploration of the man's role as priest and the attendant paradox of being part of, yet separate from, the structure of society." Richard Priebe, "Demonic Imagery and the Apocalyptic Vision in the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah", *Yale French Studies*, N° 53 (1976), p. 111

man's restored harmony in his household, and on the other hand, Koomson's shattered equilibrium based on immoral actions.

Oyo's reconciliation with the man is but a tiny glimpse of hope that Armah offers near the end of his otherwise mostly criticized book. The glimpse comes in the form of hope. For the glimpse is indicative of the chasm still to be bridged between the rulers and the ruled, as well as between self and other or beauty and excrement[38]. The man expresses this case quite rhetorically when implying that the coup is simply a façade betraying only a change 'of the hunters and the hunted'. And as the drama unfolds, between the first bus scene and the second one, which significantly marks both the beginning and the end of the novel, Africa lives inside its morass of corruption and stench. Such a structuring of the novel justly captures the spirit of Armah's understanding of African politics. When one refers only to Ghana's record of military *coups*, history has not proved him wrong. In the final analysis, Africa's case looks very much like the mad woman the man met by the sea when back from Koomson's rescue: "It was not young, and it looked like something that had been finally destroyed a long time back. And yet he found it beautiful when he looked at it." For though destroyed and ripped in her nerves, Africa is still resourceful in beauty. Expecting her to articulate some understandable statement, she only cries: "They have mixed all together! Everything! They have mixed everything. And how can I find it when they have mixed it all with so many other things?" (*The Beautyful Ones*, p.180) Perhaps the mad woman is metaphorically like Oyo, she is confused over which scale of values to take and which ones to refuse. Like Oyo, the gleam has made it difficult for her to decide and distinguish the truly beautiful from the fake.

3. **Creative Inspiration: Education as an Ideology of Beauty**

Armah's view *vis-à-vis* the role that education has to take in order to promote Africa's re-birth is expressed in his last two fictional works in terms of symbols and

[38] Joshua D. Etsy, in the above mentioned article, "Excremental Postcolonialism", offers an interesting observation. If corruption ends up with Koomson no better than the excrement his body gets rid of (think of the time he was hiding in Oyo's bedroom and the foul smell he lets go of), then that excrement is the product of the self. Esty claims that "Shit, operating as the preeminent figure of self-alienation (the matter that is both self and not-self), becomes a symbolic medium for questioning the place of the autonomous individual in new postcolonial societies." pp. 36-37. In other words, to what extent one is involved within the cycle of beauty-excrement seems very relative and a matter of little clarity. That is why, it seems, the man unquestionably and without second thoughts decides to help Koomson escape. The metaphor of shit as both self and not-self works its effects on the man and shapes his ethical choice not to leave Koomson to the Soldiers' jaws.

myths. Rebirth, according to Armah, necessarily involves inspiration from the great heritage of the past. To have a rebirth and miss the contact with the navel, that is the source, is for Armah another manifestation of loss and death. The insistence on going back to the source is not only vital but crucial for this rebirth. That is why in *Osiris Rising*, there is a group of talented (albeit mostly western-trained) intellectuals working as one body to the same single end of rebirth. The mythical dimension appears in the fact that his intellectuals cannot go on without considering all their efforts as a reactivation of some Ankh secret society effectively raising children along proper African values, resisting the slave trade or preserving the authentic African way of life at every cost. In a seminar at the University of California at Berkeley, Armah stated: "We need to develop institutions of awareness to maintain our values; a knowledge of our spiritual and material resource bases and be given to our children from the early age."[39] In *KMT*, Armah makes the backbone of his drama entirely dependent on occult collaboration of two university professors with two griots—traditionalists. Beyond mere criticism of the current educational system or just an emphasis on the centrality for going back to the source, Armah has the merit of blending these two analyses without in the least forgetting to provide the drama, with enough people working to make their convictions come to fruition.

Instead of just curtailing his project by attacking what he calls 'imperial education' in general remarks or dispersed statements for the sake of providing depth, Armah outlines nearly all his reservations regarding this education in his early intellectual characters, namely Teacher, Baako and Modin. In *Fragments* Armah designs Baako as the experimental object wherein western education can either prove its utility for progressive projects in Africa or simply belie that often proclaimed role. In this sense, the first part in the second section helps the reader to perceive the irony in *Fragments*. This irony aims at revealing the reasons behind Baako's cruel and dramatic downfall. By so revealing the factors behind that metaphorical collapse, Armah leaves readers to decide whether Africa should count on western education or not. In other words, Armah's reader retains his/her right to examine whether western education can be really an asset contributing to Africa's rebirth or a means of subjugation and control. Finding their own ways up from the nadir where Baako, Teacher and Modin are left, the late

[39] Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening." (1990) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related

intellectual characters, and particularly those of the last two novels,—all stress education as a pillar for what can be called the foundation of beauty in the continent all over again. The second part of this section is wholly dedicated to dealing with Armah's exploitation of this concern: authentic education as an element of regeneration and rebirth. We follow the writer's ideas and the extent to which he details and envisions authentic education in the context of the present condition, that is, beyond dispersed attacks that are limited in scope (paying only a lip-service to the deeper problem behind education). Very precisely, we are going, in this section, to examine the ways in which Armah translates his first and early rhetoric (mainly that one made in *Why Are We So Blest?*) concerning education into a praxis capable of making a positive change.

a. Baako's Experience: Problems with the Western Educational Paradigm:

Any reader with a keen interest in the ideas evolved by Armah will find that education is an important concern in his vision. The reader can consider the hopelessness and disappointments of the protagonists of the first three novels as attributable to the western education they received in the first place. That Teacher, Baako Solo and Modin cannot face their overriding concern about their societies and most down-to-earth problems, despite their mental strength, testifies to the time lag or epistemic chasm separating the learnt 'wisdom' in the western shrine of knowledge and the real exigencies of their own societies. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Teacher, the supposed role model, cannot face and stand whole before his mother. He escapes from home but she is still capable of haunting him in dreams. Similarly, Baako, the "been-to", seems never in a position to live up to his mother's expectations. For her, he is just a failure and a disappointment. Meanwhile, Modin is totally wasted and despite quitting his Ph.D. program in Harvard, the grip of that alien education has been very stressful on him. Below in this section there will be emphasis on what Armah indicates as Baako's experience of failure. This interpretation seems grounded since the writer leaves enough evidence for readers to assume that Baako's failure is mostly attached to the effects of the western education he receives. Saying this, however, does not exclude Teacher's or Modin's cases. Because Modin never actually makes it to his home country, and in fact, never has the chance to test his received knowledge or western 'wisdom' among his people

and family, then we cannot conclude on the effects of his metropolitan education on Africa. Besides, in Teacher's case, there are no indications where he did his schooling or when. Perhaps, in his story one learns about the processes and procedures of that knowledge, but not about how it affects society at large. In addition, Teacher's little background knowledge together with his cynical and finalizing remarks about Africa's fate and the responsibility of his neocolonial 'ex-friends in power render us slightly liable to self-deceit and misconceptions about the exact effects of his western education on his role in society.

This, however, does not imply that Teacher's and Modin's experiences are of little help to this study and reference to them will duly be made. But in comparison, Baako's trajectory lends itself to a better perspective. For it is with Baako, the protagonist of *Fragments* (1970), that the reader has the opportunity to weave all the threads of Armah's thoughts *vis-à-vis* the on-ground impact of western education on Africans. Modin certainly utters very strong statements about foreign education; teacher can leave us with some concern about living under a corrupt national government; Lindela at first avoids dealing with its disquieting effects, but none of these protagonists embodies better than him how Western education has affected African people on the personal and communal levels. One further appropriateness of *Fragments* is the belief that there is no loud rhetoric in it about the dangers of this foreign education in direct terms as in *Why Are We So Blest?*; *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*. *Fragments* has the merit of allowing the drama of the events themselves to form an understanding of the writer's resentful attitude regarding this foreign knowledge and education. We shall attempt to interpret Baako's failure to fit in with his society and its metaphorical implications from this perspective.

An examination of *Fragments* necessarily leads to studying Baako's mindset and attitude regarding what his newly independent society expects from him. Armah, at some point in the novel, simply endears him to the reader only to eventually turn him mad. Perhaps, this last strategy helps in articulating the idea that his fellow Ghanaians, like Athenians before, have themselves turned mad after condemning their sage to madness. Interesting, though, is the following question: To what extent, can we say that he is a historicist moved by a positive notion of historical consciousness? Does historical consciousness entail that one should give up the fight before ever trying, like Baako? This young man seems unable to work out a coherent and practical agenda, albeit with few, but nevertheless attainable measures. (like Achebe's Obi in *No Longer at Ease*; endorsing the

suggestion that Baako aims at initiating drastic social change). Amongst other concerns, he is obsessed with a movie script on chattel slavery. This pictorial condemnation of slavery can be linked to condemning the intellectual slavery that is implied by a visible African allegiance to the Western cultural paradigms.

Armah might have succeeded in creating a unity about the fragmented world he decries. But what is at stake, however, is that both the unity and the fragmentation decried in the novel bear evidence to the modern day African identity crisis. At heart we argue that *Fragments* primal concern is that it questions the prestige generally claimed from pursuing studies in the metropolitan university. The drama in this novel is aimed at disproving the belief that an African graduating from a western-style university *ipso facto* helps to ensure the welfare of his community. Moreover, Baako's drama attests to the idea that having a Western education is simply of no help to survive in an African environment. With only a pile of books and a guitar for luggage, once back home from his studies in America, Baako airs the opinion that social transformation will be a matter of time only. Had he received a useful, home education, so the writer seems to indicate, the strangeness or his difficulty to fit into his native country should not in his circumstances amount to a fragmentation of the mind, alienation and loss. As we start reading the novel, we discover Baako's estrangement from his people and society. He is quite baffled to learn that it does not take a degree to secure a job. For a genuine historicist, the same strangeness and difficulty are all expected as part of the obligation which his ideals entail. Indeed, this difficulty should be understood as the guiding principle justifying his very existence as an intellectual; otherwise why should there be such a bad need for intellectuals? What is amiss with Baako, however, might be his seemingly an innate incapacity to expect people's traditionality (resistance) as part of his historical fate. Part of Armah's design is that he appears to debase Baako by portraying him seeking, not to say hankering after, his own peace of mind and welfare in the first place while the desire to be a model in society comes only after.

Reviewing *Fragments*, the Danish critic Kirsten Holst Petersen finds that "[…]the form of the book can […] be said to not only reflect, but be an integral part of its message or meaning"[40]. The division of time, according to the same source, is at the heart of what the writer wants to say. The critic maintains that the circular conception of time as introduced by

[40] Kirsten Holst Petersen, "Loss and Frustration: An Analysis of A. K. Armah's *Fragments*" in: Derek Wright, (ed.), *Critical Perspective on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Three Continents Press, (1992), p. 217

Baako's grandmother, Naana, works in favour of "a religious mode of perception, rejecting rational, scientific explanation of phenomena" where the "transcendental, mythical system […] defies logic…"[41]. In the end the same critic concludes that "Naana represents true spirituality, the seeing blind eye as opposed to the blind seeing eyes that surround her."[41] In what follows, one finds that despite the fact that this reading reflects perhaps how the writer himself wants his novel to be read, there are several problems before such a stand can be taken. First, spirituality, if it ever appears as reflective and constructive (the way Petersen assumes), cannot fail to make its case applicable to *all* members of the community. The contention that members of the same community have undergone a cultural surgery whereby they have lost their values and become alienated from so called "true" spirituality leads us to consider the role of the same spirituality 'holders' to fight in a corrective cause as part of these holders' mission.

Kofi Owusu insists on reading *Fragments* as an African story that strongly compares with William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*[42]. Baako is seen as a complex character, but that complexity does not prevent his ideas about cultural regeneration from being subject to reflection and criticism. It seems that gaining Western knowledge does not ensure practical insight of African realities. Such impracticality of the 'wisdom won' in foreign lands, Armah plans it to mean, as essential and foundational. Education is initially planned and processed among student communities that way; always postulated as a very rough competition with potential and privileged others. The expression 'survival of the fittest' is fairly accurate to account for scholarship and the way education in general is approached in the western academy. Its momentum is found by the writer murderous because in the end its structure is hierarchal. The pyramidal structure forces Baako to underscore his vision and goodwill. Therefore, the pyramid as metaphor can be reenacted for a constructive comprehension of Armah's meaning from staging Baako's fate as suicidal. Although he imagines a context where he can be a sort of modern healer, the thrust of the pyramidal drive impairs his noble ends. Again, it is this very self-centeredness that ironically misleads him and causes his insanity at the end. Petersen's position is quite pertinent. Armah works on both the circular and the linear

[41] Kirsten Holst Peterson, "Ibid.", p. 218.
[41] Kirsten Holst Peterson, "Ibid.", p. 220.
[42] Owusu opines the following: " Society's unreasoning 'reason' condemns Baako's reasoned 'unreason' as 'madness'. Society's wrapped notion of 'reason' defines Baako's 'madness'; but the 'dialogue' between Baako and the society which consigns him to a mental hospital is 'faked'…" Kofi Owusu, "Armah's *Fragments*: Madness as Artistic Paradigm". *Callalo*, N° 35, (Spring, 1988), p. 363

(that is on the mythical and factual) lines with the purpose of showing that Baako is stripped from historical consciousness as a result of having to make it to a foreign school that little attends to the specificities of the African or Akan world. Hence Baako cannot take a positive approach to the situation resulting from the interaction between Traditionality and European modernity. Consequently, his quest for an authentic identity is severely injured and hampered.

William Walker assuming the same critical perspective suggests another way of reading Baako's fate:

> The protagonist [Baako] seeks to reenter a fragmented world which holds his roots, his lost culture and his only source of redemption. This quest, however, is doomed in advance since the distance between the two worlds has become too great and the return path is no longer clear, buried under too many years of alien influence.[43]

In this connection, one can easily notice that common or popular Traditionality, when manifested through nepotism, political corruption, family hypocrisy and repudiation of the old ancestral ethos, is perceived to a large extent by Baako as the unfolding of some facts of nature rather than the result of some traceable and unfortunate historical circumstances. Indeed, matters would be different if he had started to approach these ills as results of deliberate actions of will where both European Modernity and local arcane practices bear evidence to such results. In his illustration of the African Writers Series edition of *Fragments*, cover designer Bill Heyes draws two black hands tightly fastened together with a white string. Although there is no obstacle before the five fingers to keep them from stretching out freely, they remain strangely half-cloned and turned inwardly with plams facing each other. The five fingers form a bone sandwich which, though seemingly fear-inspiring remains, in actual fact unable to untie itself. In fact, the two hands may stand for action needed on the part of intellectuals. This reaction may be due to two main reasons. The first one is that the white string suggests capitalistic consumerism and profit values, made possible by European Modernity; the second reason is that those closed knuckles bear witness to arcane *mental* practices. Indeed, it is this failure of imagination that is mostly deplorable on the part of Baako, which is again attributable to the education he has acquired.

Overlooking his Nietzschean premises which might not gain unanimous sympathy, pragmatist theorist George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), offers a body of knowledge whereby we can verify whether Armah's Baako has a genuine historical self-consciousness.

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[43] William Walker, *Major Ghanaian Fiction in English: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Kofi Awoonor*. PhD Thesis, University of Texas at Austin (1975), p. 201

Mead contends that in critical situations (of which identity issues are glaring examples), the self need not withdraw to itself in a kind of refractive self-defense. The self rather ought to confront the challenges it faces by considering the option of compromise, if only for a time. Mead writes: "[O]ne senses the self only in so far as the self assumes the role of another so that it becomes both subject and object in the same experience." Interesting, too is his idea of novelty. He takes novelty as "the foundation of consciousness, intelligence and freedom; it is the ground of human experience."[44] Here the focus is only on the problems that Baako mostly complains of, like nepotism, societal corruption, exposure to consumerist-culture together with the adoption of new values that are not necessarily in line with the old ancestral ones. If we take these as novelties challenging the social fabric of Ghana, then we will not fail to see them, the way Mead confides, as opportunities for self-reshaping and readjustment. Contrary to this positive perspective, we note that Baako harbours nostalgia for an irremediably lost world. But even if Naana's vision can prove helpful, it is his training in the first place that leaves him without mechanisms that would objectively assess Naana's lost world and opt for a constructive choice based upon that understanding. Baako never allows us to doubt that the failure to meet his people's expectations might be indicative of some roaming tribulations inside himself. Eventually, he never considers the option of questioning his intellectuality; to confront it courageously as a historical construct (not as a mystical or mythical holistic entity) and see in what ways it can be either deployed or done with in his African situation.

No less interesting is the idea that Baako almost never shows any sign of taking his intellectual aptitudes as a social skill or a social construct, traceable from the very social constraints he is subject to. Dissatisfaction, non-conformity or sheer non-compliance with the Ghanaian communal pursuits seems to make the foundation of his thoughts. Indeed, he seems to be primarily motivated by a need to react to these tendencies, rather than seeking an articulated notion about self and other. To the exception of Naana, communication with family members—the reader can easily find—is already a problem for Baako. This is so not because others are hesitant or reluctant to establish channels of communication with him but primarily because he, in the first place, thinks that he cannot manage relations with them. As to how he cannot find a way to communicate *with* fellow countrymen or prove his case *before*

[44] George Cronk, "George Herbert Mead", *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.bergen.cc.nj.us/faculty/gcronk/>, (2005)

them, the reader is only left to question the credibility of the means used for the cause he claims he is defending. For apart from some generalized abstractions, there is no clear statement detailing Baako's line of contest against what he decries. Commitment to a cause entails active involvement in social acts *with* others who do not necessarily share exactly the same ideals. Contrary to this, we find Baako all the time lamenting Naana's lost notions about tradition knowing that Naana has become, like him, a social outcast.

The debate is centred now on the keenness of the active subject or historicist to work out the equation of spending to his side. One can easily remark that keenness parallels his awareness of himself as a social entity or a consciousness of his own self as this self interacts in the social field at large. Consciousness, according to Mead, has to be materialized through a constructive conceptualization of the self as more or less "a reflexive process…distinguishing itself from other objects and from the body."[45] And even when meeting this requirement, there is a need to distinguish between 'rudimentary consciousness', which is a form of a pre-reflective awareness that refers to the "bare thereness of the world", and 'self-consciousnesses' where the individual self is objectified in accordance with its interaction with other selves in the social environment[46]. Self-consciousness is but one first step on the way to achieving 'historical self-consciousness', according to Mead. That is why stopping short of meeting the demands of the first, i.e.—self-consciousness, does not allow us to even wait and expect historical self-consciousness.

Under such circumstances for Baako, the historical self-consciousness with which he would have been credited by entering and later changing the world is simply absent, and this is due to his lack of contact with his country's realities. To take his main point of criticism (exposure to capitalistic or consumerist culture), we should bear in mind that Baako calls it derogatively "Cargo Mentality" (*Fragments*, p.160). Reading his hastily written personal notes, one cannot fail to see that Baako compares his society members with some Melanesian natives who perform 'primitive' rites by waiting for the cargos to come from heaven. In some Melanesian islands and during World War I and II, some indigenous religious sects looked at American and other Allied troops coming with their military cargos (aircraft carriers, planes, tanks, vans, etc.) as the realization of the prophecy of the cargo

[45] George Cronk, "Ibid.,"
[46] George Cronk, "Ibid.,"

cult. In order to share the bounties of the prophecy, there has to be first a hedonistic mass hysteria like "violent shaking of the hands and ecstatic trances" in a way of sacrifice.[47]

The parallel that Armah, or at least Baako, draws between his own people and Melanesians is clearly perceptible. All yearnings after Western goods are understood as gratuitous and dull, depersonalizing rites that recall benign Melanesians. Baako makes no efforts at understanding why his people long for western goods. His self-righteousness does not allow him to reconsider the idea that there has to be, perhaps, some deficiency with his 'authentic' tradition. On the contrary and as we find in Baako's notes, the young man even consults Naana (his fountain of authenticity) for explanations, "[A]sk Naana later. Try to find out what she sees and knows of this." (*Fragments*, p. 157). For what does Naana know about Melanesians?

Thus Baako never doubts the parallelism of his society with Melanesians, an attitude in him that downplays a large section of his people to mindless imitators, devoid of self-esteem and self-respect. He, in addition, moves on to refuse the construction of his presumed role within that inaccurate portrait which no one but himself draws in the first place. Baako imagines or takes himself for one among those important mediators standing between their ever expecting people and the gods who are supposed to bring the bounties. In his travel to study abroad, Baako takes modern day students (since students are also a 'been-tos') as the ones who assumes the role of "a messiah and the ancestors [who] bring huge supplies of manufactured goods. Their arrival will usher in a wonderful new era when the believers will have their identity, dignity and honor restored."[48] Baako ridicules that position due to no other reason but that stubborn refusal to be belittled into the role of the crucified 'messiah', that is, as somebody who sacrifices his own individual self so that others of his kind after him may lead a better life. In fact Baako's reference to Oedipus's pride and the hubris in Greek mythology (*Fragments*, p. 157) shows how aware he is of his defeatist premises. Like Oedipus's journey to the Oracle of Delphi, in Euripides' *The Bacchae* and in which tragedy was the result of vanity, Baako's travel as a 'been-to' comes as an ultimate

[47] Sources go even to report that there exists even today "Some cult members [who] believe they must imitate the foreigners. They even drill with wooden rifles and hold flag raising ceremonies. They adopt western dress and imitate western behavior. They have built wharves, storehouses, airfields, "radio masts," and lookout towers in anticipation of the arrival of good fortune. Cult leaders make contact with the deities by using "wireless telephones," often nothing more than wooden posts or carved totem poles." C. V. Gilnes, "The Cargo Cults", *Air Force Magazine*. January 1991, Vol. 71, N° 1 <http:www.afa.org/magazine/magz:asp.>

[48] C. V. Gilnes, "Opcit.,"

product of vanity in front of the Gods. Ironically, Baako's decision to be an artist evokes Oedipus's defiance to challenge God, so as to be a god himself[49]. Baako notes:

> The idea that the ghost could be a maker, apart from being too slow-breaking to interest those intent on living as well as the system makes possible, could also have something of excessive pride in it. Maker, artist, but also maker, god. It is presumably a great enough thing for a man to rise to be an intermediary between other men and the gods. To think of being a maker oneself could be a sheer unforgivable sin. (*Fragments*, p.157)

Baako is stressing the point in order to make people believe that refusal to know one's limitations ends in digressing toward what is properly the realm of makers or gods. He takes artists as an exceptional category of people competing, albeit unsuccessfully, with the gods since both seem to be engaged in a similar work, creation. Therefore it is the gods who while motivated by sheer jealousy of their competitors, defeat 'been-tos' and artists alike.

Nevertheless, the very parallel that he assumes linking Oedipus with himself should not overshadow the fact that Baako refuses the mediator's role for the waiting inhabitants of Ghana. One can note then that Baako's self-image of the god-like visionary supersedes that of the messiah or mediator. And implicitly the idea arises of the messiah's image is displaced on the ground that bounties cannot be provided since there is no place where they can be found to start with; they need to be made, that is created first. That is the reason why artists are urged to create, that is, to compete with gods or offer what gods have not been able to offer. Artists like to think that in the godless chaotic universe which they find, they either assume the role of the gods or the world becomes an uninhabitable place for humans. It is paramount at this stage to note why Armah orchestrates Baako's failure in the first place. Baako's worldview is fundamentally based on the postulate of the Greek paradigm. If Armah parodies Baako's presuppositions, it is because Baako, perhaps unconsciously or naively, perceives Africa as one of the old Greek city-states where the world is an arena in which gods and demigods brutally compete against each other. This makes him unfit for the battle with the consumerist inclinations of his society because in the end such a society slips into a variation between what is European and African.

[49] Braden Ruddy, "Hubris in Greek Mythology". <http:www.gradesaver.com/>

Even when condemning Baako's choices as unconstructive and self-defeating as far as Armah's identity quest is concerned, one may still observe that these choices are the result of certain premises in his thinking that are more in line with Platonic beliefs. Truth, in the Platonic school, is always situated outside human beings, beyond the reach of the individual because it is conceived as very objective, thus, it is both abiding and superior. In order to be abiding, just and holy, truth has to be regarded as a holistic entity, fixed in a timeless and shiftless 'objectivity', that is, a sort of a metaphysical fact which surpasses the human[50]. Within this paradigm one scholar observes that for Plato as well as for his mentor Socrates, truth can only be conceived "as an independent realm external to human beings. In ancient Greece, truth was regarded as an unchanging hyper-reality whose principles may be discoverable through, but not created by, human activity"[51]. His portrait of Baako allows us to think that Armah shows symptoms of this age-old Platonic view with the presupposition that a mind can lead a life totally independent of that of the body, à la Socrates[52]. By veering to mental suicide, that is, madness, Baako gives the illusion of eliminating bodily pain and enjoying the world of the mind only. But are not Baako's choices simply more about death where they should be dealing with more positive aspects in human existence? Aren't such choices purely pouring into the formation of "the disengaged self, the atomistic subject and atomistic individualism in society"[53]? With all fairness one might not miss the fact that Baako inaugurates what we may call 'a Traditionality of Postulations', which is responsible for his psychedelic identification with an idealistic heaven. Now identification with what can be termed Naana's 'Traditionality of Past-ness" is doomed to failure, knowing that it defies logic. The proof is that Baako turns

[50] We can witness some of these platonic principles in the famous Socratic dialogues. Trying to fix the meaning of Holiness, Socrates works out these analogies for his interlocutor, Euthyphro: "…if something is coming to be so or is being effected, then it's not the case that it *gets to be so* because it's *coming to be so*, but that it's *coming to be so* because it's *being effected*, but that it's *being affected* because it *gets affected*." Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates: Euthphro*; *Apology*; *Crito; Phaedo*. Trans. Hugh Tredennick & Harold Tarrant, Penguin Books, (2003), p. 21. (Emphasis in the original)

[51] John L. Hemingway, "Recovering the World: Varities of Philosophical Experience", *Schole*, 8, (1993), p. 5. <http//: faculty.wiu.edu/J-Hemingway/Publications/Hemingway__Recovering_the_World.pdf>

[52] After knowing that his case is almost desperate, Socrates turns furious as he attacks his main accuser, Meletus. The language, as we notice, is more rhetorical than economical. The reason for that switch to rhetoric can be explained on the ground that by then Socrates merely wanted to gain the audience's sympathy: "[B]ut perhaps someone will say, 'Do you feel no compunction, Socrates, at having pursued an activity which puts you in danger of the death penalty?' I might fairly reply to him, 'You are mistaken, my friend, if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. He has only one thing to consider in performing any action; that is, whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one. On your view the heroes who died at Troy would be poor creatures, especially the son of the Thetis…Do you suppose that he [Achilles] gave a thought to death and danger?" Plato, *Ibid.*, p. 54

[53] John L. Hemingway, "Opcit.,", p.7

mad at the end. In this regard *Fragments* can be taken as a precursor or prototype for Armah's plans for the creative intellectual in *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers*, *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*.

In an article entitled "The Promethean "Factor" in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest*?", Joyce Johnson tries to establish a connection between Baako and Modin on the one hand and Aeschylus' Prometheus on the other hand. Johnson works towards this end by claiming that Armah has deployed the same old Greek myth in both novels. According to Johnson, "Baako, with his desire to see the oppressed break out of the circle of oppression, his rejection of privilege, and his 'foolhardy' attempt to defy an entrenched power structure, is clearly a hero in the Promethean mold"[54]. Our argument above concerning the lack of social action on Baako's part questions Johnson's presumption. For how can either Baako or Modin be compared with Prometheus, knowing that the latter has never been perceived as alienated or disengaged from human affairs. Prometheus' disagreement with Zeus and his subsequent punishment are all part of his identification (made possible through social participation, one can still stress) with the world of the mortals. Stealing the sacred fire of knowledge at the risk of raising Zeus' fury, in actuality that which diametrically opposes Baako's disinterestedness. This latter is manifested in his lack of any serious willingness to understand his society's present choices and its need for new configurations. As his name stands for "forethought", we are justified in understanding that Prometheus might have been still conscious about his former moral error of uniting with Zeus to overpower other Titans "including allegorically-named Kronos ("time"), Mnemosyne ("memory/ remembrance"), Themis ("justice"), Phoebe ("brightness"), Oceanus ("the ocean"), Hyperion ("the high one"), Tethys and Theia (both mean "the goddess/ the revered lady")"[55]. One is not likely to miss the fact that Prometheus' handing of the sacred fire might be after all his conscious efforts at redeeming his error when allied with the unscrupulous Zeus with whom he destroyed other titans. Conscience with the welfare of fellow humans not disengagement from their world would have been the starting point of Baako's identification with the Promethean factor.

[54] Joyce Johnson, "The Promethean "Factor" in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest*?" in: Derek Wright, (ed.), *Critical Perspective on Ayi Kwei Armah*. Three Continents Press, (1992), p. 207.
[55] Ed Friedlander, "Enjoying *Prometheus Bound*", <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/6969/myth.htm>

b. Authentic Education as an Alternative Choice: Embracing Asar's Kind of Intellection

As stated in the above segment, Armah's objection to western education is basically centred on the Graeco-Roman foundations of this education. Whatever his attachments to Naana's fountain of Akan spirituality, Baako still conceives of the world as an arena where gods and demi-gods are constantly fighting! There is a rift deep inside his imagination which uncritically pushes him to reduce his case to the sharp edges of some brave but, in the end, still a hopeless gladiator. Given Armah's balanced and symmetrical view about African deity and African man in the earlier section of this chapter, it will not be difficult to locate his alternative proposal on education as an important paradigm for regeneration and self-invention. Partly in answer to Baako's case in *Fragments* but also in the hope of coming around his philosophy of self and being, Armah through "the words of Swri the drinker, elected scribe of the companions in the house of life" in *KMT*, provides the African man with precise levels of consciousness. The first level is connectedness; the second one, commitment. Baako might enjoy both of these but he lacks the means by which he would break the wall separating connectedness from commitment. The solution to this problem would be what Swri calls 'energy':

> Energy in dispersed form may go unrecognized as power, as long as it remains divided, broken, the pieces attached to a million disparate objectives, objects of simple desire, vague goals, empty wishes, haphazard dreams.
> Thus fragmented, our energy is so dissipated that in each instance of its myriad uses it is inevitably a weak force, its motion without consequences. Commitment gathers the many wandering fragments of the energy that is our soul, concentrates the gathered energy, then focuses the beam on goals we set ourselves. (*KMT*, pp. 244-5)

In connectedness there is the reason behind Baako's catastrophic failure. Baako lacks both commitment and energy. Indeed, it is because of this very problem, the lack of a functioning mechanism for drawing connections with the rest of people, that Armah subsequently bases his philosophy of 'redemptive' or constructive education. Seeking a lost connection with others and with the deeper traditions going millennia back in time by identifying with its long buried wisdom can make the promise of a sustainable program for bettering the Africans' conditions

in the world today.[56] That is the reason why Baako, as a protagonist, remains an easy target for many critics. Wodajo finds him even 'naïve'[57], and that is perhaps why he is in favour of Asar. Instead of Baako, Asar is the one who conveys Armah's visions about authentic education. He finds that Asar's methods of 'study groups' and 'system of reconnaissance' excellent means whereby smooth and peaceful transformation of society can practically take place[58]. Below in this subsection, we try to see Armah's details on this factor of connectedness as it is reflected upon by his other protagonists.

But before expanding on Asar's qualities, one should note that in the first part of *KMT*, Armah again restates the reasons why he doesn't trust Western educational system on Africa's regeneration. Lindela observes that such a system and the way it is implemented with African students prevents them from being "system makers". By "system makers", Armah has in mind graduates who are more than just engineers, doctors, lawyers and simple administrators. By "system makers", one can understand an elite that is a blend of conscious, talented and committed think-tanks working always for the long run to ponder over the postcolonial conundrum. Holding to the conviction of 'system making' as conditional for a redemptive education, Armah tacitly but artfully moves in the second part of the same novel to lay the foundations for this alternative education in the hope, so we are to understand, to produce "system makers." The trust that has honed between traditionalist Djiely Hor and the university professor Sipha Jengo can only expand to meet the conditions necessary for "system makers" through a sound educational system. Good-hearted Traditionalists join hands with dedicated, innovative and secular university scholars in the hope of reversing Africa's fortunes. In *Osiris Rising*, Asar proposes to "design a new system, do detailed research

[56] In fact this opinion is not only Armah's. Molefi Asante shares roughly the same idea. At one instance Asante positions the centrality of ancient Egyptian history at the heart of his Afrocentrist philosophy. He states that: "But my aim…is to show that the very intense concern the Afrocentrist has with psychological dislocation, that is, where a person's psyche is out of sorts with his or her own historical reality, is a legitimate issue for any African corrective. You cannot have an African building a church in the heart of Ivory Coast that is larger than St. Peter's in Rome without wondering what do we Africans think of our own ancestors? A one hundred or two hundred million dollar shrine to an African deity might have changed forever the religious respect for Africa. But a people who do not respect their own gods should not ever expect respect from anyone. I am saying this as one who is not religious. I am talking pure symbolism here, pure rationalism, not irrationality, but common sense. If you are not going to use the money as you should to improve the health conditions of African people, the educational standards, and the economic circumstances, then by God, use it to showcase your own ancestors, not to compete with Rome for who can build the largest European building in Africa." Molefi Kete Asante, "Ibid.,"

[57] Tsegaye Wodajo in this regard finds that "Baako's choice to struggle alone is partially based on his naivety in believing that the disease could be cured solely through individual efforts. He fails to see that the disease is too deeply entrenched to be dug out and removed by an individual regardless of that individual's position." Wodajo, *Op.cit.*, p. 105.

[58] Wodajo, *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

to outline necessary content, compare it to the old, argue its superiority in open debate, then organize its practical implementation." Maanan Djan, known to the group of teachers at Manda Training College as the Mystic Comrade, suggests "We'd have to organize in a way we haven't done before. Around precise objectives. With specific volunteers taking charge of each project. The rest of us would form a permanent support and resource group." (*Osiris Rising*, pp.189-90). Interesting still is the fact that the debate can quickly switch from the abstract to action and *vice versa*, thanks to Asar's charismatic role.

Among the critics that consider *Osiris Rising*, neither Ode Ogede, nor Tsegaye Wodajo discuss the contents of this curriculum. They both acknowledge that Armah means his proposed curriculum to be at the heart of his message out of the novel, yet they have done nothing to help explain why and how[59]. The group of teachers comes up with detailed observations and suggestions, all ready for execution in three departments: African Studies, History and Literature. The proposals are all predicated on the need to outdo the colonial cerebral paradigm in educating Africans. Gbemisola Adeoti does not miss the advantage from group work: "The group sees education as the bedrock of social change and a window into a new world. It advocates a system that displaces the centrality of Europe and America, making Africa its starting point."[60] Since the Europeans' aim to shape learning in the continent was primarily in the hope of "keeping Africans usably underdeveloped and dependent." (*Osiris Rising*, p.213), it is very logical to seek different criteria once Europeans have left. Curricula, according to Manda school designers, are not to be viewed as separate from subject—object dynamics in Africa; hence they recommend the necessity to free African students from 'old colonial servile reflexes' and habits of mind. The three departmental proposals are drafted by 'a joint committee drawn from interested faculty and students', and are all submitted to the Humanities Faculty for deliberations. Each department comes up with its proposal highlighting mainly three same concerns. The African Studies department outlines its proposal in three elements. The first element is entitled: **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**, where there are reviews on the state of art on the discipline as first charted in the European curricula. The second is called: **PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW APPROACH** outlines the

[59] Ode Ogede notes the highly symbolic framework on which Armah structures his novel. He declares that "the significance of *Osiris Rising* lies in the fact that it is allegoric and parabolic in conception, for, as in the preceding works, the characters presented in *Osiris Rising*, while aspiring to the status of flesh and blood humans, also illustrate attitudes, emotional states, and experiences that are representative." Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*. Athens, Ohio University Press. (2000), p. 140

[60] Gbemisola Adeoti, "The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an(Alter)-native Route to Development". *Africa Media Review*, Volume 13, N° 2, 2005, p. 11

reasons why main changes need to be implemented in the new curriculum. The third element, however, is labeled **DESIGN SPECIFICS** where it attempts translating the desired changes directly to a practical memorandum. History and Literature departments work in slightly the same fashion. Each provides what they call: **THE BACKGROUND**, **BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE OLD CURRICULUM** and later **PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW APPROACH**. By the end, each one department presents a list of demands they call: **RECOMMENDATIONS**, proclaimed to be a statement where immediate steps are insisted on for implementation.

In African Studies, the general assessment goes along a more stringent line that considers Western triumphalism as an attitude resulting from a penchant "locating exploitable antagonisms". Grabbing the African space could not be done effectively without "missionary intelligence gathering" too. In order for Manda Teachers to outdo this state of affairs, they emphasize the need to overcome the Darwinian linear 'anti-historical approach'. Instead of only accumulation, they "advocate a dynamic consciousness of history as a process.", where all factors, and the interplay between these factors, are brought into light and put under scrutiny. The activity of determining who is an African and who is not has to filter through the investigation of Africa's inhabitants prior to the Arab and European invasions. Since mythical *Kemet* is placed as the starting point from where Africans first originated, a full program attending to the study of heliographic scribes becomes paramount for the full appreciation of this starting point. And to this end, the use of archeological and linguistic evidence can be a means to determine who is African and who is not. We can consider here Brenda Cooper's reading of *Two Thousand Seasons* when she states that Armah "essentialises race, rewrites and freezes the past, and creates myths that have the effect of blurring the realities of black class differentiations."[61] Nevertheless, such racist drives in Armah's rhetoric do not reflect the entire content of his quest.

Similarly, in reviewing the state of the History Department the essentialist drive is fairly the same one. Priority number one is enabling students to read heliographs as part of their reading assignments routine. The mystery of the scribes is lifted from the monopoly of eccentric scholars and here kemetic life is brought out and starts shining its radiating influence that brings forth egalitarian ethics. Observing the great changes that have occurred in Japan, China and Korea has the value of locating the cultural elements that can dissolve

[61] Brenda Cooper, *To Lay These Secrets Open, Evaluating African Writing*. David Philip Publishers. Cape Town, (1992), p. 47.

social differences and result in societal cohesion. Armah's desire to watch over the experiences of these far eastern societies is for the purpose of making Africans shift from tribal identities, characteristic of feudal populations, to modern, self-dependent and self-developed communities. Besides, such a study breaks the European paradigm, publicized as the only option which Africa has to embrace or else die. To consider other experiences, particularly of these Asian societies that reached acceptable horizons of science and high technology while meanwhile keeping rooted in their origins and the sense of who they are, can induce Africans to do the same.

When it comes to the Literature Department, literature becomes a tool whereby one aims at optimal re-structuring of the mind are channeled for purposes ranging from simple educational instructions to a situation where we would have quality citizens. From this perspective, African Literature crucially sets instructional habits of democracy and designs strategies of knowing by providing excellent interpretive devices. This is aimed to go against the preposterous view which assumes Africa as a continent without literature or worse, beyond literature. Modern African literature, in this view, has been regarded as a twentieth century innovation, almost a bastard creation without roots in the African Oral Tradition, and not worth more than a few lines of comments when placed alongside works of the western canon. Driven by their illusory superiority complex, Europeans have presented their own literature as the only literature that deserves serious attention[62]. Obsessed with presenting their worldview as the only valid, very little has been said by European scholars about 'exotic' literatures and experiences, say the Chinese one or the Korean, etc. That is why in Manda Training College, teachers seek a literature curriculum that is open to writings that are different from the Europeans' experiences and tastes. In the same vein too, they advocate a reevaluation of both Africa's Oral Tradition and Kemetic scribes. Meanwhile, if the old curriculum overstresses the aesthetic elements in a literary work of art just to downplay the overriding political and social concerns, the new one pins all its hopes on an outlook *vis-à-vis* literary reading that mirrors all its concerns and social background.

The novelty of the approach lies principally in its boldness. Anyone reading Armah's *Osiris Rising* for the first time finds an unusual and perhaps an unprecedented fascination with Ancient Egypt telling the reader how the writer orientates his identity quest

[62] In this connection, Armah recently comments that "Literature was used as imperial propaganda; for Africans this made it part of a program for deadening natural sensitivities, a form of social anaesthesia." Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes. Op.cit.*, p.71

towards Pharaonic civilization. In the three proposals, ancient Egyptian civilizations and their written records are in the centre. Explicating his hopes for an alternative curriculum in Manda Teachers' Training College to the newly arrived Ast, Asar summarises what has to be done in three basic recommendations:

> But for me the most important come down to three. One, making Africa the center of our studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientations to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. The last would mean placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome. We would also bring in Asian and pre—Columbian history, something the old guard is ignorant of and hostile to at the same time. (*Osiris Rising*, p.104)

If this be the case, then, Armah's vision seems to be in line with that of Molefi Asante[63]: knowing one's potentials and limitations cannot be achieved without the regaining of one's past in the first place. Hence, authentic education is one step made for the formulation of a paradigm that would be helpful for Armah in demythologizing Western supremacy and proceed with his forward-looking and progressive vision of the African renaissance. Armah's concept of deity (and which Armah deems necessary not for religiosity *per se* but for what Asante calls "self respect" and self esteem) itself gets translated into an educational system. We see in the following part the writer's mechanism(s) devised to guarantee his this understanding for all Africans through education. In Armah's mind, the struggle to achieve symbols, and a mythology tailored for African needs has to be deeply rooted in the imagination of the African community in order to retain its aim for cultural authenticity. One is 'not to leave for school' is Armah's metaphor in *Why Are We So Blest?* to indicate the adverse effects of western education on Africans in search of non-profit values. In outlining his philosophy of education, one agrees with Kwame Ayivor that "Armah's fictional programme […]is a two-edged literary weapon designed to destroy both European and Arab myths and their interpretations of African and Diasporic history and the indigenous, neo-colonialist, Eurocentric academics who

[63] Asante bases his philosophy of Afrocentrism on taking over from Orientalism and Africanism when it comes to the definition of Africa and Africans. His opinion is that: "We remain one of the few people who have allowed others to become experts on our history and our ancestors; this is the source of our confusion. The Ghanaian often refers you to Rattray for information on Asante customs and some Nigerians still believe that Lady Lugard's A Tropical Dependency says everything about Nigeria. … , …all Afrocentric analysis is a critique on hierarchy and patriarchy because the analysis stems from all forms of oppression." Asante, "Ibid,."

are reluctant to restructure Africa's educational systems."[64] In each fold, Armah offers excellent arguments for support.

In *KMT*, Armah offers the reader the genealogical reading of White Castle School. In the biography of each of its three founding members, there lies a deep uprootedness and self-suppression. The result is that despite the glamour of the post, each leads an unfulfilled life. The Indian Vishnu DeSouza, after decades in the service of British Empire, and contrary to what is left on him in the official records, took his own life at the end. One can even say that he has done all he can to deserve his British identity and be treated with respect as such. He assimilated every aspect of his former Indian life, offered untold sacrifices and zealously served the empire more than many British-borns. Armah shows that all his efforts were in vain because they were primarily anchored on a deep self-resentment. DeSouza's glory in joining with Irene Lowenberg by becoming the Chief Financial Officer of White Castle School was supposed to compensate for his suppressed self-esteem. Yet this proud position only plays havoc with him and leads him to deep despair. By implementing its set of instructions the purpose is not having black children with British mind-sets. On the contrary, the narrator later finds out that the intention was to write in these children's mental slates that they must be sorry for their blackness and Africanity. In schooling, therefore, there lies a whole range of metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic world view. Each of these works in a process along with other components to result either in one's misery or happiness. When observed in its symbolic framework, DeSouza's suicide induces the reader to choose his or her own fate through the very structure of education one takes. Indeed, it is his education that led him to an acrimonious self-esteem battle and the suicide is but another facet indicating a pit of a protracted identity loss. In reading this particular structure of the novel, however, Kwame Ayivor, finds that:

> …the reason why Armah exploits Steve Biko and the Dalit Black Untouchable character, Vishnu DeSouza, in *KMT* is […]to foreground the theme of the racist exploitation of education and religion as a cover for the Aryan Hindu, Arab and Euro-American obsession with absolute political power and the ruthless determination to oppress and to enslave the Black world.[65]

[64] Kwame Ayivor, "Op.cit.", p. 65

[65] Kwame Ayivor, "'The Charlatanism that was our Education': Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of Pan-Africanist History in *KMT*". *English in Africa*. Vol. 32, N° 2 (October 2005), pp. 113-4.

The exploration of Armah's mythical vision demonstrates that his identity quest is both elaborate and complex. One can quite distinctly see that Armah is still unable to root out the traumas inflicted by Western knowledge. The way his narrator shows his uneasiness unclear about his identity (witness the heavy recurrence of the "*they*s" and "*their*s" almost in direct opposition to the "*we*s" and "*our*s") indicates how far that African identity is tainted by westernisation. Denying or "writing back" to refute "orientalizations" can become then a counter productive way of spreading knowledge. 'Reciprocity' and *Ma'at*, two of Armah's key African concepts seem to go counter to his 'overstating' the case of African identity; they are featured as essential and historically different elements from other identities. Although Armah's mythical constructions suffer from overstatements, this never belittles the worth if his quest. As Baako's failure seems to exemplify that of society as a whole, the intention of the writer has been to convince his readers that the Greek paradigm lies at the heart of Africa's crisis. Unless Africans start to consider and conceive of the world as a just and egalitarian entity, the quality of life they lead would barely improve. Drawing off the veil on Kemetic mythology has been Armah's answer to the present overriding challenges and needs of Africa. In *Osiris Rising*, the writer simply translates that mythology into a leading way of life and an enlightened educational system. Under this Kemetic worldview, life is essentially a choice. It involves identification and commitment, both a deeply articulated supposition and a never failing habit of democracy. Again, the Kemetic paradigm entails the gradual suppression of ugly images, arcane practices and irresponsible customs. In campaigning for this one end, beauty becomes just another mythical variation for the concept of justice.

Chapter Four: Armah's Project of Spiritual Transformation of the Self

> Without historical remembrance there would be no beauty, so that we are led to the position of being required to assert the authority of either nature or history, of space or time, but their confluence, the assertion that one needs the other. This requires as well that our concept of natural beauty change as well with time.
>
> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*. 1970

In this fourth chapter the focus is again on expounding the author's views and the reasons underpinning the choice of his materials. Presently, the study uncovers some thematic developments introduced in the third chapter and which compose the spearheads in Armah's project of self-transformation. In other words, the objective here is to explore the formation and geneses of the ideas previously approached in chapter two and three. More precisely, there is an attempt at examining the extent to which African matriarchy and *Ma'atic* ideology, as developed and championed by Armah, can convey in the end the

African humanitarian ethos. Concurrently, it will be useful to find whether the same African matriarchy and *Ma'atic* ideology form the vision of an awakened Africa given the unstable socio-ethic situations observed at the present moment. This chapter attempts in particular to examine Armah's treatment of the relation between male and female groups that could lead to a mutual and constructive understanding of the two genders. Furthermore, the chapter studies the assumption that there were moments of stability when women enjoyed having the upper hand in the political as well as the social and cultural organization of some African communities.

Similarly, the present undertaking looks at Armah's championing of 'reciprocity', as the sole guarantee for his philosophy of "our way, the way", as the narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* advances. We study the extent to which 'reciprocity', which is essentially based on value exchange, might be able to ensure the presumed matriarchal ethics of the continent. Again, in their celebrations of ancient Egypt, can both Ast and Lindela, the two heroines of *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* respectively, successfully defend and reflect the principle of justice, or *Ma'at*, and adopt it for the pressing demands of healing the present ills? In other words, we try to locate Armah's guidelines whereby we can safely judge that he genuinely translates his abstract intellectual understanding and proclaimed convictions to active mechanisms capable of making a difference on ground.

Put another way, the objectives sought from Armah's experimentation with the hypothetical past concerning African matriarchies cannot be fully attained unless he—Armah—frees his dramatic narrations from patriarchal "methodological paradigms and theoretical attitudes"[1] lumped with modern life, to borrow Kaarina Kailo's words. Patriarchy, in other words, is not only a collection of some cold beliefs and stony practices that can be easily dispensed with. Recent research has shown that patriarchy provides spheres of thinking and areas of discourse that inhibits imaginative reconstruction(s) of matriarchies from being adequately brought to light and clearly substantiated even when one manifests (naively or not) the willingness that he is moving constructively against it. Besides, we study the extent to which Armah's matriarchal ideology matches the curriculum of the new educational system he proposes.

The first issue to be examined in this chapter is Armah's proposed idea of deity. Some of its concerns have to do with the following questions: Was there really a point in time when ancient Egyptians used to conceive of gods and goddesses primarily as metaphors reflecting care for the welfare of Man and his aspiration to lofty ideals instead of

[1] Kaarina Kailo, "Women, Nature and Technology in the Service of Eco-Social Sustainability" http//www.kaarinakailo.net/

authoritarian orders requiring only obedience and sacrifice? Was such a notion of deity ever practical even then? And if so, how can this notion lead to a difference in understanding the possibilities of the present Africans', (not ancient Egyptians') lives? In addition, at some point in the chapter we try to see how this original approach to the deity agree with Armah's projected appreciation of beauty, and brotherly love which would promote equity and social order. This will lead to our appreciation of Armah's idea of the concept of *Ma'at*, and how it applies in Africa. These concerns have to do also with the second and third section of this chapter. Armah's notion of the aesthetic of the renaissance does not have only few correlations with the ethical and educational interests he sets as objectives from his novelistic projects. By the end of the present chapter, the study concludes that the writer's aesthetics is well-entrenched in philosophy and logic and it is not a "pipe dream" as some readers might suspect.

1. The Concept of Deity and Africa's Promise of a Cultural Renaissance:

Reading Armah's latest novel *KMT* (2002), one can observe that Armah attaches a particular concern to the concept of deity. By examining the archeological findings about the ancient Egyptians' worldview, it appears that the bulk of the drama of the novel makes clear that Armah engages his readers with a challenging vision about the meaning of God/gods. The gist of his claim amounts to the following idea: if the ancient Egyptians could elaborate an egalitarian and humane civilization, it is because they used to enjoy a very healthy and highly constructive notion of deity. But the reverse is no less abiding. In case one agrees that modern day Africans are performing poorly, as far as human relationships are concerned, this would be due to the fact that they maintain a crippling and reductive understanding of the role of God or gods in their day-to-day life. Put differently, no matter how badly Africa has attempted to get out of its present predicament, it has first to face this metaphysical question and try to resolve it at the metaphorical as well as the ontological level first. Armah seems to argue that Africa's identity quest involves the need to achieve a clear understanding of its deity. Such an understanding can start a resolute march forward by means of which a cultural renaissance can be attained. Armah's idea about the meaning and role of deity is compared to a state-of-the-art research in Egyptology and other related disciplines.

To begin with, perhaps the first impression one gets from researching egyptological data and checking different sources is that Armah is justified in his choice of subject matter, setting and body of ideas for his last two novelistic experiences; i.e., *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT in the House of Life*. Even if we suppose that egypotology is not the prime concern of Armah in writing these later novels, the legacy of two centuries of slave trade, a century or more of a direct colonial occupation and half a century of post-independence misrule provide the motif of these dramatic stories and his search for a new social and philosophical framework for Africa. According to him, if Africa suffers today, it is because of its misconception of God. With this in mind, there will have to be a healthy understanding and projection of the meaning of God/deity in order to start hoping for a better life. This then would illumine and give substance to his research for an identity that would give full credence to the African ethos that Armah has always wanted to bring to the fore.

1. 1. The Need for a Fresh Definition of the Concept of Deity in Armah's Novelistic Experience

Perhaps what Armah articulates in *KMT*, particularly in chapter ten, entitled "Origins", is a view stressing the fact that people's varied concepts of God or deity are cultural constructs instead of being simply natural[2] tokens and incontestable inheritances. If Africa lives in an impoverished culture today, then clearly that culture cannot possibly foster a healthy or progressive understanding of deity. In *KMT* the drama is more ambitious than just that. Armah's principal idea seems to assert that if modern day Africans cannot raise their standards in terms of inter-ethnic tolerance and political stability, as witness the civil wars of Rwanda 1994, the Sudan and Somalia currently, to name but a few, famines, multiple instances of state-collapse, tribalism and political corruption (the list can be extend to include alarming rates of AIDS infections, illegal immigration, child- and body parts-trafficking etc…), then it becomes clear that the conception of deity nowadays suffers from a prevalent haziness. In parallel, the breeding or conditioning factors play a major role which frequently go unnoticed and which Armah wants to highlight by outlining some of its disastrous implications. Usually people mistake this man-made factor and process deity as a collection of mandatory ecclesiastical diktats that has little or no implication(s) at all on

[2] This idea of god as a social and cultural construct owes a lot to Louis Hoffman's paper entitled: "Cultural Constructs of the God Image and God Concept: Implications for Culture, Psychology, and Religion" http://www.godimage.com/Papers%20and%20Publications/Cultural%20Constructions%20of%20the%20God%20Image%20and%20God%20Concept.pdf

everyday reality. Unaware of its real importance, ordinary people usually conceive of it as a distant subject-matter that has no direct consequences on their well-being or little affects their approach to life and the way they go through their various experiences. Some even take it as a highly esoteric or simply mind baffling question, to the extent that to venture into a debate about deity is to risk blasphemy which, for them, remains mainly an unrewarding action. Still, some others take it for granted that the topic is crystal clear and therefore it is quite unnecessary to think twice about it. Reading Armah's *KMT*, however, has the value of challenging the reader's preconceived notions; a fact that betrays the extent of one's ignorance and how much still one has to learn before leading a productive life. This novel has the didactic value of revising hackneyed beliefs and of persuading readers to reexamine hastily acquired concepts. This would perhaps lead to a sharper awareness of what one's role should be in today's society.

One of the main reasons why Djiely Hor, in *KMT*, breaks the oath of secrecy, and thus exposes himself to threats of death, is his need to correct people's understanding of the exact place and role the deity should play in their life. In his famous inaugural address before Western and local Africanists, he states that traditionalists were deliberately trained "to reveal no important truth, nothing that would clear the people's mind and help them see that the ruler is no representative of god but just another human being mistaking his way through life, like all of us, except that he does it at the expense of everyone who remains blind." (*KMT*, p.187) What is obvious from Hor's explanation is that knowledge of God has been deliberately kept shrouded in mysteries in order to maintain political, economic and socially undeserved privileges for the same social group. Exact knowledge, however, would have altered the entire social and political fabric, and those undeserved privileges would have been all gone. Ignorance, in the form of misinforming metaphysics and ontology, is a choice intentionally planned rather just an accident of history and which has long been adopted to preserve an unjust status quo. Again, Djiely Hor puts his life on the edge so that people would know that that particular knowledge about the god cheaply sold for the public is a choice made by some people at some time instead of the order and the norm. In the same address he comments on the effects of that oath griots are obliged to give before their final initiation. Armah opines: Exact knowledge is cheaply covered in just a show of knowledge

> [B]ecause it reaches them [the simple populace listening to griots] from a background they are prevented from understanding, it arrives as magic. Whatever touches the mind as magic strengthens the infant urge to believe in wonders, to give up the work of explanation and understanding. Hear what I'm saying: foolishness comes to a people through deliberate training, not through luck and not through nature.

> Needless to say, we traditionalists are trained never to explain to the people that what we know and do is not magic, just knowledge backed with practice. (*KMT*, p.185)

Nowhere does the politics of knowledge reveal its magnitude better than in this statement. True, earlier in the novel the brilliant Biko loses his life because he, in the eyes of his white teachers/aggressors, has transgressed the limitations already set for him and his likes. As a result, his example has become too threatening and does indeed expose their entire false premises and unjust prerogatives. That is why it was decided to "rusticate him", make of him an example, so that the rest would learn how to keep quiet and be content with their already appointed places. But in this statement by Hor, the malice and plans of subjugation do not come from outsiders. Hor here shows that evil-doing comes from the inside, from those depositories and trustees of knowledge. By withholding exact awareness of the gods (casting it as impractical and useless knowledge), the way they—griots—know it, from the respective communities, they simply wreck these communities' chances of leading an egalitarian and productive life. (hypnotic effects of knowledge prepare ground for a domesticating version of knowledge)

1. 2. Reason versus Faith: How was the Constructive Concept of Deity Lost?

Given the position of *KMT* as a *locus classicus* in Armah's ideological approach, we find that it is not accidental that the first scribe whose text Lindela translates is devoted to this concern over the gods. The title of the tenth chapter, "Origins", can be a good illustration of this concern. However, when presenting his point, we spot the depth of Armah's irony. The irony lies in the fact that his conception of deity is not about origins, as it is commonly understood. For we find him primarily positioning his argument against origins and first matter, i.e., of matters which supposedly come first and leave last. Armah, at least in the way his narrator Lindela explains, processes this very metaphysical point rather differently from the way it is usually explained by philosophers and other thinkers. In other words, just his refusal to accept the word "origins" as his denominator for a debate on deity explains the core of his bold undertaking. Therefore, if the gods are not the origins or the first matters, one needs to know about their actual position. Indeed, it becomes interesting to consider Armah's idea of a god for the African renaissance he outlines. In case the word "believe" should prove problematic, what are his suggestions, alternatives, and perhaps, his proposals for a true cultural revival in Africa?

Indeed, it is for this quality of 'disbelief' that distinguishes the griot Djiely Hor from the rest of the traditionalists and that costs him his life in the end. For Hor, embracing

the tenets of Judo-Christian or Islamic ethos has the effect of compromising one's identity and, by extension, the egalitarian ethics of his community. In this novel, the indictments of Islam and Christianity sets the tone of his arguments against these two religions, particularly as they become doctrines working for unjust political agendas; offering underserved privileges for some on the one hand, and spelling terror and wretchedness to the many on the other. The Muslims' Allah and the Christians' God are, the way conceived by Hor, foreign deities that hammer mental intoxication, obscure reason and trap the mind. Thus, belief mixes heart with mind and trades reason with blind faith. Such murkiness is, in Hor's assessment, offensive since it happens to be profitable in every regard to the preachers of both these two foreign doctrines.

We read that Djiely Hor, even before going public about the oath of secrecy, and thus meeting his death in consequence, had hard times to mask his outrage at seeing blind faith. Despite the fact that he lives in a predominantly African Muslim community, he never hesitates to show his dissatisfaction with the inconsistencies he spots in the practice of this faith. During his formative years he was unusually not satisfied with reading by heart, for he was restlessly inquisitive. This quality obliged his suspicious instructors to send him off from Niani to Yarw, a comparatively smaller village far off from the power games[4]. His inquisitive nature made him a candidate for more trouble as he always probes and disturbs the accepted formula. He can tell more than the agreed upon version and amount of history. In addition, he finds it against his disposition to accept the recipe that women must not lead the prayers. Hor, also, cannot see the point of performing the Tabaski[5] rituals. Similarly, it is hard for him to accept going on a pilgrimage to Mecca and the custom of naming offspring after fathers instead of mothers. He even has reservations regarding some protocols in marriage and burial ceremonies.

To take into consideration only one or two instances, in which Hor questions the point of these communal activities, is to be in a position to assess the way he approaches and experiences god, his god. In his refusal to sacrifice the sheep for Tabaski, Hor's reasons are more provocative than what the Imam is ready to take in one go by way of an excuse. Beside the vegetarian argument, Hor just refuses to slaughter a sheep for more serious reasons. Arguing with the Imam that comes to dissuade him from behaving 'so oddly', Hor lets out his true motivations. "'You know that in sacrificing sheep, all we're doing is

[4] Yarw, we read is a small village of traditionalists and, though the first place founded after ancestors' migration from the Nile valley, has been overshadowed by Niani where this latter has been renowned as the center of political maneuvering and power. Nevertheless, Yarw retains the air of authenticity, since only those traditionalists who were disapproved of, those on whom there are doubts that they might not keep their oath of secrecy and thus endanger the social fabric, were cast off to Yarw.

[5] Tabaski is the Banabara word for Muslim feast of sacrifice.

repeating the gesture of Ibrahim, our ancestor' ", the Imam advances. Hor retorts: "'I don't know how Ibrahim came to be our ancestor. But even if he were, why should I imitate an act just because he did it?' ". When the Imam restates that this is just the order of Allah, the griot simply cuts him short by saying: "'Why should a merciful Allah issue such a command?'" And it is exactly the point at which Hor needs to stop and help the Imam reflect on the reasons behind such religious decrees. The Imam recognizes his inability to offer an explanation, but he arrogantly justifies this logical limitation by pretending that "'The universe is full of mysteries the human mind cannot comprehend. Let us not waste time discussing matters beyond the knowledge of the profane.'" (*KMT*, pp.165-6) In Hor's mind, there can be no greater offense than to stop short of providing rational explanations. In presenting life as a mystery, people are easily deceived as they are made to embrace what is essentially false and self-effacing.

One reason why Hor should be outraged is that the Imam tries to deter him from his choice not to follow the unthinking masses of the population. The Imam, through his behaviour, has taken liberties in dealing with Hor as a respectable individual (breaking the griot's privacy and dignity). Indeed, the Imam, and this is why Hor cannot remain silent, has become God's spokesman and decidedly has shown the door of divine mercy before Hor. The Imam might not be aware of the full bearings of the drama he is engaged in, but Hor certainly is. The effect of the Imam's talk leaves Hor with no choice but to feel guilty, anxious and angry because he is left to feel essentially alienated from the realm of the Imam's God. Interestingly, though, Hor is not ready to experience guilt, anxiety and alienation simply because he wants to make up his mind before taking any steps in life. His main grudges against that Imam's God (clearly illustrated in all the instances where the griot shows his displeasure before some practices) stem from the fact that he is made an object of derision. The Imam's God is initially, and perhaps innately, positioned against him. He condemns him even before he knows him. Hor and everybody thinking like him are cornered and put in the defensive. Making boys preside over elderly women in prayers or in not allowing women to lead prayers are rules that Hor finds hard to accept. In short, that Imam's God's image has become too negative to be cheerfully embraced because the least and simple use of logic and history is, for Hor, outrageously ignored.

This is why Hor is appalled at the Imam's God and why revulsion is the only form of reaction Hor finds. For Hor that Imam's God seems to sit and watch judgementally from a distance and remains totally passive, not in the least compassionate about his misfortune. Not only does that Imam's God casts Hor off, but it stands there aiding his abusers and instructing them to wreck his community's self-esteem and egalitarian

aspirations. For Hor, that same God does not even seem to regret the horrors of slavery both as an institution and a practice. In addition, he destines women to be simple tools for male pleasure. And when these attitudes are challenged or contested, that same God, through the Imam, simply pours in more threats of exclusion and utters additional calls for retribution. Identifying with the Imam's God, according to Hor, has put his self-respect and self-esteem on an edge, and Hor most understandably cannot possibly part with the one property, he thinks, defines him[6]. For even if he comes close to that God, which is quite an impossibility as the reader can guess from the pitch of the accent and the flow of the narrative, Hor is more likely to experience only the debasing feelings of being tolerated and pitied (not loved and accepted the way he is) by an arrogant and unmoved God. This same God, Hor would keep in mind, does not want to know how he really lives or how he was victimised in the past, a fact that still lingers with him in the present time. If that God is all just, all powerful and all compassionate, then why did he tolerate the slave trade, colonialism, famine, civil wars and the rest of Africa's present impasse? Certainly, inside Hor's mind, there exists a sort of a lethargic lamentation or a lot of historical baggage (unfinished emotional business in connection with slavery) that makes him resentful against that Imam's God, it is next to impossible that Hor would identify or succumb to Him.

This is why Astw, the griot's wife informs Lindela: "[…] I doubt if a conscious African can believe in the European God. There's just been too much bloodshed and cruelty in Christianity. The sheer injustice. Now do you see why I can't believe in an Arab Allah either. Same reasons: too much bloodshed, too much cruelty, too much injustice." (*KMT*, p.166) For Hor, God's image, in the way it stands now, needs to be re-cast in order to be felicitous, identifiable and not downright oppressive. He is not ready to part with his conviction that God or god should be loving, caring and just. And when he experiences hatred or disrespect or belittlement from whatever source, then it is understood he has no other option except to seek an identifiable profile in his god. If God is ever needful and loving, then, in Hor's logic, that God has to prove his goodness, love and care on this earth and for all his subjects. Armah's idea is very similar to that of Mercy Amba Oduyoye when she states that "… it is important to see the goodness of God here in the land of the living, for that is what establishes the presence of God among human beings."[7] Therefore, the

[6] In regard to this idea, Louis Hoffman comes with an interesting insight. He says: "Experientially, this [just the possibility of switching to and embracing the others' God] reinforces a God Image in which they [people abused in the name of their abusers' God] perceive God as loving and caring, but also which experiences the self as negative or inferior. While this may emphasize grace, it does so at the cost of self-worth and self-image… God, here, is experienced even from within his own culture [to the sinner] as being different from himself. *Otherness again, is the basis for salvation*." p. 20

[7] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The African Experience of God through the Eyes of an Akan Woman", *Cross Currents*, http://www.aril.org/african

Imam's unreasoning, uncompromising and defensive attitude—in other words, his cavalier assumption that he is the guardian of God's door for both heaven and hell—has to change radically so that Hor and his thinking companions can locate some mercy and compassion for themselves. But in order for this to happen, the entire present culture regarding God has to be addressed seriously and examined, the point being to see if a new conception based on love and understanding can be envisaged. Conversely, this is what Armah is interested in: an attempt to figure out a deity that is primarily loving, accepting, lovable and loved instead of just feared.

What we understand from this chapter, "Origins", in particular, can confirm that Armah indeed has difficulty accepting the word "believe". For him, to believe is to find oneself automatically embracing blind faith which is another word for self-erasure and identity loss. To believe, as we are likely to understand from that first translated scrolls, is to surrender one's most valuable part, reason and thinking, to abusers. In Armah's opinion, this is very similar to accepting self-destruction and subjugation. Furthermore, nearly all the atrocities Africa has experienced are, according to Armah, logical consequences of relapsing into blind faith. And the ready made suggestion for a way out, in this regard, is that if Africa is really serious about putting an end to centuries of domination, it has to devise an effective anti-dote against plain belief and blind faith and the idea of deity as it is currently conceived. It has to exchange blind faith for sharp reason, and beliefs for vigilant contemplation; this is how the first scribe warns his reader about how to proceed when trying to approach the concept of the gods or the netchers: "We named each netcher according to its place, its action and its quality. But we have never called for belief in any netcher as living substance." Just a few lines below, we find the same warning again "Do not take it in the manner of believers, eyes closed against the honesty of shared perception, heart locked into the prison of superstitious faith." (*KMT*, p. 217)

1．3. The‘Netchers’as Metaphors for Energy & Creativity:

In tracing the authenticating artistic elements in Armah's *The Healers*, Charles Antangana Nama claims that Armah draws from Akan traditional lore in which heroes are usually endowed with supernatural gifts that enable them to miraculously accomplish very risky missions. Nama contends that Densu falls in "a category of exceptional men—"supermen" whose okra (mission) was to salvage the community." He follows: "[T]his self transcendence of the "superman" beyond the acknowledged ethos of the community is

precisely one of the spectacular traits which Densu portrays in *The Healers*."[8] Nama cites J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* (1944) and Okpweho's *The Epic in Africa*. (1975) to support his claim. Below there is a different approach to the same Armah's drama. However effective, this 'supernatural drive' exists as part of Densu and Isanusi's characters. In *The Healers* and *Two Thousand Seasons*, no one belittles these main characters' shaping the lives and fates of their respective communities. In other words, the hard but humane efforts these characters perform, and with which they incite readers to follow them, should hold a prominent dimension. Densu, the reader finds, beams with fiery energy. He is zealous, intelligent, hard working, passionate, and in short, we meet in him an exceptionally gifted person. Armah, contrary to what Nama advances, stresses the principle of the "god-within-Densu" in a way to empower and transform the reader to the heights of the likes of Densu, Isanusi, Asar and Lindela.

Perhaps one of the best qualities with these main characters is their refusal to put reason aside. Such quality, if well applied and put to the test, is in a position to articulate an original approach to man and his role in the world. By drawing the readers' attention to the need to proscribe blind faith and put trust in reason instead, Armah, simply but effectively, aims at dismissing debates about origins as pointless and utterly self-defeating. Contemplation helps invoking the mystery of creation as it is everyday enfolded all before man. The mystery of creation, if it deserves to be called a mystery at all, lies in the constant manifestation of the forces of creation and energy wherever one looks. As it has taken place a long time ago, it is still constantly re-enacted and it will keep doing the same over and over again. It is like an open museum or a free show begging only for reflection in order to win appreciation. The metaphor of land and water can summarize the story of creation ever since its beginnings.

> "Out of Nwn [brute being] this land was the first to rise into the light of day. Land rose, but risen, stayed nostalgic of its origins in water. Aeons have passed. Time might have assuaged nostalgia for origins. But century after century, land returned to knowledge of origins, tasting again and again the devastating power of uncontrollable flood.
> …
> Our oldest remembrance contains the memory of that first time. It is a remembrance because of intelligence trapped in the howl of chaos, lonely because it thinks itself alone. In the despair of utter solitude, borrowing the energy of initiative from loss of hope, despairing intelligence cries out. In the moment following utterance insight breaks into the prison of despair, riding on the music of answering voices whispering into the brutal disharmony of chaos. Its message is incredible, but stronger than incredibility is its clarity. What it says to

[8] Charles Antangana Nama, *Aesthetics and Ideology in African and Afro-American Fiction: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Toni Morrison and Richard Wright*. PhD Thesis, State University of New York, (1984), pp. 119-120

> intelligence contemplating chaos is what the companions bid me say: you are not alone.
> Heartened against despair, the lonely soul calls out. Inside the discord of chaos its lonely melody is heard in turn by others thinking themselves alone. This is the first stumbling step toward creativity, the flow of initiative toward intelligence in the teeth of confusion. (*KMT*, p. 218)

Before listing the netchers or the gods and in order not to leave space for possible channels of confusion and misinterpretation, Armah has had to approximate his conception of the deity in the metaphor of land and water. Flood submerges the land and the land becomes scarcely visible as a result. Besieged and trapped that way, the land only wishes to go back to its former status before it is outflanked by water. The fate of the individual is closely similar to that piece of land as it looks to rise up above water level. The metaphor can be considered a *précis* detailing on man's need to get out of despair, "What it says to intelligence contemplating chaos is what the companions bid me say: you are not alone." As water recedes by time, so man is indirectly instructed not to fall prey to despair, a situation similar to chaos; the state is not as bad as it may appear at first. From Nwn or brute being, one starts on the seven stages of growth from existence to becoming. What needs to be emphasized instead is the understanding that one cannot even embark on this growth process, as well as its possibilities, if he/she is a believer. The preconceived miraculous intervention of the divine simply interrupts intelligence and cannot help believers to capture the meaning of the metaphor. One has to reason and think over the difficulties met along the way. And it is here that we observe that, accompanying each single stage, there lies a netcher or a god. This netcher is in fact, not a heavenly body (for in this design there is no such body) but only a mental propensity, some parallel or metaphor whose role is only to reflect man’s inner worth and good. This metaphor functions only as a mnemonic aid and draws logical parallels to keep one focused while being in deep contemplation. Similarly, it also implies warning against the shackles of blind faith.

This is why near the end of his text, the scribe again reminds the readers of the need to resist the urge to separate constant contemplation from belief. The scribe just writes, "Hold this reader, listener, in your memory: The netchers belong to legend. Remember them and they will help you live by sharpening your judgment. Believe in them, and you will kill your intelligence with the poison of blind faith." Indeed, the reason from having these netchers and how they should mentally function, according to Armah, is the subject of the following lines below. "The netchers are spirits of our own creation, inhabited created narratives, made to help shared understanding. The netchers of intelligence and justice will never demand credulity from as the price of their gift,…" (*KMT*, p. 219)

Armah's concept of deity, and contrary to the way Nama reads it, emphasizes contemplation and reason instead of a blind surrender to faith. Disposition in favour of reason is so because it is thanks to reason that one may fully understand the metaphor of land and water which fairly approximates how the world, since times immemorial, functions. What might be termed as a practical concept of god is based on the presumption that there lies a down-to-earth need for a god in humans. As the metaphor aptly illustrates, propulsion out of despair cannot possibly endure unless one confidently understands that in the final analysis it is pointless to lose hope. Come what may, the circling water is bound to subside in the end, ushering in each time a new phase of life, a new possibility. This alternation of hope and despair is what Armah stresses as a basic life principle and the primal motive behind his concept of god. According to Armah, in order to fight the present pathetic lack of collective concern on the part of Africans, and to urge them to look for genuine progress and to revive their self-respect, they have to shake off their beliefs in unloving, domineering and unidentifiable gods. The potential for action, when embracing this attitude, is much wider than frequently imagined. This implies addressing the problems of today and taking part in actions aimed at promoting progress and development.

In connection with modern African realities and in order to locate the utility of the concept of divinity as introduced by Armah, one can cite the Ivoirian writer, Ahmadou Kourouma (1927-2003). In his novel, *Allah is Not Obliged* (2006), Kourouma tries to break the pathetic misunderstanding of divinity. He does this by illustrating that there is neither mystery nor mystique in the latter's intervention in humans' daily affairs. Birahima, Kourouma's narrator, explains how he conceives of the notion of the deity from the very title he has chosen for his narrative: "[T]he final and completely complete title of my bullshit story is: Allah is not obliged to be fair about all the things he does here on earth."[9] Birahima's primary reasons from mixing profanities with what is usually considered as sacred, 'bullshit' side to side with 'Allah', probably aims at 'desacrilization' of culture. This suggests his conscious attempt to free the same culture from the theological paralysis which draws people unconsciously to evaluate every aspect of their lives in the eyes of foreigners. Birahima keeps journeying from one war-trodden zone to the next, barely escaping death and fraud. He never blames God, the almighty, for his misfortunes, nor does he thank Him when he hits some luck. In the end, he is an intact and experienced boy where many in his case are either dead or useless. In perfect agreement with Armah, Kourouma's metaphor aims at inciting readers to think that Birahima's survival and triumph over danger comes principally from his unshaken belief in none but himself; he is himself his own god,

[9] Ahmadou Kourouma, *Allah is not Obliged*. (2000)Trans. Frank Wynne, Anchor Books, New York (2006), p.1

consistently combining between his natural dispositions for sharp intelligence and dedicated action. Here is another instance, similar with Armah's, where a novelist figures ways at drawing a distance from what he or she considers as worn out ideologies.

Further support of the thinking (and anti-belief) qualities which Armah outlines and their importance in effecting a true and constructive awakening, one can cite Manuel Castells' observations:

> In a so-called information society, minds are not only the most important economic asset -- companies with minds make money; companies with money and no minds lose the money -- it's the same thing in everything. The networks are not programmed by technology; technological tools are programmed by minds. So the human consciousness [is the source], because everything now depends on our ability to generate knowledge and process information in every domain and activity. Knowledge and information are cognitive qualities from the human mind. Yes, human minds usually are connected to bodies, which means that you have to take into consideration the overall system of human existence, social services support, etc. But fundamentally, the human mind has always been, but more than ever now, the source of wealth, power, and control over everything. Now, therefore, in a world in which signals, processed by our minds, are constantly shaping and reshaping what we do, the ability to influence, to change the categories through which we think our world (here, what I call the code of our culture) -- this becomes the essential battle. If you win the battle of minds, you win the battle of politics, the battle of the economy, because people will decide what they want to buy or what they don't want to buy, for instance.
>
> So it's a battle, but ideas and talents are, ultimately, the source of productivity and competitiveness. The same thing is true in terms of the overall social organization, how people change their minds determines how they change their behavior. And the change of behavior would, ultimately, translate into changes in the overall social organization[10].

If the upper hand in the world today goes to people who are gifted only for their minds and the ability to reason, then there is no reason why Africans should step away from what Castells refers to as 'a battle' for ideas and talents. Here Castells implicitly suggests that people with minds and talents are today's inheritors of gods of lore. The rest, people in short of this one quality, are helpless subjects whose aspirations do not translate in social reality. Applying the mind, the way Armah's emphasises and is further proved to be adequate, becomes one condition for bringing about a positive and constructive change in Africa.

The payoff one gets from applying reason is attuning one's energy to the energy of deity. If that happens, Armah contends that man can ascend to the heights of a divinity which is never short in value and estimation from that of a god or goddess. This, one can

[10] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*. Blackwell Publishers: Malden (Mass.) and Oxford. (1997), p. 12

advance, is the ideal state which the Homo sapiens aspire to. But in the imperfect world, one can usually project that divine image in mind and try to stay consistent with that image while going about one's daily business. The astral figure of a perfect man or god, when well reasoned, always keeps man trying despite frets and odds to lead a better, more egalitarian and productive life. Armah cleverly shows the distance between the profane and the sacred can be extensively narrowed provided one applies his mind in revealing the throbbing of his own heart. The divine is conceived of here in terms of a metaphor and never as an entity.[11] Only in this sense can the reader interpret Armah's presentation of both Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano and Asar in *Osiris Rising*. The former preaches his pacifying ideology, all contained in submission and alienation from the self: "God sends trials, God sends succor. Allah sends pain, Allah sends relief." (*Osiris Rising*, p.141) While the latter, Asar, induces action and the claiming of the self in the claiming of the one's fate. He is constantly shifting: lecturing, reading, training, setting plans and making certain these plans get implemented.

The above development can lead us now to conclude on the implications of Armah's metaphorical conception of the divine. As shown, Armah disbelieves in all transcendent gods, those thought to be located in faraway heavenly skies, always distant and indifferent to the Africans' suffering. Like the character of Hor in *KMT*, gods who do not care about the well-being of their creatures and stipulate blind obedience and sacrifice have proved to be very dangerous to Africa's self-definition. Osiris and Isis are earthly gods in as far as ordinary Egyptians used to invoke them for their daily well-being. The drama in *KMT* incites readers to observe that transcendent gods are set with some motivation in the minds of those who preach them, instead of existing freely in themselves. In other words, the people who preach faith in such gods (Christians and Muslims) have turned themselves, by extension, to deities, exploiting and conquering. According to Armah, Africa's abusers came first as preachers of a new religion, promising a distant and blissful heaven for their followers. After taking control over the resources of these African communities, these colonizers pacified their subjects' spirit with long sermons about heavenly rewards and retributions. And here it becomes clear that while one concept of deity has been responsible for peace and well-being for many African communities, another one has spelt only disasters and plundering. True, such abusers have done this through mainly war and fragmentations of African social systems. Yet, their first transgression was when they introduced a strange

[11] A modern conception of divinity that I find approximating the ancient Egyptians' notion is put by Sydney Poitier, a Hollywood icon. In his autobiography, he articulates his opinion as follows: "He confesses that if pressed, he will admit to a belief in God. But he considers this to be, not an entity, but an immense consciousness that holds every particle of the entire universe in its awareness at every instance. He is uncomfortable with even this much defining and demurs at naming it even with the word 'god' as he sees naming and defining as the beginning of divisiveness." Sydney Poitier, *The Measure of a Man*. San Fransisco Harper. (2000)

concept of the divine, that can be defined as a 'transcendental' deity, standing in direct opposition to a loving and caring, identifiable and understanding god.

Still one has to note the negative aspects of such an approach. If man can aspire to the position of God, the way Armah puts it, then already Africa has witnessed a number of megalomaniac rulers 'who try to ape God'. In other words, such exaggerated self-esteem can have disagreeable effects on people who prove to be short of moral qualities and are only hungry for power. Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* (1984) and Ngugi Wa Thing'o's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) draw a sinister picture of African dictators without any sense of duty towards their respective peoples, and determined to rule with an iron hand no matter what the consequences. To answer his psychopathic need, the ruler sleeps on the real developmental schemes, dreams of an unprecedented mythical tower of domination and set up plans to build it. In reading Soyinka's work, one critic finds that "the setting reveals African leaders' profligacy and mismanagement of resources, which ensure the continued economic retardation of the continent."[12] It is interesting to note that the remedy for such 'aping of God' can be pursued in the code of ethics often associated with the concept of deity and is known as *Ma'at*.

2. *Ma'atic* Beauty: Ethics & Aesthetics for the Ancient Egyptians

> This […] was no royal society. There were farmers and potters in it. There were masons and cobblers and aristocrats and fishers in it, there were priests and scribes in it. They were in the companionship not because they were peasants or princes or aristocrats or scribes, but they agreed to work to its aims. The companionship belonged to no particular portion of our people, to no family, no clan, no tribe, no nation… (*Osiris Rising*, p. 161)

This is traditional historian, Tete, informing Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano about the exact meaning of the symbol of the ankh. Cinque tightly holds the symbol, presuming it carries evidence about the royalty of his ancestry, giving him social distinction and pomp. Overlooking the treacherous past of his ancestors, Tete informs the superficial and delusional prince that the insignia can refer to anything but royalty and aristocracy. Rather the ankh stands for the unique society combined of individuals coming from various walks of life. The society's sole objective is setting justice. And the task of setting justice goes

[12] Olusegun Adekoya, "Psychopaths in Power: The Collapse of the African Dream in *A Play of Giants*" in: Björn Beckman & Gbemisola Adeoti (eds.), *Intellectuals and African Development*. CODESRIA, Dakar (2006), p. 12

according to the ethical percepts of its members. The society which Cinque is interested in happens to be a secretive anti-slavery group dedicated to punishing slave suppliers (factors) and their collaborators. The interesting aspect of this group is not the secretiveness of the group or its effectiveness. Instead, it is its non-hierarchal structure and way at assessing reality which should be constantly reviewed and subject to deliberations and discussions. Readers of this part, at least, of *Osiris Rising* wonder about how egalitarian and just this society in many ways is. They would also wonder about the reasons that forced it into secrecy and the nature of the people who opposed it and worked in order to systematically destroy it. Tsegaye Wodajo shrewdly observes that "[T]he circumstances that gave rise to the formation of the ancient organization—hedonism and divisive tendencies among the chiefs—are once again in great abundance in the postcolonial African social and political terrains."[13] But in as far as slave trade is concerned, it is interesting to note that there was a group of forward-looking Africans who approached the problems of their days in terms other than some fateful or superhuman dictation.

In connection with the ankh society and stemming from Armah's original approach to the concept of deity as developed by the ancient Egyptians, is the concept of *Ma'at*. In *Osiris Rising*, *Ma'at* is presented as the spawning force empowering underprivileged Africans to assess slavery as essentially unethical. In addition, thanks to *Ma'at* again, these conscious Africans deploy the concept as an ideological nemesis that tried on several occasions to stage the termination of the spiteful trade in humans. In elaborating on this concept, one finds out its potential uses in the cultural battle of today's Africa. There are a lot of definitions to this concept, yet the consensus among archeologists is that that *Ma'at* for Kemetic peoples, more or less, stands for the fundamental order of the universe. It organised the ancient Egyptian world and made it spiritually and artistically *sui generis*. People used to embrace it, knowing that whatever the situations, little escapes the wisdom of *Ma'at*. Armah also pays a special interest to this foundational principle. There are multiple instances in *KMT* where various narrators evoke it for the sake of fulfilling their aspirations. Below in this second section, I try to contextualize Armah's ways in displaying this term and deploying as an instrument for present social change.

Before doing just this, it is important to note at this stage, that is in reconstructing the dynamic tradition of *Ma'at*, Armah's aim is not simply limited to showing how he writes a religious history of his own—that is, reconstructing a historical narrative about the set of the religious beliefs and practices of the desired African renaissance. Rather, the purpose in what follows is illustrating that Armah's deployment of

[13] Tsegaye Wodajo, *Hope in the Midst of Despair*. Africa World Press, Inc. (2004), p. 153

the concept at this stage in his novelistic career works as a prism through which Africans can refract situations and then reflect upon a range of important themes in African history. One such important theme is how Africa can project a viable culture whereby it may get out from the present dysfunctioning and malaise. Abstract, as it may easily be charged from first reading, *Ma'at* cannot be disconnected from debates over narratives of anti-colonial and postcolonial resistances. The resurgence and expansion of the concept, the way Armah outlines it in *KMT*, shows its selective deployment as an effective tool, among a range of many, in the cultural battle of his identity quest. In short, and as below illustrated, Armah has revealed that far from being marooned into a state of archaic, timeless and unchanging tradition, *Ma'at* has the potential to shape and enhance an ethical code for nowadays Africans.

2. 1. *Ma'at*, the Desired Ideology of the Renaissance in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*

Reflecting over *Ma'atic* significance cannot be divorced from thinking over the concept of deity. In this connection, Armah is certain to maintain the correlation between the two concepts as they were conceived by Kemetic people. In the excerpt from *KMT* below, the word *Ma'at* appears among several deities. The reader could easily mistake it for a deity, but the mistake won't totally affect the overall meaning of the writer's projects. Despite its difference from deity, *Ma'at* occurs in association with a number of gods in order to highlight its utility and magnitude for the Egyptians. It brings together nearly all the ethical attributes of the gods and melts them in one unified and unifying principle. As it calls for balance, grace, justice, beauty, genius, grace and all the virtues inside man, *Ma'at* can be defined as a sum of pure derivatives from these deities. In the end it makes an ideology carrying very befitting potentials for a praxis.

> These are the netcher names we gave the streams flowing together to make the living river of shared intelligence: Kheper for initiative, Harthor for boldness, Ast for the magic wisdom of genius working, Re for the presiding harmony of creation, Jehwty for the precision that makes shared intelligence a working habit, and, great sister of our values, Maât for balance, Maât for grace, the beauty of things and bodies, Maât for justice, the beauty of hearts connected, Maât for genius, the beauty of intelligence merged with grace, with justice, with balance in shared work. (*KMT*, p. 218)

Armah here draws attention to the leveling and egalitarian trends of *Ma'at*. In *Osiris Rising*, Armah illustrates this through Hapa's most powerful man, Seth Spencer Soja. Seth's initial fury against Asar is rooted in the suspicion that the latter might be taking active part in a secret society, with the ankh symbol as its emblem. The reader may easily detect that in trying to intimidate the newcomer, Ast, Seth wants just to win her over in relation to his argument with Asar. Similarly, the reader still can observe that *Ma'at* is the argument between the two men. For Seth targets not only the kind of society Asar aims to found, but obviously the ethics that form the backbone of that society as enfolded in the symbol of the ankh:

> You obviously don't know that the symbol you call the ank is an old one here. You can see it in various forms in the pagan fertility cults still surviving here, and in some of the sculpture. But in the form printed on the articles it was used by a dangerous secret society that tried at one time to destroy all social and political institutions here: monarchy, the aristocracy, slavery… (*Osiris Rising*, p.35)

Asar signs the articles he writes using the ankh as his group's logo. Though old and largely in circulation, the ankh, as Seth attests, is given a new and, for him, 'subversive' meaning. According to Seth still, Asar has been able to denature the logo in order to break political institutions and create a classless society which is, for Seth, one version of chaos. In a raised voice that betrays his rage, he adds before Ast: "But the secret society that used the ankh sign or whatever you call it didn't even have an internal hierarchy. It was bent on leveling society, beginning with itself."(*Osiris Rising*, p. 36) Ironically, and while trying to debase his opponent in Ast's eyes, the reader discovers that it is Seth, Asar's arch-enemy, who is bound to endear Asar to Ast. What Seth rebuffs on the grounds of 'leveling society' and destroying 'hierarchy' is a life experienced according to the precepts of *Ma'at*; hence Ast's initial desire to come to Africa and help establish that very kind of order and beauty. Not surprisingly, Seth's main condemnation of Asar as more or less Ast's main attraction to Asar. Earlier in the novel the reader has Ast's background of loss and search for meaning while still in America. The same loss and search is approached in mythical terms: "Hrw triumphant, steady between Jehwty and Maet sisters. She saw time, saw herself in its passage, saw its passage in herself, felt in her soul its energizing flow." (*Osiris Rising*, p.8) Further, the reader finds that Ast wrote her thesis on 'identity and social justice in the philosophy of ancient Egypt.' Certainly, it is the possibility for a *Ma'atic* society that has kept feeding her desire for a better world and has finally triggered her decision to quit America for good and rejoin her roots in Africa.

It is interesting when addressing the issue of hierarchy, as it is handled in this context by Seth, to observe that hierarchy contradicts *Ma'at*. Seth's hunger for power initially

blinds him to other possibilities according to which human societies can be organised. His code of ethics shows a keen attraction to control and domination; he cannot conceive of power in terms of peaceful sharing and listening. According to Marilyn French, patriarchy is essentially to blame for such a state of affairs. Because "[t]he need to dominate" cannot be a true call from the deep essences of man. It is a need that is conditioned only by patriarchy. By tracing the sources of that primitive need, French finds that it is only "a substitute for faith in affection and other satisfactions."[14] One can learn that trading affection and emotions with control has been detrimental to man's very nature and his longing for the egalitarian ethics, like the ones enfolded in *Ma'at*. Consequently, man's sense of value needs to undergo a conscious paradigmatic shift from transcendence and the desire to act as gods, or on behalf of gods, toward embracing nature and the world of the flesh.

The state-of-the-art security facilities from which Seth runs the state of Hapa, in *Osiris Rising*, together with the high tech weaponry contradicts the very setting in which it is planted. That security center stands in sharp contrast to its surrounding locale, filled with disorder and destitution. Furthermore, and as it isolates him from its natural extension with the rest of the population, the citadel building covers Seth's inner and, perhaps, unconscious wish to be transcendent, the unmoved mover, the god of Hapa and its people. The denaturalized setting eloquently tells of the increasing gulf between him and the rest of population, therefore, between him and nature. Such a wish may not be at all imaginable without patriarchal modes of thinking. In warning Asar against the power and, hence, threat that Seth can exercise, Ast says: "SSS has as much power as one person can get in this country. But he is unhappy. He feels insecure at a deeper level than you admit." (*Osiris Rising*, p.164) It is not difficult to notice that Asar is the antithesis of Seth and all that Seth stands for. Asar, on the contrary, is more drawn to nature and more in tune with the environment he lives in and the group of activists he works with. He is determined to lead his life naturally in the way he thinks is the best, regardless of all the threats posed by some power-mad security officers. Truly, Asar does not attribute to himself a transcendental character; his personal security is not on his agenda of priorities as long as he is part of a group working for the same egalitarian and *Ma'atic* ends[15].

The *Ma'atic* ideal, then, comes in a context that makes it antithetical to patriarchal modes of perceptions and practice. In addition, it is interesting to note that patriarchy, as

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[14] Marilyn French, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals*. Summit Books, New York (1985), p. 512

[15] In referring to Seth and Asar, Ode Odge analyses these two antagonistic characters more in terms of carriers of ideas instead of ordinary human beings who just accidentally have differences: "Thus both the individual who chooses to reveal the beast in mankind, on the one hand, and the one who aligns himself or herself with action aimed at communal uplift, on the other, are subjected to intense scrutiny by the narrative." Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah: Radical Iconoclast*. Ohio University Press, (2000), p. 134

illustrated through the character of Seth, and in its strive for power and control, spells only violence and chaos. Order and balance, as *Ma'at* foretells, can be achieved only from a paradigmatic shift toward matriarchal modes of perception which are synonymous with *Ma'at*. Below, I examine *Ma'at's* potential for constructing an ideological platform. Then, I will shed light on some of the reasons that hamper *Ma'at* from living up to the positive role it is theoretically said to be capable of assuming in today's Africa. The method in which these two steps are processed is historical; I will examine what archeologists and Egyptologists developed in their recent findings.

2. 2. Can *Ma'at* be Deployed as an Ideology?

According to the German scholar Jan Assmann, without *Ma'at* the world is absolutely devoid of meaning and purpose. *Ma'at* confers to the universe the satisfaction that every evil making of whatever kind and nature is to be addressed whereas all good deeds are rewarded. For Assmann:

> *Maat* designates the idea of a meaningful, all pervasive order that embraces the world of human kind, objects, and nature—in short, the meaning of creation, the form in which it was intended by the creator god. The difference manifests itself in the phenomena of *Isfet*, "lack". Sickness, death, scarcity, injustice, falsehood, theft, violence, war, enmity—all these are manifestations of lack in a world that has fallen into disorder through loss of its original plentitude of meaning. *The meaning of creation lies in its plenitude which yields order and justice*. Where, all are cared for, no one is oppressed, no one commits deeds of violence against others, no one need suffer. *Suffering, scarcity, injustice, crime, rebellion, war, and so forth had no meaning for the Egyptians*. They were symptoms of emptying and estrangement of meaning from the world, which had distanced itself from its origin in the course of history… They did not see reality in the contingency of ordinary or extraordinary occurrences and events, but in Ma'at as the embodiment of an original plenitude of meaning that manifests itself in provisioning and justice.[16]

It is better to process both concepts: *Ma'at* and its diametrically opposed *Isfet* as the manifestation of two possibilities of conceiving the world. Plenitude and lack are the two states that show how the world is essentially postulated and therefore, the condition where the divine is, by and large, experienced in the eyes of the people of *Kemet*. Abundance and joy, not lack and suffering, posit the order of things on this earth. The ethical implication of this formula is that in the production of value, there is absolutely no need for competition, jealousy, hatred or murder. Everyone, basically is entitled to have the

[16] Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*. Trans. David Lorton. Cornell University (2001), p.3 (Emphasis added)

joy his/her heart yearns for provided he/she pursues exactly what the heart wants. To long for what is in the hands of others is to shut the vibrations of the heart; cause competition and create, as a result, sorrow. The abundance of possibilities and choices lies at the heart of *Ma'atic* ethical strategy and value system. It is clear from this that if abundance is the order of the universe, scarcity is not an unfortunate state of affair, but is primarily a means of perpetuating control over the population. With his traditionalist vision of history, Malidoma Patrice Somé reads the present civil wars and mal developments in Africa against the background of "[C]olonialism [that] weakens a native people by, among other things, sapping its economy and creating scarcity."[17]

Inculcating this strategy and checking people's daily ethical standards imply that *Ma'at* precipitates God's wrath or love. It can be explained around only these two diametrically countervailed forces with which the world functions. Above all, *Ma'at* negates *Isfet* and in turn, *Isfet* negates *Ma'at*. If shortage of goods is predominant, all sections of Egyptian society realize the misdeed and, hence the need for adjustment so that the Ma'atic lacuna is restored. In this sense, *Ma'at* and *Isfet* function as a system of checks and balances; a scale whereby ancient Egyptians measure the level of their own morals. The scale helps everyone so that he/ she always can dedicate his or her efforts for the restoration of the reign of *Ma'at* since that would be the point where individual as well as communal welfares meet. People would fear straying aimlessly from emptying the original plenitude already there. A twenty-first century reader is, then, left wondering about how practical and efficacious such a scale in curbing people's evil; hence lifting society to the idyllic heights of gods.

If Armah's Seth is Armah's fictional means of probing the ethicality of Africa's present polity and the way, in ideal situations, this polity should be constructive, discussion of *Ma'at* has, then, to project insights on political organization. From the idea of divinity and concerns about how God is conceived, the topic evolves to the ways in which that same God manifest its divine presence and functions ethically through lack or plenitude for the general public. Again, *Ma'at* probes into heavy questions about the ruler and the ways in which he is supposed to run the state. Like Armah, Maulana Karenga is a scholar with an Afro-centric perspective. Karenga finds Assmann's sacred approach to the king a little problematic. Karenga has a book length study on *Ma'at*, entitled: *Maat, the Moral Ideal in*

[17] Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*. Tarcher Penguin, New York (1998), p. 14 Somé interestingly continues: "Everyone knows that scarcity results in the loss of human dignity. A person whose identity has been violated becomes subject to control. If a gun is then given to such a person to use as a way of restoring his sense of dignity, chances are he will use it. My people are frustrated by the lack of credibility they experience from the modern world, and many have lost hope that anything but the gun will be heard."

Ancient Egypt (2004), in which he argues in favour of *Ma'at* that is free from royal power. The gist of his idea concurs with Armah's in the sense that *Ma'at* can be a viable and redeeming ethical option for today's world. Interestingly enough, he does not define the concept in its theoretical abstraction. Karenga rather insists on the practical side of the concept. According to him, the practical side, that which touches people's everyday life, is what really shapes and defines *Ma'at*. This is so because *Ma'at* constantly bears an ideal content. People frequently strive in order to achieve the Ma'atic condition, so *Ma'at*, in its overall and encapsulating significance, stays a test checking their everyday ethical choices while trying to better them. For Karenga, *Ma'at* is defined similarly with the way Armah does:

> This [the practice of Maat] evolves out of an ontology which poses a unity of being and posits Maat as the fundamental ground for this unity. Ethically this has meaning in that it becomes a task of king and members of society to uphold this Maat-grounded world which is essentially good, and to restore and recreate it constantly. It is in this context that Maat expresses itself as an ongoing ethical project… the central category here [in Karenga's study] by which Maat is understood is the right with its expansive range of meaning indicated in its various forms: rights, rightness, rightful, rightfulness, righteous, righteousness, upright and uprightness. This field of meaning of Maat as the right includes in such meanings: that which is in accordance with the fair and due, i.e., justice; in accordance with fact and reason, i.e., truth; in accordance with the fitting and appropriate, i.e., propriety; and in accordance with the virtuous and valuable, i.e., the Good, etc. Thus, the idea of the right in its expansive field of meaning captures a significant part of the poleysemic concept of Maat. And this focus on the right in the concept of Maat is relevant and required in the interrelated realms of the Divine, the natural and the social.[18]

Reference to the king and members of society and their responsibility for keeping up with the meaning of *Ma'at* remains a paramount priority in its definition. Unlike Assmann's explanation of the same concept, Karenga's does not presume that the king acts on behalf of retrieving or flying gods. On the contrary, *Ma'at* in its wider meaning, is presumed on the idea of setting up the right; yet this task is not, because it cannot be, the exclusive power of one king or a single individual however powerful that individual might be. All active participants, a king as well as members of civil society, act as the executive powers in the realization of *Ma'at*. Continuing in the same explanatory line, Karenga posits:

> Given this, in its essential meaning, *Maat is rightness in the spiritual and moral sense in three realms: the Divine, the natural and the social*. In its

[18] Maulana Karenga, *Maat, The Moral Ideal in Ancient Egypt*. Routledge, New York & London (2004), p. 10 (Emphasis in the Original)

> expansive sense, *Maat is an interrelated order of rightness which requires and is the result of rights relations with and right behavior toward the Divine, nature and other humans*. As moral thought and practice, *Maat is a way of rightness* defined especially by the practice of the seven cardinal virtues of truth, justice, propriety, harmony, balance, reciprocity and order. Finally, as a foundation and framework for the moral ideal and its practice, *Maat is the constantly achieved condition and requirements for the ideal world, society and person*, i.e., the Maatian world, the Maatian society, and the Maatian person. And it is in this inclusive understanding that this project [this book] is conceived and pursued.[19]

It is of much service to the reader if one stresses here the idea of the *Ma'at*, the way Karenga processes it, as both: *an ideal* and *a project*. The part of the ideal entails that *Ma'at* is the level that should reflect or, at least, approximate the ordinary ancient Egyptian's moral. While the part of the project indicates that it is a never ending assignment; it is constantly realized and chased as Karenga himself admits: "to establish the value of this restored tradition as an ethical option in our time; and […] to bring this interpretation forward to engage it with contemporary ethical discourse and discussion."[20] In stressing the meaning of *Ma'at*, as both an ideal and a project, one has perhaps to keep in mind that this meaning stems and is so engendered from a peculiar Egyptian vision of reality that conceives being only in becoming. One cannot claim to be alive unless he/she is constantly striving, heading and moving in between moral and ethical states. Existence is permanently entrusted to the future and can never stand still. That is the reason why the Egyptian's moral worth is constantly weighed. Françoise Dunand and Christine Zive-Coche maintain that even "…the creator […] came into existence, using the verb *kheper*, which means "to become" and "to transform""[21] Hence the idea of *Ma'at* as an ideal instead of the real; a working platform, or an ideology, permanently leading to the betterment of the human moral and ethical existence.

In coming to the more practical sides and in connection with statecraft, *Ma'at* underlines the fact that one's identity is always in the making, a never-ending and constantly, but also consistently, enduring project. This is again another instance where Armah's idea of the concept matches Karenga's. Being, for both, can be reduced to the idea of eternal becoming. In other words, whenever one, because of some reason, is encumbered before fulfilling the obligation of constant becoming, then that person has started on the process of moral decay and is only awaiting physical extinction. *Ma'atic* ideology, if so one

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[19] Maulana Karenga, *Ibid.*, p. 10 (Emphasis in the Original)
[20] Maulana Karenga, *Ibid.*, p. 13
[21] Françoise Dunand and Christine Zive-Coche. *Gods and Men in Egypt*. Trans. David Lorton. Cornell University Press, (2004), p. 55

may call it, involves what Karenga calls the concept of perfectibility; a notion that enfolds "perpetual process of becoming, perpetual striving, going through stages of moral achievement, of self-mastery, reciprocity and all other virtues and excellences."[22]As noted above, part of any royal's obligation is to attend to "the orderedness of being." And if this obligation of offering and extending *Ma'at* to the world is not met, then the royal in question has failed to prove, not only his entitlement for the privileges of royalty, but his/ her very existence as a human being.

This obligation of extending *Ma'at* to others gives rise to what Karenga notes as the "constellative" aspect of the *Ma'atic* person, or of the Egyptian person living according to the percepts of *Ma'at*. That person is always processed as part of a group that is constantly striving for the aim of realizing *Ma'at* in their everyday life. This aspect of group solidarity and homogeneity reminds readers of Asar and his fellow group of teachers. Ode Ogede keenly observes: "Not only do these individuals as a group have conversations distinguished by being devoid of any gender bias and by being marked with a high level of intelligence, they get to the core of the ailments troubling the continent and what needs to be done to remedy it permanently because of their cooperative spirit."[23] Each one performs the task he/ she is most excellent at and capable of so by the end, and at the group level, the most desired transformation inside man and on earth becomes attainable. When such kind of group collaboration becomes second nature, the Egyptian person becomes the man-god he aspires to. Therefore, if we take the emulation of the divine as the identity of the Egyptian person, that identity is composed mainly of excellence and devotion to work of betterment, plus the atonement of one's efforts to the exigencies of the group. The individual within a vigorous group and a group with healthy individuals can fairly approximate how identity functions in ideal conditions for ancient Egyptians.

After reviewing these insights brought by both Assmann and Karenga, it becomes fairly clear that Armah's project of self-transformation is principally traditional. It is an exercise in the recovering of tradition via the use of selective memory. In this sense, Armah's work can be classified as typical of memory as opposed to history where the principal interest lies not in tracing differentiations and discontinuities, conflicts and contradictions, but in finding a coherent tradition to which he can connect. Armah, it is understood, desires the elevation of the tradition of *Ma'at* to the rank of a classical and rich stockpile of ideas, able to serve as a mode of perception and procession in contemporary life. In other words, *Ma'at* can be adopted as an ideology for the desired African

[22] Maulana Karenga, *Ibid.*, p.231
[23] Ode Ogede, *Opcit.*, p. 145

renaissance. For this reason, it becomes clear that it would be inconsequential to characterise Armah as someone suffering from some acute phase of Egyptomania, some people might so regard him.

Armah's frame of reference is determined by his quest for a "classical tradition" upon which to found his African identity. The Egyptian concepts about the origins of the world, the way he conceives and dramatised them, are centered around the idea of a self-generating god. Armah, like Karenga, links this with the concepts of human creativity regarding man's self-development. That understanding finally reaches very deep insights into moral self-creation and the realization of *Ma'at*. Said differently, the typical modern day African, for Armah, is someone who breaks the manacles of false tradition, as it is fed by arcane and lazy practices together with foreign malicious designs, and works with like-minded people for liberating aims set up by a conscious group. This is what Armah himself has stated recently in his autobiography, *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006)

> Change would come in the form of unity. To work toward unity, significant numbers of Africans would have to grow into *a new and active sense of continental identity*. It sounds obvious, but it needs stating: it will take conscious, active Africans, individuals and groups ready to live purposefully as Africans (as distinct from Ghanaians, Nigerians, Senegalese, Tanzanians, Somalis, Rwandans, Ibos, Hutus, Tutsis or Twa, Christians and Muslims), to create the human Africa of the future. (*The Eloquence of the Scribes*, p. 101. Italics mine)

Regretfully, Armah does not put this in the mouth of the character of a fully-fledged story. In other words, though conscious about the fact of translating the ethics of *Ma'at* into modern-day African situations, he so far comes short of bridging the ideal with the real in his last two novelistic experiences. His *moral calculus*[24], if one may so call it, lacks a dramatic touch with the present reality. Tommie Lee Jackson's remarks concerning the protagonist of *The Healers* can be extended to Armah's last two novels. Jackson's note is the following:

> Undoubtedly the novel lacks credibility, since fictional realism is sacrificed to social symbolism. The characters are forced to assume roles which, in turn, make them cardboard characters rather than real –life personalities.[25]

Jackson complains from the ideological overdose in the novels he read; a fact which he sees threatening the poetics of the drama and risks turning it into a political tract.

In addition, although Armah's position *vis-à-vis* the need of a new and egalitarian morality is sound and binding, because it matches what other African thinkers point to, he

[24] The term "moral calculus" is a term of the contemporary American writer William T. Vollmann in his *Rising Up and Rising Down: Some Thoughts on Violence, Freedom and Urgent Means*. Harper Perennial (2003). This is a seven volume study on violence, running up to 3300 pages in length, where Vollmann closely examines philosophically the origins of violence, its justifications and results.

[25] Tommie Lee Jackson, *Ayi Kwei Armah and French Existentialism*. PhD Thesis. University of Nebraska, (1985), p. 127

does not offer the reader reasons why it is so. To take only one thinker and in his insistence on the need for a new ethical attitude, Willie E. Abraham reminds researchers of what he calls 'value vacuum' resulting from the loss of independence and the 'confusion' associated with that loss[26]. While Abraham adequately identifies a combination of factors, with decipherable causes and effects, Armah does not look to be sufficiently sensitive to direct and practical pressing demands of the continent. In short, his project of *Ma'atic* rediscovery can be easily indicted as clarion call for a mythically constructed Kemetic life.

In reality though *Ma'at*, as explicated by Armah, serves in a corrective agenda for African politicians as well as ordinary people. It is not news that Africa's problems are so complex and so dense because of the still heavy influence of the inhibitive past on the present. Therefore, no amount of explication about the beauty and symmetry of *Ma'at* can induce decision-makers in Africa, together with their subjects, to abandon violence and fraud; these latter are both an aspect of a stagnant and repressive culture. Recently, a number of African writers have indicated the need to have a new moral model which is not defined as essentially African, but based on peaceful and egalitarian approach to life. From the images they draw in their novels, it looks as if the souls of Africans are suffering untold humiliations and are traumatized under the yoke of tyrants of all sorts, causing only civil wars, child-soldiering, human- and drug-trafficking. The unsolved problems of the generation of independence, ranging from uncontrolled urbanization and sporadic programmes of development, have escalated and have resulted in an untold number of crises at an unprecedented scale[27]. The overall picture gets worse everyday, and as one reads the recent works of some of these African writers he or she gets a bleak picture about the ethical standards of African ruling elites. Albert Memmi, in a recent study, assesses the extent to which African and third world cultures have been damaged:

> The reality one experience in everyday life and that constitutes one's ordinary experience is one of interminable convalescence from the consequences of colonization, widespread poverty, and the scandalous wealth of a small minority, the corruption of the haves and the petty bribes of the majority. There is a sense of mass resignation in spite of the

[26] Willie E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*. The University of Chicago Press. (1962), p. 191

[27] Because of this one has only to read *Song for Night* (2007) and *Becoming Abigail* (2006) by the young Nigerian novelist Chris Abani. Also the Nigerian Helon Habila seems to capture the heart of the crisis which African youth face in his *Measuring Time* (2007). Uzodinma Iweala is a Nigerian writer. He devotes his *Beasts of No Nation* (2006) exclusively to the problem of child-soldering in war-trodden zones in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma in his *Allah is Not Obliged* (2006) and *Waiting for the Wild Beast to Vote* (2003) offers gloomy and heart-breaking narratives about the corruption of politician, their lack of any ethical standards except staying in power and swindling the peoples' assets. Kourouma brilliantly shows how the youth simply suffer in consequence. The Ugandan Moses Isegawa, in *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000), locates the source for low moral standards of most of the Ugandan people in general as a consequence of uncontrolled urbanization and lack of planning. This has resulted in having psychopaths like Idi Amin in power. Interesting though, is the fact that Isegawa weaves his story in a careful way so that readers get informed about the growth of despotism in Africa. Mugezi, the narrator, does not hesitate to call his own parents 'despots' breeding future despots.

> sporadic disorderly, ineffective, and easily repressed outbreaks, the refusal of responsibility or complicity of the elites, the diminishment of culture to the benefit of religious obscurantism, the motivated and derisive plotting associated with politics, the envious comparisons (almost always detrimental) with other people, some of whom, less gifted by nature, nevertheless manage to succeed in their development.[28]

The result on youth is so destructive that it affects their chances for good health and their life expentancy. What is worse is the fact that their 'capacity for interest in life and trust in other human beings, of [one's] very integrity' becomes severely wounded[30]. Such a state of affairs leaves serious questions about how effectively one may apply *Ma'at* in present-day African life. Following this, one can conclude that Armah's project of self-transformation faces no simple obstacles. But in keeping in mind that the problem is, from first to last, a problem of culture, as evidence proves, one would consider as viable Armah's offer of a set of values derived from kemetic philosophy of life.

- **Matricentric Elements for Matriarchal and *Ma'atic* Ideals**

More needs to be said about the *Ma'atic* ideal outlined above, and likewise one needs to study how Armah conceives of it in practical terms. The egalitarian comportment of *Ma'at* risks staying part of the cultic and mythic baggage of the African continent if there are no organizational channels through which it can be made palpable, particularly in relation to gender. Accordingly, Armah pays particular respect to the female side of the African personality. In Chapter Two and Three, attention has been drawn to the way Armah pays tribute to African feminity. In this section, there is an attempt to examine how such an interest can be fed into the main current ideas about the course of morality needed in order to found the egalitarian society Armah envisages. In other words, Armah seems to consider the choice of matriarchy or matricentricity as a new morality for founding the new African egalitarian ethos. Indeed, Armah promises a new morality in matriarchy which can be deployed as a new vision about humanity and the ways in which Africa can get out of its present impasse.

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[28] Albert Memmi, *Decolonization and the Decolonized*. Trans. Robert Bononno. University of Minnesota Press, (2006), p. 95

[30] William T. Vollmann, *Op.cit.*, p. 35

Armah's preoccupation with the kind of morality pertaining to matriarchy and matricentricity is not limited to his last two works only. While *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* clearly and directly develop this concern, his earlier works, particularly *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Two Thousand Seasons*, provide the signals in this direction. The attempt is based on his search for an alternative paradigm of knowledge that can result in altering the present patriarchal structures and modes of feelings and attitudes. Modin's involvement with prominent American women (highly educated) shows the extent to which he was dissatisfied with the mechanism that motivates such women in order to set traps for him and getting the better of him. Such an apprehension is soon followed up with the narrator of *Two Thousand Seasons* announcing the rule of women and clear cut distinctions drawn between African and non-African women.

As his entries in *Why Are We So Blest?* illustrate, Modin raises with his verbal defiance against the architecture of knowledge in the modern world into freezing levels presumably to solidify the wall of differences between two visions of reality. These two visions can be reduced to African matriarchy versus Western patriarchy. Detecting this preoccupation is a blurred activity, especially when one reads the text casually. Nevertheless, it is he, Modin, who goes to break down that cemented wall all the time through what can be called his 'erotic' adventures with Aimée and Oppenhardt's wife. Again this contradiction might be Armah's way of exploring the idea of the necessity for switching to another sexual paradigm where violence and catharsis mark identity. As they rob man of inner peace and balance, patriarchal premises are characterized by Armah to be all behind the scene. The very instant women are looked down upon as handy tools for males' pleasure and approached as evil or capable of doing only evil, man risks processing violence and rape as a normal and logical course of action. In trying to emulate Aimée's sexual attitudes and cater for her emotional need, Modin seems to be unconsciously engaged a gender war, the one that leaves him finally bleeding to death in the wild desert. He starts becoming caught in contradictions of frantic masochism and sexual repressions that strip him eventually of his identity and estrange him from himself.

Indeed, Modin's attraction to Mrs. Jefferson, the professor's wife, together with Aimée, and the erotic experiences with both, should not be taken for granted. The case of these two women speaks of what Cheikh Anta Diop would call 'Amazonism', a phenomenon which "appears as the logical consequence of the excesses of an extreme

patriarchy."[31] The two women's disinterest in their fellow American males and haunting desire for Modin, an African, thus explains their revulsion with representatives of patriarchy and catharsis. Diop proves, again, inciting because he finds that Amazons "[…]following their triumph, they were to fight everywhere against upholders of that régime [patriarchy] and were to spare, or even make friends with, the representatives of a régime where the members of their sex had always been allowed to develop freely."[32] By 'members of their sex …freely', Diop is referring to the matriarchal system. According to the same source, Modin comes from Africa where matriarchy presides as a *modus vivendi*. Matriarchal conditioning, based on respect for and honouring woman kind, is what justifies the two women's attachment and desire. Looking back at one of these two in his biography, Aimée Reitsch is modeled around Emmie Sachrader. This latter Armah pays tribute to by stating: "Sharing academic interests, and attracted to each other in a deepening erotic relationship as well, we experienced a friendship that felt uncannily complete." (*The Eloquence of the Scribes*, p. 98)

It is true that Modin keeps justifying his love affairs on the ground of helping Aimée to feel her dead feminity return to her. Because of aggressive routine that characterizes life in the market economy, Aimée gets sexually frigid and had no further desire to indulge with males in intimate relationships. Because Modin comes from a radically opposite culture, namely a matriarchal one, he is treated as a friendly companion. Aimée keeps attached to him because unlike fellow Americans, those with inclinations to be aggressively patriarchal, she is hopeful to achieve what she calls "[…] resurrection." (*Why Are We so Blest?*, p. 95) She insists on calling the change 'resurrection' and not just 'an awakening to a dormant tissue', the way Modin suggests. Aimée, and so is the professor's wife, is deceived into believing that satisfaction is possible by suppressing the direct cause of what they think is the reason behind their plight. Aggressive modes of production, when they escalate, lead to drastic limitations of individual space. The result is that these women's mounting isolation in patriarchal modes of organisation leads them to seek connections with people like Modin. Such connections, which are no more than brief sexual encounters, as we might understand, can be genuine, that is, based on harmony and respect. Furthermore, these connections feed on the illusion of satisfaction where in fact they cover deep holes inside these Amazon women since they have been turned into machines and Modin remains the only means of providing harmony they can reach out.

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[31] Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*. Karnak House, London (1989), p. 109

[32] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Ibid.*, p. 110

That is why in *Two Thousand Seasons*, Armah defines Africa as essentially a matriarchal domain where lines of descent are traced to women. He even claims that their rule had been more symmetrical, natural and just than men's. And as illustrated in the previous two chapters, this keen interest in African women makes Armah position them as the cornerstones and guardians of his ultimate project, and without whom the just and egalitarian society he aspires to cannot be projected. Indeed, Armah's position vis-à-vis women matches what some social theorists bring to the fore of the debate. To count only one, the American feminist Marilyn French is vehemently supportive of the opinion that women cannot be dispensed with in case there exist serious attempts working for positive change of the patriarchal components of the world of today. In her study, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals* (1985) Marilyn French, provides useful sociological insights into terms like 'matrilineal' and 'matriarchy'.

> In the beginning was the mother; the word began a later stage. The single universal covering primate and ungulate (hoofed) species, indeed all mammals and much other animal life as well, is that the core of society, the center of whatever kind of social group exists is mother and child. Such a social organization is called *matrifocal or matricentric*. These terms are not the same as *matriarchal*, a word formed by analogy with *patriarchal*, which denotes leadership (from *the Greek root arche*, meaning *chief* and *arche* in, *to be first, to rule*. A matriarchy would thus be a society in which mothers rule in the same way fathers have ruled for the past few thousand years. There is no evidence that a matriarchy ever existed on earth… Matricentric societies are spontaneous, organic; the mother cares for the baby until it is able to move about easily by itself, find food, and protect itself without fear. The mother "rules" by greater experience, knowledge, ability, but the intention of her "rule" is to free the child, to make it independent. [34]

There are several concerns all at once in this long quote. As French states, archeological evidence suggests that there had been no instance where mothers used to be on the same line of importance as fathers in ancient human societies. Mothers have all the time been there forming the centre and always providing the conditions that made man's existence possible. Nevertheless, while mothers form this centre; a factor that can be spotted in descent, naming, caring and nursing, they have no intention to lead or to rule. Their organic attachments or commitments keep them busy with nature and basic human components. According to French and in line with what Armah brings to debate, women show no instinctual inclinations for power as it is understood in the modern age, mainly as domination. They have been naturally happy with their roles of caretakers and nurses. Yet, even the business of care taking and nursing—during this very felicitous state—is an

[34] Marilyn French, *Opcit.*, p. 27 (Emphasis in the Original)

exercise of some sort of power. Again like Armah, Marilyn French stresses that this kind of 'rule' exercised by women is positive since it is directed towards freeing the child and preparing it for responsible adulthood.

Armah emphasizes the fact that patriarchy has been motivated principally by the male's growing hunger for control and domination. And for him, it carries a cluster of meaning, the first one indicating its parallelism with patriarchy; that is, a kind of "mothers' rule", or 'a society in which mothers rule in the same way fathers have ruled'. By "mothers' rule" French has in mind a system of monopolizing the means of production, resulting in a domination that is based on a morality sharply contrasting with stratification and hierarchy, in short matriarchy. Unlike Armah at least as far as *Two Thousand Seasons* is concerned, French is certain that such 'gender-based rule' has never been the case in human history. Armah thinks that patriarchy has never been congruent with Africa's destiny. In French's analysis, which can be comparable with Armah's viewpoint in some parts at least, 'matricentricity' can be the vehicle to this end if it contains the structures and models whereby these egalitarian principles can be drawn, extended and enforced. Unearthing such matricentric structures of feelings and attitudes by Armah is the first step in the construction of a more humane ideology that is expected to found the peaceful and egalitarian world. Armah seems to be aware of the fact that while carrying this vision of 'matricentricity' as a mission seeking to realize a new and just morality, it is important not to fall prey to the illusion of false and easy solutions. This is the case because of, as French warns, "…the penetration of patriarchal morals into those disciplines [medicine, psychiatry, education, law and business]". She pursues: "[T]he best intentioned efforts to solve human problems falter or fail because they are dyed in the same pattern of thinking that created the problems."[35]

It is interesting to note that Armah does not contend with this theory of the fall of matriarchy and its replacement by patriarchy as part of the evolutionist march of humanity. Following in Diop's footsteps, Armah considers matriarchy as Africa's main contribution universal civilization. This is so because Africa has developed a unique conception of deity that does not trust transcendent and heavenly gods. In addition, the morality of *Ma'at* keeps ideal relationships between men and women. Therefore, Armah sees matriarchy as essentially African. *Two Thousand Seasons* clearly attributes the disappearance of matriarchy to outside factors, mainly the presence of conquering

[35] Marilyn French, *Opcit*., p. 22.

foreigners. It is first the Arabs' religion of Islam that first shook Africa's devotion to matriarchal values and ethics. Later on, the arrival of the Europeans 'from beyond the sea' forced Africans, through various devices, into aggressive forms of patriarchy. Armah explicates:

> Killers who from the desert brought us in the aftermath of Anoa's prophecy a choice of death: death of our spirit, the clogging destruction of our mind with their senseless religion of slavery…Killers who from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left, shrieking fables of a white god and a son unconceived… (*Two Thousand Seasons*, p.2)

Such a position, however offensive towards Arabs and Christians, is supported by evidence. Cheikh Anta Diop also thinks that Africa has been wronged by invaders, and in this sense Diop's theory does not contradict Armah's blatant attacks on Arabs and Europeans. According to Diop, and historically speaking, Africa belongs to the Southern Cradle of humanity where matriarchy reigns freely. Europe, on the contrary, is part of the Northern Cradle where patriarchy has been processed as the norm. Patrilineal lines of descent, worship of fire ashes, the practice of cremation, nomadic life and violent manifestations of power are some of the characteristics of the Northern Cradle. The Southern Cradle, however, is identified by its matrilineal lines of descent, ancestor worship, the practice of burial, sedentary and agricultural life plus equal distribution of gender roles. The harsh climate and the constant journeying of the peoples living in the Eurasian steppes form the patriarchal modes of thought and behaviour in the North. Diop reports that "[D]uring a difficult and lengthy journey the woman becomes a useless mouth to feed."[36] While the abundance of resources, stability and mild climate in the South necessitate respecting and honouring woman kind. Like Armah, Diop extends his admiration for the matriarchal model prevalent mainly in Africa by claiming:

> … in fact it is only in this framework [of abundance characteristic of Africa] that the wife can, in spite of her physical inferiority, contribute substantially to the economic life. She even becomes one of the stabilising elements in her capacity as mistress of the house and keeper of the food; it also seems important in the discovery of agriculture and in plant selection while the man devoted himself to the hunt. In those primitive ages when the security of the group was the primary concern, the respect enjoyed by either of the sexes was connected with its contribution to this collective security.[37]

[36] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Opcit.*, p. 25
[37] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28

Not only is there admiration for the matriarchal model of human organisation on the part of Diop, his prose shows an equal commitment for this type of organisation because of it egalitarian nature. When each sex no longer stands idle and remains dependent on the other one, that is, when all contribute to the welfare of all, Diop sees no reason for practices of belittlement. Diop, again like Armah, thinks that such an ideal state of affairs in gender relationship is a natural conclusion to the type of the predominant climate in the Southern Cradle and hence the kind of worship practiced by Africans. On the contrary, the foggy swaps and the constant shift of place as they are characteristics to the life of people among the Northern Cradle result in 'decaying character' and is all a sign for 'a poverty of thought' which result in patriarchy:

> …in the icy northern cold, the god benefactor par excellence is the fire; thanks to its incomparable usefulness in these latitudes, the primitive northern soul was not long coming to its worship. This would be the material base, which subsequently gave birth to a religious superstructure. It is evident…that cremation and fire worship arise from a specifically Indo-European tradition, a tradition which has perpetuated itself until the present day in the consciousness of men who have forgotten its origin; the everlasting flame, the Olympic torches, the associations whose members, although Christians, allow themselves to be cremated, can probably be explained in the light of this Aryan tradition…It is remarkable to observe that cremation is the ethnological and cultural trait which distinguishes the Aryan world from the southern world, an in particular from the African one…[38]

While the meaning of matriarchy in these above definitions is restricted in the sense that it amounts to the idea of gaining access to rule at the larger social fabric, it is, however, not the case with some scholars. In Cheikh Anta Diop's spectrum, matriarchy amounts to the rules of succession and inheritance working in favour of women and precisely of queens. Descent of kingship is sought via feminine blood lines instead of masculine.[39] For her part, Ifi Amadiume freely associates matriarchy with nearly all that touches the concerns of the family where "women and their children produce and eat in one pot." where "the moral value seems to generate anti-state and anti-centralist tendencies."[40] She contends that African matriarchy "does not have to be invented, it is there. It is a question of analyzing it."[41] Clearly there is a gulf between claims that matriarchy has never been in existence in human history and assertions that it is just there. The first camp views matriarchy as a vision whereas Diop and Amadiume regard it primarily as a social project. Obviously, these

[38] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Ibid.*, p. 46
[39] Cheikh Anta Diop, *Ibid.*, p. 60-61
[40] Ifi Amadiume, *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture*. London & New York: Zed Books Ltd (1997), p. 117
[41] Ifi Amadiume, *Ibid.*, p. 23

last two definitions do not draw clear distinctions between matriarchy on the one hand and matrilineality or matricentricity, on the other. As we attempt to find out below, such a division among theorists has further implications among practitioners and cultural activists.

But beyond preoccupations with rites of descent and which parent has affiliations rights and which does not, one still wonders about ways to address current family issues in modern day Africans. Most African communities have moved to the cities where they can find jobs. This has brought urbanisation problems, categorised in changing patterns of family organisation. City life cannot be, under any circumstances, compared to traditional life in the village. Nowadays, some African "mega-cities" like Lagos, Cairo, Kinshasa or Johannesburg compete with western cities like London and New York[42]. In other words, what can Armah's call to revive matricentricity or matriarchy imply on the kind of the African individual or group of the projected African renaissance? It is understood that matriarchy attempts the strengthening of traditional ties between individuals, preserving the old harmonious morality of peace and equality between the sexes. But the majority of Africans no longer live in traditional villages where these ties used to be carefully observed. Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah finds that resorting to clan-based or ancestral blood kind of identity lead to disastrous results, akin to the current situation in Somalia[43]. Lauretta Ngcobo questions African women's abuse by new circumstances in urban areas. She traces the origins of this abuse to the perpetuations of crippling traditional conditioning against women in modern contexts:

> The indigenous literature reflects a turbulent change for the worse in the condition of women in a changing Africa. In the reality of Africa where fathers live away from home, working in the cities or are weakened by liquor in the stressful life of those cities, women often have to combine the roles of motherhood and fatherhood in bringing up the children. They themselves have to be strong to take on both roles, loving protecting and counselling in turns. African women may

[42] One study has found out that: "Rapid urbanization in a situation of continued poverty has outpaced the financial and administrative capacity of governments to ensure that cities provide efficient locations for economic activity and satisfy the basic needs of all their citizens." Carole Rakodi, "Globalization and Africa: The Challenge of Urban Growth" in: *The Urban Challenge in Africa: Growth and Management of its Large Cities*. Ed. Carole Rakodi, United Nation University Press, (1997) Naturally, the study illustrates that traditional patterns of locating identity are outdated because of the rapidly changing economic arrangements. Hence the need to reconsider tradition and traditionlality in projects of identity quests.

[43] In *Links*, Farah thinks that the worst kind of identity configuration is the one found on clan. It leads to the worst of civil wars. In this novel, a military major, in one fighting militia, explains to the newly arrived Jeebleh: "You'll see for yourself when you've been here for a couple of days that there are no longer 'friends' you can trust, anywhere in this country…Here we don't think of friends anymore. We rely on *our clansmen, on those sharing our ancestral blood*." Nuruddin Farah, *Links*. Penguin Books. (2003), p. 30 (Emphasis added)

> not be born that way, but they do wax strong, faced with the challenges in the African context…[44]

Not only does Armah seem to overlook this 'turbulent change for the worse', but there are instances where the reader can easily spot his silence on how matriarchy can be mobilised in the present context. This silence seems to be due to the writer's misidentification of some aspects of the African crisis. In his defence of traditional ways and traditional values, and while perceiving almost every measure for healing in traditional terms, Armah can be said to remain reluctant to admit the entire impact of European modernity on the traditional way of life in Africa. Addressing an audience of African writers, Ngcobo suggests that one way to be an active member of the African community would be to make conscious efforts to stop thinking about "…the dream like recapture of an escaping tradition such as many of us write about and read from each other's books."[45]

Now as to the viability of this matricentric perspective in today's real life situation, Manuel Castell asserts that the world today is changing and male domination is gradually eroding. This supports Armah's above-mentioned argument and confirms that after all there is hope for a constructive change since:

> In the last thirty years there has been the most extraordinary cultural revolution in history: women have changed the way they think about themselves. Once women in industrialized countries, but also in most developing countries -- there is a process toward this thinking -- decided that the patriarchal family (the institutional domination of men over women and children in the family) is not correct, that men and women are equal and women have to develop their own interests and culture, have their own relationship to work, to everything -- once women have changed that, everything changes. The family changes; therefore, socialization of children changes; therefore, personality changes, sexuality changes, everything changes. And that's the process we are in[46].

There remains now the need for fresh reflections over the new social equations and how best they should be worked out for maximum freedom and justice. Perhaps, if classical manifestations of patriarchy are eroding, given Castell's assessment, we read in Armah's novelistic project a condemnation of that old and classical form only. In addressing Armah's call for the recovery the traditional *Ma'atic* ideals and matricentric organisation of society, one is before a good instant about how traditional outlook still inhibits Armah's analysis. He still cannot see that a progressive and forward looking vision

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[44] Lauretta Ngcobo, "African Motherhood- Myth and Reality". In: Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (eds.), *African Literature, An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Blackwell Publishing, (2007), p. 536 (Emphasis mine)
[45] Lauretta Ngcobo, "Ibid.," p. 533
[46] Manuel Castell, *Ibid.*, p 15

has to attain to the interaction of all various factors combining the present. The dyad modernity/tradition has proved to be very superficial as a model and mode of analysis. This same opinion is given voice by Spencer Albritton when he concludes his study:

> But despite the merits of Armah's use of traditional culture, there are some problems. First, by representing traditional African society in a symbolic or idealized form, he fails to account for the diversity and stratification that exist in that sector; and second, by setting traditional values in direct opposition to a Westernized post-colonial state, he is unable to show how that state has been able to embody these values into its own nationalist ideology and thereby refuse its opposition. In a related way, Armah's scheme fails to account for how capitalism in its colonial and neo-colonial formations has utilised traditional societies--semi-feudal and communal—to serve its own economic and political purposes. Far from destroying these formations, western capitalism has frequently modified and incorporated them into its own structure. The result is that by not giving a well-defined picture of how European and African ruling classes have managed to manipulate and incorporate the various sectors of African society into a world capitalist system and by not giving sufficient examples of how this incorporation has been resisted, Armah fails to pinpoint those groups in either the traditional or modern sector of society capable of changing the direction of contemporary Africa.[47]

Perhaps, the only instance where Armah seems to be nearest to providing a live example about how the modern neo-colonial African elite incorporates elements from world capitalism is when he sheds light on the theme of western education. Albritton, despite the pointedness of his critique, does not mention western education. But as will be shown in Chapter Five of this thesis, Armah's portrayal of Western education in most of his novels draws interesting connections frequently unnoticed. Indeed, incorporation takes place via alien education, yet the way Armah reports such a drama cannot be, in any way, helpful in addressing the connection.

In his iconic work, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka maintains the opinion that the literary artist's indulgence in ideology cannot be healthy for his or her trade. If pressed to choose between 'ideology' and 'social vision' as the genuine product of the artist, Soyinka prefers the second over the first. Such choice is justified in the following:

> The danger with a literary ideology poses is the act of – and of course excommunication. Thanks to the tendency of the modern consumer-mind to facilitate digestion by putting in strict categories

[47] Spencer, Norman Albritton, *Political Consciousness and Commitment in Modern African Literature: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*. PhD Thesis. State University of New York at Stony Brook. (1985), pp. 105-6. Albritton is not alone in this opinion, Tommie Lee Jakson obsrves that Armah is "becoming himself too much of a programmatic writer, … [adhering] too closely to Fanon's normative perspective." Tommie Lee Jackson, *Opcit.*, p. 119

> what are essentially fluid operations of the creative mind upon social and natural phenomena, the formulation of a literary ideology tends to congeal sooner or later into instant capsules which administered also to a writer, may end by asphyxiating the creative process.[48]

What can appear as a setback in Part Three of *KMT* is the total absence of any drama. All that Armah puts in that part is a combination of stored hieroglyphic translations written by many scribes and arranged in one long sequence and divided into chapters. True, one can read that as a scripture, comparing, if not actually competing, with the Old Testament or the Bible, and this is already a bonus for the thematic concerns of the novel. But when considered from a purely technical side such absence of drama and the divorce this absence makes with the two earlier parts shows that Armah has probably fallen to what Soyinka calls the ' asphyxiat[ion of] the creative process'. [49]

All in all, Armah's project of self-transformation shows strong aspects as well as weak ones. The new divine principle together with its accompanying *Ma'atic* ethics he brought to the fore of reflection in his last two works are excellent elements of culture that can get Africa from the present impasse. The first element, which is an explication of the meaning of deity, is empowering and enhancing. It breaks age-old manacles and frees the African psyche from the yoke of essentialisations and immanence of whatever nature. The second element, *Ma'atic* ethics, serves a corrective purpose, that is, to warn Africans against lowering their moral standards lest they desire their own annihilation. Armah processes *Ma'at* as Africa's gift that would lead to a 'renascent Africa', to use Nnamdi Azikiwe's expression. Nevertheless, Armah's highlighting of Matricentricity as part of the solution seems to be not fully adequate. While good in itself, the reader can question how matricentricity can be enhancing in a radically changing Africa, and where the sway of modernity leaves little or no space for such minutiae. Willie Abraham has remarked that culture, especially in the African context, has three major facets or aspects: value, material and institution. Each aspect interrelates with the other two creating an interesting synergy

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[48] Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*. Cambridge University Press, (1976), p. 61

[49] In this connection and in his "Our Awakening" lecture series at Berkeley, Armah starts his address by commenting on how he first came to write fiction: "I write books because I tried to do something more useful and failed. And since I've been trained to write, I do that as a defense against total despair." Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening", "Opcit." Readers guess that 'something more useful and failed' nothing else than Armah's interest in revolutionary activities and direct contact with ideology and ideological tracts. With the publication of *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Armah confirms this early course of his life. In fact, the whole purpose from *The Eloquence of the Scribes* seems to justify Armah's move from his first longing to be a revolutionary and ideologue to a novelist. Nevertheless, one can observe that the revolutionary inside Armah never died as he kept writing one ideological pamphlet after another, pseudo named works of fiction.

which is an undivided whole[50]. Lack of consideration of such a dynamic risks developing a myopic vision, relating only partially to the lived reality.

Armah's drama thus does not seem to emphasize the interconnection between the value and institutional aspects, in his case, *Ma'at* together with deity, and the material aspect. Because he processed them in terms of isolated particulars, Armah does not show how *Ma'at* and the enhancing concept of God correlate to have in the net result an industrialised, stable, prosperous and democratic Africa. Adorno's statement used as epigraph to this chapter, suggests the need to see beyond the dyad that in either nature or history lies man's solution to his problem. The confluence of both, as he calls it, can be the starting point of a more positive approach for all humanity, not only Africans. But such understanding proposes an identity composition other than that of Armah's. In addition, more pressing and concrete issues like development and social welfare hardly figure in Armah's reflection on morality, deity and education. In the final analysis, Armah's identity quest, from a purely thematic perspective, can be said to resemble Egyptomania or a postmodernist narrative attempting to connect some elements of a past which he thinks useful. Armah's distrust of modernity, its biases and implications oblige him to take refuge in traditional lore, plunging deep in the past so that he unearths the civilisation of *Kemet* and claims it to have a healing potential for ailing African societies.

[50] Abraham, *Ibid.*, "The interrelation between the three aspects of culture can be found everywhere…" p. 33

Chapter Five: Armah's Educational Perspectives in New Africa

> A college in West Africa for the education of Africa youth by African instructors, under a Christian government conducted by Negroes, is something so unique in the history of Christian civilization, that wherever, in the civilized world, the existence of such an institution is heard of, there will be curiosity as to its character, its work and its prospects. A college suited, in all respects, to the exigencies of this nation and to the needs of race cannot come into existence all at once. It must be the result of years of experience, of trial, of experiment.
>
> Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, p. 82

For Armah, a carefully devised and administered educational system should form the basis for a reformed African ethos. This last chapter explores Armah's call for renovating the present educational philosophy that aims to promote a new idea of Africa. Constructing an authentic educational system is justified by him through the need to supersede the devastating effects imposed by and instituted through colonial education. Below is an attempt to debate Armah's deconstructive approach of the colonial educational pattern. Similarly, viable prospects of a change of perspective are reviewed. In founding schools throughout Africa and granting scholarships in metropolitan universities to African students, Armah thinks, colonial powers only meant to maintain control, even after the end of their direct occupation. In Chapter Three we have seen how Baako, due to his alien education, has been portrayed as someone emptied of the will-power to exert a leading influence on his society and offer an alternative project through tradition-oriented values. The Greek premises of his thinking, which come as a direct result of that alien education, are outlined to be the reasons behind this shortcoming.

In nearly all of his seven novels, there is a tendency to praise and prefer traditional learning institutions. And this tendency concurs with a certain trend of thinking that advocates the

need for a deep respect and serious reconsiderations of these traditional institutions of learning. It is significant that Lindela, in *KMT*, translates and adopts the ideology of cultural awakening from scribes who wrote almost six millennia ago. Similarly in *Osiris Rising*, Ast and other university professors seek the aid of the traditional historian Tete. It is Tete's contribution that reveals the fake identity of the presumably Ethiopian prince, Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano. *The Healers*, too, contains a strong emotional drive thanks to the inspiring call of the residents of the Eastern Forest, that is, Damfo and his group of healers. Indeed, Armah implicitly stresses the viability of such an approach in today's world. That is why the reference to traditional trainers should not be separated from the writer's perspective of a cultural awakening of Africa. The first section of the present chapter tries to address the following question: what does Armah's retrospective investigation suggest in terms of his overall liberating perspective?

The present chapter examines Armah's call to trigger the urgent social and cultural transformation he thinks necessary for Africa's cultural awakening. A 'perceptive reading'[1] will establish that Armah's call can be viewed as multilayered philosophical outlook containing four main steps. The four steps can be approximated as salient but increasingly narrowing markers in an upside-down triangle; the shape connotes the depth of the writer's search. First, Armah does not object if traditional initiation is simply transliterated in modern African schools, but given the historical impossibility of such an idea, he deems it necessary to consider the premium values enclosed in traditional schooling systems. Second, in order to catch the essence of the fabulous values of traditional schools, Armah incites readers to combat the Euro-centric and potentially destructive effects of neo-colonial schools. Instead of being rewarding and liberating, Western education is seen by Armah as an institutional machinery that indoctrinates African minds in submission to Western power and blinds them from ever aspiring to a just world order. According to him, without a conscious inhibition of this institution's festering viruses, there is little hope for Africa's cultural revival to come about. The third step involves conscious ground preparation for founding a just organizational social order. Armah here dispenses with the revolutionary alternative as he thinks it not only wasteful and superficial but also suicidal. Conversely, the novelist's evolutionary outlook confers a well-planned corrective agenda and thoughtful implementations in the already existing school system. The fourth and final step narrows the search till the readers are able to measure the power of educated people to avert the 'sabotage' of

[1] This study shares Kofi Owusu's call for 'perceptive reading'. It is in his doctoral thesis that Owusu makes the point that Armah "[…]takes the 'familiar' or what is usually taken for granted and turns it into something 'strange'; but the process itself—that of turning the familiar into something strange—is tinged with ambiguity. The result is that the perceptive reader is offered a fascinating text which sponsors the familiarity of the strange and the strangeness of the familiar. (I refer to the *perceptive*, rather than *any*, reader because Armah's 'effects' are intended to elicit *critical* not *emotional* or *literal-minded* reader-response.)" Kofi Owusu, *Fictionalising as Fiction-Analysing: A Study of Select 'Critical' Fiction by Ayi Kwei Armah, Wole Soyinka, Ama Ata Aidoo and Chinua Achebe*. PhD Thesis. The University of Alberta (1989), p. 69

the mind exacted by Western education, while also reversing its inhibitive influence for the purpose of social transformation. In line with Gramsci's concept of 'public intellectual', Armah opts for a category of intellectuals called 'collective intellectuals.' Such intellectuals seem to be his messiahs, the people qualified to found the new Africa and be its subjects.

1. Emulating Traditional Education

Perhaps part of what Armah tries to achieve from exploring the components of traditional lore and in different contexts (ancient Egyptian or Akan) is his need to adopt, however partly, the egalitarian contents for his present liberating objectives. In dramatizing Densu's learning process with Damfo, or Tete's narrative with Ast and the fake prince Cinque, Armah has perhaps no intention to literally repeat their educative pattern. Rather, his intention is probably to spur an incentive for modern readers, enabling them to consider the regenerative cultural impulses enfolded in traditional education. Meanwhile, one can read Armah's novels as an implicit attempt at inducing readers to embark on a mythical shuttling back and forth in time, stressing its metaphoricity. The aim is to amend the alienating present, thus restoring African man's ascription to space and time through that mythic journeying. According to Armah, African traditional systems of education are key factors to the spiritual transformation needed to posit the African identity. By drawing attention to *Ma'atic* ideals, Armah seems determined to contest the ethics and values of patriarchy. Such an objective cannot be attained without an educational system that is immune to the 'viruses' that normalize hierarchal and patriarchal ethics. The way traditional initiation is handled by Damfo and Densu in *The Healers* offers some useful insights into the way in which an educational system can put patriarchy under control. The proposed curricula in *Osiris Rising* works towards the same end as sought from traditional knowledge. In the end, Armah's aim from comparing traditional with modern education provides an in-depth understanding of the cultures of peace and companionship, all in the hope of rebuilding Africa's culture along positive ethics.

Thus Armah seems to reason that if Western education cannot function positively and African would-be visionaries are systematically pushed to the margins as a result of trusting it, switching to traditional education might provide the longed-for rebirth. In embracing the traditional path, it is likely that Armah aims at discrediting Western education and uncovering its schemes to cater for the imperial structure. The task of exposing the entire imperial educational

design implies the innovation of a real alternative project that is premised on well thought out philosophical foundations. In fact, this could be the reason for much of the drama of initiation in the seventh grove in *Two Thousand Seasons*, and the water-gazing exercise in *The Healers*. In these two examples, the best part of this African educational system is not only its systematic, but also meticulous centering of the self in the spirit. Once the combination is effected, transformation becomes a mere exercise of shifting the self from petty individualistic concerns to an interest in communal welfare. Such a metamorphosis is portrayed as important for launching the identity of the desired African renaissance. And this identity, in its mature stages, can easily be seen to be reflective of egalitarian ethics like a loving God, equality between the genders and the shedding of violence as a way of life.

In this connection, one will note Armah' heavy reliance on the African fund of knowledge and folklore in shaping his stories. Kwame Ayivor considers *KMT* to be Armah's attempt to fictionalise what has already existed in traditional African lore. According to him:

> To substantiate the hypothesis that in his fictional reconstruction of Africa's multi-millennial history Armah has self-consciously concealed a large mass of well-researched information under the guise of fictional fantasy, it will be necessary to juxtapose Armah's 'fictional versions' with some of the historical and other factual sources magically massaged by the novelist into the textual body of *KMT*.[2]

Ayivor concurs with Armah's interest in renovating Africa's educational systems along the spiritual and ethical dimensions. Meanwhile, one can note some variation between Armah's juxtaposition of his fictional material with the way other scholars approach traditional training. In this section, we examine the views of two scholars, one being an Egyptologist (historical source), and the other an African traditionalist (a factual source). Normandi Ellis presents the notion of a spiritual education and the ways in which it used to be effectively handled among ancient Egyptians. Malidoma Patrice Somé elucidates this with his native Dagara[3] initiation ritual, and shows how a typical traditional educational system can be very useful in identity formation. These two specialists are in a position to help readers to assess Armah's call for a new educational system rooted in traditional African lore. The modern African self, as Armah maintains, stands in dire need for a positive transformation. The opinions of both the Egyptologist and the traditionalist below present reliable information to compare with the way the transformation

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[2] Kwame Ayivor, "'The Charlatanism That Was Our Education': Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of Pan-Africanist History in *KMT*." *English in Africa*. Vol. 32, N° 2, (October 2005), p. 109

[3] The Dagara tribe lives in the south of Burkina Faso. And according to Somé, there are some Dagara in the north of Ghana as well on the coast (further to south of Ghana). After the Berlin Conference (1884), Burkina Faso became part of French West Africa, while Ghana, or the Gold Coast, became part of British West Africa. As a result, the two Dagara sections lost connection. Somé says: "I belong to a group of people called the Dagara, who trace their origins to the region once known as the Gold Coast, now called Ghana…" Malidoma Patrice Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa*. Tarcher Penguin. (1999) p. 1-2

should take place. Their views can help readers appreciate Armah's standpoint concerning the ongoing debate on self-engineering through education.

In her *Dreams of Isis*, Normandi Ellis offers an interesting reading of some sections of the myth of Isis and Osiris. Her reading is insightful mainly because she is primarily motivated by finding answers to modern-day questions in ancient mythology. According to her, the battle between Horus and Seth is not to be oversimplified and limited to interpretations about the eternal fight between good and evil. Inside this mythical drama, Ellis spots a primordial journey of initiation and self-transformation. For the purpose of engaging with Seth in battle, Horus had had to come face to face with the dualistic nature of existence in the hope of finally achieving his maturity. When articulated in the language of the present, her insights reveal that gaining maturity is equivalent to receiving a sound education; acquiring the useful knowledge with which one can face the world. Simply put, beating Seth implies beating one's shadow, that is, the other side of the self. Orphaned in his father, and in order to confront his shadow, Horus has to have the necessary learning; a condition which his mother, Isis, isolated and threatened, cannot meet.

Despite the fact that Armah does not explicitly emphasize the need for initiation before the mythical Asar can overcome his rival Seth, an implicit reading would establish that modern day Asar has been, on the personal level at least, well prepared to play the role set for him. For up in heaven, Osiris, the father, appears to Horus in a dream and instructs him to deal with the wrongs committed by Seth. In the earthly arena, however, Horus has to undergo the rigorous task of self-transformation before attending to his father's recommendation. This work "involves periods of silence and isolation" so that he becomes ready to "tap[…] the power of the unconscious. He sees his situation clearly with combined intuition and logic. His enforced silence and isolation is a prerogative for strength, to call upon his inner vision and to prepare himself for what lies ahead."[4] The necessary period of isolation and silence provides Horus with the chance to prepare himself, away from the negative influence of others, for battle. In this situation, Horus' godly status does not immune him from going through the critical stage of decision and later, action. In other words, Horus cannot wait for a divine or miraculous intervention to put down his enemy. It is only when he clears his mind and explores his own unconscious that he can aspire for victory.

> The gods watch Horus' earthly battle with a vested interest. There is more than egoistic heroics at work here. The matter is of gravest spiritual consequence; yet the gods do not, perhaps cannot, do anything to sway the outcome. Seth represents a part of the gods' own being which appeared at the down of creation. He is what is needed to set in motion the hero's human and divine drama. Seth is an evil as necessary as death in order for the world of creation to continue… Constantly aware, he deals with whatever demons

[4] Normandi Ellis, *Dreams of Isis.* Quest Books, (1995), p.101

> appear, yet he searches continually for the source of the conflict. He does not imagine that, having battled once, twice or even three times, he has slain all the serpents of darkness. He does not allow himself to rest[5].

Perfect union between a couple in a divine marriage, as Ellis illustrates, is only an example about how every aspect of life should be mentally processed. What Horus, in his fight with Seth, learns from the metaphoric lesson of Ptah—Sekhmet 'divine marriage' is the realisation that Seth forms half of him and that he, Horus, is half Seth, half Osiris at the same time. In other words, Horus learns that he is as prone to evil as Seth is, and in 'righting' what is wrong one has to own a tacit understanding that he carries inside him the very seeds of his own destruction and fall. What saves Horus and eventually makes him a victor is his humility and the pity he carries in his heart for Seth. Horus' isolation from the rest of his soldiers between battles for meditation delineates the initiation he has to get before he gets the self transformation necessary for victory over Seth.

Taken all together, Horus' mythical story and the pause he takes in order to gather knowledge emphasize initiation as a necessary measure for his self transformation. Without such a transformation, Horus' eventual meeting with Seth in battle could not be crowned with victory. In downplaying this aspect of the famous myth, Armah's *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* lack 'a Horus dimension'; a dramatic device that would have been helpful in projecting the role of traditional training. Armah's preference to dramatize the myth of Isis—Osiris as a separate myth; i.e. severed from the totality of the Egyptian pantheon and creation myths—has its constraining implications. In not premising Isis—Osiris' love story and divine union on the model traced by Ptah and Sekhmet, Armah impairs his attempt to demonstrate how ancient Egyptian education corresponds with its worldview. In the initial story, Isis falls prey to Seth, mistaking him for Osiris, and this fact confirms Ellis' account that part of what Isis deeply abhors has been only recently the object of her radiating beauty and charm. In his seclusion, Horus is forced to think over these contradictions. His initiation, by which he gains maturity, indicates his ability to finally explain this puzzle. Horus discovers that he is partly Seth, and all of Seth's as well as Osiris' attributes are concurrently running in his blood. And in order to look like Nefertem, "the magic child", Horus has to acknowledge this duality. In Armah's dramatization of the myth, the reader can spot a conscious attempt to demonize Seth and make him look like a weird spirit, not as someone breaking the union of entwined souls and disrupting the natural flow of love. According to Armah, ordinary African individuals cannot be as 'fallen' as Seth, since these ordinary individuals are thought to be immune to Seth's destructive bent. Armah is assertive that Seth's disintegrative attitudes are exclusively reflective of African politicians since they appear to him the only ones vulnerable while ordinary people are not.

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[5] Normandi Ellis, *Ibid.*, pp. 101-102

The metaphoricity of the initiation section of the myth can be further clarified with some factual types of narratives that have been noted by scholars. Malidoma Patrice Somé in his *Of Water and the Spirit* (1994) records some parts of traditional initiation he himself underwent as a requirement before maturity in his native community, the Dagara tribe of Burkina Faso. The book takes the form of biography and, at varying degrees, reminds the reader of Densu's experience in the Eastern forest in Armah's fifth novel, *The Healers*. The biography confirms rites like Densu's water gazing and tells of a tradition of initiating children into adult life. Somé claims that the initiation aims at wholeness, body and spirit, and that the physical as well as the metaphysical aspects of existence, are equally important in an individual's life. Western education deliberately avoids attention to spiritual needs. Yet spirit is a defining element of the self in the Dagara world which serves as an example to illustrate the spirituality of Africa. We are told here that ignoring this aspect of African life is equivalent to committing serious acts of violence against the African self. That is why:

> Part of the violence in modern Africa is created by leaders who were educated as violently as I have been. I do not know *if a person who was raised in terror, then given leadership, can think in gentle terms*, for I do no think I would be the kind of person I am today without the powerful experiences that my elders gave me in my village of birth[6].

Somé qualifies Western education as essentially violent; his testimony seems credible since he has received both Western and traditional training. At the age of four, a French Jesuit missionary kidnapped him and put him in a Jesuit school in the hope of winning him as a priest. As an instance about the kind of education that had been inculcated in these young children's minds, Somé recollects one maxim they were taught: "We learned that war was peace and peace was war. '*Qui para pacem, para bellum*'—if you want peace, get ready for war."[7] After fifteen years in that school and at the age of twenty Somé fled back to his village where the elders decided that he has to undergo traditional education before accepting him back. In addition, "the powerful experiences", Somé refers to, are the several exercises that were part of his initiation. The book recalls some of the exercises he took with other village boys and describes in detail the nature and the objectives of initiation.

The Dagara rite of initiation aims to stimulate communal consciousness by targeting the person's psychological center through the unification of body and spirit in the hope of having a harmonious existence with the natural world. Only with that kind of existence can the Dagara

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[6] Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit*. Penguin Compass, New York, (1994), p. 12 (Emphasis added)

[7] Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Ibid.*, p. 112 In another instance, Somé remembers what one elder concluded after examining the case of alienated black students who attended mission schools. This elder has this to say: "The spirit that animates the whites is extremely restless—and powerful when it comes to keeping that restlessness alive. Wherever he [the white man] goes he brings a new order, the order of unrest. It keeps him always tense and uneasy. But that is the only way he can exist.", p.177

people refer to that blissful state where the initiated enjoys peaceful relationships with other modes of life that exists in the universe at large; modes that are not exclusively human. Trees, plants, water, birds, animals and fire—in short, all that is *flora and fauna* plus the spirits that animate each one of these, combine a homogeneous world of its own. Like Armah, Somé demonstrates that in the traditional outlook if man honestly aspires to a peaceful and ordered existence with the 'neighbors', he has to teach himself how to focus with the rest towards the realization of shared ideals and goals. Initiation, therefore, aims at preparing the village youths to define themselves in relationship to the rest of other forms of living. True knowledge is thus the knowledge of the self. The welfare of the individual self becomes synonymous with that of the communal self. Hence, Somé highlights how traditional education is keen on ideals of unity and mutual respect. The same traditional education, as the writer shows, meticulously observes the promotion of collective consciousness in the young applicants. The purpose from promoting communal consciousness is injecting future generations with a corrective moral incentive that is antithetical to the culture of violence and hunt for profit.

Densu's learning experiences at the hands of his mentor Damfo in *The Healers* are reminiscent of the objectives of conducting traditional initiation rites. Damfo carefully monitors Densu and renders him excellent not just as a healer aiming towards a certain type of intellectual capacity already set by the mentor, but principally as an innovator and smooth facilitator. He innovates an original way to litigate Ababio in court as a criminal. He also facilitates General Asamoa Nkawanta's mission of leading the Ashanti armies by providing him with necessary intelligence about enemy moves and preparations. Actually, it is the failure to see the healers' example as a serious and mature approach to life, hence a systematic philosophy, which convinced Y. S. Boafo to admit that "the healers' endeavors appear too idealistic to be worthy of practical consideration. Though their approach constitutes a fitting safeguarded against the deliberate abuse of power, it is nonetheless unthinkable to expect saints to triumph over power that is well entrenched and ever ready to defend itself tenaciously against all odds."[8] Boafo suggests that the true measure of a given healer is not political achievements or shortcomings. In focusing on what lies beyond the political dimensions of the events in the story, like the part related to training toward acquiring skills needed for a holistic healing strategy, one is likely to witness a healer's true value. In taking the example of Ababio's unscrupulous machinations and rallies for power through a palace coup, readers find that these machinations are curbed thanks to Densu's studied involvement. But without the training he received from the master healer Damfo, Densu's initial confusion would amount to thoughtless, angry and short-lived reactions

[8] Y.S.Boafo, "The Nature of Healing in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*", in: Derek Wight, (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah*, Three Continents Press, (1992), p. 332

that are not only counterproductive but also suicidal. However abiding the political dimension in Densu's adversarial and corrective agenda is, it cannot be fairly assessed without considering also the arduous training Damfo conducts.

Furthermore, initiation as a traditional mechanism is best approached as a transformative vehicle lifting the individual from an alienated and fragmented existence towards a conscious and well-defined moral and creative world. Armah suggests that positive transformation is perhaps the one test which a true intellectual should not fail to take even if that obligation implies that they have to directly assumes key social positions and be political leaders. Armah in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* discloses his closeness to Mofolo's *Chaka*, hence the reasons for naming the hero of *Two Thousand Seasons* Isanusi. In Mofolo's story, Isanusi appears to Armah as an unusual diviner:

> Isanusi is a highly efficient mentor, a consultant who does not impose rigid view points on his young ward but shows him real oppositions, stands aside to give Shaka the freedom to make conscious choices, with no illusions, then coolly lays before him the necessary actions he must undertake in order to reach the chosen goal. This is the rational, goal-oriented, efficiency-seeking aspect of Shaka's personality given full literary space in the guise of a whole character interacting with the central hero.[9]

Such profound admiration for the diviner's qualities underlines Armah's interest in what can fairly be called leader training. Intellection is not valued as an art in itself if divorced from social and political challenges. Shaka's strenuous efforts to unify the then fragmented Zulu tribes against a common white enemy are shown by Armah as a result of Isanusi's role in forming his trainee and shaping his worldview and convictions[10].

Now the reason why such a vision of education should not be so easily dismissed as sheer mysticism, or 'Armah-going-Zen', is the background from which he starts working. In Armah's assessment, Western education, the one brought to Africa by missionaries and secular individuals, has an adulterating and self-effacing influence on Africans. For him such an education only ensures Africa's dependence on Europe and America, generating a ruling elite that is conditioned not to play the historical role of leadership. Armah's call to investigate the traditional lore of education, in the examples of Isanusi and Densu, can be interpreted as a marked hostility to a host of attitudes that compose Western schooling. While he seems to be making up his mind in favour of a totally Afro-centric curriculum, Armah outlines the necessity to

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[9] Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, p. 169

[10] Armah, in this connection, details: "One dimension in historical Shaka's personality, however, is given insufficient emphasis in Mofolo's work: the unifying thrust of his political thinking. Here is a literary portrait of an individual who not only organized his personal energies into the instrument of a determined will, but also adopted as his lifetime project the unification of a scattered and (to his mind) powerless people, in order to shape them into a cohesive, powerful society." *Ibid.*, p. 168

note what one can derive from traditional learning. Both Ogede and Wodajo share Armah's interest in drawing suggestions from traditional education and emulating some of them in order to construct a viable system capable of generating what he calls 'system-makers' and serving Africa's present needs. Ogede seems satisfied with what Armah highlights in drama since "[T]he ideal of a revamped curriculum in which humanity as well as the achievements of all people of the world are accorded equal recognition…"[11] Wadajo accommodates this opinion and marks "Armah's choice of these disciplines [history, African Studies and Literature] demonstrates his awareness of their importance as tools that shape young minds."[12] for regenerative ends.

2. The Social Structures Required for an African Renaissance

> I know I can't work outside a home, a society. And I'm realistic enough to seek a friend likely to know the way there. One's society should be a source of strength, not a constant drain on one's energies and self-confidence.
> (*Osiris Rising*, p.110)

In their commentaries over his work, Armah's critics do not usually go beyond stressing the importance of education in his project of cultural awakening. It is true that educated characters are mentioned to be the category of people carrying Armah's project, but little is mentioned by critics beyond the fact of qualifying them as intellectuals or educated. Armah, contrary to the way most critics read his work, does not limit himself to showing the category of individuals capable of achieving his most needed objectives. If we consider Kwame Ayivor's paper entitled: ""The Beautyful Ones Were Born and Murdered": Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of African History and the Pan-Africanist Dream in *Osiris Rising*", the work of rehabilitation of the African self along authentic lines is exclusively trusted to intellectuals. Nevertheless, when it comes to the ways such intellectuals may start this enduring task of self-transformation and of defining the kind of institutions they would use Ayivor offers but little in elucidating this point. Although he focuses on *Osiris Rising*, Ayivor briefly considers instances of *KMT*, *The Beautyful Ones*, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* and he finds almost nothing beyond "…indigenizing the European method of interpreting African history and historiography."[13] Instead of approaching the one institution which carries the potential of change, as suggested from the title

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[11] Ode Ogede, *Ayi Kwei Armah, Radical Iconoclast: Pitting Imaginary Worlds against the Actual*. Athens, Ohio University Press. (2000), p.148

[12] Tsegaye Wodajo, *Hope in the Midst of Despair: A Novelist's Cures for Africa*. Africa World Press, (2005), p. 162.

[13] Kwame Ayivor, ""The Beautyful Ones Were Born and Murdered": Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of African History and the Pan-Africanist Dream in *Osiris Rising*". *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 2003;38;37, p. 37

of the paper, this critic chooses to focus on how best the writer matches his ideological convictions with an artistic formula he thinks fitting. In the present section of this present chapter we try to account for that lack by addressing the following questions: what kind of social structures or institutions does Armah's group of intellectuals deploy in order to proceed for positive change?

To start with, the university is Armah's institution for effecting the desired social change. If intellectuals can ever meet and discuss plans, it is inside higher learning institutions like the Teacher Training College in *Osiris Rising* and the University campus in *KMT*. Upon her arrival at the state of Hapa, Ast wonders which institution appeals best to her friend Asar. Based on the experience of their students' days in the United States, she already knows that his heart and soul vibrate only in the direction of social change in Africa.

> Where might she find him now? In the bureaucracy? No, not Asar. … Farming. She could imagine him in a cooperative farm group, but he's often said it would take an eon to convert people back to the intelligence of ways lost in such pain. A factory? With his education he would be pushed into some graveyard of the soul, a managerial niche or the insane asylum. Teaching? Possibly. Yet his belief in the existing educational system was not great. To work within it he would have to locate some area of hope, some interstice where an innovative teacher might work to turn a few students away from the laughingly called the system's alienating viruses. Working in the educational system in preparation for the remaking of a devastated continent, a people destroyed: that was possible, barely. (*Osiris Rising*, pp.16-17)

Working as a teacher is portrayed as Asar's second nature. Everybody who knows him as closely as Ast would guess that he will make an excellent trainer. Nevertheless, Ast's certainty about Asar's natural inclinations did not come as his first choice after he finishes his degree. Asar had first to experience the freedom wars in Southern Africa before hitting on his passion for education, or renewal by means of gradual change. Experimenting with the revolutionary actions has proved to be Armah's initial choice too. In 'Our Awakening', Armah recalls that: "…I write books because I tried to do something more useful and failed. And since I've been trained to write, I do that as a defence against total despair."[14] What is evident is that Armah at one stage had been seriously thinking of the revolutionary option as a means of implementing social change. Presently he no longer finds it practical.

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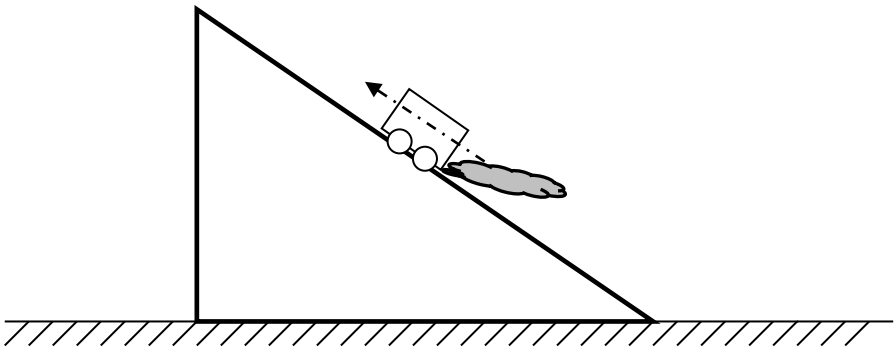
[14] Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening", Video Lecture at Berkeley University (1990), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related. In *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Armah explains in detail the reasons why he decided to quit Harvard weeks before final exams and graduation. According to him, he had reached a decision where he had to work for a liberation movement in Angola. After some hesitation, "I decided, if at all possible, to go to work with the liberation movement in Angola." Soon in the narrative, Armah reveals that he travelled from the U.S. to Cuba and from there, he moved on a cargo ship to Morocco. From Tangiers he moved to Algiers all on his own and in poor sanitary condition, desperately trying to make ends meet. His failure to join the Angolan movement was due to suspicion from the officers of this Angolan movement in Algiers. Armah was made to wait and when the delay became interminable, he reports that he knew that he was an unwanted element and taken as a spy because of his apparent bourgeois status. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. p,102

In *Why Are We So Blest?* Solo comments that revolutionaries, like Modin, are romantics who throw off reason and logic and pursue lofty ideals through violent means. That violence is portrayed as infesting the ideals. Working under the pressing conditions of the revolution empties substance from ideals like justice and egalitarian ethics. Revolutionaries, according to the same logic, are narcissists, moved by their dreams to the extent that they turn adamant to the "'cracked promises and the maimed bodies of lost believers." Armah demonstrates that revolutionary process, even when it succeeds in achieving its immediate political objectives, creates unnecessary victims that impairs its initial undertaking. By force of habit and time, the first ideals, those of having justice in society, become diminished once the heroic/military side of the struggle starts to be a structure of little significance, justifying undeserved access to privilege and power. Unlike the self-doubting writer, who "before I can put one word a thousand objections rise up in my mind…" (*WASB*, p.13), revolutionaries are portrayed as insensitive to suffering, and as such they are but poor leaders. 'Their entrails are hard' and quite logically, it is expected that they are incapable of assessing the full cost of their 'toughness' in human terms. (see Fig.1 below):

Fig.1 *Solo's illustration of revolutions and the militants' part in revolutionary work*

- The van stands for a society undergoing a revolutionary process
- The energy consumed (the cloud of wasted petrol or *l'essence*) in order to lift the van upward stands for the militants' sacrifices to the cause of revolution. In Solo's assessment these massive deaths cannot be all necessary. Witness his emphasis on number when saying: "One girl told me, the first time I saw her, that *a million of her people had died* in the war." (*WASB*, p.16 Emphasis added) For Solo these deaths are wasteful, particularly when considering the numbers orphans.
- The steep incline itself may refer to the challenges a society faces soon after the revolution wins the political struggle, indicating that still other peacetime struggles have to be won.



Armah's cynical approach to revolutionaries is extended as he describes them as suicidal and self-erasing; in the end, he condemns the revolutionary path of change as wasteful. Inside the hospital library, 'the one-legged man', who is an ex-freedom fighter, confesses to Solo that he sees himself as 'l'essence'. The cryptic phrasing: "L'essence de la révolution, c'est les militants" is suggestive. The French word, "l'essence", is a pun, as Solo establishes a little later. It

stands both for "that which is essential; and l'essence, petrol." (*WASB*, p. 26) In order to devise his planning, he draws 'a diagram of a vehicle moving up a steep incline from one level stretch to another.' In addition to the meaning of the image, the ex-militant suggests that "The militants are the essence. But you know, that also means they are the fuel for the revolution. And the nature of fuel…you know, something pure, light even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself." When it comes to matching this understanding with Solo's drawing, the ex-militant proceeds that "The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants… But they themselves are destroyed in the process." (*WASB*, p. 27)

The novelist carries on the same uncompromising attitude towards revolution to *Osiris Rising*. Asar, the protagonist, is an ex-freedom fighter, a revolutionary who fought in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. His discussion with Ast reveals the nature of revolutionary work and the reasons why, for him, it cannot be promising, particularly as a long term strategy facing up to hostile international structures:

> Working for a movement under fire, he [Asar] said, you don't spend much time in the abstract. Specific problems confront you all day. Eventually, though, some of us concluded that what we were fighting to create was not a socially just society, only a radically reformed society. What we were creating was in each case just a neocolonial society with racial barriers slightly lowered. At first it was confusing, the fact that some countries had to take up arms merely to achieve neocolonial status. But revolutionary rhetoric was in the end insufficient to forestall the realization: the societies we were fighting to make would remain structured in hierarchal unjust ways. (*Osiris Rising*, p. 116)

True, the experience of dismantling the colonial structure is by no means a small or an insignificant one. According to Armah, crude forms of colonial power equations have been assessed as too embarrassing and were eventually altered. Nevertheless, that formal power shift does not yield the expected ease when assessed from the perspective of the neocolonial population. In some situations, the conditions of the newly independent, and due to internal strife and civil wars, get worse. An in-depth reflection is required to establish working alternative avenues for social change while pushing aside the revolutionary option as self-defeating. By categorizing the revolutionary dynamics as a process that gradually extinguishes its ideals and purity, Armah concludes that revolutions are not as liberating and enhancing as they are usually portrayed. For him, the amount of waste and the expensive cost in human terms both immediately and in the long run disapproves of the logic that justifies revolutionary action. For Armah, the revolutionary path, even when necessary, outlives its utility and becomes a justification for uncompromising and brutal power structures. That is why the ex-militant's very

first words to Solo were a three time repetition of the phrase: 'Who gained?', expressing his manic-depression, and perhaps regret for taking part in a revolutionary process at all.

Because revolutionary change is pushed aside on the ground that it is only ephemeral and wasteful, Armah in real life turns to writing which he seems to take at the same level of seriousness as revolutionary action. In fiction, however, Armah seeks education as a means for his project of cultural awakening. He makes use of the already existent institutions of higher learning which he plainly denounces in *Why Are We So Blest?* as imperial, hierarchical and anti-egalitarian. Perhaps this cannot be a contradiction or a naive miscalculation. In *Osiris Rising*, and according to the DD's testimony before Ast, Asar came back from the revolutionary war in the South to work at "the lowest of our tertiary institutions." because "…Teacher training colleges here were set up to absorb border-line cases. Kids unable to make it into secondary schools. Or into the university." Processed through the ironic filter of this statement, the reader realises that DD knows that Asar is serious about social change. He knows that Asar could apply for a post at "some top university abroad, say Emerson, to spin theories understood by three other academics, worldwide." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 32) Asar's choice to work at Manda is not a naïve wish to liberate his consciousness in a sporadic and confused way. Rather, that choice springs from a deliberate and well-thought out action plan to reverse the authoritarian and hierarchal drives of the world's social structures.

An in-depth reading of *Osiris Rising* should reveal Ast's remark about the time when she was wondering over Asar's whereabouts (soon after her arrival in the state of Hapa). After hitting on the possibility of having him teaching in a formal school, she imparts to herself the conviction: "To work within it [the existing institution of education] he would have to locate some area of hope,…" And the hope Ast speaks of relates to a genuine way to cultural regeneration. When studied closely, the hope comes to be matched with two conditions. First, it has to be more down to earth and not too abstract and theoretical because all that is theoretical seems to be "incurably committed to the servicing of European power". Second, since it has to be more for the practical efforts of alleviating popular consciousness, it has to be done by stressing "fresh ideas and new habits" so as not to replicate the disastrous effect of the institution. Here it appears there is an in-depth analysis of Africa's current situation by Armah. For him, an immediate and brutal change would be fruitless because it would only have a superficial impact on society. Positive change is due to be planned and systematized. In other words, while the educational alternative has to reverse the ideals and ethics of the present social order, it has to be institutionalized, i.e., functioning through reliable channels, in order to be effective. Asar operates with the presupposition that the transmission of ethics is accelerated when it is affected through already existing institutions.

Furthermore, focusing on the education of "border-line cases", the way the DD pejoratively refers to 'school drop-outs', implies a choice of gradual and long-term change. The DD knows that Asar's new shift, when well-administered, stands for a new organizing paradigm, and cannot be just the result of a confused or despaired vocation of the defeated. In joining a teachers' training college, Asar has decided to work with what the DD would more explicitly call the least fortunate sections of the student community. They are the ones the least likely to be subjects to the 'system's alienating viruses' in the sense that promotions and higher posts in the hierarchal system will be reserved for them. Netta informes Ast: "But teaching here is low-grade work. Capable people flee it. Only the trapped remain." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 78). For Asar, the potential of these graduates is gathered from their hopelessness. If he is to work with them, he presumes that the results will be inspiring, particularly in the long run. On one occasion, he invites Ast for a week of supervision work: "All over the country. Assessing trainee teachers doing practical exercises." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 158) Asar aims for the revitalisation of culture, for its injection into routine work for positive action. It is known that "in psychology, apparently repetitive behaviours are assembled into traits of personality."[15] With Asar's careful monitoring, new, counter-inhibitive and constructive habits will become part of the future teachers' life, and it is understood that later in their careers, each graduate will help in his or her own way in implementing these liberating habits among their teaching communities.

Armah insists on the fact that innovation has to be tried out. During one of Asar's tours in Hapa's many districts Ast attends a lesson given by one of the college teacher-trainee. She gets first hand feedback concerning Asar's techniques and their results. The lesson is about choices and options. In not interfering, the teacher-trainee allows students to choose and decide through secret ballot their own representative. In the end they are given some elementary exercises in democracy by implicitly inculcating formulas like 'teacher knows best' as questionable. Asar's educational perspectives are meticulously tailored to challenge the philosophical foundations of the school as an institution.

> What is taken for granted as knowledge in the society comes to be coextensive with the knowable, or at any rate provides the framework within which analysis anything not yet known will come to be known in the future. This is the knowledge that is learned in the course of socialization and that mediates internalization within individual consciousness of the objectified structures of the social world. Knowledge, in this sense, is at the heart of the fundamental dialect of society. It 'programmes the channels in which externalization produces an objective world[16].

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[15] Smith, R. D. "Social Structure and Social Theory" *Sociological Research Online,* vol. 3, no. 1, (1998) <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/3/1/11.html>

[16] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*. (1966) Penguin Books (1991), p. 83-4

In spite of their apparent indifference, formulas, like 'teacher knows best', are assessed as value-laden. Asar thinks that 'teacher knows best' reproduces mini-dictators. Put differently, the schooling system in its 'capacity to determine what is knowable and what is not, is an institution that not only structures the social world but also reproduces it. Armah's hope, one may say, is hung up on the conviction that while one is reproducing, and seemingly reinforcing, the system one can exercise his or her philosophy to favourably alter it.

Now even if this line of thought seems convincing from the outset, it still has to address the issue of how to effectively outsmart or minimize the unwelcoming outcomes of the objective structures of institutions, in this case, the school. It is obvious, as Armah shows, that Asar's teacher-trainee has been able to lift the fog on the mental structures of the pupils of his class, initiating them to learn and account by themselves for their real needs. This step is liberating and important, and it enables these pupils to acquire a critical attitude which can make them supersede the inhibitive influences of the entire schooling structure. For apart from what looks like Asar's own musings about inculcating positive habits and egalitarian spirit, what frequently sets the mood at schools is that: "…the mental structures evident in their classified output, that is through the structures of the educational institutions as much as through direct teaching that the schemata that structure perception, appreciation, thought and action are inculcated and imposed."[17] According to Pierre Bourdieu, what gives the educational system its power and ensures its perpetuation is its unusual combination. For the system is propelled by means of reconciling two opposites: 'mental' or 'subjective structures' as well as 'objective' or 'organizational' ones. Bourdieu submits that while it is possible to transcend the mental structures with some conscious efforts, it is also increasingly challenging to notice the organizational structures. Moreover and in the rare cases where such objective structures are detected, they appear overwhelmingly irreversible:

> While we should bear in mind, in opposition to a certain mechanistic view of action, that social agents construct social reality, both individually and collectively, we must take care not to forget, […], that they have not constructed the categories that they implement in this construction. The subjective structures of the unconscious that carries out the acts of construction, of which academic evaluations are but one example among many, are the product of a long, slow, unconscious process of the incorporation of objective structures. It is thus the objective structures of the educational institutions […] and, through the homology that binds them, the structures of social space that, at least negatively, orients acts aiming at preserving or transforming these structures.[18]

[17] Pierre Bourdieu, *State Nobility*. Trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997), p. 29
[18] Pierre Bourdieu, *Ibid.*, p. 29

In presenting new attitudes animating his ideal college life, Armah does not miss providing some practical examples of the transformation of subjective structures taking place on and off campus. True, Armah does not maintain that these measures are sufficient to result in a radical change; he rather maintains that such steps are necessary 'preparatory work'. Armah might be questioned about the extent to which this 'preparatory work' does not stay vague, unstudied and left to chance. After an uneasy campaign, the administrative board finally agrees to pay for African professors travel expenses to any part of Africa and back, on a par with the expatriates' 'home leaving' allowances. Formerly, this used to be a privilege for expatriate staff only. Now every long vacation staff members have the right to travel but African members are encouraged to connect with other African educational institutions, not do the 'home leaving' like expatriates to Europe. On the same level, housing cooperatives are expanding. As they little expect government agencies to provide them with housing facilities, faculty members are shown to have taken the initiative[19]. The architecture department joins in and sets plans for beautiful, inexpensive and well-built flats. Five sets in the form of an open rectangle, each set has two houses designed to save plumbing. Part of the change touches Manda's ordinary inhabitants, and here change is not exclusive to the academy alone. The fishing cooperation is a project worth considering. For after survey on the fishing community in Manda done as part of a course assignment, Asar and his students find that 75% of the profit goes to somebody who does not fish but own the boats. The fishers had but a few options. The cooperative with investors from among the community of fishers has undertaken the task of solving their problem. With a bank loan and efficient organization, fishers had their dream come true: they are now sharers in the business in addition that they now own their apartments. Interestingly, they are well ahead of payment deadlines set by the bank.

In order for such rudimentary or 'preparatory work' to be successful, Armah insists that they have to observe the need for interconnection with the far reaching reasons and implications with each problem at stake. Here Armah carefully stages his scheme so that the activity of noting such interconnection remains the only condition that Western education is unable to meet. Asar carefully watches his words; indeed, he appears not to be interested in explicitly and publicly exposing the government's poor performance. As a neo-colonial government, it is a made up construct whose focal point is remotely-controlled from the metropolitan 'centre'. For him, any remedial strategy should target international institutions like the UN, IMF and the World Bank.

[19] The condition where government becomes inconsequential in the lives of some individuals is a measure for the success of Asar's initiatives in stimulating a constrictive culture. Abraham, in *The Mind of Africa*, explicates that the true measure of culture is a situation where it "…unit[es] the people in common beliefs and attitudes, or at least, in tolerance for certain beliefs, actions, and values, *culture* [then] *fills with order that portion of life which lies beyond the pale of state intervention*." Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (1962), p, 27 (emphasis added)

Asar seems earnest that the political, economic and cultural union of the African continent through the presupposition of a continental identity should never be processed as a demagogical trademark tailored for electoral rallies. His tireless efforts express the conviction that the peoples of Africa will make no progress if they hold on to neo-colonial identities, Nigerians, Angolans, Senegalese, Ghanaians, etc... He calls for an intellectual revolution that is predicated on a working awareness with the rest of social structures and the ways in which such structures can be reversed to advantage. Asar calls for the day when most Africans can perceive the fragility of the social structures that function unsteadily on an unstable ethical basis. Ast, perhaps with the naiveté of the new arrival, reads Asar's outlook as revolutionary. Asar thinks that all he and his colleagues are aiming at is "preparatory work" for a social, not military revolution:

> Do you need a name for it? I'd say it's a matter of bringing up generations of conscious Africans with democratic *working and living habits*. *Not rhetoric. Habits. Live, day to day practice*. The daily work of people capable of examining the World Bank, the UN and the IMF and seeing through them as inherently undemocratic institutions wrecking the lives of millions they're unaccountable to. If we could move a generation beyond the notion that voting for politicians is democracy enough; if we can reach the point of refusing to have our economic lives run by dictators in banks and boardrooms, we can say we are working. (*Osiris Rising*, p.117 Emphasis added)

The central point Armah wants to emphasize in this debate over institutional structures is the need to push the liberating dynamics so that unjust organizational structures do not impinge on the lives of the multitudes. Asar's perception offers hope as it succeeds in finding a way to extricate Africans from the clutches of imperial control. Ast reminds Asar of his former refusal to beget children. His reasons then were "Structures. Just the idea of bringing children into such an intensively structured world used to horrify me." It comes as a natural attitude for him to dedicate his efforts to "…intelligent people [who] want to change the way this society is organized." Ast discovers that Asar has changed his minds as he becomes ready to conceive: "Years ago all I saw was injustice triumphant. So I suppressed the urge to procreate. I'm moving beyond that now." (*Osiris Rising*, p.121) Only when the reversal of unjust social structures becomes a reality can Armah's fiction be said to be liberating and empowering. Even Seth seems to realise that the change has taken place, which is why he stages Asar's murder near the end of the story. Again, with Armah, the reader is not requested to wait for the destruction of the unjust world order to see the new one dawning. Armah seems to imply that with working knowledge and a vocation for active endurance, 'the Asars' of Africa will be simply unstoppable. When Ast reminds Asar of the SSS's threats on his personal life, he answers her ironically: "Why not wipe out the future before it wipes him [the SSS] out? … He can't stop the future." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 115) What is discernible

from Asar's reply is the latter's consciousness that he is making history by providing a shining alternative to the deplorable course of events of the present time.

3. How History can Affect Africa's Future

> The basic assumption is that (Western) writing of history represents on a social scale what dealing with psychic events is on a more individual level: certain events, evolutions, facts have to be dealt with, meaning that they have to be preserved and forgotten at the same time. That is why writing history implies the creation of a place - the past - that can be studied from another safe place and perspective - the present. Certeau characterises this as a discursive practice with a radical constructivist bias: *one does not study history but makes history*[20].

In his portrayal of Asar as an agent of change, Armah, seems at pains to impress on readers the possibility of active engagement in history. While stressing Asar's impulse towards positive action, Armah shows that Africa's history is characterised by betrayal and oppression, as witness the slave trade, colonial occupation and neo-colonial dictatorships. On the other hand, it is also a history featuring resistance to such oppression. Hence his proposal that dedicated African educationalists would find it helpful to shed light on resistance. The writer's preoccupation with history demonstrates his determination to think out liberating stratagems to uncover the unjust social structures instituted by white schooling systems. In this connection, Armah's reading of history can be taken on the same footing with de Certeau's, in the sense that both Armah and de Certeau highlight the importance of history as an activity which reflects more than an ordinary interest in 'the pastness' of the past. Alex Demeulenaere, in the epigraph to this section, reprocesses the liberating dynamics that lie in rereading history; distrusting those readings thought to be abusive while endorsing others that are inspiring to the effect of a fundamental structural change.

Almost all his novels published after *Why Are We So Blest?* are propelled by history to inspire a cultural revival. Despite its adjectivisations and name callings, *Two Thousand Seasons* can be approached as a raw experiment in presenting the resistant part of the African story alongside the oppressive and treacherous actions of some enemies 'within'. *Two Thousand Seasons* articulates the idea that 'the Koranches' of Africa cannot roam freely without some 'Isanusis' denying them a free hand. In revealing the collision of both parties , Armah brings us to assume that his narratives

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[20] Alex Demeulenaere, "An Uncanny Thinker: Michel de Certeau". *On Line Magazine of the Visual Narrative*. Issue 5 (2003), http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.htm (Emphasis added)

are authentic, since they are devised to articulate the lives of sensitive human beings, who refused to endure passively mass destruction and violence. In *The Healers*, the writer's interest lies in providing readers with a round and harmonious picture of African resistance prior to the British invasion and the destruction of the powerful Ashanti kingdom. The drama shows that it is Africa's hesitation over which kind of ideals to uphold, and the ultimate disunity generated from this hesitation over ideals that finally enabled the British to take over the Gold Coast territory. The healers' background and active part in the drama form the resistant part of African history. Similarly, in *Osiris Rising* and exactly in the article entitled "Who We Are and Why", Asar, the presumed author, resonates with the need to highlight African resistance to aggressive ideologies as an inseparable part of the unfolding story of continental narrative:

> It may look as if all we ever did was to endure this history of ruin, taking no steps to end the negative slide and begin the positive turn. That impression is false. Over this disastrous millennia there have been Africans concerned to work out solutions to our problems and act on them. The traces these makers left are faint, because in the continuing triumph of Africa's destroyers the beautyful ones were murdered, the land poisoned. Now wherever future seed seeks to take root it strikes sand.
> Still, even in defeat the creative ones left vital signs. They left traces of a moral mindpath visible to this day, provided we learn again to read pointers to lost ways. Then, connected with past time and future space through knowledge recovered, thinking Africans seeking one another in this common cause will meet the best of humanity for the work ahead: ending the past and current rule of slavers. (*Osiris Rising*, p.10)

Stressing this often neglected history of resistance is for Armah a *sine qua non* condition for Africa's cultural awakening. Even if different in tone, Armah's reading of history concurs with Cheikh Anta Diop's, since it is European "Ignorance of the Black's ancient history, differences of mores and customs, ethnic prejudices between two races that believed themselves to be facing each other for the first time, […]—so many factors predisposed the mind of the Europeans to distort the moral personality of the Black and his intellectual aptitudes."[21] In keeping the same distance from both parties of the colonial divide, Diop attests that the Africans' contact with Europeans in the last few centuries should not be conclusive, since there had been a constructive contact in Antiquity. The sorry state of affairs between Africa and Europe is a result of a multilayered 'ignorance', and Diop suggests that with the right kind of historical knowledge, the present situation can be remedied. Armah's remedy, however, is handled through injecting pride by stressing that what Europeans tell Africans about their own past should not be taken for granted. Asar's assertions in the passage above are fictional elaborations to the writer's own convictions as to the negative effects of the Orientalists' mindset. In his own biography, Armah

[21] Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization*. Ed. & Trans. Mercer Cook. Lawrence Hill Book (1974), p. 24

recalls the kind of history he and other schoolboys like him were apprenticed at Achimota School, a typical colonial school:

> There the history we learned was not African. It was not a balanced history of the entire world. It was European. Doing well in school would mean learning to operate within a new vision that systematically emphasized the importance of European information while just as systematically bringing us to believe that African information was at best subordinate and inferior, at worst negative.[22]

Armah's interest in history should be read in connection with the way Edward Said assesses the colonial encounter. For "…we are obliged on intellectual as well as political ground to investigate the resistance to the politics of Orientalism, a resistance that is richly symptomatic of precisely what is denied."[23] In other words, there is a considerable amount of unfinished cultural, economic and political business between empire and its former colonies. In translation of this charged background, Armah's unearthing of resistance in his last two novels can be understood as extending Anta Diop's path of historical investigation.

Of all Armah's protagonists who variously experiment with the history of resistance, Ast in *Osiris Rising* and Lindela in *KMT* are prominent. Both of them elaborately set the tone for Armah's most articulate commitment to accentuate the history of resistance and address colonial historiography. Armah attributes this role to female characters, expanding on his belief in the radiating symbol of the feminine principle as regenerative and empowering. In the present section, there is an attempt to trace these two female protagonists and observe the ways in which their approach to history is constructive and liberating. What might be approached as a difference between the personal lives of the two characters is perhaps only a variation between what is fairly authentic and what is particularly authentic. Ast was born, raised and educated in the United States. Her formal connection with history comes through reading. In this connection, one can adequately cite the instances where Ast takes Diop's books as personal assets and enjoys reading them again and again. Readers are told that she nourishes her love for the discipline through conscious efforts and pains. Later in Hapa she pursues decoding the remains of the ankh secret society but this is achieved mainly by means of the book. Nevertheless, it is through her attachment to history books that she was able to transcend her pre-slavery roots with the present confused and confusing condition. By contrast, Lindela is more fused with history since she lived it through and later read it as part of her degree preparations. The loss of what she calls 'her soultwin', Biko, is behind this entwined experience of history. In the first paragraph of the novel, Lindela makes it clear that she had no infatuation with history as such. On the contrary, she

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[22] Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. p. 49
[23] Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered", *Cultural Critique*, N0 1. (Autumn 1985), p. 91

implies that she was fated to unearth it: "This is not work I chose. I ran from it in the silent panic of a frightened spirit…But the work I sought to escape found and possessed me." (*KMT*, p. 11)

In starting the novelistic drama with the ways in which the two heroines first discover their vocation in history, Armah does not mean to downplay Ast's experience and emphasise Lindela's. The variation between the two protagonists portrayal of personal drama seem to map the novelist's changing perception about how best history should be processed in a drama. It is a little discomforting that no critic has commented on this variation[24]. As he draws on Lindela's career, it becomes increasingly clear that Armah has embraced the belief that there is no escape from history; that the meaning of who is African and who is not cannot be separated from the principal storyline supporting or justifying each one's private existence. Lindela, in this sense, can be said to be induced to assume her Africanity by the forces that undertake Biko's 'rustication'. Through writing her own experience of the events leading to Biko's elimination, and the subsequent incidents, there lies her chance in successfully connecting with herself and be in position to lead a more or less balanced existence. She also has to struggle and resist the temptation to be silent about the historical data she knows. One has to narrate one's story, which is the understanding gained from historical experience, in order to "free [the] mind from the burden of betrayal." In fusing the private with the official experiences of history, Armah aims at sensitizing the reader to the indispensability of active engagement with history, insisting on generating communal consciousness from apparently casual events in the heroine's life. Biko's eradication years ago, if not processed in some palpable way, that is by means of narrative, will continue making life very unbearable and miserable for Lindela. This is where Said's insight about how history can be deployed in battles for cultural revival becomes pertinent:

> …appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in the interpretation of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps.[25]

It is remarkable that the invocation of the past by a considerable number of African writers, of whom Armah is one, can be interpreted as an anxiety to settle some old 'scores' or 'answer back'

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[24] Despite his in-depth commentary on Armah's critique of Western schooling system, Kwame Ayivor does not distinguish between varied treatments from *Osiris Rising* to *KMT*. Truly, he finds that "Armah identifies 'this institutionalised ignorance we call education' as the dominant corrosive destabilizing historical factor that has been undermining Africa's racial civilization and socio-economic growth since the Pharaonic period.", but the level of the author's treatment is not subject of analysis for this scholar. Kwame Ayivor, "'The Charlatanism That Was Our Education': Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of Pan-Africanist History in *KMT*". *English in Africa*. Vol. 32, N° 2 (October 2005), p. 108

[25] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books (1994), p. 3 Said reveals the shape of the struggle between empire and its former colonies in the following: "Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not about soldiers and canons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings." *Ibid*, p. 7

some reductive clichés as these clichés have been inflicted on Africans by Western dominating powers in the imaginary battle over the geography of Africa. Technically speaking and in order to illustrate for readers how history is central in the battle for cultural awakening, Armah recasts history in the individual life of the heroes and heroines of his books. In other words, instead of abstract, indifferent or lukewarm interest in history, Armah intelligently casts his *dramatis personae* in conditions to take history seriously or risk staying alienated and completely disengaged and suicidal.

Lindela, in the above excerpt, translucently suggests that in telling Biko's story she is just securing some breathing space for herself; the narrative she provides is approached as more or less a momentary relief from a constant burden. In *Osiris Rising*, suffice it to add that Ast chooses to leave America in a bid to undo her ancestors' forced shipment to America as slaves. Her crossing of the ocean back to Africa is a decision indicating her desire to remake history on her terms. Without her razor sharp sense of slave history, she would have preferred to stay in America. Her consciousness reaches its peak when she answers Asar who teases her by trying to dissuade her from the regenerative work she has in mind: "Why is it that your ancestors were not shipped across the ocean and mine were, you can be working every day for a more human life but you don’t think I should be interested in doing the same?" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 112) Her decision to join Asar is a complex instant translating her intention to take her revenge on history. For Ast, there remains only one way to cast herself as a respectful human being and that is by refusing the slave identity of her past. According to her, the new identity cannot function unless there are two favourable conditions. First, she has to get physically out of the place of her enslavement, America. Besides such a symbolic step (and perhaps the easiest part towards regaining her identity as African), she has to join efforts with the liberation strategy inside Africa that is aware of the causes and consequences of slavery in different facets and forms. With the second step, according to Armah, one can truly think of the practical reversal of the slave trade of and of the making of history.

Armah indicates that the nucleus for successful liberation in *Osiris Rising* starts to be felt when Ast begins unearthing the secret society that resisted slaving commercial activities. In other words, the present resistance is inspired from the historical resistance dating back to slavery times. Ast does not start from scratch, or at least does not want to, because it seems that the need for the connection with the past is also a connection with the self. Ast's shattered self, her former enslaved identity, has to be processed as part of an objective assessment of her past. If that assessment is genuine and objective, it would generate practical steps towards the reversal of that past through the reversal of its ethics and governing dynamics. Here, too, history is personal in the sense that it is not a useless rhetoric. The personification of historical dramas, the way Armah

shapes them, aims at illustrating how necessary it is for one to make sense of those dramas and to link them to present reality. Ast prefers to start her account at the moment just before her ancestors lost their freedom and were forced into the slaving ship bound for the Americas. That one moment is definitive for Ast as to the identity of her enslaved ancestors: should they be portrayed as failed resistants, innocent and betrayed defenders or willing slaves? Ast wants to shed light on the conditions of their shipping, because that investigation would influence the kind of woman Ast wants to be for the rest of her life. In other words, her historical investigations decides whether her spirit should be defeatist or resilient. At the beginning of *KMT*, too, Lindela is awesomely confused and Armah meant her to stay confused and frustrated until she realises the connection that fuses the former classmate Biko with the griot, Djely Hor and both of them with the school of knowledge sharers in their struggle against the keepers. Superficial accounts of her private experiences when divorced from entrenched historical knowledge would not give her enough energy to translate the scribes.

Perceptive readers would remark that Armah's focus on the ankh secret society is perhaps not aimed at portraying the secret society as such. If limited to that scope only, Armah's book would be classified as an African thriller with a finely polished amalgam of action and intrigue. Rather, the stress is on how that discovery is covered in history books written by European merchants, slave captains and historians. Here there is an elaborate argument about how African history should be portrayed in writing. Ast's patient checking of a large collection of volumes in search of secret societies does not prove to be an easy task at all. Because of methodological problems, the promising titles, like Quincy Twirp's *African Secret Societies* hardly touch on what they are supposed to deal with. Ast is disappointed because "The author spent a good half of the text giving information about his own obscure self, the next quarter explaining how, after a life of unrelenting failure, he conceived of the idea of becoming an explorer "in an original sense."" In order to establish that those European adventurers who were engaged in writing African history were not in the least qualified to write history, any history, and what they wrote was only their own prejudiced fancies and stereotypes, Ast adds her first impressions after reading the material:

> He [the explorer and book author] never actually ventured outside the trading outpost where he spent five slow years at the tail end of his life. But he wrote down stories told to him by other white men. And he selected the strangest of them, those about secret societies, for printing by a friendly publisher interested in satisfying the mounting hunger for exotica. As a source of information, the book was worthless. (*Osiris Rising*, p.172)

Ast appears certain that European adventurers were principally interested in selling thriller stories satisfying the need for the exotic. Ast concludes that not all authors whose work she checked in

the Archive exercise caution, as they reproduce statements such as "rituals entailing the eating of human flesh and the drinking of prodigious quantities of infant blood". In this connection, it becomes apparent that such chroniclers do not consider Africans as round human beings, a fact that discredits their accounts. Like Molefi Asante[26], Armah shows that the Europeans versions of African history are incapable of drawing a rational distinction between myth and fact. This initial capacity is justified because the so called historians take it for granted that Africans as individuals do not deserve attention: "The author admitted he had never seen Africans eating human flesh and drinking human blood. But he argued that as a rational being he did not have to observe phlogiston with his naked eye to know it existed…" (*Osiris Rising*, pp. 172-3)

Interestingly too, the choice of the ankh secret society in *Osiris Rising* discloses Armah's intention to dramatically treat the theme of resistance against slavery differently from the way he does it in *Two Thousand Seasons*. The difference lies in the way he stratifies the material collected from the search about slavery times into a coherent argument stressing the identity of each party involved, slavers and freedom fighters. In *Osiris Rising* Armah extensively elaborates on the theme of betrayers and resisters or 'the Koranches' versus 'the Isanusis', a critical line already approached in *Two Thousand Seasons*. In other words, in *Osiris Rising*, there is no intention to be satisfied with drawing a picture of resistance and trusting its interpretive activity to chance or the good will of reviewers. The same understanding can be generated from *KMT* where Armah supplies the historiography himself. The collaboration that takes place between the griot Djiely Hor and the university professor Jengo underlines the writer's intention not to leave the exercise of history writing for random. This historiographical obligation, if one may so call it, indicates Armah's suggestion that Africa has never been short of defenders, resisters and leaders. Instead, Africa and according to the same opinion, has lacked professional and conscious historians who would unearth and highlight the brilliant side of continental history. This underlines, perhaps, his disapproval of European historians' monopoly over African history which implicitly and simultaneously involves a tacit monopoly over writing. Armah, with his last two novels, finds that orality can no longer work as the only means to substantiate African expression the way it has been in *Two Thousand Seasons*[27]. European historiographers perpetuate the myth of Africa without

[26] Asante, in a recent study, concurs with Armah's uncompromising tendencies when it comes to Europeans' engagements in writing the history of Africa. Indeed, the latter lacks "…some appreciations for the intricacies of the African story. I think that there are three aspects to the difficulty: (1) the lack of thematic centrality, (2) the distortion of African agency, (3) the lack of a clear vision." Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa*. Routeldge, New York and London, (2007) p. 1

[27] One critic finds that with *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah expresses a "…need for a new narrative, an understanding grasped earlier in *Why Are We So Blest?* permeates the entire framework of *Two Thousand Seasons* to suggest that the present predicament would be viewed in the wider contexts of the past and the future. The recourse to orality in the novel – the incorporation of oral forms of imaginative expression – is a significant aesthetic move even though orality itself has a complex contradictory relationship with the written narrative." Nana Wilson-Tagoe, "Narrative, History, Novel: Intertexuality in the Historical Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Yvonne Vera", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, Vol. 12, N°

a history due to the predicated absence of writing in Africa. Subsequently they maintain, Africa is not worth considering because such people initially premise that "…the proper study of non-western societies was neither history nor sociology, but anthropology: not the study of dynamic, self-developing human societies, but that of static anthropoid subcultures." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 198)

Both instances from Armah's last two novels explain the unique place history is credited with, an importance already highlighted by de Certeau[28]. Significantly, the time of resistance prior to slavery and loss has been chosen as points of departure from which Armah's heroines can locate their 'safest point' to approach history. Both of these two heroines want to be identified with the past preceding the present *status quo* which they identify as alienating and destructive for self-definition. The choice is again justified on the ground that other starting points do not generate awakening possibilities. The danger of other approaches, therefore, lies in the fact that these other approaches would take the Orientalists' positions and blame slavery and all disasters on Africans, that is, on victims. More importantly, other approaches to history, the ones beyond what Lindela and Ast take, canonize the identification of Africans primarily as a loose collection of types always on the edges of other peoples' histories and economies. In the same line, since they do not exist as independent entities, Africans cannot be said to possess their own history; hence they cannot be said to be like the rest of peoples with achievements and contributions to human civilization. After searching through old history syllabuses, Ast establishes that "History was not a world discipline, but a European discipline, a Western invention… The rest of the world became a subject worthy of historical study when Europeans integrated it into the western system." (*Osiris Rising*, p.198)

The portrayal of similar inconsistencies in the Europeans' historical writing about Africa helps Armah to expand his illustration that history making remains inseparable from history writing. Both activities are characterized in the narratives as complementary. What is special about *KMT* is the elucidation of the idea that, more than what is aimed from *Osiris Rising*, the conditions that give birth to African history writing have not been yet closely and objectively studied. In *KMT* Armah indicates the responsibility of the African agency in the misrepresentations and the gross falsification of African history. Kwame Ayivor, in an interesting study on *KMT*, suggests in this regard that "Armah manipulates a powerful array of re-Africanized scholarly modes of re-interpreting history and historiography for his fictional project in order to foreground the historicism of *KMT* and the new generation scholarship that he recommends as a solution to the existing poor educational system and pseudo-scholarship in

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2, Literature and History (Dec., 1999) p. 158 In *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, there is a critical revision to the earlier a trust in Orality as an effective formal and thematic mode of fictional approach.

[28] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* trans. T. Conley (New York: Columbia Uni. Press, (1988)

contemporary Africa."[29] Armah advances the position that in their presumed studies of African communities, Africanitsts and Orientalists were deliberately misled by African informants. In addition to the reductionist notions about Africans, and which serve as presuppositionally negative thinking premises about Africa and Africans, the superior outlook with which European anthropologists, adventurers, church missionaries or colonial administrators, and which they never tried to push back, proved to be problematic before getting balanced history of Africa. Such a problem is extended when Western-educated Africans continue to refer to traditionalists in the same reductive attitudes adopted by old European historiographers. In discussing the possibilities of writing a more positive version of African history and how African traditionalists can best be drawn to the task, Professor Sipha Jengo reviewed before Lindela the conditions that marked early European engagements with writing:

> The scholars they got to know first were colonial anthropologists. Let's call them by their real name: colonial military and administrative agents on reconnaissance missions among the African population the Europeans came to subdue. Traditionalists were trained to tell them nothing. If forced, they could tell them polite nonsense. Conservative racist European anthropologists recorded this as the innate absurdity of the African conception of the world. Liberal racists recorded it as the wisdom of the primitive people. (*KMT*, p. 117)

As Jengo goes on, it becomes clear that what encouraged Europeans to perpetuate their pseudo-historical writing, elaborate their stereotypical presuppositions and label them African history, is the distrust African traditionalists had about their European interviewers. Jengo, in the context of this exchange with Lindela, is emphasizing to her the necessity to win the traditionalists' trust and cooperation. If these traditionalists' prejudices are not cleared, Jengo implies, perhaps the opportunity of writing reliable and authentic African history will be missed and for good. Therefore, African academics aiming to write the history of the continent have to stop behaving like European anthropologists in order to break the ice of distrust and win the traditionalists to their side.

What is remarkable is that Jengo does not limit his role to the descriptive side only. He has his antidote to the traditionalists' distrust, and here lies his principle and brilliant handling of roles. Armah credits him with a rare qualification, the ability to make the smooth shift in role from history maker to history writer, all the way back and forth. Jengo calls Lindela's attention to the fact that "Colonial scholars were good at integrating their personal interests into their working condition: transportation, housing, pay." Conversely, "But they [colonial scholars] consistently behaved as if the African traditionalists they depended on for knowledge had no such interest." (*KMT*, p. 118) If African traditionalists are to be engaged in 'honest conversation', African

[29] Kwame Ayivor, "'The Charlatanism That Was Our Education': Armah's Visionary Reconstruction of Pan-Africanist History in *KMT*". "Opcit.", p. 110

academics again should not fall in the trap colonial scholars fell in. Jengo breaks the ice about the historiographical question: "…the traditionalists are the real source of knowledge. Yet academics refuse to recognize them as producers of knowledge." Only African intellectuals, that is, dedicated academics seeking knowledge, not the fund or the fame associated with the knowledge gained, can entice traditionalists to 'honest conversations'. It takes Jengo some time before he declares to Lindela his action plan:

> We can start from mutual respect. Approach them [traditionalists] as professional colleagues. Instead of giving them some stupid gift to start telling us their secrets, we can talk salaries, allowances, working conditions, transport arrangements, lodging, food, with them. Figures, budgets, time lines, exactly the way we see ourselves: as people with careers, material and moral worries, ambitions and plans they hope to fulfill through the exercise of their acquired skills, just like us. It's not explanations and words that we need when go to them. It's practice. (*KMT*, p. 121)

What Armah has in mind from this apparent stress on the material needs of the traditionalists is the idea of respect. Armah insists on approaching these informants as partners, and in the end, round human characters, with ordinary dispositions.

It is not only the factor of respect which has to be carefully considered before seeking the traditionalists' help in writing African history. Armah sheds light on another dynamic which according to him fatefully decides the way African history is accessed. It is the problem of oath of secrecy which traditionalists coronate their initiation with. And again without neutralizing this problem, the doors of African history will remain impassable. Because he is certain of Jengo's genuine dedication to the learning of ancestral knowledge, the griot Djiely Hor is encouraged to take Jengo's efforts a step further. The oath, as Lindela learns from the griot's wife, Astw, is part of a spiteful design to keep knowledge hidden, circulating only among a tiny minority allied with 'the disease', royalty. Ironically, the oath, as Lindela determines, frequently works as a pretext meant to maintain undeserved power; a power that is antagonistic with leveling propulsions that combine the true contents of that knowledge. Staged as a formal requirement, the oath turns objective historiographical investigation impossible. Nevertheless, there are those who are ready to break it. In the conference organized by Professor Sipha Jengo the griot, Djiely Hor publicly reveals the secret knowledge, protected by the oath and, in consequence, gets killed. For Djiely Hor belongs to the traditionalist school of Sharers, and the traditionalists who staged his killing are rivals from a school known as the Keepers.

The time Djiely Hor ascends the floor, before a professional audience replete with established Orientalists and Africanists, seems to be Armah at the peak of instituting a balanced historiography, dismantling centuries of falsifications and stereotypical representations supplied as history. Armah identifies the circumstances giving birth to history falsifications which, according

to him, uncover a significant connection between the falsified date and abusers of power. As one critic has observed, Armah has been ever since *Why Are So Blest?* active to demonstrate "…how the rising middle classes 'interpolate' traditional communal values into their own political ideology as a way of maintaining hegemony and furthering their own interests."[30] Hor's final remark suggests that from their positions as guardian of the people's memory, and as a result of Arab conquest, African traditionalists were forced to abandoned writing and reveal only a falsified version of history, serviceable to the invaders' hegemony. In a series of forced migration from the banks of the Nile River, "The seventh movement was the journey of the companionship of the scribes. Their writings were forbidden, and those caught reading them were put to death." (*KMT*, p. 197) The community of scholars is impressed, it promises to revise all that used to be taken for granted. As soon as the griot ends his speech, scheduled speakers simply "abandoned their texts to say how much Djiely Hor had changed their perspectives." (*KMT*, p. 205)

It is noticeable that Armah brings other factors to the debate about African history and its writing which was formerly unnoticed by cultural scholarship. Edward Said and Valentine Mudimbe, for instance, do not account in their studies for the origins of the European approach to the Orient in general and Africa in particular. That there are some Africans who have a hand in the misrepresentations publicized as evidence for inferiority of Africans is perhaps not sufficiently debated. The interesting part in *KMT* is that the 'unholy alliance' between a small but powerful section of Africans and the foreign powers had been maintained for millennia by means of circulating one version of history and hiding the one thought to be provocative to the established order. The collaborative drives of some orthodox elites with heartless invaders from outside the continent and the treachery of both parties have resulted in the sabotage of Africa's true history. "That is because the established story told by the griots now is in much of its content a fabricated tale imposed on a people subdued first by violence and then by the fraud of lying teachers." (*KMT*, p.187) Instead of stressing the conspiratorial alliance, as it may appear at first for readers, Armah's drama focuses on the power of narratives which the conspirators have for long deployed since their power has depended from to first to last on those narratives. Implicitly Armah indicates that if African intellectuals can be sensitized to the uses and abuses of narratives, they can take action by participating, through their writings, in uncovering their people's narratives and stressing the need for positive change.

What seems to be at stake in this debate over which is the authentic account of events or the more representative history is the epistemological crisis within tradition. The fact that some people prefer not to get involved in a crisis of such sort on the ground that it causes chaos to the

[30] Albirton Spencer Norman, *Political Consciousness and Commitment in Modern African Literature: A Study of the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*. State University of New York at Stony Brook. P.hD. Thesis (1985), p. 281

established order is viewed by Armah sees it as an opportunity for what de Certeau calls 'the return of the repressed' through writing. Writing, in a tradition-infested context, is processed as a liberating cultural mode of expression in Africa. Given his celebration of orality, Abiola Irele would not read Armah's trust in the writing system as only a protracted questioning of European anthropologists and chroniclers vision of the continent since "…the fundamental irony of colonial education, whose ideological premises obliged its agents to have recourse to texts, images and other modes of discourse and representation that devalue the humanity of their dark-skinned wards, as part of the effort to establish the cultural and moral authority of the colonizing race."[31] Armah's stress on writing and translations of scripts mark a departure from a common opinion that attributes writing to the West while it defines Africa as essentially an oral culture based on memory as witness the griots' accounts. While he is himself unable to decode the scripts, Djiely Hor breaks the typical clichés of traditional Africa's disposition for oral narratives instead of written ones. The griot, presumably the spokesman of orality, denounces orality and memory as antithetic to African repute. Here Armah, at the level of technique, strips the oral form from its traditional garment of authenticity.

Djiely Hor knew that the price of his revelations will be death, nevertheless and for the sake of giving Africans a chance for self-definition and renewal he does not hesitate to perform the act. What is undeniable is that at the end of the conference organized by Lindela and Jengo there is a major break through in Africanism as a discipline. But careful reading shows that that achievement is impossible without preparatory work. The crucial task which has to be carefully monitored in order to allow this definitive 'return of the repressed' is the in-depth examination as well as the reversal of the structures allowing such repressive articulations of history to be maintained[32]. It is not only the contents or the statements advanced by the historians that make sense and construct meaning. The apparatus of history writing involves more implicit dynamics that are not limited solely to linguistic import. In order for Armah to demonstrate his in-depth understanding of the complexities of such machinations, we read in *KMT* that ever since the time he joins the academic institution, Jengo never hides his dissatisfaction with the ways university life is organized. Aspiring African academics, those with a potential and a desire to dedicate their efforts to opposing the wearying conditions of their works are suffocated as a result of the stiffening structures of the educational system. Such a system, as illustrated in the protagonists'

[31] Abiola Irele, *The African Imagination*. Oxford University Press (2001), p. viii

[32] In connection with the importance of the institutions giving birth to the writing of history, de Certeau declares: "Before knowing what history says of society, we have to analyse how history functions within it. The historiographic institution is inscribed within a complex that permits only one kind of production for it and prohibits others. Such is the double function of the place. it makes possible certain researches through the fact of common conjectures and problematics. But it makes others impossible; it excludes from discourse what is its basis at a given moment; it plays the role of the censor with respect to current social, economic and political-postulates of analysis. Michel de Certeau, *Op.cit.*, p.68

lives, excludes non-Europeans, non-whites. In educating only a small selection of blacks, the aim is to leave these blacks' respective communities tied in every respect to an alienating power that systematically shakes their self-esteem and self-respect.

4. Armah's Idea of the New African in Modern Africa

Given Armah's staunch commitment to Africa's cultural awakening, readers can easily notice that in almost all his novels Armah sets the standards that define the men he thinks are responsible for bringing about this awakening. In *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the example of the man can be seen as a sketching of the category of the new Africans needed for the task of cultural renewal. In the bleak worldview of that first novel, only honesty, patience and refusal to trade with one's principles seem to feed the man's resistance and keep him going. In *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest?*, Armah switches to shedding light on cases of misled African intellectuals who, though honest and resourceful, remain marred by a misleading consciousness because initially they are inadequately acquainted with their history and roots. Here the pull of Diop's argument about the alienating effects of Western education can be easily spotted in Armah's text.[33] In *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, the readers are brought to know of Armah's 'Renaissance men'. Isanusi and Densu's exemplariness and abiding commitment to cultural renewal remain a little vague since the flow of the drama seems tailored to leave no clear interpretation of the outcome of their life search. Their experiences appear too evanescent to allow the historical metaphor to be propellant towards its desired end. Perhaps the setting of the two stories makes it a little difficult for some readers to seriously consider how Armah's visionaries can react to similar conditions in the present. In *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, Armah connects in plot past activists with present ones. Readers are called to observe that these past and present activists are one gush of energy. In other words, the would be 'awakeners', 'system workers' or 'cultural workers'[34], as Armah prefers to call them, have only to seek past 'footsteps' and join their efforts with those already traced from the past to put an end to the present cultural lethargy. Past and present endeavours are joined in the hope of conflating the identities of each, demonstrating that cultural awakening cannot be interrupted by little difference in chronological setting.

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[33] Diop attests that "This climate of alienation finally deeply affected the personality of the Negro, especially the educated Black who had an opportunity to become conscious of world opinion about him and his people. It often happens that the Negro intellectual loses confidence in his own possibilities and in those of his race…" Cheikh Anta Diop, *Op.cit.*, p. 25

[34] The idea of qualifying African intellectuals who can affect a renaissance as 'system makers' comes in *KMT*, exactly when Armah openly criticizes the perpetuation of the colonial education in the African present and accuses this education for its disabling agency to produce 'system makers': "They would not be trained for system –making professions." (*KMT*, p. 67)

Following his call to 'cultural workers', Armah insists that neither African politicians nor academics (not every learned individual in Africa) can activate the desired change. Politicians, in the rare cases when they are not ridiculed like with Koomson, seem to be barred from starting an over all cultural renaissance because they seem to work under the heat and pressure of electoral mandates. So seems to be the case of revolutionaries who often work under pressing conditions, allowing no time for rational and long terms plans. As a result, political activists together with revolutionaries are swollen by the fast rhythm that characterises modern life; they cannot afford the necessary time to concentrate on lasting cultural awakening. It seems that in Armah's analysis African politicians, from colonial times till the present, have not been able to generate an egalitarian ethical, economic and political system. Armah explains this unhappy state of events as a consequence of the kind of education these politicians received in the first place. Here is a situation similar to what Pierre Bourdieu would call '*school-mediated*' kind of system reproduction[35], where African students during colonial times sought their formal training in western schools and assume by virtue of such schooling elite and managerial positions once the colonial powers formally left. Perpetuating the colonial power game, with its strategies of exclusions and inclusions, is the main reason behind the writer's attack on African politicians. But here it is not a matter of direct complicity, an important factor which Armah leaves without clarification. Bourdieu estimates the process of generating what is more or less the same governing elite through education as 'symbolic violence'; which is different from 'objective violence'. By 'symbolic violence' he refers to a situation where "…the dominated always contribute to their own domination." Unlike Armah, Bourdieu helps in reflecting on this complicity by observing that: "…the dispositions that incline [members of the dominated section of community, or African politicians] toward this complicity." Although Bourdieu qualifies such a complicity 'an active complicity', he instantly clarifies that "it does not mean that it is conscious and voluntary …[the dominated are complicit] only insofar as they deprive themselves of the possibility of freedom founded on the awakening of consciousness."[36] As graduates of colonial schools, African politicians, even when they surpass what Bordieu calls the constrains of 'the mental structures' cannot easily escape the crippling effects of the organizational or 'objective structures' of the world.

The lack of depth in Armah's critique of African politicians can also be found in his approach to early African nationalists. The way he derides some of them shows that they are also not safe with his thinking schemata. Readers can easily detect his visceral dislike of this learned

[35] Loïc Wacqurant, "Forward" in: Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997), p. xiii
[36] Pierre Bourdieu, *Op.cit.*, p. 4

community which seems not to meet his standards of cultural revival. Decrying the depersonalizing attitudes of modern time Africans, he writes in the first novel:

> Here and there the names had changed. True, there were very few black names of black men, but the plates by the roadside had enough names of black men with white souls and names trying mightily to be white. In the forest of white men's names, there were the signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. MILLIS-HAYFORD…PLANGE-BANNERMAN…ATTOH-WHITE…KUNTU-BLANKSON. Other that must have been keeping the white neighbors laughing even harder in their homes. ACCROMOND…what Ghanaian name could that have been in the beginning, before its Civil Servant owner rushed to civilize it, giving it something like the sound of the master name?.... (*The Beautyful Ones*, p. 126)

Perhaps it is not very relevant to identify each name, but there is no way of mistaking the first one, at least[37]. Inserting the name of Hayford in this way and within this context could only mean the writer's disrespect for the entire group of early West African nationalists, of whom Joseph Casely Hayford was a prominent member. Even Armah's early inspirer, Frantz Fanon, comes to be under attack in *Why Are We So Blest?* In poking fun at the fake nationalist, Jorge Manuel, Fanon's trust in the good will of nationalists is ridiculed as he locates Jorge Manuel's office in Lacrryville. Solo, with an ironic filter of tone comments: "The Bureau would then have on paper a fitting address for a center of revolutionary activity: BUREAU OF THE PEOPLE'S UNION OF CONGHERIA **1** RUE FRANTZ FANON" (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 48) Put in this way, the writer leaves the reader assuming that Jorge Manuel embodies Fanon. This sardonic representation of Fanon is stretched a little further when later Manuel remarks that "an African in love with a European is a pure slave", yet he was found by Solo later with a 'White haired woman', meaning Aimée's immediate superior. Fanon made literally the same remark "Historiquement, nous savons

[37] Concerning the third name that occurs in the list of depersonalized Africans, there might be good reason to believe that with ATTOH-WHITE, Armah meant the famous Reverend Samuel Richard Brew Attoh-Ahuma (formerly Samuel Solomon), a distinguished clergyman and educator, a founding member of Aborigines' Rights Protection Society together with Hayford and others in 1898 and leader of the so called Backward Movement. He also wrote a book entitled *The Gold Coast Nation and National Consciousness* (1911) in which he advocated his call for a Back to the source vision. A group of western-educated Fanti intellectuals, backed by traditional chiefs, agitated against the Colonial Office when it tried to introduce the Land Bills in 1894. They organized themselves in the form of a civil society designed after the anti-imperialist British society, the Aborigines Protection Society (APS), led by its secretary, F. H. Fox Bourne. Their success in securing the Colonial government respect for the long-established customary laws governing the distribution of land triggered other possibilities of cooperation between the educated elites and traditional ruler. LaRay Denzer, " Aborigines' Rights Protection Society: Building the Foundation of Modern Ghana", <http//diaspora.northwestern.edu/mbin/WebObjects/DisasporaX.wa/displayArticle?atomid=905>. Concerning the fourth name, KUNTU-BLANKSON, Armah might have in mind George Kuntu Blankson, an educated activist and a member founder with other educated the famous and short-lived Fanti Confederation of 1871. Sudden change in British policy from free trade to aggressive forms of imperialism was the reason for the Confederation demise. George Padmore considers this organization as the forerunner of the Aborigines' Rights Protections Society. Indeed, it was one of the earliest and most articulate bodies of nationalist expressions in the whole of the British West Africa. George Padmore, *The Gold Coast Revolution*. Dennis Dobson LTD, London, (1953), p. 34. As to the second name, Armah might have been illuding to James Bannerman, a multato merchant of a Scottish father and African mother. Highly respected and experienced to the extent that a group of European and African merchant, and upon the death Governor Winniett in 1851, wrote to the Colonial Office to appoint him as Governor. David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*. Oxford University Press, (1963), p. 65.

que le nègre coupable d'avoir couché avec une Blanche est castré."[38] while he, too, married a French woman. Again, there are indications that in Dr. Earl Lynch, Armah has Dr. William E. Burghardt Du Bois in mind. For it was Dr Du Bois who studied at Harvard and perhaps would have accepted a teaching position in Harvard, had white Americans been fair *vis-à-vis* his talents[39]. Meeting Dr. Earl Lynch in his home library, Modin recalls "the snide remarks Professor Jefferson's friends had made about him: that in twenty-five years he might qualify as the first black full professor at Harvard." (*Why Are We So Blest?*, p. 33), implying the way African Americans are often deceived by insincere calls for equality. With such attacks, Armah implies that African Americans are subject to indoctrination by means of white schooling systems. And as a result, their contributions can not be seriously considered in the enduring task of seeking viable African identity

Armah's uncompromising account of politicians and political activists is extensively elaborated in *The Eloquence of the Scribes*. The coolness of the tone in the following passage might be seductive, in the sense that it gives the illusion that Armah has moved from the early visceral, and perhaps far-fetched, portrayals of politicians and nationalists of the 1970s to what may be judged as cool and articulated elaborations. The tone has indeed been leveled, but the import, the result of the same old visceral approach, has been preserved all the same:

> Our problem is that we think our politicians can lead us, but politicians cannot be Africans—yet. An African identity is not a five-year plan. It is a long-range necessity, required sustained, intelligent, determined planning. That is work for cultural workers, the kind of intellectuals who can spend twenty, forty years working on a problem, so systematically that after they die, their colleagues can continue their work, at higher levels[40].

Armah denies politicians an African identity because they seem to fall below his standards for qualification. In the final analysis, politicians for him seem to accept, willingly or not, the rules of this unjust world order to be set. Even when these politicians are not interested in boosting their individual careers, and motivated with well-meaning intentions, they are fated, according to him, to fail simply as a result of being subjects of Western education.

Armah posits that since Western schooling is premised on a hunger for domination and profit, its structures automatically, if not dismally, exercise self-deprecatory reflexes on

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[38] Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire masques blancs*, Edition du Seuil, (1952) p. 58.

[39] Donald B. Gibson, in his introduction to Penguin edition of Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, comments that despite Du Bois's firm belief in reason as a value and guiding principle for progress and self-betterment in life, he was denied a teaching position at The University of Pennsylvania. For "[h]ad reason prevailed, Du Bois would certainly have been invited to join the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania,… As it was, racial consideration alone prevented his even being considered a bona fide member of the faculty." Donald B. Gibson, "Introduction", in: W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of the Black Falk*. (1903), Penguin Books, (1989), p. x

[40] Armah, *Op.cit.*, p. 238

African politicians. As a result, they are portrayed by the writer as individuals who place no strategy to outsmart such structures, and in the rare instances where they exceptionally do, they judge it as unpractical and keep perpetuating 'the killing system'. The SSS in *Osiris Rising* functions as these politicians' spokesman[41]. Convinced with this negative approach, Armah portrays the SSS as a security boss, not a politician, which is a further indictment suggesting that so called African politicians are not politicians at all. Armah suggests that Africa is run by parasites, contracting security militia men in order to ensure their unpopular clinch of power. Just after he detains the newly arrived Ast on account of the 'subversive' article found in her handbag, the SSS explicates that the article bears the sign of a 'subversive secret society' that was active during slavery times. When asked what he finds troublesome in a group that only fought to end slavery, the SSS uncovers his elitist affiliations: "You mustn't think slavery was an inhuman practice in Africa." He even takes Ast's derisive remark: "You belong to the 'African slavery was beautiful' school of thought" as a real compliment. He is not moved even when she accuses him to his face of serving the interests of the metropolitan West: "That makes you a subcontractor in the defence of Europe and America." Readers can easily detect that there is a conscious attempt from the writer to demonize Seth, portraying him as a freak who takes serious accusations as compliments. This trend of demonizing immoral characters, which as it progresses further on, risks sacrificing thematic depth by offering simplistic, if not caricaturist, portrayal of people and events. One can witness how Seth accounts for Africa's political independence. Readers again detect the same provocative explanation and once more Armah succeeds in not leaving critics speculating about the way he reads present ruling elites in the continent:

> It's a layman understanding to consider independence a revolt against white power. We—the authorities in Africa—we accept the framework established by the Western powers. There was only one thing wrong with colonialism. It denied responsible Africans participation in the managing system. At the elite level, independence solved that. (*Osiris Rising*, pp. 35-6)

Even if Seth does not react to a direct accusation of collaborating with imperial powers, one believes that in reality no African politician will openly and happily boasts of his supposed collaborationist mindset. Through his answer, Armah paints the entire African political elite in blacks and presents them as irremediably non-African. In *Black Leadership for Social Change*, Jacob Gordon hits on some of the qualities that make good as well as bad leadership. It is true that

[41] Fanon is categorical in his attack of post-colonial national bourgeoisies, and Armah does not only share this Fanonian perception but also elaborates his findings in a new and unprecedented way. *Osiris Rising* can be read as a fictional elaboration of Fanon's ideas. "The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. But this same lucrative role, this cheap-jack's function, this meanness of outlook and this absence of all ambition symbolize the incapability of the national middle class to fulfil its historic role of bourgeoisie. Here, the dynamic, pioneer aspect, the characteristics of the inventor and of the discoverer of new worlds which are found in all national bourgeoisies are lamentably absent. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. (1961) Trans. Constance Farrington. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1967), p. 210

Seth's non-functional behaviour is tantamount to an admission of negative traits like: "aggression, blocking, self-confessing, competing, seeking sympathy, horsing around, recognition seeking, withdrawing."[42] In dealing with each trait of personality as maintained by the writer, one concludes that Seth is indeed an immoral character. Such a critique is reminiscent of Fanon's inflexible assessment of the third world national bourgeoisie. But to strips the SSS from one's definition of Africanity, presuming that this latter has been seeking education to consciously transmute colonial power into a neo-colonial one, may easily be rejected. True, the means for this transmuting has been schooling, that is, grades and diplomas offering expertise and service. Readers notice that apart from the doctorate the SSS did along with Asar at Emerson, he has added what Netta pejoratively calls: "…esoteric degrees. A doctorate in criminology, quickie post-doctoral titles in espionnage, something heavy in counterinsurgency, and rows of credentials in intelligence work. He'd found the levers of neocolonial power." (*Osiris Rising*, p.76) It is true that without these degrees, the SSS would have found it impossible to escalate the administrative ladder and become the most powerful one in Hapa. His degrees function like a 'rite of passage' or more relevantly what Bourdieu calls as 'the rite of institution', since the degrees do not only demarcate 'a before' and 'an after' but practically "…differentiate between those destined to occupy eminent social positions from those over whom they will lord."[43]

Walter Rodney is similarly resolute when it comes to misapplying education for the reactivation of the colonial power structures. Despite the lapse of time (some four decades separating his statement from Armah's), both agree that Western education is responsible for a sabotage of the mind:

> Colonial education did more than corrupt the thinking and sensibilities of the African. It filled him/her with abnormal complexes which de-Africanized and alienated him/her from the needs of his/her environment. Colonial education has thus dispossessed and put out of the control of the African intellectual the necessary forces for directing the life and development of his/her society.[44]

Like Armah, Rodney also strips colonial education from the potential of producing conscious elite members whose loyalty goes to Africa first; that is, not lapdogs or puppets in the hands of foreign exploiters. Nevertheless, and unlike Armah, Rodney does not see African intellectuals as naïve collaborationists. For Rodney, there seems to be objective reasons, like access to privilege and comfortable life, that account why should African educated elites prefer not to radically disrupt the perpetuation of the neo-colonial power structures.

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[42] Jacob U. Gordon, *Black Leadership for Social Change*. Greenzood Press (2000), p.20
[43] Loïc Wacqurant, "Op.cit.", p. x
[44] Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Harare: ZPH, (1981), p. 275.

Along with his attack on the political factions ruling independent Africa, Armah in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* keep his generalising mood. This time he derides another category of educated Africans, academics. From their positions as part of the neo-colonial political elite, academics are not only portrayed as incapable of devising a plan to give independence its true meaning, but are the ones who demean it. Given their survival instincts and inclinations towards safe areas in the hierarchal structure, academics look satisfied when reflecting over problems from a distance. The 'good' or 'politically correct' academic is the one who locks himself in an ivory tower. Involvement in an issue is encouraged to be antagonistic to the very definition of an academic. Netta, in *Osiris Rising*, warns her hostess that the intellectual she is dying to meet is an atypical member of faculty. Unlike most of the rest of academics who "analyze […] social problems days in, days out", Asar "doesn't make a career of analyzing problems. He proceeds to put his conclusion into practice." Appalled at such type of academics she meets everyday, Netta adds to the newly arrived Ast: "Here educated people use their intelligence to avoid risk, to accumulate power, money, privilege. We call it security. That makes our choices sound less cowardly, not so greedy. But Asar used his gift to design a high-risk life." (*Osiris Rising*, p.71) Netta's lowered tune translates the fact that the author has modulated the angry reactions and name calling spotted in the early novels. Netta adds that Asar could easily thrive along the rest of academics by opting for opportunistic venues within the existing social order.

> The magic ability to fly high above famine, inflation, civil war. The charmed life while the continent burns. Money. Politics. The bureaucratic trip. Local directorship in multinational corporations. Diplomatic posts. Lucrative positions in international organizations to fight illiteracy, disease, whatever. Money traps, such jobs are called. That's where the African elite soul is headed. (*Osiris Rising*, p.76-7)

Such an attack on parvenu academics, or those whom Netta categorizes as 'pseudothink tank for dollar-eyed African intellectuals', disqualifies the highly-educated from being 'cultural workers'. In addition, Armah dismisses them as fake intellectuals. For Armah, intellectuals have to earn their names, and the only way of earning that name has to go through their conscious revival of culture.

We notice in *KMT* Armah's assault against pseudo-academics becomes downright categorical. The derisive memo outlined by Jengo and entitled: "CONFERENCITIS", underlines Armah's attempt at ironically deriding the negative motifs of African academics. Instead of clarifying the issues under study in seminars and conferences, parvenu academics, according to Armah, are increasingly encouraged by financing bodies to mystify and make problems look insoluble. Mystification takes place by stressing the necessity to observe a given issue as an existential instead of historical phenomenon. Poverty, when taken as an example, is circumspectly

articulated to appear like a precondition for Africa, while every effort to alleviate or reduce it, is monitored to look like a waste of time. Not unexpectedly, the language is orchestrated to be descriptive, exclusive to real analysis since that would entail a remedial action plan. That is the reason why recommendations at the end of each seminar are addressed in vague terms, stressing nothing except the need for endlessly lengthening the study so that it can be carried on in upcoming conferences. Meanwhile, the jargon of the seminar is impressive, so only a handful of academics can follow; non-specialists are intentionally baffled by opaque and mystifying effects of the scientific jargon. Similarly, five star lodgings and roundtrip fly tickets are arranged for participants, turning the conference a perfect occasion for academic tourism. The overall arrangement of higher educational institutions keeps academics, in Armah's view, handmaids to the political puppets in the service of the imperial world structure. As long as their duty is "neither to understand the world nor to change it but to adjust comfortably to it" (*KMT*, p. 92), academics pose no threat to the existing social structure, and in return, they are rewarded with postdoctoral fellowships, allowances, trips and stipends. Once more one can observe that while some of this criticism can be valid, the gloomy portrayal and accusations of academics as collaborationists seem to mystify instead of seeking to clarify what is really at stake in the politics of education in Africa. Pierre Bourdieu's remarks prove useful and provide practical insights. Seeking legitimacy of their domination, government bureaucrats together with academics are interested in the massive stupefying of their respective communities. As a result they "greet projects aimed at the restoration of culture whose sole virtue is that they comfort those privileged with cultural capital, whose narcissism has been wounded by the revelation of the common foundations of their distinctive delights."[45]

Perhaps, Armah's reason from being very categorical and unfriendly *vis-à-vis* politicians and academics is the fact that they seem to him entirely unconscious to the adverse effects of Western education. What is deconstructive, for him, is their inability to be system makers. At first reading it seems that if the quality of system making had been given sufficient elaborations in *Why Are So Blest?,* as it is the case with *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, a number of critics would have save their reproaches *vis-à-vis* Armah's attack on Western education[46]. An in-depth approach would still establish that Armah with time has modified only the wordings, while the content stays practically the same. The elaboration of what looks like smart vocabulary: 'system-makers' and 'cultural workers' is not followed through with worldly analysis. Armah is not ready to submit that not all African politicians and academics are part of an unjust global structure. Indeed, Western

[45] Pierre Bourdieu, *Op.cit.*, p. 5

[46] An example about such critics is Albirton Norman Spencer who sees that "The problem with Armah's approach to the struggle for national liberation is that *he is so obsessed with the betrayal of opportunist elements among the leadership* that he overlooks the genuine radicalization that takes place among the population as a whole." *Op.cit.*, p. 231 (Italics mine)

education either blinds such elite members from envisaging a world order based on non-competitive and non-hierarchal structures. Even if such elite members escape being blinded and realise how entrapped they are, the chances of having this western educated elite work for an egalitarian world order are judged by Armah as low. But Armah presents his African politicians as incorrigible lackeys since the idea of a classless society simply does not appeal to the SSS. This perhaps rightfully accounts for what Armah sees as the sabotaging influence of the Western education the SSS as a student and many African elite members receive. But Armah's problem is that he sees this sabotaging influence going on for ever beyond repair and constraints to the extent that Africa ends up having only parasitic leadership.

Armah's account of the damaging role of Western education draws interesting parallels with the Zimbabwean writer Tsitsi Dangarembga's work. Unlike Armah, Dangarembga prefers to reflect on the African students' backgrounds and motives before, during and after going to Western schools. In *Nervous Conditions* (1989) and *The Book of Not* (2006), Dangarembga like Armah, decries the competitive drives of western education and hold them responsible for squandering the talents of the African elite. But unlike Armah, she shows how archaic traditions together with acute poverty trap the African student and leaves him or her drained from energy to consider another world order[47]. In Dangarembga's novels, readers do not meet the likes of the SSS where leaders are automatically unpopular and self-serving.

It is true that Western schooling (through entrance examinations, grants selections and scholarships nomination) accustoms students to rivalry and competitive trends of thinking. In active life, negative drives of such sort function as models for violent elimination of rivals, hence the source of political instability and economic retardation[48]. In other words, Armah is right in pointing at these competitive attitudes as sources of instability, hence jeopardizing focus on true nation building. But in stressing that these negative attitudes and destructive tendencies shape and define the political life of a given country to the extent that suspicion and contention become the norm and the rule, here Armah appears untrustworthy. Caught by the impinging yoke of Western education, positive change among warring elites, in Armah's view, cannot be processed as a

[47] Similar to Armah's, the prose in Dangarembga's two novels does not only state the domesticating aspects of Western education but consciously proceeds for its fictionalization. In setting competitive systems to win scholarships, African students were blinded from applying to roles of leadership. Each step in their educational careers, they have to consider financial means to ensure they continue through till the next stage. Given the scarcity of the financial resources, applicants fiercely compete to the extent that each applicant sees other applicants not only as rivals, but essentially as his or her archenemy. Babamukuru, like his niece, Tambu, has been trained to absorb western power to the extent that all his visions about prospects of a possible and different worldview based on non-competitive rules are crushed. These two characters' *compos mentis* are rendered incapable of operating beyond what can be called the western paradigm. Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (1989) Seal Press, California (2004) and *The Book of Not*. Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd (2006)

[48] Exactly the same analysis is put by Olusegun Adekoya when reviewing Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*. "It is not patriotic zeal to serve or correct mistakes of civilian government but the lust for the perquisites of office and privileges that makes the armed forces desire political power." Olusegun Adekoya, "Psychopaths in Power: the Collapse of the African Dream in *A Play of Giants*." In: Björn Beckman & Gbemisola Adeoti (eds.), Intellectuals and African Development. Codesria, Dakar (2006), p. 16

natural flow of forces within struggling elites. What is perhaps inadequate is that for Armah, such competitive structures are the personification of evil, and as a result, well-meaning intellectual activists will be better off if they simply stay at home and reject drawing alliances with other social groups and seek help from the media. In the social world, in which Africa is a part, "offspring from the cultured fractions of the bourgeoisie [when they] accede to posts of corporate or political responsibility [through education combine] powerful sources of change within the field of power…"[49] Put differently, positive social change cannot just happen; it has to be engineered through acts of social emergence in public life with all what this emerges entails. But Armah seems to read every attempt at social emergence, like making alliances, as conspiratorial and hence negative.

Furthermore, instances of Armah's imprecise outlook of how social change can be operated can be spotted in the way he sets the standards for his intellectuals in order to qualify as 'cultural workers'. Positive change, he implies, and unlike what revolutionaries think, cannot be implemented from above. In his belief that an effective social transformation has to include the gradual uplifting of the public consciousness, the reader once more can detect imprecise, little or not well-defined reasons why Armah discredits all politicians and academics from taking an active part in Africa's cultural awakening. Considering the national bourgeoisie as a handicap is a Fanonian standpoint in origin, but with Armah the reader finds this negative judgement of the bourgeoisie conclusive where in fact Fanon's statement carries no pejorative slant[50]. Given his desire to change the cultural climate, Armah sees that intellectuals have to be "system-makers", that is working gradually in order to shape a living and constructive culture. But in stressing the need for political science, and the quality of 'system-making', Armah offers no indication where they can be found, or the kind of experience these would be system-makers should gain before finally starting as 'system-makers'. Armah gives the impression that his 'system-makers' are his beautiful ones whom African should again wait, there is no indication how long, for their birth. Witness how he portrays Asar as naturally born 'system-makers': "Interested or not, Asar was a winner. Something the SSS was dying to be, but couldn't be." (*Osiris Rising*, p. 75) The factor of experiencing the hustle and bustle of the world, considering even mediocre beginnings and failures, form little part in Armah's outlook. Almost all attention is on demonizing Western education on the ground that it fails to train African students 'for the system-making professions':

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[49] Loïc Wacqurant, "Op.cit.", p. xvi

[50] Fanon attacks the national bourgeoisie as it blindly and unsuccessfully tries to reproduce the consumerist proclivities of metropolitan bourgeoisie. By forgetting that metropolitan bourgeoisie had known an arduous beginning in order to reach the comfortable situations in the present, the national bourgeoisie jumps over historical periods. Fanon reveals "Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives to itself and cuts itself off from the people, undermined by its hereditary incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe." Franz Fanon, *Op.cit.*, p. 261

> They would not be trained for system-making professions… The system was neatly structured to habituate the African colonies to the simple and thankless export of raw wealth, not the complex lucrative business of its processing. There would be no point in training people destined to live as colonial subjects in Political science or Philosophy. Such system might produce system-makers, and there was something turbulent about the talents of system-makers. (*KMT*, p. 67)

Such trend of thinking is pursued even when he given an account of the leaders' performance since the beginning of Western training of African elites:

> The recent history of Africa reveals leaders who failed to create thinking, self-sustaining communities. Some failed because they did not have time, they were killed. Some failed because of luck of opportunity. But some also failed because they did not have any real desire to empower the powerless. Because they saw in the powerlessness of those who raised them to power a source and they were afraid that if they empower the powerless, there will be no body who need them, bearing them up. At any rate, these leaders have tremendous work thrust on them. They were too busy to address certain fundamental questions regarding our awakening. That is why although we have had such wonderful leaders, many of us are still asleep[51].

The positive aspect in this account is that not all leaders are lackeys in the pay of either colonial or neo-colonial powers. Discovering genuine leaders and detailing their work is a complex mechanism which Armah takes pains to reflect on. He explicitly notes that in analysing the African crisis one cannot miss the factor of leadership, that is, leaders 'who failed to create thinking, self-sustaining communities.' The leaders who can get Africa out of the present cultural crisis would be the ones willing to remedy the failure of the previous leaders. Even when trying to stay cool and provide an objective account of African leaders—as shown through their classification into three principal categories, not the usual two: angelic versus devilish—Armah's tone still carries an accent of blame. Indeed, Armah notes that the true measure of adequate leaders is how she or he will raise public awareness. But it seems that he is unconsciously avoiding any suggestions as to how to find these leaders-intellectuals that would uplift the consciousness of their people and still manage to lead against all odds. Instead of shedding lights in this direction, readers can see Armah' attention perverted to peripheral reflections over egos and legacies and how these leaders' histories should be written. He thinks that would-be leaders will risk becoming no leaders at all since sharing knowledge transforms the leaders and the led into one operating body, where there exists no distinctions or discriminations. He further wishes that once knowledge becomes an everyday commodity, there would be no place for leaders with egos to boost. In order for this to happen, there have to be intellectuals ready beforehand to leave public view; willingly self-dismissing once their historical task is done.

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[51] Ayi Kwei Armah, "Our Awakening", Video Lecture at Berkeley University (1990), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wrTdqlBHK&feature-related

In order to make up for his little account of how leaders should be raised and get experience in the ways of the world, Armah expands on essentializations, the activity he appears to be excellent at. In presuming that his 'system-makers' who will be ready to disappear from the public scene once their historical role of cultural awakening is over, Armah dramatises Asar and Jengo as inherently do-gooders. Western education is portrayed as incapable of nursing these self-erasing leaders, and it seems that this is the reason why Armah stages Asar's death at the end of *Osiris Rising*. By contrast, we wonder how Asar and Jengo can play the role of good leaders, knowing that they themselves were educated in Western learning centres. Again in reviewing the calibre of his academics and politicians, Armah's readers can see how neat their profile is and how untarnished with any negative spots that would result from getting experience and be mixed with the exigencies of social reality. They are formed from a blend of consistency, intelligence and hardwork. They are also resourceful; they are made winners, by dint of honest, committed, and diplomatic activists. In short, despite the fact that the qualities of Armah's 'system-makers' are derived mainly from his last two novels, they nevertheless constitute no radical move from what may look like the stupefying and mystic qualities that define Densu and Damfo in *The Healers* and Isanusi in *Two Thousand Seasons*.

According to Jacob Gordon, there are two sets of qualities. The first set concerns what can be referred to as the technical, or the purely objective aspects of leadership. Combined, they provide an outlook of the good leader. These are: "Information giving, opinion giving, elaborating, coordinating, summarizing, testing feasibility, evaluating and diagnosing" combine what Gordon calls 'Task Functions' qualities. The second set, however, details the human or the subjective aspects that keep the genial touch and jovial atmosphere among those with whom the leader immediately collaborates. These are "Encouraging, gate keeping, standard setting, expressing group feelings, consensus taking, harmonizing, tension reducing."[52] Following Asar and Jengo closely, one notes that these two protagonists variously enjoy these qualities. Endowed with a different mindset from most academics and intellectuals, Asar, as elaborated in the following quote, is just true to himself. He is a born-winner, just naturally successful.

> Seth was terribly competitive. It didn't matter that Asar hardly noticed there was a competition. Asar was curious about things, mostly trying to pull his understanding together. He read way beyond the syllabus. He won prizes, but he was a bit off-hand about it. Once he got punished for not showing up on prize day… Interested or not, Asar was a winner. Something SSS was dying to be, but couldn't be. He tried, but his best never got him past the middle of the heap. (*Osiris Rising*, p. 75)

[52] Jacob U. Gordon, *Op.cit.*, pp. 19-20

In order to resist accusations of essentialising the good qualities, the narrative tries to make up for this by expanding on Asar' presumed conscious forays to exert concentration. Here there is deliberate training. Netta lets Ast know that

> He's always been pensive. He came back quieter. One rumor said he'd been shocked into catatonia by the horrors of the freedom wars. No drinking, no smoking. No drugs, no sexual hunting. Another said the boers had castrated him.. (*Osiris Rising*, p. 77)

Budda-like and always composed about every aspect of his life, the narrative shows Asar as simply unstoppable. He seemed to be the unmoved mover, endowed with a non-defeatable spirit, the one bent on levelling society and be an agent of justice. About justice, he is constantly hopeful; he refuses to worry about his personal safety, even when reminded of the danger the SSS represents. One way of endearing him to still enchanted readers is to draw attention to his supposed coolness of mind. While facing serious threats of assassination, Ast could not wait to tell him: "You refuse to let the possibility of negative experience make you paranoid" (*Osiris Rising*, p.119) Like a self-proclaimed prophet in mythical times, Asar is shown refusing to consider hints at essentialising his qualities by making them look extraordinary, hence unattainable by the rest of would be 'system-makers'. The time he realises he is seen as superhuman or a star by Ast, he hurries to correct her: "Nothing extraordinary about it [life, Asar's life]. Nothing to attract anyone not born into my situation." (*Osiris Rising* p.102) Armah succeeds, though perhaps superficially, in showing that system-makers fall in love only with other system-makers. Asar had to wait for Ast to come all the way from Emerson in order to commit himself seriously.

> But there are things I know about you. They attract me. I'm not talking infatuation. And not interested in infallibility. What drew when we met was what you were about. The direction you were giving your life. That's the key to our attraction: the clean sense of direction. It is the way I plan to live. Doesn't it make sense to you that I see you as a companion? (*Osiris Rising*, p.111)

Here is a situation where "the beautiful ones" mix, talk and even marry with only other "beautiful ones"; a fact that leaves readers questioning how Armah's beautiful ones come to be beautiful in the first place without ever interacting with other social categories that are not necessarily like themselves. In addition to personal attachment based on love between Asar and Ast, it seems that Asar is no less successful in drawing connection with the rest of faculty members he works with. All faculty members are shown to have abandoned the competitive reflexes inherent in their Western training and work hand in hand with under one well-defined agenda. Bai Kamara, the Mystic Camrade, Bantu Rolong, Imo Moko, Lamine Djatta, Iva Mensa, together with the couple Aba and Duma Essiene are part of an idealistic group that is shown to be carefully initiating slow but positive change. The situations arising from Asar's arrest and subsequent assassination

indicate that the School's students are also mesmerized with his changing framework. For in the final and fateful events near the end of *Osiris Rising*, all students are shown risking their careers and assuming engaged position by forcing Seth's security cronies to retreat from arresting their teacher on campus. In *KMT* we have Sipha Jengo who unexpectedly leaves the luxury of the diplomatic world and joins the academy. Such a career transition reads like an opening from the dream world.

Now the reason why Armah's portrayal of the impact of Western schooling on Africa can be easily qualified as not totally adequate principally lies in his characterization. This latter shows little trend towards dramatising actions of individuals who are supposed to illustrate Armah's project. There is enough evidence to suggest that the characters' interest in essentializations is superficial and eschews the praxis of ideas in the face of social realities. Again, there is a conscious attempt from the writer to simplify complex situations and complex decisions and present them as black or white,. If characters are either demonized or deodorized, then certainly depth is sacrificed and essentializations remain the writer's resort to fill in the remaining blanks. Asar and Jengo, like Densu and Isanusi are probably idealised characters. If the writer intends them to be role models, then he risks finding almost no audience to take seriously his socio-cultural project. The new Africans in a modern Africa are, to borrow from the title of the writer's first novel, his own beautiful ones that are not yet born. And in order to be born at all, they are supposed to be prepared for the ways of modern Africa. In other words, they have to learn through their mistakes like all well-meaning people do, and from time to time fall short of the *Ma'atic* ideals they carry. Indeed, here lies Armah's notable flaw: he forces a socio-cultural programme into protagonists like Isanusi, Densu, Asar and Jengo without portraying them as fallible or imperfect human beings.

In this connection, Armah still cannot tolerate even experimenting with the idea that as positive social change does not come through armed revolutions, still it cannot come through a divorce of the beautiful ones from social reality. The Manda school of teachers seem to prefer working almost only among themselves and with people like themselves, turning the campus into an island where it is presumably free from Seth's corrupting influence. Asar's point of departure for positive social change has perhaps to take into consideration the presupposition that "…social strategies are ever determined unilaterally by the objective constraints of the structure any more than they are by the subjective intentions of the agent." Instead, experience has shown that:

> …practice is engendered in the *mutual solicitation of position and disposition*, in the now-harmonious, now discordant, encounter between 'social structures and mental structures," history 'objectified' as fields and

> history 'embodied' in the form of this socially patterned matrix of preferences and propensities that constitute habitus.[53]

Armah's intellectual protagonists show no intention to work and mix with other intellectuals, traditionalists, students and ordinary people. In the context of apartheid South Africa, African intellectuals according to Raymond Suttner resorted to the principle of "collective intellectual" in their fight. In his study of the formation of the African National Congress intellectuals, Suttner notes that the ANC has been aware of the need to merge its activists' intellectual, political and organizational efforts with other social organizations, not necessarily exclusive to the academy[54]. As a perquisite condition for its success, the ANC's intellectual framework emerged as a blend of a variety of social forces of whom academics are only one part, and by no means the very important one. As the ANC realized the need to joint efforts and make alliances with multiple players not necessarily all sharing an exact ideology for its success, it would be indeed inspiring if Armah staged a story where dedicated academics harmoniously interspersed with students, traditional historians and other camaraderies and circles for yielding the category of "collective intellectuals". Armah's Manda group and the fishers cooperative are excellent starting points in order to find what Antonio Gramsci calls 'organic intellectuals', and the party's cohesive elements. Without such intellectual elements that supply dynamics and direction, the party would stay disorganized and full of socially dysfunctional players: "the political party for all groups is precisely the mechanism which carries out for civil society the same function as the state carries out, more synthetically and over a large scale. In other words, it is responsible for welding together the organic intellectuals of a given group—the dominant one—and the traditional intellectuals."[55]

As a further condition for the formation of these "collective intellectuals", Suttner observes that the ANC has been conscious about the need to project its liberating dynamics for the long run. Short terms politics had been assessed as self-defeatist. Without the cumulative efforts or what Armah judiciously calls "preparatory work" for solid future collective action, present leadership would not possibly operate and would be obliged to start with preparatory work. In his study, Suttner notes that the Mandela generation and the final coronation of the ANC as a ruling party in South Africa should be understood as the tip of the iceberg, stemming from a century-

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[53] Loïc Wacqurant, "Op.cit.", p. xvi

[54] In this connection, Suttner elaborates: "In the context of the ANC-led national liberation movement, the concept of the intellectual may be said to apply to individuals created through various processes, some inside the ANC and allied organizations, sometimes deriving from the outside, through more conventional institutions, such as universities. In deploying intellectual skills derived from these conventional institutions, it has not been a case of simply applying that knowledge and training. These professionals have needed to undergo various intellectual transformations within the organization(s) in order to perform tasks related to national liberation, to give them the skills that are organizationally specific." Raymond Suttner, "The Character and Formation of Intellectuals within the ANC-led South African Liberation Movement", in: Thandika Mkandawire (ed.), *African Intellectuals*. Codesria, (2008), p. 118

[55] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Trans. Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith. International Publishers, New York (1971), p. 15

long struggle for freedom and equality. One former ANC activist and prisoner at Robben Island recalls that it is the education he received by fellow party members in prison that enabled him and the rest of illiterate activists to project their effort as part of a long term design for liberation[56]. In other words, the proof of having accomplished necessary training as potential collective intellectuals is the extent to which they are ready to realize that the struggle can be long and arduous, like the one in the South African context, seven to eight decades.

Armah's 1976 move to Lesotho, where neighbouring South Africa was in utmost agitation against the apartheid regime, enabled him to closely reflect on the South African situation and its struggle for freedom. The Lesotho experience seemed to have influenced the nature and depth of his further works[57]. His last two novels seem to be dramatic modulation of the example set by the ANC liberation struggle against apartheid. In theory at least, Armah is aware of the complex collaboration between different elite factions adopting their organizational skills to fit the need of the struggle. He includes an intellectual training free from the inhibitive reflexes, the ones caused by Western education. Despite some shortcomings like the one related to characterizations, Armah's novels offer useful insights into the ways in which African social transformation towards the renaissance can be successfully conducted. One solid conviction readers cannot forget is his stress that the formation of intellectuals of the renaissance cannot be left to chance or in the hands of imperial educational institutions because that will just be counterproductive.

In connection with Armah's efforts of founding responsible leadership in Africa, it would be not too farfetched to review the views of Edward Wilmot Blyden, proffered more than a century ago. In the epigraph of this chapter, excerpted from a chapter entitled: "Aims and Methods of Liberal Education for Africans" Blyden sounds, perhaps, more objectively reasonable than Armah as he acknowledges Africa's need for assistance by Western learning. He also concedes that the labour resulting from that Western assistance cannot be immediately productive for the advancement of the continent. Blyden trusted that by time Africans are to develop their own schemes in education, generate forward looking leaders while gradually be in position to free

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[56] Daniel Montsisi, a leader of 1976 Soweto uprising recollects: "The Island was a political education for me. Firstly, we discovered a deep comradeship through discussion with the older leaders, and a deep respect. Before I went to the Island my understanding of the Freedom Charter was not thorough. There I had the time to look back at history…It was like putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which had been missing all along. We delved into our history. We discovered that we young people were not the first to take up the fight against apartheid, but a new part of a developing project." Quoted in: Raymond Suttner, "Ibid.", p. 137

[57] In *The Eloquence of the Scribes* refers to the Lesotho teaching assignment as fruitful on a number of levels. First, he had personal contacts with Mofolo's family and that has helped him to understand some important dimensions in the story, *Shaka*, together with the circumstances arising from the first publication of this work. Second, he showed his part in training an engaged Soweto group of activist poets. His surprise and admiration for the group is rendered in a style that is perhaps celebratory: "That community had created an itinerant poetry troupe, a part of the revolutionary movement whose chosen work was to travel through the oppressed country disseminating the message of coming freedom in the form of poetry and music." *Op.cit*., p. 123

themselves completely from the possible constraints and inhibitions. Interestingly too, is that in Blyden's analysis there is not the slightest suggestion about underground conspiracies and founding fathers' ill intentions, like it is with Armah[58]. Cultural historians may attribute this difference in approach as answerable to different historical contexts: Blyden's was the time of intensive military European intervention in the continent and as a result he was under growing pressure to adopt a passive line, while Armah's has been that of regaining political independence and as such he is, in some degree, justified in adopting his uncompromising stance. Armah thinks that with the massive inculcation of *Ma'atic* principles, Africa can afford to ignore the technological progress and the economic and political world order engineered by the western world. Whether this is a tenable and realistic proposition is a question that deserves more attention on Armah's part.

[58] Blyden also submits that Western education extends hasty and hazy awareness about Africa. But this 'evil' as he qualifies it is the result of no ill attention from the part of the school curriculum. Instead, Blyden attributes this lack, not to conspiracy, but simply to ignorance: "The evil, it is considered, lies in the system and method of European training to which negroes are, in Christian lands, subjected, and which everywhere affects them unfavourably. Of a different race, different susceptibility, different bent of character from that of a European, they have been trained under influences in many respects adapted only the Caucasian race. Nearly all the books they read, the very instruments of their culture, have been such as to force them from the groove which is natural to them, where they would be strong and effective, without furnishing them with any avenue through which they may move naturally and free from obstruction." Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*. (1888) Black Classic Press (1994), p. 87

Conclusion

> A successful work of art is not the one which resolves contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its inner most structure.
>
> Theodor Adorno

In the five chapters of this thesis, we have been following the progress of Armah's underlying argument regarding his identity quest in his seven novels to date. Chapter One, "The Driving Force of Armah's Novels and the Fate of Africa", illustrates the idea that Armah's identity quest is culturally activated through a revisionist approach of tradition. For the novelist, tradition can be an interesting source for identity formation. In line with Edward Shils' 'Tradition of Change and Reasons" versus "Tradition of Traditionality", Armah distinguishes between the fossilized and inhibiting traditions on the one hand, and those which are inspiring and progressive on the other. In the African social context, positive tradition, as suggested by the writer, can be made useful via the inculcation of a set of values in the everyday life of African communities. Armah argues that there are two diametrically conversing sets of values. The ones that publicize for consumerist attitudes, competitive drives and hierarchal organization of society are judged as negative ones. They are interchangeable with abuse of women by men, ending in the reduction of women to second class citizens. In the same way, the writer highlights other sets of values that treated the feminine principle with respect, and taught plenitude as a founding tenet of the universe. Meanwhile, both value systems are assessed by Armah as culturally sensitive to race and ancestral blood in the sense that a given community is more predisposed to one value system instead of another one. Indeed, the writer's own reading of such systems helps him to develop more or less a coherent cultural paradigm that rivals the Cartesian premises of European modernity. Armah has no problem in being labeled a traditionalist; nevertheless, his is a

revisionist approach to tradition that more often than not claims to offer a sophisticated and critical cultural paradigm..

As a result of working on tradition to form an identity, Armah's fictionalizing remains fraught with some misunderstandings and misconceptions for a number of readers. But instead of downplaying his poetics as irrelevant or ambivalent, a keen reader will find Armah's outlook both practical and inciting. As far as the apparent contradictions are concerned, Albert Memmi underlies an interesting suggestion that third world writers frequently reflect on the shifting movements within their respective societies. Indeed, postcolonial nationalism, for Armah, has been a slide towards a negative tradition that undermines genuine development and empties nation building from a constructive meaning. In seeking to legitimize their postcolonial regimes, African ruling elites resort to tradition in often celebratory or nostalgic mood. Armah is against tradition when it becomes an ideological fountain justifying mediocre political choices, spelling corrupt and disintegrating *status quo*. In this connection, postcolonial nationalism is conceived as a form of traditionality that is in harmony with European modernity. Tradition seems not only able to survive but also to prosper and to develop innovative forms to exercise its crippling influence. Armah submits that the European idea of governance and polity in postcolonial Africa becomes 'traditionalized' when shortsighted and self-flattering tactics are implemented. Thus, in becoming 'traditionalized', aspects of European modernity in Africa misleadingly draw impressive illusions, turning genuine consideration of the African political and cultural context challenging. In line with Eric Hobsbawn and Terence Ranger's study, Armah believes that negative tradition institutionalizes chaos and proves to be a real problem for social activists campaigning for its displacement.

Armah stresses in his seven novels that the problem of 'tradition-infested' societies is not limited to politics. Rather, the problem with tradition is that it is directly linked with the cultural field. For this reason, Armah mobilizes the same tradition (the part he thinks enhancing) in order to found an ideological background suitable for the egalitarian worldview he calls for. In elucidating the ancient Egyptians' understanding of deity's meaning, their view of women and family, and even their tutoring of youth, Armah delves into what he assumes as 'genuine and authentic' forms of tradition. Nearly all his novels from *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* to *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* are a thorough-going examination of tradition: initiating readers in so called 'authentic' tradition while presenting historical (not imaginative) instances and reasons for its deviation and consequently, its corruption. For Armah emphasizing on 'authentic' tradition for purposes of cultural revival

has the advantage of erecting the necessary elements for his 'African identity'. Only with this kind of traditionally-rooted and expanded identity, he expects, Africa can successfully face the deceptive action of European modernity and assume its corrective destiny in the world stage. However idealistic such a vision might look at first, the writer succeeds in convincing readers with his cultural project. Again the stress on authentic tradition indicates that Armah propounds his vision, in the same way Manuel Castells suggests, as a long term project that both resists and transform the present *status quo*.

It is, however, in the second chapter, entitled 'The Cultural Poetics of Desire and Armah's Projection of his Worldview' that readers can find that Armah's African identity is presupposed on the idea of selfhood *versus* otherness. Here identity is processed as a form of desiring, as such desiring structures and organizes a worldview based on cultural presumptions. Expanding on Cheikh Anta Diop's theory Africa as the cradle of humanity and its positive role in the history of the world, Armah presupposes Africa to be diametrically-opposed to Europe and the West in terms of cultural components: values and ethics. Africa's destiny underlines a peaceful approach to the world and is respectful towards the feminine principle. Similarly, Europe is portrayed as more prone to violence as it develops a negative outlook vis-à-vis women, and encourages uncontrolled competitive tendencies. This explains perhaps Armah's reasons from dramatizing in *Why Are We So Blest?* contradictory essences, explaining why multicultural claims of neo-humanism cannot be successful. Since Aimée, the American girl, is culturally conditioned to be insensitive to pain, she unconsciously inflicts much harm on presumably her African lover, Modin. For Aimée pain is an inseparable part of almost every aspect of life, including even love. According to her cultural paradigm, one is supposed to endure some amounts of pain first in order taste pleasure afterwards. Armah argues that in her people's culture, pain is unconsciously filtered through catharsis. This is why she shows little care for Modin's emotions, presuming he is feeling that experience in the same way as she does. The story explains why he, as an African, can easily turn into a loser.

According to Armah, Aimée is inherently incapable of experiencing genuine love, since that mutual feeling is lacking in her culture. Sex and fantasy are the elements that feed her desire and this unusual situation refers to Amazons, back to the principle propagated in ancient Greece. Because of the superciliousness with which the ancient Greek males treated their feminine partners, Armah explains how some women were reactionary as they become social perverts or anti-males (Amazons). In addition, the Christian heritage plays a significant role in circulating such a misogyny; it teaches sinless austerity and conceives of

desire initially as defilement and sin. Capitalistic mores like hard work and a consumerist mindsets further extinguish the few remaining sparks of desire as mutually and spiritually shared experience. Finally, capitalism turns desire into a spurious and mechanistic operation. Patriarchy as a complex attitude is found by Armah to be combining the above three perverted variants of desire; emotion is synonymous with weakness and responsible attachment is considered as unpractical or unnecessary for self-balance. In the African experience as illustrated through Modin and other main characters in the upcoming novels, desire cannot be partial or disruptive for self-realization. On the contrary, its absence can severely tax one's peace of mind. In other words, Armah notes that in the 'proper African' worldview there cannot be a duality in the constitution of balanced man's consciousness, for feeling and emotions should never be ridiculed. The emotive part in man does not deny or contradict the rational part; they consistently harmonize and sustain each other.

In Armah's approach, it is the European cultural matrix that spells perverted and violent forms of desire. That is why European modernity is found destructive, and as a result it cannot be adopted as a developmental model. The most apparent reason behind excluding the European paradigm of culture is that violence is judged necessary for self-apprehension and identity. Indeed, violence in the writer's understanding of the European cultural matrix is judged not only as frequent and intrusive, but as normative and common. That is why, in Armah's view, Africa will be better off without this cultural matrix which is responsible for patriarchy, slave trade and colonialism. In unearthing its 'deep tradition', Africa can provide itself and the world with interesting traditional material to adjust its present impasse. Regeneration can only come from within the African cultural matrix where identity is processed through a balance between the emotional and rational components of man. Reading and commenting on some images (like water), metaphors and symbols help Armah draw the major fundamentals of what he presumes to be the African paradigm of desire. Such a paradigm is approximated by the writer as a framework where healing should be predicated upon transcending individual desire by getting rid of selfish and petty ambitions. Healing, thus, can only be attained when seeking communal desire becomes second nature. In other words, the individual's happiness lies principally in seeking his welfare within the group's welfare to which he belongs. The act of fusing individual's identity in the communal one reflects the meaning of *Ma'at*. Furthermore, *Ma'at* summaries Armah's ancestral (traditional) cogitation and epistemology with which he hopes to supersede the patriarchal, dualistic and capitalistic cogitation of Europe.

Chapter Three as its title "From Symbol to Meaning: Armah's Reference to African Metaphysics and Philosophy of Power" indicates, seeks to group and survey Armah's elements of African culture. Here the study attempts to uncover the literary devices by which Armah draws on his bipolar division of culture and identity. According to the writer, the selection of images, symbols, myths and metaphors indicates a choice of a certain ethos or desire whose ideological bearing can either be liberating or restraining. Put differently, Armah's myth making expresses his own metaphysics, and it is this metaphysics that forms the precepts of his new cultural outlook, the one he intends to outrun the present impasse in Africa with. Such myth making process can be witnessed in his understanding of the gods as metaphors connoting energy and zeal (positive forms of desire) for setting eternal balance and justice. Similarly, Armah tries to trace the cosmic significance of natural images like trees, rivers and circles in order to suggest the kind of metaphysics that identifies African man with his natural background. This is, perhaps, Armah's way of answering the metaphysics encoded in cults like pyramids and which thrive on cultures of maximum profit, hierarchal stratification of society and the abuse of women.

As early as in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah's writing strategy carefully distinguishes between two sets of exclusive imagery, one positive and the other negative. Remarkably, readers are offered images of light, cleanliness and greenness that reflect the metaphysics of beauty rooted in honesty, accountability and purity. Natural beauty becomes a vehicle transmitting no abstract kind of freedom but a concrete obligation to engage in a campaign aiming for freedom. Similarly, there are plenty of images that connote darkness, stench, decay and rottenness; these are introduced to suggest a worldview tied to ugliness, dishonesty, public theft as well as moral and social corruption. Here ugliness simply underlines the imprints of an absent beauty. In being so categorical, Armah develops his corrective metaphysics in order to help readers emulate the man's moral choices and patience. Patience is judged necessary to distinguish between genuine and illusory forms of beauty like the gleam. The radiating gleam, as in Koomson's case, can hide a reeking desire to debase what is spiritual and beautiful. Material development alone, as shown through excessive levels of consumerism, reflects a passive and disengaged existence where self and other are never clearly defined and handled.

When following Armah's metaphysics a little further, one can note that the writer proclaims education as his regenerative dynamics, a force that, when well-mediated, can reach the beautiful ideal of existence. Nevertheless, inspirational and genuine education in the case of Africa has not been given a chance yet to reflect its egalitarian and beautiful

metaphysics. The infiltration of foreign metaphysics through education disarms African potential leaders and social activists and turns them into passive cynics. In *Fragments*, it seems that the writer has made Baako's inability to effectively address his societal ills and level criticism at the prestige generally claimed from pursuing studies in metropolitan universities. Coming back home after having finished a PhD in America, Baako has become estranged from Ghanaian reality. His reflexes and modes of thinking, the ones he gained abroad, render him helpless and innately incapable to place the corrective agenda he has always had in mind. This explains the reason why he accounts for his people's mounting needs for goods in terms of Cargo mentality. His Western education is portrayed to have predisposed his understanding of consumerism as an eternal fight between gods and demigods, creators and mediators. This interpretation explains Baako's incapacity to adequately explain his community's addiction to Western goods; a fact attributable more to Western education. Put in this way, Armah does not question or doubt the protagonist's passion and sensitivity for the welfare and well-being of his countrymen.

A sound reading of Armah's oeuvre shows that Baako's discontented experience in *Fragments* seems to be compensated by Asar's achievements in *Osiris Rising*. Armah articulates the idea that in order to change unfavourable conditions in the African social reality, intellectuals have to assume leading positions. But these intellectuals cannot step into leading positions without adequate training first. Here adequate training implies sensitizing intellectuals to their society's true needs. In order to achieve this goal, a sound and authentic educational system has to be implemented. Western schooling systems, for the writer, leave honest and dedicated African intellectuals (people like Baako) straddled over the gap separating their well-meaning intentions from their active self-analysis. This gap explains why the attempt to activate a visionary and liberating agenda for their communities is often impaired. *Osiris Rising* illustrates that Asar's kind of intellection, the one that puts Africa and Africans at the center of analysis, genuinely promises the generation of the desired positive transformation. The proposed curricula, as designed by Asar and his colleagues, call for the consideration of the ancient Egyptian tradition of *Ma'at*. For this tradition is shown to be inherently capable of finding the roots of egalitarian ethics. No less interesting is the appeal of the group of innovators who are inspired by the continent's oral production of literature together with the resilient memory it tries to preserve for guiding and inspirational purposes. The three departmental suggestions work in the direction of instituting an African educational system that is more or less free from the inhibitive influences of Western perception and its educational apparatus.

As indicated from the title, "Armah's Project of Spiritual Transformation of the Self", or Chapter Four of this thesis, studiously traces the traditional foundations of Armah's metaphysics. These are the concepts of deity, the *Ma'atic* approach to the universe and the matricentric organization of society. The writer has been gathering these three elements of culture and identity in order to found an overall strategy that addresses the damages encroached by European modernity. With such elements, Armah thinks, Africa will not only break the manacles of European slave trade and colonialism, but also will have the chance to play its corrective role and healing the entire world. In Armah's view, patriarchy is constitutional in the Arabs' and Europeans' unconscious. Their constant recourse to violence, throughout history, holds them responsible for all the ills inflicted on Africa. As a consequence of such a reading of history, the writer calls for a vision principally based on 'netchers', *Ma'at* and matricentricity.

In Armah's assessment, Africans live in deplorable conditions because their conception of god has been basically falsified; it has become crippling and reductive. That is why in an undertaking that takes Africa's identity quest as its objective, a translucent understanding of deity is thought to be an absolute necessity. Through the griot character, Djiely Hor in *KMT*, Armah proposes the adoption of the ancient Egyptian notion of god, as he finds this latter self-enhancing. The ancient Egyptians conceived of gods more or less as 'netchers' or metaphors approximating the energy and the fiery creativity needed for introducing improvements in the quality of life. According to Armah, Kemetic people used to think that God was a mental propensity that constantly induces each person to transform the world into a better place for living. This concept of Man-God contradicts the prevalent opinion that gods are gigantic and invisible essences that are non-imitative by ordinary humans. This second view decrees that only kings, with miraculous intervention from the divine, have the right to function on behalf of transcendent gods. According to Armah, the second view is essentially 'non-African' and self-destructive. Moreover, the idea of gods as non-imitative entities had been the result of the conspiratorial design of those groups aiming to install themselves gods through the circulation of blind faith among confused and misinformed populations. Djiely Hor dies seeking to recover that positively identifiable godly profile: loving, caring and imitative of god. For Hor, without that original meaning African populations will keep passive and alienated from its surrounding.

In connection with the self-empowering concept of the deity comes *Ma'at*. This latter, when considered from the ethical point of view, extends the meaning of the enhancing concept of god to everyday life. *Ma'at*, as Armah shows, campaigns for the sake of freeing the

world from hierarchal organizations and undeserved privileges. In *Osiris Rising*, the writer shows that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some dedicated Africans deployed the ancient Egyptian concept of *Ma'at* as an ideological nemesis to resist the slave trade. The potential of *Ma'at* today, as developed by the writer, is the fact that it can outline a conscious paradigmatic shift from transcendence and desire towards embracing nature. This is so because *Ma'atic* ideal presupposes a world that is antithetical to patriarchal modes of perception and production. Initially, *Ma'at* presumes abundance and plenitude, not lack and scarcity, as the first condition or the world in its original status. The identity of *Ma'atic* man is shown to be lying in his constant attempt to proffer meaning to existence, and such 'meaning fulfillment' vocation can only be attained through extending abundance for all people. As he strives towards that noble end, man's *Ma'atic* identity is understood to be constantly taking shape; his or her 'becoming' is measured against how he or she 'transforms' scarcity into plenitude. When transformation becomes massive, the eternal 'becoming' of Ma'atic community suggests the existence of the individual within a vigorous group and a group composed of healthy individuals.

Armah's experiment with ideas related to matriarchy and matricentricity, as a new morality for founding the African ethos of the renaissance, has started with *Why Are We So Blest?* The reader notices that Aimée's and the professor's wife's repulsion from their fellow American men and hunting for Modin is indicative of the patriarchal pressure put on these two women. Their irresistible desire for Modin explains their need to experience their feminity with somebody unconditioned with patriarchal modes of production. In other words, the two women's unusual interest in Modin as a sex toy supports the belief that they are reactivating their Amazonian ancestry; they consciously severe emotional commitment with what they think as exploitative and pleasure seeking men. Modin little suspects the two women's emotional needs; as a result he falls victim to their Amazonian vengeance. The unhappy ending of the drama supports Armah's thesis, the one he shares with Cheikh Anta Diop concerning Northern and Southern Cradles of humanity. Armah's reading of Diop demonstrates an uncompromising outlook about the role of predispositions in identity formation. Instead of being a weakness, Africa's predisposition to matricentricity is judged as a bonus, calling for solidarity and the eradication of class differences. Matricentric organization can indeed be Africa's main contribution to universal progress, but one wonders how far his traditionalist approach to society organization can be adopted, knowing that the continent has already been distanced through the colonial factor from this ideal. Similarly, Armah does not specify the ways in which he intends to implement Ma'atic ideology. Willie

Abraham's reference to 'value-vacuum' and confusion associated to the loss of independence for long stretches of time in most parts of Africa is very pertinent and this is why Armah's visionaries should not overlook it.

In "Armah's Educational Perspectives in New Africa" or Chapter Five, however, the writer elucidates the reasons that underpin his emphasis on education as a strategy of regeneration. In his belief that education proffers the right regenerative strategy, Armah determines the category of the elite, who in their turn, determine the future of the continent. According to the writer, forward-looking and pioneer African leaders need not be graduates of Western schools. As the Western school system can be traced to the European matrix of modernity, rooted in patriarchy, the remedy, as Armah suggests, lies in whether or not the elite is able to develop an awareness to base schooling on ancestral models. Traditional training systems are judged successful in the task of the spiritual nourishment of the self. Here, the school is processed as the governing dynamics that sets the tone for social, political as well as cultural life. The interesting element here is that Armah takes schooling as an institution. The same opinion allocates the task of reversing this institutionalized violence to positive schooling, reaching thereby acceptable levels in self-enhancing values. This reversal is judged as the best tactic, since it comes as a change from within instead of an irresponsible recourse to bloody coups or costly revolutions. A quiet revolutionary outlook, can be judged as the generator of Armah's vision.

In reflecting over the kind of Africans on whom the task of finding a modern Africa is trusted, readers can notice that Armah sets almost inaccessible standards for affiliation. For Armah only a few Western educated Africans can be depended on in the task of rebuilding Africa on solid backgrounds of self and identity. Because of mental blocks like suspicious attitudes among would be African graduates resulting from competitive tendencies like entrance examination, selections for grants and scholarships, Western educated Africans are left with little time to consider other preoccupations beyond self-protecting careers. As a result of such unbecoming outlook, Armah had a problem of characterization: he has only two sets of people and these are either angelic or demonic characters, with very little variation in between. Tendencies towards essentializations seem to limit Armah's scope of identity quest. Readers wonder how the good characters can be good without developing experience by fraternizing and socializing with the everyday exigencies of the people. Responsible and forward looking leadership, in Armah's scheme, is shown to be possible as a result of inherently positive nature. In reality, however, and as suggested by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, good leadership is frequently the combination of multiple and

challenging historical processes. Bourdieu submits interesting observations in respect of identifying the accurate factors that finally determine elite formation. Perhaps it would be inspiring to use Bourdieu in commenting on how Armah qualifies intellectuals to be his leaders of 'the African awakening':

> The problem does not lie where some locate[…] It is simply a matter of granting to individual *agents* who are not necessarily the subjects of their thoughts and actions the share that effectively falls to them in the preservation or transformation of structures, at one and the same time, of returning to them the responsibility they unknowingly assume when, in letting themselves be guided by unconsciouses we may justifiably call *alienated*, since they are but internalized externality, they agree to make themselves the apparent subject of actions that have the structure as their subject.[1]

The distance that separates Armah's characters who assume leading positions in society from the real exigencies of the historical moment seriously questions the intended exemplariness from these characters. When the story only fairly explores the presumed contexts it claims to reflect, there cannot be an in-depth debate over cultural renaissance. This lack seems to be attributed to the writer's hesitation about being actively engaged with the real, not the rhetorical, side of the cultural battle.

In reflecting on Adorno's note in the epigraph above, readers are reminded that literary writers are not expected to resolve their communities' cultural problems. On the contrary, Armah's insights as a writer should emphasize the ways in which he objectively renders the complexity of identity formation and the ways in which he accommodates Africa's present crisis. In this sense and despite his positive outlook, Armah's dwelling on carefully chosen symbols for the articulation of his African renaissance project raises some reservations. Stressing *Ma'at* as a leveling factor only discredits perhaps Armah's argument about the egalitarian nature of the ancient Egyptian society. As recent research has shown, a gulf had most of the time separated the ideal from the practical and real, even back in kemetic times. As we have discussed in the early part of Chapter Five, the Egyptological materials outlined in Armah's last two works are not put to great advantage. Instead of conceiving of the world in terms of the myth of Isis and Osiris, one instead could more effectively bring into play the myth of Hathor. For the myth of Isis and Osiris itself complains of some patriarchal overtones, since it is after all mainly a story of a woman's attempt at escaping the throes of male's dominance and injustice. More egalitarian venues and perhaps the one that would offer an entirely new and striking set of role models and perspectives would be an exploration

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *State Nobility*. Trans. Lauretta C. Clough (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1997), p. 29 (Emphasis in the original)

of the myth of Hathor. As a feminine goddess, she has a unique position among other Egyptian pantheon and indeed could be examined effectively to arrive at a corrective moral tool of checks and balances.

The characterization of the man, Baako and Modin as individuals alienated from their post-colonial contexts like some foreign people visiting Ghana and Africa induces important questions whether these intellectuals can under any workable conditions defend and later alter societal Traditionality to advantage. The idea that these heroes' refusal, and hence distance from, their societal consumer practices as ahead of their time logically does not stand. Withdrawal into personal safety, as the early characters, like Teacher and Baako differently show, illustrate how alienated they are[2]. In dramatizing them as essentially alienated, Armah ironically (and perhaps unconsciously) disseminates the myth of 'Africa's dysfunctionality'; a factor that undermines his project of cultural awakening. The reason for their lack of action, one may deduce, remains attributable mainly to the fact that Armah's early heroes and narrators are characterized by a failure to examine their societal Traditionality. They keep processing phenomena in terms of black and white, African and western, modernity and tradition. One can only conclude that this mindset is self-defeating since perhaps the staunchest of essentialists among African thinkers, W. Abraham, admits that such a division is but an easy escape from real analysis and rational thinking. The continental identity which Armah claims to be his key formula for cultural renewal is one example about this escape from thinking about the particulars of African communities[3]. Judging from the fiction at hand, Armah's intellectuals could not realise that one kind of Traditionality of perception/postulation breeds another one of more critical and severe dimension[4]. Therefore, these characters' awareness does not reach the proportion where it can cross the divide channeled by Societal Traditionality and thus have a genuine historical

[2] Arguably Armah's position has remained the same ever since the man and Teacher in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* also display their intellection as a value in itself and satisfy their tormented consciences with some lines of Gibran's poetry: "Those who are blessed with the power/And the soaring swiftness of the eagle/and have flown before,/Let them go./I will travel slowly,/And I too will arrive." (1968: 51)

[3] Abraham thinks: "In introducing the idea of a paradigm, it is not my intention to suggest that all African cultures, or even the majority of them, share a certain identity of principles and a certain identity of detail. Every culture has its sanctions. It is these sanctions which indicate what general value statements are within that culture reasonable." W. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (1962), p. 45

[4] The same point is expressed more articulately in a panel paper of a recently held conference by Amina Mama. She argues: "identity is at best a gross simplification of self-hood, a denial and negation of the complexity and multiplicity at the roots of most African communities." She adds that the trick was deployed in academic discussion as an issue by colonial an post-colonial regimes. "That these enmities are often more imagined than real can be seen in the record of history. One might even go so far as to suggest that they have been discursively *orchestrated*, first by colonial regimes, then by subjective conservatism of post-colonial rulers, and later compounded by the duplicity of global economic institutions that deny their own agency, instead attributing responsibility to an abstraction, "market forces"". Amina Mama, "Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power in African Contexts", Discussion Paper 12, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Amina Mama, Henning Melber and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Identity and Beyond: Rethinking Africanity*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutest, Uppsala, (2001), pp. 11-13

consciousness. In the final analysis, these intellectual heroes risk appearing traditionalists who are as inhibited from conducting a positive change as the characters they decry.

Having advanced that, the critique never belittles Armah's efforts in constantly attempting to surpass European modernity. Armah's deployment of natural images, say trees, mountains and water, as shown in Chapter Three, is quite pertinent for his identity quest. For very probably, these images, being part of the entire Egyptian pantheon and myth, denote a condition of trying to reinvent oneself according to the precepts of the cosmos. In Armah's opinion, conditions can be ideal if one faces up to the challenges of development in present day Africa while one is ontologically anchored in ancient Egypt. In this connection, water embeds a matrix that identifies the inhabitants of Africa with the physical space as well a mythical store of ancient Egypt. Egyptian hieroglyphs, like the griots' memory, seem endowed with the possibility to offer a different story, actively propelling Africans to attend to their present needs by learning about who they are and the place where they come from. With water functioning as a principle image, the scripts also promise to fulfil the intellectuals' obligations of keeping critical in order to adopt that self-absorption to changing times. By knowing that they are conceived out of the struggle between the forces of shifting waters, good and evil, Osiris and Seth, Africans can simply free themselves from Orientalism and that abject perception that they ought to get Americanized or Europeanized in order to feel civilized, with equal share in the bounties of the modern world. Goodness prevails and Osiris wins the task of making fellow Egyptians prospered again when Africans' self-definition flows freely, like water, between their masculine and feminine attributions. In one word, Armah's heroes and heroines incite his Africans to reflect on the 'spirit within' and the strongly anti-authoritarian, pro-feminine that existed and was intentionally marginalized and shoved aside as heresy by history's 'winners'.

In line with what this thesis has been trying to demonstrate, Armah’s intention has always been an attempt at providing a perspective on where Africans as a people among peoples have been and where they are, and to suggest viable channels as to where they can be heading for. That perspective offers not a program, though there are multiple instances when we have this false impression, but a vision for the future. Indeed, he does not denounce the past as much as he consciously tries to convince readers to understand the complexities that underlie the past. Above all, his fiction can be read as an earnest plea for the reconsideration of Africa’s own image, of what it thinks it is and can be. With a keen eye on present life—however problematic it may look—Africans have slowly approached a way of thinking that allows them to survive and reach a certain degree of happiness.

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الملخص العربي The Arabic Abstract

نتطـــرق في هذه الرسالـــة لموضوع الهوية و دورهـــا في التنميـــة من خلال دراســـة معمقـــة للروايـات السبعـــة للكاتـــب الغـاني: **أي كـواي آرمـا**. هـذا الأخيـر و مـن خـلال نصوصـــه يطـــرح مشـــروع نهضـــوي للقـارة السمـــراء عبـــر دراســة و تمعـــن التاريخ القـــديم، إذ انه يحـــلل الواقـــع التعيـس على انـه نتـــاج مجموعـــة من القيـــم كالسعـــي من اجل الفـــائدة و الربـح السريعيـــن، سطـــوة الرجـــل على المرأة، الحـــروب و التوسع من اجل الثـــروة.

هـــذه القيـم يرجعهـــا الكـاتـب على أنهـــا نتـــاج تأثـــر الأفـارقـــة بمنـظومـــة القيـم الغـربيـــة و التـي هـي بـــدورها نتيجـــة الإرث الإغـريقي و الرومـاني في الثقـافـة الغربيـة الحديثـة.

هـذه الأخيـرة أنتجـت بدورهـا التوسـع الاستعماري و استغـلال ثـروات الشعـوب عبر استعمال نظـم حكـم فـاسدة و متسلطـــة في الفتـرة التي تلت الحقبة الاستعمارية.

من خـلال هذا التحـليل، يستنتـتج آرما أن الحل يكمن في إعـادة تعريف الذات الإفـريقية ، و هذا من خـلال استنبـاط مجموعـة قيم بديلـة تكون عـادلة و رحيمـة.

مجموعـة القيم البديلة هاته يرسم معالمها آرما في روايتيه الأخيرتين خصوصا ***Osiris Rising*** و ***KMT*** عبر العـودة للإرث المصـري القديـم للحضـــارة الإفريقيـــة ، هنـاك يزيل آرما الغبـار عن معنـى جديـد لمفهـــوم الـرب، مفهـــوم العدالـة و مفهـوم العـائلـة و دور المرأة.

كل هـذه المفاهيـــم الثـــلاثة هـي ايجابيـــة و نظريـا قـــادرة على صياغـــة ثقافـــة بنـاءة تسـاعـد في صناعـة النهضـــة المنشـــودة. لكـــن عند العـــودة للـــواقع التعيس للقارة و سكانها نصـطدم بمشكلـــة كيفيـــة تطبيـــق مجموعـة القيـم الجديـــدة هاتـــه .

آرما يقـــر أن المـنظومـــة التعليميـــة المـــوروثة عن الاستعمـــار هـي المســـؤولـــة عـن الواقـــع الأليـــم، لكـــن بـــدلا عن تحديـــد الأسبـــاب الحقيقيـــة للتخلـــف و معاينـة المشكـــل الرئيسي ، يعمـــد آرما إلـى مهاجمـة النظـــام التعليمـــي الغربـــي كليـــة، هكـذا و بـــدون تحليل حقيقـــي للأسبـــاب.

في الأخيـر نقـر بان مشـــروع آرمـــا الثقافـــي هو جـــد ثري و جـــدي لكنـــه يبقـــى عاجـــز عن تصـــور كفيـــل بتغيـــر جـــذري فـــي القـارة السمراء.

هـــذه النقطـــة السلبيـــة لا تقـلل من قيمـــة المواضيـــع ولا المشـــاريع التـي يحـاول آرما التعبيـــر عنهـــا و إيجـــاد حـــلول لها.