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Abstract

In 1967 an article decrying the absence of an ideology which could facilitate Africa's decolonization appeared in the Paris-based influential journal of black studies, *Presence Africaine*, and its young author Ayi Kwei Annab, then twenty-eight years old, cited Senghor's Negritude as an artistic statement which reflects the political leader's inferiority complexes, his slave mentality. Negritude cannot lead Africa to freedom, he declared, and described it as 'the flight from the classical Cartesian big white father France into the warm, dark, sensuous embrace of Africa, into the receiving uterus of despised Africa'.¹ Negritude, Armah added in the same article, is a wooden attempt to perpetuate western assumptions and stereotypes in reverse because 'the image of Africa available to Senghor is obtained through the agency of white men's eyes, the eyes of anthropologists and ethnologists, the slummers of imperialism'. Impatience and youthful exuberance could be discerned in this article but, twenty years after, in 1987, Armah still persisted in his outright condemnation of Negritude, even though in between no less than five novels, six short stories, a poem and a number of essays have poured from his pen, all of which, as I will show, together substantially resembles Senghor's work in tone, intention and achievement.

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In 1967 an article decrying the absence of an ideology which could facilitate Africa's decolonization appeared in the Paris-based influential journal of black studies, *Présence Africaine*, and its young author Ayi Kwei Armah, then twenty-eight years old, cited Senghor's Negritude as an artistic statement which reflects the political leader's inferiority complexes, his slave mentality. Negritude cannot lead Africa to freedom, he declared, and described it as 'the flight from the classical Cartesian big white father France into the warm, dark, sensuous embrace of Africa, into the receiving uterus of despised Africa'.¹ Negritude, Armah added in the same article, is a wooden attempt to perpetuate western assumptions and stereotypes in reverse because 'the image of Africa available to Senghor is obtained through the agency of white men's eyes, the eyes of anthropologists and ethnologists, the slummers of imperialism'. Impatience and youthful exuberance could be discerned in this article but, twenty years after, in 1987, Armah still persisted in his outright condemnation of Negritude, even though in between no less than five novels, six short stories, a poem and a number of essays have poured from his pen, all of which, as I will show, together substantially resembles Senghor's work in tone, intention and achievement.²

In the 1987 article Armah reinforced his original conviction about the irrelevance of Negritude to the modern needs of Africans, arguing that 'Negritude is a blind artistic summary of actual relations between Europeans and Africans from about the start of the slave trade to the latest adjustment programme designed in Washington, Paris, London or Rome for adoption and implementation by an African elite that still refuses, out of sheer inertia and habit, to do its own thinking'.³ He thus joins Wole Soyinka, Lewis Nkosi and Ezekiel Mphahlele,⁴ who are also English-speaking Africans who show insensitivity to the significance of Negritude, although their own works are replete with the main features of this ideology. These features include the common aims among these writers to reassert and revive the cultural values, identity and dignity of Africans, and to glorify the ancestral achievements and beauty of Africa, through usages, images, references and symbols that are taken from African traditional life. Armah more than anyone illustrates the curious way in which the English-

speaking African writer's persistent criticism of the occasional tendency toward sloppy sloganeering and posturing in Negritude writing has tended to obscure his own reliance on the essence of the theory.

The place to begin is with the number of paradoxes in African literature in the colonial languages which Armah's work brings into focus. One of his quarrels with Senghor is that Armah considers it hypocritical for Senghor to be 'swooningly extolling the beauty of black womanhood'⁵ in poetry while Senghor is married to a white woman, and yet a similar criticism can be made against Armah, who directs his work primarily at an African audience but started publishing in some of America's most bourgeois and conservative magazines, outlets to which only a few African elite with international contacts have access. Furthermore, he wishes to be a teacher – and an artist who wants to be a teacher should be direct, open, clear and accessible – but Armah, like Okigbo and Soyinka, hides behind mystifications in what is generally regarded as his uncommitted work. Believing that communication between the artist and his readers should be through the medium of the work, Armah neither granted interviews nor gave speeches in the early phase of his career, preferring to remain a recluse. Thus, although he addresses himself primarily through an African sensibility,⁶ some of his mannerisms smack of the attitudes of decadent western artists, such as James Joyce and William Faulkner, with whom Armah has often been compared. Not until recently, partly in response to adverse criticism, has Armah begun to write more openly, stripping his work of the old veneer of Obfuscation.

It is important to point out right away that while Armah shares with Senghor the ideal of restoring the lost African dignity, he was able to initially transcend the romanticism which constantly forms a major limitation in Senghor's work. This is an achievement which owes more to the social and historical conditions that inform his early writing, rather than the individuality of creative genius, for progressively, Armah finds himself increasingly trapped in a situation where he has to ultimately fall back on the Senghorian mystique. Born in 1939 in Takoradi Ghana, Armah witnessed as he grew up the cultural confusion engendered by the colonial experience. After his primary school education, secondary school and sixth form education at Achimota, he worked for eight months as a Radio Ghana script writer, producer and announcer before leaving for America in 1959. When Armah started writing upon returning to Ghana in 1964, the phase of colonialism in which the various European colonial powers physically obtained political and economic domination over the territories they invaded, save for Southern Africa, had virtually ended in Africa, although it had been replaced by its new form called neo-colonialism. This new evil formed the issue to which Armah directed his writing; he no longer felt called upon to paint a picture of traditional African society in the Senghorian, glamourized perspective, as opposed to that presented by the European which denied the African tradition any form of dignity.

Camara Laye, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi and a host of other African writers had together with Senghor shown all that in the early phases of their work.⁷ A matter of greater urgency was the need to discuss the fact that political independence, far from ending the problems of colonialism, was in fact intensifying these problems. The African leaders who took over from the European masters simply put on the robes of their predecessors and then marched in their footprints, thus emerging as the new colonialists. Not only were the structures that facilitated colonial subjugation and exploitation left intact or fortified; infected by European materialism, the leaders became wild in their drive to acquire the luxury goods of Europe, such as cars, refrigerators and European style houses. Corruption became pervasive. The leaders ran away from the responsibility of good government to alleviate the hardship of the majority, and threw the societies into chaos, giving the new generation of African writers material for their work. Armah belongs to this generation. 'There was nothing at home so unexpected as to shock him', Armah said. When he started writing Armah was rather in 'the position of a spore which, having finally accepted its destiny as a fungus, still wonders if it might produce Penicillin'.⁸ All his writing is conceived in such therapeutic terms, as an attempt to heal the wounds of colonialism, to lead Africa to freedom.

His international fame was established in 1968 with the publication of his first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*,⁹ although Armah had made his debut with 'Contact',¹⁰ as a short story writer. Moved by the novel's power Eustace Palmer has remarked: 'Even if Ayi Kwei Armah had not written a second novel' he would still have to be mentioned in any discussion of the African novel.¹¹ Overnight, Armah became a sensation and a growing body of commentary started to develop around his work. While the quality of this novel, and of the subsequent ones, was very high, ironically the criticism has been largely obtuse.¹² Glossing over the main concern of the novel to assert traditional values, most critics have been content to merely level charges of racism,¹³ or misanthropic neurosis,¹⁴ mischievous intent and slavish imitativeness¹⁵ against Armah, although more careful attention to the author's in-forming vision,¹⁶ has proved to the more perceptive ones among them that Armah shocks Africans with the squalor around them primarily to force the people to revitalize the more healthy aspects of their values.¹⁷

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born has remained the most vivid and vitriolic attack on those squalid interests that have led to the betrayal of the independence dreams of the underprivileged Africans. The impact of the novel derives from the consistency with which Armah uses the quest motif to present Africa's post-independence maladies through the experiences of a particular African country. The action of the novel is woven around the protagonist, the man, a vehicle through whom the disorder, filth and irresponsibility in Ghana are examined. The narrator's periscope over-view of Accra lays bare the national psychology with regard to the

corrupt practices taking place between drivers and conductors of public transport and their police collaborators on the roads; the neglected and crumbling offices, such as the Railway administration block; the filthy streets and toilets in Ghana. There is a naked contrast between the opulent life style of a few elite and the stark poverty of the underprivileged. Attributing the deterioration of the national life of Ghanaians to the erosion of traditional values which are embodied in the man, the author brings the man to life as symbol of traditional altruism, discipline, humanism, communalism and industry,¹⁸ and so as both an individual and a pious ideal on whom the other members of society are asked to model themselves. Although considered a fool and despised by his associates because he refused to accept bribes and to use his connections among his classmates in highly placed positions to enrich himself, the man remains committed to honesty until his position is vindicated by a military coup which topples the civilian regime. In the novel the author's linguistic dexterity and high moral tone are already evident and he comes close to the oral tradition in his didacticism, in his exploration of the communal consciousness of Africans and in his apt use of allegory, anecdote and symbolism.

In all essentials the next novel, *Fragments* (1970), and the stories 'Asemka' (1966), 'An African Fable' (1968), 'Yaw Manu's Charm' (1968) and 'The offal kind' (1969) have followed the same didactic and liberal-humanist pattern, although the works are certainly not mere preparatory exercises for the radical novels to follow. The critic who describes *Fragments* as 'the story of Baako, a young man of 25',¹⁹ who returns to Ghana after five years of studies overseas only to be frustrated in his country, is wrong. True, the novel contains a good measure of the inner drama of the anguish of the idealistic young man who wants to be a producer in a society that has no room for such ideals. As with the man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the action of *Fragments* is centred around Baako. Nevertheless, like the preceding novel, *Fragments* is really about African societies, about the need for Africans to abandon unhealthy social habits and return to traditional industry, simplicity and integrity in order to carry their society forward. Thus Armah directs a fair measure of his satiric venom at the elite who should lead this programme but as yet are far from attaining the expected standard. The Director of Ghanavision, where Baako works, regards his work as an opportunity he has won to ingratiate himself with the authority for his own self-advancement to the detriment of the nation. On the other hand Baako's work seeks to sensitize the people through films based on the experience of the local people. Thus Asante-Smith's opposition to Baako's work derives from the commitment of the two personalities to different systems of values. In the story 'Yaw Manu's Charm'²⁰ Armah attributes the self-serving sychophancy involved in the attitude of the elite to the failings of the educational system inherited from the colonial era, a system which encourages individuals to

regard the acquisition of a western certificate as a tool for self-advancement rather than a tool for national development. Yaw Manu, the protagonist in the story, is representative of the average African. Basically honest and hard working, the bank clerk in a colonial set up is eventually forced to abandon all morals, resort to juju, examination malpractices and finally stealing from his employer in order to pass the Cambridge examination which he has repeatedly failed, all in a bid to meet society's requirement for social advancement. The integrity of the average African is perverted by institutionalized false values.

The notion of African culture which Armah seeks to rehabilitate is articulated in a recent article entitled 'The Festival Syndrome',²¹ which has substantially resolved the inconsistencies in his previous thinking expressed in 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific'.²² 'The most sensible demonstration of cultural awareness,' he explains in 'The Festival Syndrome', 'would be to use available resources' to ensure that Africans are able to contain the scourge of drought, famine and poverty ravaging their continent. 'Culture is a process, not an event', such as FESTAC, which Armah describes as 'wasteful demonstrations of intellectual bankruptcy': 'The development of culture depends on a steady, sustained series of supportive activities whose primary quality is not a spectacular extravaganza but a calm continuity.' Armah cites the examples of the Chinese, the Japanese, Americans and Europeans as people who rely on their culture to improve their daily lives, through their 'publishing houses, television stations and movie industries working full time to promote their culture on the domestic level, but also to export it'. Africans should look inward to themselves, improve their inventiveness, management strategies, shun corruption and regain their self-reliance.²³ This is the view of self-reliance that lies behind the objectives of Baako, the central figure in *Fragments*; the author does not deny that westerners and Africans can learn from each other's civilizations, but laments that in Africa's relationship with the West only the evil aspects of western civilization seem to be magnified.

One advantage the short story medium has over the novel is urgency. 'Asemka' (1966) is of particular interest in that it is cast in the form of an allegory, a technique which looks forward to *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, and shows the working relationship Armah establishes between the short story form and the novel. 'Asemka' tells of the experiences of Mr Ainoo, of his life as an adult. He works as a clerk in the city and has abandoned his traditions in favour of middle-class western values. The narrator in *Asemka*, like Naana who champions tradition in *Fragments*, is an old woman who is critical of the culturally dislocated Ainoo. Even more than *Fragments*, 'Asemka' relies on techniques of traditional story telling for its support. The narrator ascribes Mr Ainoo's 'strange' attitude to pride, a cultural affliction rather than an idiosyncrasy. He is the new African brought up in the ways of western individualism,

arrogance and independence; and he is scornful of communal solidarity, humility and respect for elders, qualities which are cherished by Africans.

'An African Fable' (1968) further dramatizes the insensitivity of the black elite and demonstrates why the elite cannot be entrusted with the moral health of the nation. The imagery in 'An African Fable', even more than in 'Asemka', is sustained, as in the novels. In this macabre story of bestiality, the African elite, represented by an inexperienced warrior, sets out on a quest for leadership which turns out to be an adventure for self-enrichment. The warrior journeys across Africa, 'down through the lands of the middle' into 'the moistness of the forest land itself'²⁴ in the south. The warrior's inability to resist the human and material resources of Africa is a metaphor for the greed of the elite, for as in Senghor's 'Black woman',²⁵ Armah embodies Africa in the image of a woman; the quest of the warrior leads to his confrontation with colonialism, symbolized in the sexual encounter between the woman (Africa) and the rapist (the West) but, paradoxically, the warrior drives the first colonialist away and then becomes the new rapist.

When we get to 'The offal kind' (1969) we are struck by a dimension of anguish which is more disturbing because it is a human one. In the story, as in Achebe's 'Vengeful Creditor',²⁶ a young girl, Araba, is given away by her poor mother to a powerful town lady: 'She was going to be the lady's household help, and if she was good and learned everything there was to learn, she would perhaps be a lady herself one day, perhaps.'²⁷ As in Achebe's story, the vague promise is never fulfilled. While Achebe focuses on the consequences of the attempt by Veronica, the ten-year-old protagonist, to make Mr and Mrs Emenike pay for failing to fulfil their promise to send her to school after serving them well, Armah stresses Araba's consequent debasement. Over-worked, exploited, starved and denied freedom, Araba is ultimately forced into prostitution where she is further exposed to double-faced exploitation, at the hands of men, and at the hands of Elizabeth, a retired prostitute who becomes Araba's new mistress. In vain, Armah stresses that Araba is not basically deficient, she possesses the elemental emotions clamouring for self-reliance. Instead of seizing the opportunity to make a frontal attack aimed at destroying the structures which legitimize Araba's inequality, the author asks the likes of Araba to take their destiny in their own hands and never allow themselves to be duped again. This liberal/ humanist approach contrasts with Ousmane's, for example, in 'Black girl',²⁸ where Ousmane casts a glance at such a problem as Araba faces, from a racial perspective.

In contrast to Ousmane, the direction of Armah's thinking in the early phase of his writing is that he seeks equitable distribution of the national wealth but avoids calling outright for a revolution in the orthodox Marxist sense as the best means to bring about egalitarianism. Armah calls for a change of conscience among the elite, whom he believes capable of reform, in order to promote a healthy social and economic environment in Africa.

The weakest point about his politics, which the later works, fortunately, correct, lies in Armah's belief that the elite must eschew greed, shun imported western cultural artefacts, political institutions, neo-colonial economic structures and imported mode of conduct, and revitalize African values. He asks the underprivileged masses to resist their exploitation and the excesses of the elite. These are unrealistic requests which ignore the fact that the elite lack the vision and will to reform themselves and the exploited people cannot change their situation without revolt.

Why Are We So Blest? (1972) marks a new phase in Armah's writing, in which he breaks away from the liberal and gradualistic approach to the issue of decolonization. Advancing the battle which the author initiated in his earlier work against the erosion of African values by the West, *Why Are We So Blest?* demonstrates the manner in which western education as an agent of neo-colonialism turns Africans into citizens who are alienated from their roots but are not given the status of white men due to white racism. These Africans, who revolt against the western values they have absorbed, see themselves as the liberators of their people from colonialism and are often looked up to by their people as saviours. However, the violence of westerners has deprived these Africans of dignity and self-assertion and the Africans cannot recover their roots. Western violence is heightened by sexual exploitation, in which western women exploit myths of the sexual superiority of Africans. These myths are new versions of the older myths of Africans as savages; and so the dream of inter-racial harmony recedes, as Africans continue to be victims of white racist stereotyping. In Fanonian terms, Armah advocates decolonization by violent means if necessary but disqualifies western-educated Africans from the struggle which they lack the ability and orientation to lead.

Two Thousand Seasons (1973) and *The Healers* (1978) are the immediate artistic realization of the radical shift in the continuing modification of Armah's thinking.

Significantly 'the back to Africa' theme of the novels had been anticipated earlier on in 'Contact', which appeared in 1965, a year after Armah's return from the United States of America, with the memory of America still fresh in his mind. The story concerns itself with the experiences of Lowell, a black American who can neither feel at home in white society, to which history has condemned him, nor in Africa, from where he has been severed. Lowell's predicament, due to being caught between two antithetical cultures, is used to illustrate the fate of other Americans of African descent. As with most other stories, 'Contact' is simultaneously naturalistic and symbolical. It is winter in America where Kobina, an African college student, attends a party at Lowell's apartment, to reach out for understanding with others but, as it turns out, effective communication, especially between blacks and whites, is often elusive. Carin, a white girl who desires to live with Africans, is satirized as a liberal who, like Aimee Reitsch in *Why Are We So Blest?*, feels guilty at being treated as a superior

because she is white and so is involved in an exercise in expiation of her racial guilt which also gives her some gratification. In fact, Carin cuts the figure of a ludicrous, naive and escapist person and her longing for identification with black people is simply academic and superficial. The psychosis of Kobina, due to white racism, pales into insignificance in comparison with the predicament of Lowell, who has become disoriented to an extent that he not only looks down upon his ancestry but peddles standard Euro-American myths about Africa. Armah is convinced that true partnership between blacks and whites is not attainable since whites are unwilling to dispel their prejudice and arrogance, attitudes which provoke rather than suppress animosity.

Opposing the stand of activists such as Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, who argue in their book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, that black people must 'create power bases, of strength, from which black people can press to change local or nation-wide patterns of oppression',²⁹ if they are unable to take over completely, as in America, Armah asks black people in America to return to Africa spiritually and physically. Dispirited by white racism, Armah is convinced that, while the situation in Africa is far from perfect, black Americans certainly have better prospects in Africa, their ancestral land. And although on the surface Armah's request, which echoes the teachings of the Black Muslim Movements of the sixties spearheaded by the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, may seem ridiculous and impractical, the Israelis by airlifting thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1985 have demonstrated how Africans, too, can be re-united with the people of their racial origin in America.

An important achievement of *Two Thousand Seasons* is the ability to probe beyond the confusion and pain, and the surface of contemporary Africa. Written together with his next novel, *The Healers*, while Armah was living in Tanzania from August 1970 to May 1976, both novels demonstrate the influence of Nyerere's ujamaa or socialism, especially with regard to the open attack on feudalism and all forms of inequality in society; and the explicitness with which the author espouses the traditional values to which he urges the return of Africans. These are traditional 'reciprocity', 'wholeness', hospitality and creativity which have been eroded by colonialism. Armah published the novels in the East African Publishing House, 'an African outfit based in Nairobi', staffed mainly by Africans, as part of his effort to 'effectively break out of the colonialist stranglehold of western publishers such as the Heinemann African writers series', to reach his 'large African audience' directly.³⁰

By delving into Africa's past the author is able to trace the root of the problems facing Africa to the first and the continuing encounter with the tormenting colonizing Arab and European powers. Africans were originally one people, who lived communally and were self-sufficient; they have a culture that distinguishes them from Europeans and Christians, Arabs and Moslems. Armah now feels the need to explicitly expose his

negritude, feels the necessity to counter all forms of imperialist distortion of African history in order to establish the authentic African personality:

We have not found that lying trick to our taste, the trick of making up sure knowledge of things possible to think of, things possible to wonder about but impossible to know in any such ultimate way. We are not stunted in spirit, we are not Europeans, we are not christians that we should invent fables a child would laugh at and harden our eyes to preach them daylight and deep night as truth. We are not so warped in soul, we are not Arabs, we are not muslims to fabricate a desert god chanting madness in the wilderness and call our creature creator. That is not our way.³¹

Two Thousand Seasons, like Ouloguem's *Bound to Violence*, is of particular interest in its handling of the 'Arab factor' in African history. Armah debunks false notions of African history and re-writes it from a Pan-Africanist perspective, bringing into sharp focus the predatory and destructive role Arabs played when they infiltrated into the egalitarian African society where, taking advantage of certain weaknesses in the set up, such as African hospitality, they gained a foothold in Africa. Some short-sighted Africans who allied with the Arabs to impose a feudal structure on Africans are exposed. And Armah writes that the more permanent harm caused by the Arab invasion is the religious division that develops in the community.

The resistance by a group of African women to their sexual exploitation by Arab debauchers is exemplary. The women take cognizance of the fact that the Arab invaders could not have gained access to themselves without the connivance of a handful of African stooges, the askaris or zombies, who procure African women for the Arabs to engage in sexual orgies with them. Thus when the women stage a revolt, in the tradition of Ousmane's women in *God's Bits of Wood*, they show greater intelligence than their enemy and defeat them with a good measure of violence. When it is forgotten that the violence of the women has been necessitated by the oppressors' unremitting application of force, coercion and violence to brutalize and exploit their subjects, the significance of the revolt of the women will be lost and an impression will be formed that Armah professes violence for its own sake, as a result of which 'the humane sensibility tends to recoil a little'.³² In fact, it should be remembered that Armah's emphasis is on the team work which the women display in their struggle against exploitation. This is the communal spirit the writer would want to see restored in Africa; the author does not regard the elimination of the enemy as an end in itself.

Armah's ideal society is gleaned from African history, from myth and legend and also conceived from a Pan-Africanist perspective. Although Armah remains faithful in this novel to the reality of colonialism and neo-colonialism which continue to bedevil Africa, his literary warfare directed against oppression has shown the way toward liberation.

In *The Healers* (1978), which marks the climax of his fictional achievement to date, Armah returns full circle to the whole question of roots, the return to African indigenous values, as a precondition for emancipation. The most political of Armah's novels to date, *The Healers* shows the way in which the thrust of his thinking has somewhat moved away from abstract moral notions of culture, even though the ultimate goal remains the restoration of the old order. The novel emphasizes the primacy of resistance to physical conquest as an antidote to imperial domination, and relies less on myth and more on history than *Two Thousand Seasons*. The disunity that rendered the powerful Asante nation of Ghana vulnerable to British imperialism is presented as a paradigm of how other black communities were undermined during the period of western imperialist incursions into the continent. Armah asks all black people to unite in their struggle for emancipation.

The success of this novel of self-reassessment results quite substantially from the way in which Armah talks through an omniscient narrator, who plays the role of a wise epic performer, drawing his inspiration from tradition in order to redirect the present. This didactic element in *The Healers* is woven around Armah's fascination with traditional life. Although the novel avoids any simplistic polarities, Esuano stands for traditional black communities experiencing the tensions of transition from communalism to colonialism, a change from a well-ordered state to chaos. Disunity is the disease afflicting black people, the antidote is unity, another major theme in the novel.

An outward sign of the structuring of *The Healers* on the short story tradition in Africa is the division into chapters of semi-independent events. The internal link with folk tale is established by the portrait of Densu, the hero of the novel, whose exploits become indispensable to the successful outcome of the resistance to physical conquest by British imperialists. Modelled on the trickster image in folk tale, the creative, intelligent, selfless and honest achiever not only gives up obvious victories in village sporting competitions but even has occasion to risk losing his own life to save Anan, his friend, from the machinations of the corrupt local court politicians, and thereby demonstrates his abhorrence of unhealthy rivalry and injustice. He escapes a plot by the members of the court to make him a scapegoat for their criminal murder of prince Appia and links up with Damfo, a leading healer in the eastern forest where he is initiated into the healing profession and made a better person who can serve his society more efficiently.

Sadly, the revolution has not occurred on the scale Armah had envisaged for Africa. 'Half way to Nirvana', published six years later in 1984, is a crusty story which conveys Armah's attack on the elite for making a cynical, exploitative game of the liberation effort in Africa. Christian Mohamed Tumbo, who is at the centre of the action in the story, represents Africa in the Anti-Drought organization. He symbolizes Africa's

political leaders of all religious and ideological persuasions, but can also be seen specifically as an indirect reference to Oliver Tambo, leader of the African National Congress of South Africa, and thus to the leadership of the liberation movements in Africa. Christian Mohamed Tumbo attends a conference organized to combat drought in Africa. Drought is the symbol of neo-colonial domination in Africa. The charming, rotund Tumbo's eyes are like 'trapped sparks' and his cheeks are so smooth they are described as 'baby cheeks', indicating his comfort and luxurious life style.³³ So comfortable is Tumbo in his job that he is opposed to ending Africa's 'catastrophe drought' and hopes the problem will continue indefinitely. He loves conference sessions in western cities to discuss Africa's problems because he sees them as 'excellent for working up a thirst ... for the real objective of such gatherings: drinking'. The discussions, during which Tumbo sleeps, are abstract and themselves framed in equally vague language, and are going on when Tumbo experiences a nightmare in which Africa's deserts become 'forest and gardens'. As he prayed for the return of drought, 'the deserts regained their dryness' and Tumbo happily sees 'the familiar signs of famine' on the continent. Tumbo comes from a poverty-stricken background, which he would hate to return to. He was for fifteen years a poorly paid geography teacher in a secondary school in a village, whose position of respect among the villagers became eroded by growing materialism in the country. Through contacts he overcame the handicap of low qualifications and got the job with the Anti-Drought organization, which has enabled him to settle his debts and to live on the fast lane. We return full circle to the cutting intimacy of observation underlying Armah's writing; the author does not regard Tumbo as being essentially evil but upholds the idea that false political, social and economic structures are responsible for the corruption of the politician. Thus, he stresses that when the structures that endorse the false values are destroyed, the fallen leader can be redeemed. This is the vision that lies behind his sympathetic treatment of the African elite, an essential broad-mindedness that is devoid of any sense of triumphant revenge necessary for national reconciliation.

It can thus be seen that Armah's writing captures the whole gamut of the black experience and draws its force from the attempt to ingraft into English the language of traditional story-tellers, griots and dirgers to produce a new alignment of meanings, incantative patterns, repetitions, myth and images. Although he begins by idealistically looking up to the elite in Africa to bring about change for the better, he gradually comes round, as in Ngugi and Ousmane, to see Africa's destiny more realistically as lying with a community of dedicated, selfless people, whom the author asks to unite in a common onslaught against neo-colonial forces. In the senghorian fashion, while Armah highlights the qualities that distinguished traditional culture from western culture, he asks for a more synthetic attitude between Africa and the West, an attitude of mutual respect

and tolerance which will enable Africa and the West to learn from each other's civilizations. Armah's language, like Senghor's in his poetry, shows how the two cultures can be harmoniously brought together. And so claims such as Larson's, that 'Armah has gone to rather great pains to make it clear that he is writing literature first, and that the Africanness of his writing is something of less great importance',³⁴ must be seen as sweeping generalizations typifying unsubstantiated attempts to locate his work in an alien western tradition, away from the African tradition where it belongs.

NOTES

1. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?', *Présence Africaine*, 64 (1967), pp. 7-20.
2. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Battle for the Mind of Africa', *South* (August 1987), p. 62. An interesting contrast is Wole Soyinka, who dramatically revised his stand on Negritude in 1986, after receiving the Nobel prize, and drew attention to Senghor as a legitimate African aspirant for the Nobel prize in literature. See Interview, *Third World Book Review*, 2, 3 (1987), p. 7.
3. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Battle for the Mind of Africa', p. 62.
4. Wole Soyinka's better known criticism is contained in his famous remark that a tiger does not go about proclaiming its tigrity. A more detailed and penetrating discussion of Negritude is found in his book *Myth, Literature and the African World* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 126-139.
5. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?', op. cit., p. 19. Equally baffling is the fact that not even Nyerere's imagination appears to Armah at this time adequate for the task of combating neo-colonialism, hence he also dismisses ujamaa as 'the sort of simplistic formulae dispensed by the less astute religious orders'. Nkrumah's 'African Personality' is similarly scorned, although Armah's work was later to show resemblance to Nkrumah's ideas.
6. See 'Larsony or Fiction as criticism of fiction', *Asemka*, 4 (1976), pp. 1-14, where Armah writes in reply to those who accuse him of modelling his work on the work of western writers such as James Joyce: 'For the benefit of anyone curious to know where I did get the organizing idea for *Fragments* from, it grew out of a conversation with my elder brother concerning the quality of life at home.' Although influence does not necessarily deny an author claim to originality, it all too often leads to charges of plagiarism, especially against African writers, hence Armah reaches the equally extreme position of dispelling the faintest ghost of western writers from his work. See, for instance, Charles Larson, who merely stops short of invoking the ghost of plagiarism in *The Emergence of African Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 242-277.
7. See *The African Child* (Fontana/Collins, 1954); *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1958); *Arrow of God* (London: Heinemann, 1964); and *The River Between* (London: Heinemann, 1965).
8. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'One Writer's education', *West Africa* (26 August 1985), p. 1753.
9. Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (London: Heinemann, 1969). All page references after quotations in the article are to this African writers edition. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

10. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Contact', *The New African*, December 1965, pp. 244-246.
11. Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. xiii.
12. See Ode Ogede, 'Armah's Ambiguity', a paper presented to English Departmental Seminar, 1982; Ode Ogede, 'Robert Fraser's *The Novels of Armah*', a review, *African Literature Today* (forthcoming). I discuss the topic in greater detail in my 'Retrieval of African Values: A Study of the Writing of Ayi Kwei Armah', Ph.D. thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, September 1986, pp. 1-53.
13. See Bernth Lindfors, 'Armah's Histories', *African Literature Today*, 11 (1980), pp. 85-96; and Atta Britwum, 'Hero-Worshipping in the African Novel (the case of Armah and others)', *Asemka*, 3 (1977), pp. 1-7.
14. See Ben Obumsele, 'Marx, Politics and the African Novel', *Twentieth Century Studies*, 10 (1973), pp. 114-117; and Kofi Awoonor, in 'Panel on Contemporary South African Poetry', *Issue*, 6 (1976), p. 31.
15. See Chinua Achebe, 'Africa and Her Writers', in *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp. 19-25; Arthur Gakwandi, *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* (London: Heinemann, 1977), pp. 87-99; Ama Ata Aidoo, Preface to *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1969); and Charles Nnolim, 'Dialectic as Form: Pejorism in the Novels of Armah', *African Literature Today*, 10 (1979), pp. 207-223.
16. I borrow this term from Professor Mark Kinkead-Weekes, 'The Interpreters: A form of Criticism', in J. Gibbs, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Wole Soyinka* (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1980), pp. 219-238 (p. 219).
17. Prominent among these are: Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel*, *ibid.*, and *The Growth of the African Novel* (London: Heinemann, 1979); R.W. Noble, 'A Beautiful Novel', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), pp. 117-119; K. Ogungbesan, 'Symbol and Meaning in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*', *The Benin Review*, 1 (1974), pp. 59-73 and 'Simple Novels and Simplistic Criticism: The Problem of Style in the African Novel', *Umoja*, 1, 3 (1977), pp. 31-41; Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, pp. 97-112; D.S. Izevbaye, 'Armah and the "I" of the Beholder', in B. King & K. Ogungbesan, eds., *A Celebration of Black and African Writing* (Zaria and London: Ahmadu Bello University Press and Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 232-244; and E.N. Obiechina, *Review, Okike*, 1 (1971), pp. 51-53. However, all these studies, individually and collectively, are limited by a narrowness of focus: they concentrate largely on the first novel, pay scant attention to the other four novels, and ignore the short stories entirely.
18. See Moyibi Amoda, ed., *Festac Colloquium and Black World Civilization* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine), p. 193, for in-depth discussion of these values associated with Africans.
19. Robert Fraser, *The Novels of Armah* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p. 30.
20. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Yaw Manu's Charm', *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1968), pp. 89-95.
21. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'The Festival Syndrome', *West Africa* (5 April 1985), pp. 726-727.
22. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?', *op. cit.*
23. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'The Festival Syndrome', pp. 726-727.
24. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'An African Fable', *Présence Africaine*, 68, pp. 192-196. Armah pursues the image of Africa embodied in a woman who is exploited and then abandoned, in his only published poem, 'Aftermath'. See K. Awoonor and G. Adali-Morty, eds., *Messages: Poems from Ghana* (London: Heinemann, 1971), pp. 89-91.
25. J. Reed and C. Wake, eds., *Senghor: Prose and Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956).
26. Chinua Achebe, *Girls At War and other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1972), pp. 48-69.
27. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'The ofal kind', *Harper's Magazine* (January 1969), pp. 79-84.

28. Charles Larson, ed., *Modern African Stories* (Collins/Fontana, 1971).
29. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1967), p. 61.
30. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Larsony or fiction as criticism of fiction', p. 7.
31. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (London: Heinemann, 1979), p. 3. All further page references after quotations in this paper are to this edition.
32. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 111.
33. Ayi Kwei Armah, 'Halfway to Nirvana, West Africa (24 September 1984), pp. 1947-1948, (p. 1947).
34. *The Emergence of African Fiction*, p. 247.