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The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Alter)-native Route to Development

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Abstract

The paper is a critical exploration of Ayi Kwei Armah's novels with a view to analysing the author's perception of and responses to Africa's contemporary political history. Using *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and *Osiris Rising* (1995) for in-depth study, the paper stresses the trajectory of Armah's philosophical reflections on 'the trouble with Africa' as it relates to governance and development. The study is premised on a theoretical assumption that African literary arts, oral and written, are capable of generating the necessary stimuli for change. In its fictiveness, literature proffers different perspectives of existential problems and their solutions. A politically engaged novel, the type that Armah often writes, is an apt canvas for paradigmatic interactions of contending ideas and social forces.

Key terms: African Literature, Post-Colonial Literature and Development, Ayi Kwei Armah

Résumé

Cet article tente de procéder à une étude critique des romans d'Ayi Kwei Armah, dans le but d'analyser la perception de l'auteur envers l'histoire africaine politique contemporaine, ainsi que les réponses qu'il y apporte. A travers une étude approfondie de *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) et d'*Osiris Rising* (1995), cette présentation suit la trajectoire des réflexions philosophiques d'Armah relatives au «problème de l'Afrique», dans sa relation à la gouvernance et au développement. Cette étude est basée sur l'hypothèse théorique selon laquelle les arts littéraires africains, aussi bien écrits qu'oraux, sont susceptibles de stimuler le changement. A travers son aspect fictif, la littérature offre différentes perspectives des problèmes existentiels et de leurs solutions. Un roman engagé politiquement, dans le genre de ceux qu'Armah écrit, constitue un canevas

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approprié aux interactions paradigmatiques de confrontation des idées et des forces sociales.

Mots clés: Littérature africaine, littérature post-coloniale et développement, Ayi Kwei Armah

Introduction

Now we live in neocolonies called Nigeria, Botswana, Senegal, Rwanda, Tanzania, Mozambique. We'll have to work against stiff odds to turn our dismembered continent into a healing society, Africa. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising* (112).

Armah is a Ghanaian writer who currently lives at Popenguin, Senegal. From *The Beautiful Ones...* to *Fragments, Why Are We So Blest?*, *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising*, he consistently uses the medium of prose fiction to interrogate the complexity and enormity of Africa's problems. To him, colonialism was a 'post-conquest European strategy for keeping Africans usably underdeveloped and dependent' (1995: 213).

In *The Beautiful Ones*, Armah is deeply moved by the sudden collapse of the democratic experiment inaugurated at independence in many African nations. Kwame Nkrumah's project of developing Ghana along the path of socialism soon suffered a systemic setback and the 1966 military coup finally aborted the dream. In the novel, Armah presents a sober and pessimistic evaluation of Ghana's (Africa's) prospects for progress against the backdrop of instability, poverty, corruption, crude accumulation and annihilating consumption.

However, it is argued here that there is a discursive shift in the later works of the author. In content and narrative style, *Osiris Rising* concedes the possibility for Africa's development and liberation, while casting off the burden of 'otherness' imposed on it by colonialism. In this regard, Armah believes that ancient Egyptian civilisation (the oldest in the world), its history, politics and culture offer epistemic models. He contends that the source of Africa's underdevelopment is the dislocation of indigenous social formations by Euro-Arabian imperialism. That dislocation accentuates crises of development after independence. Efforts to address the problem should, therefore, begin with a constructive engagement with and not a destructive displacement of the past (as imperialism implies). He recommends a social formation that promotes partnership, co-operation, democracy and good governance. Here, self-reliant, communitarian and egalitarian principles of traditional African societies, as re-discovered by

‘the Companionship of Ankh’ in *Osiris Rising*, are important. In such a social order, individuals are bound to the collective and they derive their significance within the framework of a larger whole, the community. Armah also advocates with great clarity a system of education that has Africa as its starting point, in the study of the world—a system that truly seeks to liberate African intelligence to work for the benefit of the continent.

Armah’s novels interrogate the nature and causes of, and possible solutions to, the myriad of problems confronting Africa. His works and those of other writers like Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Sembene Ousmane, Bessie Head, Oswald Mtshali and Masizi Kunene deserve critical attention from social researchers. These writers, like nationalists, politicians and scholars, have shown an abiding concern with the condition of Africa before, during and after colonialism. Their literary creations need to be considered along with other modes of social inquiry in a bid to achieve a holistic understanding of the root of the continent’s unending crises. They are also necessary in the task of re-making Africa.

From a wide range of theoretical perspectives, scholars have interrogated the challenges of governance and development in contemporary Africa. Since the 1950s, the quest of African nations for political liberation and socioeconomic transformation has remained at the fore of discourse among politicians, social researchers and intellectuals—a group to which creative writers belong. Expectedly, from dependency theory to Marxism, from a functionalist approach to modernisation and post-modern options, prescriptions for the continent’s development are as varied as the perceived symptoms of its ailment. However, there seems to be a measure of agreement about the negative impact of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trade, Euro-Arabian domination as well as neo-colonialism, on Africa’s well-being (Fanon 1969; Césaire 1972; Diop 1978; Rodney 1982; Mudimbe 1988, 1994; Mazrui 1984, 2005). For instance, regarding Africa’s colonial experience, Césaire once remarked:

I am talking of societies drained of their essence and life, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out (1972: 21-22).

A significant part of the discourse is the construction of the African identity in the colonialists’ consciousness as the ‘other’. As Mazrui rightly submits, African societies are marked by ‘conquerability, docility, malleability, and fundamental inferiority’ (2005: 69). Unfortunately, political independence has not resulted in the much desired freedom and transformation. The elite, who took over power from the colonialists, rather than dismantling

colonial structures of social injustice and oppression merely preserve them for opportunistic ends. Thus, the post-independence years in many ex-colonies of Africa are characterised by indices of underdevelopment: economic dependency, huge local and foreign debts, ethno-religious violence, mass unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, electoral fraud, corruption, inadequate or dysfunctional infrastructures and so on. Neo-colonialism concentrates political and economic power not in the hands of the people but in the hands of a minority elite whose loyalty seems to be more toward the advanced nations of Europe/America and the Bretton Woods institutions (Ngugi 1993).

Ayi Kwei Armah is one writer who has grappled with the trajectory of the continent's history. Whether in his prose narratives or polemical essays, Armah offers deep philosophical reflections on 'the trouble with Africa', then and now. He consistently engages what he calls the pet assumption of the West: 'Africa is inferior; the West is Superior' (1978: 11), while not sparing the misrule of indigenous elites. His works are biographical, sociological, political, historical and ideological in orientation. From *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to *Fragments, Why are We So Blest?*, *Two Thousand Seasons*, *The Healers* and *Osiris Rising*, the readers are presented with a canvas for the paradigmatic interaction of contending ideas and possibilities about African development. Development to him goes beyond industrialisation, urbanisation, and military prowess. It also includes a social system that promotes equality, freedom, secularity, self-reliance, enlightenment and enhanced self worth.

He identifies several factors responsible for underdevelopment. First is the adoption of a sociopolitical formation that is not totally free, but tied to and dependent on Europe and America. Second is an exploitative economic system superintended by the so-called developed nations of the world, with the collaboration of African ruling elites. Linked with this is a third factor, the character of the elite—parochial, self-centred, committed to the accumulation of material possessions rather than general well-being. The fourth is a bureaucracy that ironically clogs the wheels of genuine development, marked by inefficiency, inconsistency, nepotism and sloth. The last factor is a Western-oriented educational system that is not properly connected with indigenous value systems, and hence generating alienation.

Born in 1939 in Takoradi, Ghana, Armah was educated at Achimota College. He later studied Sociology at Harvard University. He worked as a teacher in Ghana, Tanzania, Lesotho and the United State of America. He also worked as a journalist in Algeria, Mexico and Paris. Since 1982,

he has been living in Popenguine near Dakar in Senegal. After a battle against what he denounced as 'exploitation' by Heinemann, the multi-national publisher of his first three novels, he has been working with a publishing co-operative, Per Ankh.¹

This essay studies Armah's novels with a view to emphasising his notion of and vision for Africa. What are the problems confronting contemporary Africa? When and how can Africa be truly free from external domination? How can the continent put behind it the 'scar of conquest'? These are fundamental questions whose answers can be gleaned from his novels. In this discussion, the focus is on two novels: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (hereafter referred to as *The Beautiful Ones*) and *Osiris Rising*.

New Style, Old Dance: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*

Armah's first novel—*The Beautiful Ones*—depicts with bewildering harshness post-independence Ghanaian society. The temporal setting coincides with the twilight of Kwame Nkrumah's administration. The work was in part motivated by the author's disappointment with the sudden collapse of the socialist democratic ideal inaugurated at independence in 1957, although the problem was not peculiar to Ghana.² The February 24, 1966 coup led by Colonel Kotoka and Major Afrifa finally got rid of the administration of Nkrumah. But the new order pushed the society further away from the precincts of 'uhuru'. It only achieved 'a change of embezzlers and a change of hunters and the hunted' (162).

Nkrumah's regime was like the public waste disposal receptacle (depicted in the novel), which holds much promise in its 'gleaming whiteness' when it was first installed. But it is soon overwhelmed by moral filth and decadence.³ Hence, the socialist ideals upon which independence was erected 'were no longer decipherable' (7).

Besides, the regime is also imaged in the story of Rama Krishna, a Ghanaian who adopts the strange name to avoid 'the horrible threat of decay'. His ascetic vegetarian life notwithstanding, 'it was of consumption that he died, so very young, but already his body inside had undergone far more decay than any living body', (48) writes Armah. It is in the same vein that one can interpret the picture of the old man child in its grey old age shown by Aboliga the frog. The man child has all the features of a human baby and within seven years it has completed the cycle from infancy to adulthood, to old age and natural death. 'The manchild looked more irretrievably old, far more thoroughly decayed than any ordinary old man could ever have looked' (63). Indeed, a sense of revolution gone

awry captured in the novel recalls the end of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where things are so mixed up, and all differences deleted, that it is difficult to distinguish between the pigs and the men whom they displace through the revolution.

The harsh economic climate which fuels corruption in the society also results in a low sense of self-worth among the people as paradoxically expressed in a writing on the toilet wall: 'PRAY FOR DETENTION/JAILMAN CHOP FREE' (106). There is a collapse of the distinction between freedom and bondage in this newly independent nation. Armah captures his pessimism through the Teacher, a character who has a clear perception of the origin and nature of the nation's crises:

Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that is all. After a youth spent fighting the whiteman, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle? (92).

The blind aping of Western ways, which Fela Anikulapo-Kuti calls the 'colonial mentality', is exemplified not only in the consumption of foreign goods with a parallel contempt for locally made ones, but also in individual identities: Mills-Hayford, Plange-Bannerman, Attoh White, Kuntu-Blankson, Joseph and Estella Koomson, Fetengson (to whom we can add from *Fragments* the figures of Asante Smith, Henry Robert Hudson Brempong and Charles Winston Churchill Kessie). It is as if the whole essence of independence is not to dismantle the colonial structure, but to push a few black men closer to the former colonial masters (126).

In its style of narration, characterisation and setting, *The Beautiful Ones* does not present a sequentially ordered story of a protagonist whose life affects the course of events in the universe of the novel. Causality as narrative principle is displaced for episodicity. In fact, much of the narration takes place in the interiority of the protagonist, the man and his friend, the Teacher.

Armah wraps in symbols and metaphors a nation that is firmly, almost irretrievably, entangled in the web of neo-colonial dependence, where corruption becomes infectious. Examples of such symbols include the banister at the Railway administration building, the public lavatory, the toilet in the man's house and the *chichidodo*. The untimely decay is further shown through the interconnections of opposites—light and darkness, gleam and gloom, newness and decay, sameness and difference.

The preponderance of those who participate in the popular game of graft informs the author's gloomy apprehension of reality. They include

the bus conductor at the beginning of the novel, Amankwa the timber contractor, the space allocation clerk, the driver of the bus on the way to Cape Coast who offers a bribe to the police, the driver of the bus at the end of the novel, the landlord who is a party loyalist, Zaccharias Lagos, Abednego Yamoah and Koomson.

The man is a sort of allegorical figure who hovers indistinctly in the realm of familiar reality. He feels completely apart from all that takes place around him, more often seen on the road, going to work, returning home, visiting the Teacher or the Koomsons. His motivation for movement is ironically not so much a striving to make things better, but a psychological response to failure 'that would not let him rest in peace' (46). His life shows how Herculean a task it is to steer clear of corruption in a society with distorted social values. Essentially, he is a one-dimensional character who is not potent enough to change things around him. The only change observed in him is in the direction of deep cynicism, evident in his compromise. The man who rejects the offer of a bribe from Amankwa the timber contractor not only aids the escape of a corrupt minister from the hands of the law, but also asks the boatman to increase the bribe being offered to the night watchman who is standing in the way of a timely escape of Koomson: 'give it to him, if there's another one' (176).

The novel begins with the man going to work at dawn in a decrepit old bus. For dirtying the bus with saliva, the bus conductor insults him. His movement from the bus stop to his office at the Railway Administration offers snapshots of physical and moral decadence—individual and collective—the banister, the ceiling fan. Whatever still retains some physical allure like the Atlantic Caprice is connected with rot.

At the office, the man exemplifies the drab life of the Ghanaian bureaucrat. Poorly paid workers trudge from one brief moment of prosperity to long days of penury (passion week). To make up, they create opportunities to extract reward, using their offices. The public officer shirks his responsibility or delays its performance. That creates a condition for desperation, which the officer explores to advantage. That is the situation when Amankwa approaches the man to get his timber transported from the bush for a reward. The man declines the offer and tells his wife about it at home. But rather than being commended, his wife sarcastically refers to him as 'Chichidodo', a bird that hates excrement but feeds on maggots. It deepens his condition of alienation, which Abiola Irele describes as 'a willed movement out of the self' (1982: 25).

To escape further insult, the man visits the Teacher; another alienated being, who has withdrawn into solitude in order to escape participating in

the general game of graft. Their conversations in Chapters five, six and seven provide historical insights into the disillusionment with independence. Colonial and independence struggles produce no true saviours, but physical and emotional wrecks like Sister Manaan, Egya Akon and Slim Tano.

Pressure from the man's family further deepens his confusion. An attempt by his wife and his mother-in-law to get rich through a fishing boat partnership business fails. Koomson only fools them. But beyond the personal, the general despondency provides the enabling environment for a forceful overthrow of the government. Politicians of the old regime become birds of prey, hunted by the new rulers. Koomson escapes from the country with the active collaboration of the man. The humiliating process of his escape through the lavatory and the harbour underscores the vanity of irresponsible power. The novel ends with the man returning home from the harbour. The coup has not really changed anything fundamentally in the life of the nation. Soldiers and police still extort *kola*—a euphemism for a bribe—from travellers. The man is going back to his home, 'the land of the silent ones', and his dull working environment.

In his alienation, the man is like Baako in *Fragments*—a 'been-to' who returns from the United State of America to his family's disappointment, not with the fruits of the Golden Fleece like cars, money, electronics and so on, but with a typewriter, a guitar and a suitcase. In a society where education, especially that acquired in Europe and America, carries a special value as the means to economic prosperity, social influence and political power, Baako becomes a failure wanted by no one, including members of his family and colleagues at Ghana vision.

Through the character of His Excellency, Joseph Koomson, the Minister Plenipotentiary, Member of the Presidential Commission, Hero of Socialist Labour, Armah shows that the problem with the socialist option adopted by Nkrumah lies in the disjunction between its ideals and the real desires of its operators. In spite of its pedagogical trappings, people whose commitment to socialism does not extend beyond the realm of rhetoric are running the system. Koomson is contemptuous of its opposition to the accumulation of private capital. He is a misfit in a socialist regime as symbolically shown in his physique: 'Koomson himself looked obviously larger than the chair he was occupying' (130-31). He is carved in the image of neo-colonial leaders who are fattened by the fruits of betrayal of their own people. As the man sardonically says of him and his like: 'these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumed, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who had sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade' (131). Going into private boat business with Oyo and her

mother, he is confident of raising 12,000 pounds: '... the money is not the difficult thing. After all, the Commercial Bank is ours, and we can do anything' (136).

Many critics have responded to the evident pessimism which is significantly buttressed by the cyclic narrative structure adopted in *The Beautiful Ones* (Nnolim 1992; Kibera 1992; Muhammad 2001). Leonard Kibera sees Armah as a writer who 'cultivates a pessimism as meticulously as the undertaker touches up a dead face for the viewing process' (99). But when the veil of pessimism is parted, the lesson of the novel becomes clear. As Wright correctly remarks, 'the only hope for the future lies in breaking the paralyzing grip of controlling Western values' (1992: 2). This task is further pursued in the two historical novels, *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*. Here, Armah explores traditional folklore resources to create a community of visionaries and revolutionaries in place of lonely travellers trapped in a vicious circle of momentary bliss and interminable damnation. In place of an action-less but 'wordy' protagonist, we are presented with the acolytes of 'the way' and Isanusi, a militant teacher who campaigns against foreign 'destroyers and their local collaborators' (*Two Thousand Seasons*); and Densu and Damfo in the community of 'Healers' (*The Healers*).

Beyond Stasis: *Osiris Rising*

Written seventeen years after *The Healers*, *Osiris Rising* carries further the pan-African ideals launched in the two preceding novels. Granted the fictive nature of the novel, its relevance to contemporary social reality in Africa is not in doubt. There is a kind of association of blackness with wholeness, beauty and creative life-giving principles. Armah sees Africa as a single entity, sharing a common root in ancient Egypt.⁴ Its destiny is also entwined with that of its Diaspora through the union of Asar and Ast. The move towards the continent's rebirth should, therefore, begin with the erasure of differences constructed by colonial fragmentation of the continent. It also requires a reflective encounter with the dialectics of Africa's historiography with a view to identifying values and systems that are beneficial to the present. That is why myth, history and legend are key compositional elements in the novel.

Osiris Rising reads like a response to critics who accuse Armah's previous works of pessimism and sentimentalism. In its thematic pre-occupation, the novel admits a possibility for the re-making of Africa. But the task is to be undertaken by Africans themselves. The rising of Osiris

(sun) implies the rising sun of Africa after a long night of domination by imperial forces and their indigenous quislings (Adekoya 2001: 103).

The novel tells the story of Ast, the African-American who returns to Africa in search of love, fulfilment, identity and self-knowledge. She hopes to re-connect with Asar, an old college mate at Emerson University. But at the port of entry into Hapa, she runs into trouble with the nation's security service. It is on account of an 'unsigned article, mimeographed on yellowed paper' (9), which is judged subversive. The article, titled 'Who We Are and Why', originated presumably from Asar and it is found in her luggage. It carries an identification mark of its sponsoring organisation—the *ankh* (an oval and a cross).

The dictatorial regime of President Christian Ahmed Utumbo in Hapa has developed a paranoia with regard to opposition. The regime treats as enemy action or subversion anything critical of the establishment or suggestions of the possibility of change. Presiding over the outlandish security outfit is Seth Spencer Soja (SSS) as the Deputy Director. His initials remind one of the acronyms of Nigeria's similar organisation—the State Security Service. Ast is arrested and taken to Seth, the Deputy Director. He is also an old school mate, who is seeking a relationship with her. The interrogation of Ast reveals the reason for the state's paranoia. According to Seth, 'Our system is new. There are people posing radical challenges to it. Not simply attacking its inefficiencies. They want to abolish it, to replace it with something no one has ever seen. Destabilizers. Our work is to identify, locate, isolate and neutralize them' (31). The developmental efforts of the regime, he submits, are being hampered by instability, masterminded by those he describes, as 'incorrigible challengers', among whom is Asar. He links the subversive literature to Asar and to rescue Ast from herself, he offers her accommodation and a job in place of the risks associated with a union with Asar. Ast declines the offer, and that signals the beginning of her trouble. Seth tries unsuccessfully to rape her in her hotel room. It ends up in physical and psychological bruises for him, necessitating revenge. Since her preference is Asar, he reasons that eliminating Asar will turn her helplessly to him. He sets security surveillance after her and Asar.

Since his return to Hapa from southern Africa after participating in the apartheid wars, Asar has settled down as a teacher in the Teachers College in Manda. There, he is co-ordinating a group whose objective is a revolutionary end to the reigning order. Ast later secures employment in the same Teachers College, after overcoming the bottlenecks of 'a decision-shirking labyrinth' called the civil service. She encounters the

fake Prince Wossen of Ethiopia and his master, Dr. Chief Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano, an African-American who presides over a pseudo-spiritual group aimed at restoring African-Americans to their authentic roots. He turns out to be an exploiter and an agent of the oppressive state.

Ast joins Asar in the companionship of *ankh* in Manda College. This is a revolutionary group that believes that no positive change can be achieved in contemporary Africa without a decisive reformation of the educational system, especially its orientation, form and content.⁵ To this end, they pursue a review of the existing curricula in the disciplines of African Studies, History and Literature. 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.

The curriculum review, however, does not go down well with the champions of the old Euro-centric educational order like Prof. Wright Woolley, (African Studies), Prof. Clive Jayasekera Padmasana (History) and Dr. Ezekiel Jehosopha Nguruwe (English). Woolley is an agent of the state operating in the school. In collusion with the fake Ethiopian Prince (Rodney Jones) and Seth, they set up Asar. After orchestrating the story of a failed coup attempt that almost claims the life of President Utumbo, a dragnet is cast to catch the putative masterminds of the coup. The target is Asar. A box containing fake currencies, arms and subversive literature is planted in his flat, permitting his arrest as a security risk. Though an earlier attempt to abduct Asar from the College fails, Seth and his agents leave nothing to chance this time around. Asar is eventually murdered while sailing home toward Manda. With his rival out of the way, Seth restates to Ast his proposal for a relationship.

Asar's assassination here reminds one of the death of Patrice Lumumba in the Congo. Seth shows that in a dictatorial regime, national security is a smokescreen for settling private scores. But beyond this, the elimination of a key figure in the mobilisation toward revolution may be read as another failed activist, showing the futility of struggle for social change in Africa. Armah mediates this pessimistic strand of interpretation in two ways. First, the seed of renewal is already growing in the womb of Ast who is a symbol of love. She is expecting a baby by the time the murder occurs. Second, Asar is a member of a collective. The 'fellowship of shared ideas and work' to which he belongs has initiated a reform. The significance and effects of the reform will outlast its originators. Asar's immortality is assured when his struggle for social change is seen in the light of Kinjeketile's declaration:

A man gives birth to ... word. And the word ... grows ... it grows bigger and bigger. Finally, it becomes bigger than the man who gave it birth (30).

... A word has been born. Our children's children will tell their children about this word. Our great grandchildren will hear of it. One day the word will cease to be a dream, it will be a reality (Hussein, Ebrahim, *Kinjeketile*, 53).

The characterisation in *Osiris Rising* clearly establishes Armah's choice between good and evil, light and darkness. While those who represent good and light are presented as admirable people, the forces of evil and darkness are shaded in contemptible colours. For instance, Ast, Asar, Netta, Bai Kamara, Iva Mensha, Manaan Djan and other members of the Manda College collective are portrayed positively and they represent the author's notions about change. On the other side of the divide are Seth, Cinque, Wossen and the conservative trio of Woolley, Padmasana and Nguruwe. They are agents of the repressive state and by extension, imperialism. In essence, the creators are pitched against destroyers, and innovators against conservatives.

The existing values of materialism in which Seth and Cinque are steeped do not appeal to Asar and Ast. To reinforce this repulsive portrait, 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 as the mouth of Koomson that has 'the rich stench of rotten menstrual blood' in *The Beautiful Ones* (163).

Cinque, a mercurial character with a fleeting identity, is also repulsively created. He returns to Africa under a different name (once, he was Sheldon Tubman). As Dr. Chief Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano, he advertises himself as the 'ferryman to the new age for the lost ones'. He resides in the 'mansion of truth'. But he exemplifies a wide gap between appearance and reality as he turns out to be an exploiter of the gullibility and ignorance of his fellow African-Americans. Besides, he is an agent of the state. His 'mansion of truth' is actually a 'castle of illusion and deceit'. He illustrates the hypocrisy of some post-independence leaders in Africa, who after denouncing colonialism, turn to 'live comfortably off his (their) people's damnation'. As a metaphor for neo-colonialism, he demonstrates what Armah calls 'the twisted desire of the slave not to abolish the stupidity of royal power, but to taste it' (88).

It is important that Asar and Ast as well as the innovators are teachers with a measure of interest in the past. In their understanding of the problems with Africa, they recall the Teacher in *The Beautiful Ones*. But

there ends the analogy. The teachers in *Osiris Rising* are unlike the Teacher of the previous novel who grows cynical about the state of things and withdraws into a kind of hermetic solitude. He does nothing to change the situation and he is content with what he has—‘words’, not action. The teachers in *Osiris Rising*, including Tete the historian, work toward change. In place of disillusionment, they offer practical struggle toward a new direction for the society. In place of isolation, they provide supportive friendship and mutual protection.

Conclusion

We have identified in this paper the trend of discourse in Armah’s literary creations, from pessimism denounced by critics to optimism and a firm belief in the possibility of change in the African condition. Armah is a pan-Africanist intellectual who is committed through his writing to social inquiry. Not only is he concerned with the diagnosis of the problems, he, in later works, proffers insight into the historical and political choices open to contemporary Africa. From his works, one can decipher that the following factors are crucial to the realisation of Africa’s renaissance: a dialogic engagement between the past and present; a democratic system of governance to replace dictatorship of any sort; a united Africa that collapses geo-national political structures bequeathed by colonialism; a reformed educational system that centres on Africa in its form and content; a linkage between Africa and its Diaspora; and the creation of an African personality that is not burdened by the past, but confronts the present and future with confidence and self-knowledge.

Arising from the foregoing, it is our contention that Armah’s literary creations like those of other African writers such as Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Oswald Mtshalli, Masizi Kunene, Cameron Duodu and others deserve critical attention from social researchers. It should be noted that African literary arts, oral and written, are capable of generating the necessary stimuli for change. In its fictiveness, literature proffers different perspectives of existential problems and their solutions. As Soyinka reminds us, ‘one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of a social direction’ (1976: 106). Politically engaged novels, the type that Armah often writes, are veritable sites for paradigmatic interactions and communication of contending ideas and social forces. Such works need to be considered along with other modes of social inquiry in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the nature and causes of Africa’s problems. This is important in the contemporary search for an alter-

native social direction. As Armah states through Netta in *Osiris Rising*, 'there's no better ideal than the remaking of Africa' (78).

Notes

1. Heinemann also reprinted *The Healers* and *Two Thousand Seasons*, which were first published by the East African Publishing House of Dar-es-Salaam. Per Ankh was established with friends to produce affordable books. The Popenguine-based outfit has re-published these two titles.
2. Ghana, in this case, is a metaphor for many ex-colonies of Africa. The situations and events depicted in the novel are, to a large extent, true of post-independence Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Uganda and so on. For instance, popular disaffection with the post-independence civilian administration laid the foundation for the emergence as heads of state through coups d'état, of Matthew Kerekou (Benin), Gnassingbe Eyadema (Togo) and Idi Amin (Uganda), among others.
3. Other Ghanaian writers like Kofi Awoonor and Cameron Duodu have captured the post-independence disillusionment in their novels *This Earth, My Brother* and *The Gab Boys* respectively.
4. Armah has stressed this point at a public lecture, 'African Literature from Ancient Egypt to Today', delivered at Auditorium II, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, on 7 November 2001.
5. We have made this point elsewhere. See Adeoti 2004.

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