THE TREATMENT OF RACISM IN THE WORKS OF AYI KWEI ARMAH

by

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DECLARATION

This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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This thesis has been submitted for examination with our approval as University Supervisors.

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my father
Who held education so dear
and whose achievement this really is

For my mother
Whose constant prayers and support I cherish

To my husband, David, whose strength,
encouragement and insistence brought
this work to fruition,
and for Adhiambo.

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ABSTRACT

The question of race remains as sensitive as it is topical. Racism can be discerned from our earliest recorded history, and permeates the social, economic and political spheres of our daily lives.

This dissertation is concerned with how Ayi Kwei Armah handles racism in his literary works. Arguments and discourse with a bearing on Armah's fiction specifically as concerns his treatment of racism is discussed in the Introduction, which also provides justification for the research and charts a concrete course for investigation. The first chapter in turn traces the origins of racism and supplies a working definition of the term based on Frantz Fanon's theory in "Racism and Culture".

Ayi Kwei Armah in dealing with the problems of post-colonial Ghana in The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born is forced to reckon with the persistent intrusion of "the gleam". This becomes a recurrent theme to the point where it attains radiant brilliance (Fragments) in a symbolic escalation that finds its culmination in whiteness. This manner in which racism manifests itself in Armah's fictive world is the subject of Chapter Two, as it becomes incontrovertibly evident that there is a problem other than nepotism and corruption plaguing neo-colonial African nations. The chapter goes on to trace the impetus governing racism, and the betrayal of a complementarity in human relationships as for example, in the affairs between Aimee and Modin, Sylvia and Solo in Why Are We So Blest? Their liaisons serve as microcosms of a larger problem.

Two Thousand Seasons consequently assumes the task of mapping the beginnings and development of this problem. In this work and in The Healers, the creation of a regenerative mythology for purposes of the reaffirmation of black self-hood is apotheosized in a return to "the way". Only on attainment of this state of self-apprehension is a confluence of peoples of even greater magnitude not only desirable, but also possible.

Racism has been, and continues to be the subject of scholarly dissertations and debate. The third chapter closely refers to dialectic developed in other works, for example Rodney's How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, and Cabral's Unity and Struggle, which provide corroborative tracts that serve to clarify and consolidate arguments artistically explored by Armah in Chapter Two.

There is no scientific foundation to support the discrimination against the darker races; neither is there an inherent superiority in the lighter races that sanctions their assumption of a position of privilege. Language assumes importance as it becomes evident that it is empowered only by its application and interpretation - and "the chosen tongue" in its deceptive universality has ordered the world such that the owners of the tongue exercise a certain control over its users. Armah eschews this tenuous mode and demonstrates a creative, unfettered independence. Ultimately, Armahs handling of so repulsive a condition as racism emerges as both educated and constructive.

Garnette Onyango Oluoch-Olunya
June 1990

I N T R O D U C T I O N

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ayi Kwei Armah has received considerable polemical criticism, especially in the last ten years. When he first started publishing in the late sixties, criticism was scant and either extreme, or uncertain. As Gakwandi says in The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa, the African novel is shy of experiment, and this is the main reason for these critics' uncertainty. Armah had broken out of the accepted classical mode of presentation so typical of the newly independent artists with apparently outrageous expositions. Once the critics started coming to grips with what Luvai has lately termed the "concept of defamiliarization" ("Mwangaza", 21) there consequently emerged a better informed brand.

Armah has published five novels to date: The Beautyful Ones are not yet Born (1968), Fragments (1969), Why are we so Blest (1970), Two Thousand Seasons (1973) and The Healers (1978). These works will hereafter be referred to as The Beautyful Ones, Fragments, Blest, Seasons and The Healers. Not surprisingly, The Beautyful Ones has come under most scrutiny because of the following reasons: It is Armah's first work, and the one that ripped apart the fabric of acceptance that deceit and fear had began to weave at independence. Unfortunately,

expatriate critics such as Bernth Lindfors[1], the pacesetters, started a misguided trend that was to detract subsequent critics, and only later were the actual issues addressed by the likes of Ama Ata Aidoo.

It is also a book rich in symbolism and Imagery, and is a veritable Eden for critics.

Thirdly, most of the critics have been negatively severe because Africans had still not come to terms with the totality of their own disillusion at the "obscene haste", (Ogungbesan, ALT No.7, 101) with which Nkrumah grounded Ghana[2] after holding out such deep and fundamental

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1 For example in the essay "Armah's Histories" in ALT No.11, 1980, where Lindfors evidently does not want Armah to get to the root of the problem. He wants the African to be healed without their knowing (a) the causes, (b) the nature and (c) the implications of their disease.

2 Ghana was the first African country to gain flag Independence, and the word symbolically means "King". Its first president, Kwame Nkrumah was initially a great visionary, and at the vanguard of the Pan-African dream.

hope: the hope of positive change starting from within the individuals themselves. From this microcosm is reflected the dilemma of so many "Independent" African Nations as from the late 1960's.

So far, studies on Armah have highlighted his relentless attacks on Society and the brutality with which he shapes ideas. His style is not at all strange, though, particularly in the Francophone world where one finds similarity in the works of such writers as Yambo Ouologuem, or Andre Schwarz-Bart. This has led some critics to take a myopic view on fundamental issues raised by Armah. What rankles with the critics is Armah's lack of apologia: neither is he on the defensive. He asserts truths he considers common in his desire, shared with Stanislav Adotevi[1], to bridge centuries and differences and create a united present. This is achieved through a logical progression and fanning out of ideas (starting from the particular, and moving to the general) in an honest exploration.

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1 Dahomey's Commissioner-General for Culture and Youth, 1969 (Ref: The Africans, David Lamb).

Particularly in his last two works, Armah addresses himself to a Black audience, an African audience. As he says in his article "Masks and Marx",

> I am an African, an artist, a scholar. As far back as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values (PA, 35).

It is clear from this that Armah has got a very specific aim in his art, as Africa is in need of "regenerative values". His statement of it in a world where any occurence of Black has always been incidental to, or in relation to Whites, where Whites "don't want to upset their racial philosophy that rests so solidly on premises sanctified by time that they no longer need to be openly proclaimed" (Williams, 37), naturally raises conflict. This had led to Armah's being called a racist. Yet, it is a fact that we are a neo-colonial continent, and in agreement with C.L.R. James (The Black Jacobins, 283) it would be folly indeed to ignore the race question, which permeates the political, social and economic spheres of life. The race question shaped our present history; is the "original sin".

At this point, it is necessary to give a simple definition of Racism. According to The Longman Dictionary of the English Language it is "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race" (Emphasis ours). Naturally, there is no scientific evidence for any assumption of "superiority" or "inferiority" on the part of any race, despite the mythical and unscientific views of so many prejudiced people to the contrary.

There are differences in hereditary constitution and environments, as the Everymans Encyclopaedia points out, and they do cause significant influence. But it is important to emphasize that cultural achievement has little or nothing to do with genetical inheritance of physical characters by individuals, and that social and cultural differences cannot be explained in racial terms. Yet the racial theory persists, and as W. D. Jordan points out in The White Man's Burden, this is because of supposedly scientific and anatomical studies by reputable authors who insist on the Black man's inferiority. At the beginning of this century, W. E. B. Dubois (The Souls of Black Folk) identified and pronounced the problem of the twentieth century as being that of the colour line. Things have not changed much since then.

The main aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate Racism in the works of Armah. It will systematically seek to answer such questions as: Is race consciousness the same thing as racism? Does the issue of race inform the creative works of Armah? Does Armah employ specific artistic strategies to explore the issue? If so, of what relevance or significance is this for the literary scholar and general audience.

The study would be incomplete if it didn't pose the inevitable question, Is Ayi Kwei Armah, therefore, a racist. This becomes pertinent as some critics have accused him thus. Only from an understanding of his motivation can light be shed on the influence of his perception of racism on his artistic creativity.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH

Ayi Kwei Armah has received, and continues to receive comprehensive criticism, a healthy sign of the relevance of his literary contribution. As Steiner said of Cezanne (Steiner, 3), once one has read Armah, one cannot look at the world like they looked at it before - and critics should be concerned with masterpieces. Armah can be viewed as a modern pioneer in original thinking in

that he consciously avoids looking at the world "through the blue eyes of the Saxons" (Williams, 39). As Seymour Chatman says in Story and Discourse, what we hold as true affects our responses in our reading of a work. And for a long time, the African education and literature has been in "language so subtle, scholarly and scientific that to the uncritical mind their (Western) truths seem self-evident" (Williams, 32). This, at the expense of anything African. Thus the unwary African has been disarmed by racisms seemingly forthright attacks on racism, an ingenious innovation in Western hegemonism. Armah does not belabour the point, but goes on to state his case. An argument on the equality of black and white would only serve to ensnare him in the same trap as, for example, Negritude, which in an attempt to justify blackness succeeded in expressing African values in a negative way. It created the unfortunate impression of all values being white-oriented and all standards white-determined.

This makes the study of utmost importance in that in seeking to establish Armah's point of departure, it also hopes to establish the independent importance of an African perspective in what would involve the "total liberation of the black man from himself" (Skins, 8).

Gikandi has pointed out that the African literary tradition spans barely three decades and this raises the special problem of whether to attribute the artists contribution to his African tradition, or to Western Influence. It is the duty of the African artist to break out of prescribed modes and deal honestly with the problems, political, social and economic, that face the continent. Armah rises to this challenge, and to borrow Ama Ata Aidoo's words ("No Saviours" Ed. Killam), the fact of his novels is proof of his concerns.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A fair amount of literary criticism has been generated by Armah, some of which views him as controversial. Fraser in The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah, for example, describes him as "a startling writer, a fearless and unpredictable "enfant terrible" at drastic odds with the literary establishment" (ix). His critics can be divided into three broad categories:

There are those who, due to the complexity in style necessitated by the nature of and scope of material dealt with, completely miss the point. This happens particularly with Two Thousand Seasons and The Healers, which are moulded in the epic tradition.

The second category are didactic, and uncompromising in their approach. These recognize the message, but do not know how to deal with its harshness. In this category can be found such expatriate critics as Larson in The Emergence of African Fiction, or Lindfors in such essays as "Armah's Histories" (ALT No.11). They have succeeded in confusing subsequent critics, as they engage in:

> "that style" of criticism which consists of the judicious distortion of African truths to fit Western prejudices, the art of using fiction as criticism of fiction (Ngara, 1982, 4).

The third category can be seen as honest critics who grapple with the issues in an attempt to understand, and therefore throw light on his work. Recent and more committed criticism of this nature has come from such critics as Fraser, Ngara, Gikandi, to mention but a few.

Armah goes out of his way to fashion our almost hackneyed themes and motifs such that we, the "blinkered victims" (Fraser, XIV) are forced to look up and acknowledge our problem as a people with a past of slavery, and a neo-colonialist future. He refuses to conform to the prescribed mode of writing where the writer religiously takes into consideration the

sensitivity of his audience - sometimes to the sufferance of his art - and couches harsh reality into accepted terms. Achebe has stated very clearly that it is the duty, unpleasant sometimes, of the artist to whip society into awareness[1].

Arthur Luvai, in an illuminating essay on "Armah and the concept of defamiliarization" says that what Armah does in his novels is really nothing strange once the centrality of the concept of defamiliarization in all art, and particularly in Literature, has been accepted. He sees Armah as succeeding in getting the reader "to apprehend reality not via worn out categories, some of which could very well be opportunistic, but in a fresh and unexpected way..." ("Mwangaza", 22). He creates a new mythology to carry his developing cultural outlook on the basis of urgent social imperatives. Yet his style is only strange to scholars who restrict themselves to the

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1 In a talk given at Taifa Hall, University of Nairobi on November 7, 1988.

Anglophone world. Yambo Ouologuem's Le Devoir de Violence, and Andre Schwarz-Bart's Le Dernier des Justes and La Mulatresse Solitude[1] are only three examples of works with similar style and intensity in the expression of idea. Armah surpasses these works in his commitment, and goes on to provide the reader with an instance of "literature engagee" at its most earnest.

Armah's works should be viewed with the factors that shaped his ideas in mind. Throughout his works, he projects certain salient tenets of analysis and belief, and these can be attributed to his experiences in newly independent Nkrumaist Ghana, his sojourn in Racist Civil Rights conscious America in the sixties, and his return to a neo-colonial Africa. Thus Fraser sees these influences as manifested in his works in two ways:

> First, there is his deep ingrained suspicion of the self-defensive antics by means of which a white elite attempts to bolster up its supremacy.

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1 These works are available in the English translations as Bound to Violence, The Last of the Just, and A Woman named Solitude, respectively.

This idea is explored, for example, in Why are we so Blest? Secondly, he has

> the strongly embedded belief that black people must carve out their own destiny independent of the corrosive influences of white contact (Fraser, 5).

This stems from Marcus Garvey (1887 - 1940) and his crusade to redeem the black people.

Armah's total rejection of the myth that "we are... a people of yesterday" has confounded many critics, mainly because most literary scholars limit themselves to evidence documented by white historians that our history begins with white/black contact. As Williams (35) points out, Black inertia is a real problem in this area, because as long as black people rely on white historians to write their history for them, they should keep silent over what is written. Whites, naturally write from a caucasian perspective and it would indeed be naive not to expect them to, "scientific objectivity" notwithstanding.

The remarkable observation one makes in relation to the reception of Armah's works is that to date, black reaction to black effort is spearheaded by expatriate critics. Thus their views become the point of focus,

rather than the careful analysis of the message itself. So far, no critic has taken up this issue on Race in the works of Armah as an independent area for analysis, probably because it is as sensitive as it is topical. Indeed, this study becomes imperative in view of the above considerations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, both FORM and CONTENT will be given prominence. This is because of the researchers belief, shared with such critics as Frederic Jameson that

> any concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon - if it is to be really complete - has an ultimate obligation to come to terms with the shape of the individual sentences themselves (Marxism and Form, xii).

This is what he calls "the working of the content in the realm of the superstructure" (329).

The importance of adopting this dual approach has come into prominence in African Literary Criticism particularly in the last decade as critics have come to

the realization that an analysis of one without the other, no matter how "brilliant its insight into specific problems and details, is bound to fail unless it recognizes that content... the social element - is the decisive style-forming factor in art" (Stylistics, 20).

In fact, Gikandi in Reading the African Novel sees literary form not only as being a means of transmitting a message, but as also containing a logic all its own that warrants critical study. He goes further to see the text, not as mere content or mere form, but as:

> the process of form recreating reality in the terms set by authorial consciousness, constituting a world which might resemble external reality, but is also the novels own universe (x).

In his critical essays in Stylistic Criticism and the African Novel, which provides a firm basis for the choice of this framework, Ngara emphasizes its main aim as being "precision and system". This may sound unyielding, but is not the case. Ngara sees Literature as comprising the cognitive, emotive and affective domains. This shows that it, therefore, cannot be

subject to a purely rational analysis. As he says:

> This (ratio) cannot do justice to Literature, for Literature is not scientific, and so a purely scientific approach to the study of Literature can only kill the writers creative effort (11).

It would be tempting to approach Ayi Kwei Armah's work from the Marxist bias as some critics such as Ngara (Art and Ideology in the African Novel) or Osotsi ("An Approach to the Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah") have done, and with some success. This is because parallels have been drawn, especially as far as their ideas for example on Socialism are concerned. And African Socialism was for an erroneous reason seen as Marxist in orientation.

Yet Armah has strongly rejected Marxism as racist, not only because it is "the whitest of philosophies" in that it exists, as racist philosophies do, "to insulate the shaky social-psychological equilibra of believers against reality" (52), but also on the grounds that it did not set out to deal with the African problem at all. Rather, it "is decidedly colonialist, Western, Eurocentric and hegemonist" in its bid to impose Western philosophy on the Universe. Some of its disciples have gone as far as elevating it to the level of a science, despite its not being based on scientific research or analysis ("Masks and Marx", 41).

In Ayi Kwei Armah's works, the narratives themselves impose the necessity of an exhaustive ingestion of the material. Only then can one perceive the depth to which he explores pertinent issues. Armah's use of Language is not incidental. He chooses his words very carefully, specifically to achieve a given effect, as is clearly evident right from The Beautyful Ones are not yet born to The Healers. All his novels are evidence of a unity of style and ideas so finely knit that it becomes difficult to separate one from the other. It must be emphasized, though, that this thesis will not involve itself in the explication of language for its own sake, but only in so far as it has a bearing on the idea being expressed.

Thus the choice of the Stylistic Criticism approach, which, as already stated, emphasizes on the language component, as well as the content, and aesthetic value. This is in the hope that it will clarify the meaning, be it hidden in the words themselves, the way in which they are arranged, or in the ideas they express.

METHODOLOGY

The work on this thesis will be carried out on the basis of library reasearch. Materials will be obtained from both the Nairobi and Kenyatta University libraries, and where necessary, the Moi University library in Eldoret. Should the need arise, other sources will also be sought, either through correspondence or by carrying out interviews with informed scholars.

A conscientious attempt will be made to analyse thoroughly works that have a bearing on the thesis.

HYPOTHESES

Two main assumptions will be examined by this work, the first one being that racism is a major theme in Armah's creative works. The second assumption is that Armah's exploration of the problem of racism limits his artistic creativity.

Working definitions of the terms, "race" and "racism", have to be established unequivocally from the outset of this work. This will consequently serve as a point of reference, and clarify postulations put forward in the ensuing chapters. The first chapter therefore, comprises a thorough investigation into the origins and development of racism to the level to which it is employed in the works of Ayi Kwei Armah. This becomes necessary not only because of the partisan nature of the terms, but also the controversial subject to which they give rise, and are applied.

CHAPTER ONE

THE RACE QUESTION: AN OVERVIEW

The race question is one that has occupied man since the initial inter-association of peoples; since the realization that people of the same breed of homo-sapiens differ in appearance due to disparities in the colour of their skin. As far back as the earliest civilizations, these differences have been used to define relationships between peoples, with the darker races, for example, being viewed as descendants of the biblical Ham, the accursed[1]. These stirrings of prejudice unfortunately laid the foundation for such irrationalities as what is now full-blown apartheid in South Africa: that some should be "the hewers of wood and drawers of water".

In more recent times, many groups of scholars have carried out special studies with a view to defining and exploring this issue. The theories raised are as many and as varied as are the sociologists, anthropologists,

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1 See for instance Claude Wauthier's essay, "The Sons of Ham" (209-233) in The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa. He discusses the use of this biblical myth for the furtherance of white domination and cites examples illustrating black reaction to, and rejection of so reductive a heritage.

philosophers, geneticists, psychologists, historians and even literary scholars. Yet it has clearly remained difficult to find unbiased studies free of intrinsic values not only on definition of terms, but more particularly on the interaction between the different groups of people.

A definition of both the terms, Race and Racism becomes pertinent at the point. According to Michael Banton in Racial Theories, the word race was introduced into the English language in 1508 by a Scottish poet, William Dunbars in his poem "The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Sins". He wrote, "And flatteris in to menis facis; /And bakbyttaris of sindry racis, /To ley that had delyte" (our emphasis, 1). During this period (16th to 17th Century), the word was used to refer to lineage, this derivation stemming from the biblical, i.e. Jewish tradition.

Race has been seen by Van den Berghe as having four principle connotations. In his analysis, he takes the perspective of the physical anthropologists. These see races as the various sub-species of homo-sapiens characterized by certain phenotypical or genotypical traits, for example the Mongoloid or Negroid peoples. This is biological characterization, but as Van den Berghe points out, recently (belatedly), many physical

anthropologists are abandoning racial taxonomies altogether.

Race has also been loosely used as a synonym for species, for example, the human race.

Thirdly, laymen may use it to describe a human group that shares certain cultural characteristics such as language, or religion, for example, the "Jewish race" or the "French race", these are also described as ethnicities or ethnic groups, socially defined on the basis of cultural criteria.

Finally, many social scientists see race as a human group that defines itself and/or is defined by other groups as different by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics, these physical characteristics being in turn believed to be intrinsically related to moral, intellectual and other non-physical attributes or abilities. Thus this group is also socially defined, but on the basis of physical criteria. Ultimately, Van den Berghe sees race as a term of reference to a social group.

It is tempting to seek an objective definition of race. Such sources as the Longman Dictionary of the English Language state race to be:

> a group or kind of people unified by community of interests, habits or characteristics..., a division of human beings possessing traits (e.g. skin colour or shape of head) that are transmitted genetically and sufficiently distinct to characterize it as a particular human type.

From this definition, it is clear that the very term is concerned with differences. This is where caution comes in, because these differences are open to exploitation. Definitions carry the ideology and values of their authors, even in an apparently honest bid at objectivity. As Henry F. Osborne points out:

> race has played a far larger part than either language or nationality in moulding the destinies of men; race <u>implies</u> heredity, and heredity <u>implies</u> all the moral, social and intellectual characteristics and traits...
> (emphasis ours, Montagu, 14)

This thesis will mainly be concerned with the implications of racial differences in what is concretely termed Racism. Van den Berghe has described racism as:

> Any set of beliefs that organic, genetically transmitted differences (whether real or imagined) between human groups are intrinsically associated

> with the presence or absence of certain socially relevant abilities or characteristics, hence that such differences are a legitimate basis of invidious distinctions between groups socially defined as races (Racism, 11).

As is also evident in the definition in the "Introduction", the idea of inferiority and superiority is inherent. Van den Berghe further says that it is not the presence of objective physical differences between groups that creates races. Rather, it is the social recognition of such differences as socially significant or relevant.

Many scholars have tried to define Racism. Ruth Benedict, a Sociologist sees it as "That dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group destined to congenital superiority" (Race, 19). In 1967, a panel of distinguished biologists, geneticists, physical anthropologists and sociologists described racism as:

> ... anti-social beliefs and acts which are based on the fallacy that discriminatory inter-group relations are justifiable on biological grounds (Race, 19).

From the mid 19th Century, Social Darwinists (a school of thought stemming from the theories of Charles Darwin, 1809-1882) adopted the mistaken notion that species develop themselves through natural selection and

the struggle for existence as a justification for the maltreatment of different peoples.

Racism was also described by the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala in July 1968. They saw it as "a brutalizing force", ethnocentric pride and preference for one's own racial group, giving rise to strong and negative feelings towards people who did not share these characteristics. This led to the exclusion of the one group from full participation in the communal life.

It is clear from these definitions that the governing force behind racism is fear. This happens when a homogenous group of people in a given community feel threatened by the existence of another group of people, who may be moved to dominate them, be it because they are numerically superior, lighter in colour, or better armed etc. Following the misrepresentation of Darwins theory of "survival of the fittest"[1] in which the fact that diverse groups of people can peacefully exist without threatening each others autonomy becomes untenable, it becomes much

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1 According to Dona Richards, the apologia usually goes, "they took his theories and applied them in ways he did not intend".

easier to understand the driving force behind Western Imperialism. Western Imperialism, because as Professor Isaacs puts it:

> racial mythologies built around differences in skin colour and physical features were among the prime tools of power used in the era of the Western Empires. (Color and Race, XI).

The myths may have been destroyed, but it will take a much longer time to obliterate the long years of practice and acceptance. What exactly were these myths?

The "coloured" races of Africa, Asia and Latin America were seen as:

> ... dull, stupid and lazy, given to stealing, lying and profanity... . Inferior mentally and biologically. Strangers to every sentiment of compassion and... an example of the corruption of man when left to himself (Race, 19).

Other myths associated everything great, pure, successful and beautiful with the white skin, such that the black people saw themselves in a negative light, and tried their hardest to identify with the white. One of the results of this in the American situation was miscegenation. But on the deeper psychological level, the price extracted for the internalization of white values was black degradation and self-hatred.

This was propagated in the literary world by the type of literature produced, especially with the inception and growth of the novel from the eighteenth century. Such writers as Daniel Defoe, H. Rider Haggard or Joseph Conrad, to mention but a few, were exposed to such racism as permeated the politics of their time stemming from the Victorian era to the height of imperialism. This racism was given scientific legitimacy by scholastic giants such as Darwin and Freud, who helped concretize the myth of the biological and cultural superiority of the lighter races[1].

Exposed to this "great" literary tradition and faced with the seemingly unassailable fact of the inferiority of the African peoples as found in the structuring of the

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1 A thorough analysis of the growth of this racial myth in the European novel from its inception can be found in Chapters One and Two of Dr. M. O. Buyu's thesis entitled "Racial Intercourse in Joseph Conrad's African and Malayan Fiction" (1987, unpub.) Univ. of Sussex; Chinua Achebe in his essay "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness" in Hopes and Impediments also discusses Conrad's purveyance of these myths.

races hierarchically such that the Caucasians emerged at the top and the Black people at the bottom, it has become imperative for Black scholarship to seek to redress such falsification of our genesis and history.

One of the clearest examples of the cultivation and entrenchment of racism can be found in the United States of America. In the first place, racism here was a legacy of two particular events: the slaughter and removal of red peoples, and the enslavement of black African peoples as chattels. These events were the result of conscious acts by the white American population to ensure their position of superiority. And they stopped at nothing to concretize this reality. The American nation was securely built, socially and economically on racism. Even Abraham Lincoln, who has been lauded as a champion for the liberation of blacks during the American civil war was heard to say at Charleston in 1859:

> I am not... in favour of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races... (nor) of making voters and jurors of negroes (sic), nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to inter-marry with white people... There must be the position of superior and inferior... I as much as <u>any other man</u> am in favour of having the superior position assigned to the white race (our emphasis. Cited from <u>Race</u>, 21).

"Any other man" in this context refers, naturally, to any other white man. Fanon tells us that the white man in America succeeded so well that "the U.S.A. (is now) a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions" (Wretched, 252).

What has been termed as a classic statement on race came from a French writer, J. A. de Gobineau (1816-1882). He said:

> The white race originally had a monopoly of beauty, intelligence and strength. Association with other species produced hybrids who were beautiful without being strong, strong without being intelligent, intelligent but very ugly and weak (Race, 22).

These myths are endless. Such personalities as Adolf Hitler further promoted them, insisting on the superiority and blueness of the blood of the Aryan race. At the Olympic games held in Germany (Berlin 1936) which games symbolize international peace and co-operation, (when) Jesse Owens, a black man broke four world records, so incensed was Hitler, that symbol of racism and fascism, that he stormed out of the stadium. Owens had given the lie to his racist theory. But in America, like in Germany, Owens tells us that:

> I came back to my country, and I could not ride the front of the bus. I had to go to the back door, I could not live where I wanted. I was not invited up to shake hands with Hitler (as other white winners had been), but I was not invited to the White House to shake hands with the President either ("Ebony", 149).

Ironically, it was not until 1976, forty years later, when President G. Ford awarded him the medal for freedom did he officially receive recognition for his efforts. An unforgivable time lapse for a country that prides itself on its freedom and justice, but understandable in the light of the inferior status endured by blacks. The very word "freedom" underlines the token and condescending nature of Ford's gesture.

When one talks of racism, one inevitably turns to Western Imperialism, Christianity, Whitism. Perpetrators of racism have contended that there is no difference between ethnocentrism, for example as found among indigenous groups of Africans, and the diversity found in the larger groups based on skin colour. Van den Berghe, for instance sees the kind of discrimination that exists between the Tutsis and the Hutus of Rwanda as being based on the fact that the former who are supposedly superior, are lighter and taller, with what amounts to a description

of caucasian facial features. He also gives an example of the rivalry between the Hausa and Ibo of Nigeria, with the Hausa thinking themselves superior because they are tall and light in complexion and have embraced Islam. They are consequently a step higher culturally than the Ibo, who are generally short and dark, and heathen in that they believe in their ancestral religions.

Yet these cases are unique in themselves. The former could be likened to the position of the Baganda in Uganda at the turn of the Century, when the Kabakas ruled. These were the royal family, and behaved in the regal manner expected of their lineage. Van den Berghe can hardly accuse British royalty of being ethnocentric!

As for the Hausa and Ibo, rivalries did exist among the indigenous peoples, but once the foreign element, Islam, was brought to play, it compounded already existing prejudices. The muslims in their zeal have been known to fight jihads in their bid to exterminate heathens and non-believers, and to preserve the true religion. It is important not to lose sight of its Arabic origin.

John Vincent has argued that racism goes beyond ethnic prejudice. When one is born, it is inevitable that one socializes into and identifies with a particular

milieu. As Jackson puts it in Soledad Brother, "love of self and kind is the first law of nature". From this microcosm does one form attitudes and prejudices through which one views the rest of the environment. But when a people chooses to superimpose their language and culture on another people, and take control of their lives on the basis of contrived scientificism, simply because of differences in the colour of the skin pigmentation, then it is a totally unique sphere.

The human population belongs without exception, as archaeological evidence shows, to one species: Homo Sapiens. This unit has from time to time been divided by anthropologists and scientists into races as the earth is populated, not on the basis of utility, but to facilitate study. Obviously, this division has been misused by different people at different times to promote inequality and subjugation. Most scholars are agreed that the modern conception of race owes its widespread diffusion to the white man. He has carried it with him wherever he has gone, in a conscious attempt to preserve his identity. "Most racist discrimination is discrimination by the one eighths of the worlds whites against the other seven eighths..." (19). Seven eighths referring to the rest of the worlds non-white population. Thus, as the Assembly

Committee on Church and Society at Uppsala decided, it would be most fitting to speak of white racism.

> By white racism is meant the conscious or unconscious belief in the inherent superiority of persons of European ancestry... which entitles all white people to a position of dominance and privilege, coupled with the innate inferiority of all darker peoples, especially those of African ancestry, which justifies their subordination and exploitation (Race, 19).

In recent times, racism has been viewed from both the Political and Economic angles. Human co-existence is looked at in terms of a power struggle in which control of the economic sector is the only sure way of controlling the political and social spheres. This calls for the shedding of preconceived ideas by an oppressed people in a revolutionary manner. Revolutionary, because as Ronald Segal says:

> ... (in a society of coloured people ruled in the past by whites, and still dominated by the economic or strategic interests of a white state, ... I will show you revolution... (in which) in almost every instance will (be) a Western attempt to crush or control it (Race, 29).

An encounter with racism has of needs to be a revolutionary experience because only once the far-reaching results of the racial myth and practice have been totally demolished can a healing existence be realized. This calls for a radical change in thought and action as anyone desiring freedom must be willing to make some sacrifices. The revolt against racism is one of the most inflammatory elements of the social revolution the world over, because it is fought at the level of man's deepest and most vulnerable emotions - it is a fight for human dignity. And racism is basically a denial of personhood to another human being.

Ayi Kwei Armah is familiar with the African reality and literary aesthetics, and "insists that his writings are a synthesis of extensive research on African history". To him "African history is the oldest in the world" ("African Concorde", 18), and this has come to researched scientific light as evidenced by studies carried out in Archaeology and Egyptology. The African Origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality provides a firm base on which to highlight Egyptological findings on the origins of man, and therefore come to a greater understanding of Armah's works.

As Armah unfolded the scholarly untruths on the origins of man, it became clear that the black man had played an important role from the beginning of time, a fact necessary to shroud as the white people subjugated others and gained control of the world. And as recently as 1987, Armah immersed himself in a guided study of hieroglyphics, the ancient form of Egyptian writing to further get to the untarnished truth, free from translators interpretations and prejudices.

The history of the black people has long been misrepresented, and seen as starting with the discovery of Africa by different groups of explorers. As stated in the "Introduction", it would be naive indeed to expect a white people, intent on emphasizing their "civilizing mission" ("African Socialism", 13) to the dark continent to recount the past glories of a people so deeply steeped in primitivity as to warrant salvation from the West. The question as to why no black scholars have taken up the challenge of documenting our history until very late in the day can be looked at from two perspectives: the first one is that the black intellectuals, through those objective and scientific studies carried out by specialists, have been fed the lie. This lie, through time has taken on the semblance of truth. The second is that, as as Cheikh Anta Diop points out, the African

intellectual is suffering from inertia, inhibition and incompetence. There is the tendency to imbibe readily available information, and restraint from controversial criticism which has led to the stunting of the development of any tools which would facilitate competent research.

Yet we can no longer accept what has been presented to us as objective and universal, as this has proved a false position. Dona Richards puts it succinctly in "the Ideology of European dominance":

> As black social theorists, (we) have no use for the myth of objectivity - a myth which has served the interest of Western - European political objectives... white social theory does not present a universally valid and objective body of thought, nor a neutral tool to be used for the purpose of understanding human experience... it represents a particular view of the world as seen from the perspective of supposed Western-European superiority, and that an image of the inferiority of African civilization is inherent in the terms, definitions, and theoretical models on which white social theory is based ("Presence Africaine" No. 111, 3).

It now becomes important to seek an independent point of reference guided, not by Western ethos, which turns human diversity into raciology (10), but by a conscientious search for the values and guiding principles that went in to mould the African outlook.

In The African origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality, Diop delves into Egyptology, the study of the cradle of African civilization, to try and place us in perspective. He states emphatically that "To be or not to be does not depend on whether one knows Europe or not" (XVI). Rather, the very ideas being used today to convince mankind of the superiority of Western civilization were born in this continent. Archaeological research carried out by Dr. Louis Leakey on the monogenetic thesis of humanity, even at the stage of homo sapiens clearly indicates "that all races descended from the black race, according to a filiation process that science will one day explain" (XV).

According to Herodotus, an early Greek historian, Greece borrowed all elements of her civilization, even the cult of the gods from the Egyptians. So did the biblical Jews the idea of monotheism, which the Christian West now

seeks to impose so rigidly on "pagans" the world over. About seventy Jews initially came from Palestine to Egypt where they sojourned for four hundred years. Their situation as an enslaved people led to their selecting from amongst the medley of gods, the God of deliverance. By the time they left Egypt, six hundred thousand strong, it is not surprising that in their literature, which is now viewed as biblical infallibility, and which has been incooperated into Western civilization, they would present their oppressors as the accursed race, the descendants of Ham or Kam, which in Hebrew means black or burned.

But at a certain stage in history, it became imperative for Egypt or Kemit, the land of the black man to be seen as white. Various white historians wrote about the blackness of the soil as opposed to the skin colour of the inhabitants. This would be equivalent to saying today that white South Africa is so called, not because of the skin colour of the white minority, but because of the whiteness of the soil found there. Such distortion became necessary as it became clearer to researchers that the origin of civilization actually lay in Egypt. Whites went further to justify the presence of blacks by saying that they'd been taken there as slaves.

The Egyptian civilization thrived for some ten thousand years before the foreign invasions began. First came the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 BC, followed by a long period of domination by the Macedonians, and then the Romans under Caesar. The latter totally crushed and decentralized what had once been a citadel of power and culture. This, coupled with such geographical factors as the spread of the Sahara and thick forests led to the various migrations and subsequent decline in material progress.

During this new period of conquest, the white man ignored history. The invader and conqueror became civilizer. Because of newly acquired technology, he saw himself in a superior light, with Africa appearing as simplistic and primitive. This Africa, better known as "the white man's burden" needed the generous ministrations of the colonialists, and capitalism, under a moral guise ruthlessly exploited the African peoples. Myths on the inferiority of the indigenous peoples were created and crystallized with time. This directly affected the personality of the African people, especially as they looked at themselves vis-a-vis the rest of the world. Even today:

> It often happens that the Negro intellectual loses confidence in his own possibilities and in those of his race to such an extent that, despite the validity of the evidence presented... it will not be astonishing if some of us are still unable to believe that blacks really played the earliest civilizing role in the world (Diop, 29).

A brief survey of Egyptological research should serve to further illuminate the problem. Between 1783-1785, a Count Constantin de Volney (1757-1820), imbued with all the white prejudices visited Egypt and found negroes (sic). He had this to say:

> Just think that this race of black men,
> today our slave and the object of our scorn,
> is the very race to which we owe our arts, sciences, and even the use of speech! Just imagine, finally, that it is in the midst of peoples who call themselves the greatest friends of liberty and humanity that one has approved the most barbarous slavery and questioned whether black men have the same kind of intelligence as whites! (Diop, 28).

Most of the evidence on the physical appearance of these peoples come from art work found on bas-reliefs dug

up by archaeologists from such places as the pyramids. One such relief found by a Frenchman, Champollion the younger, confirmed what had been found by an earlier traveller, Domeney de Rienzi, early in the nineteenth century in the tomb of Sesostris I, an Egyptian pharaoh.

He found represented the black people, the white people and the Asiatic people. According to him, he found it shameful to admit that the white figure, as compared to the rest was crudely dressed and "a veritable savage tattoed on various parts of his body" (47). This moved this father of Egyptology in his incredulity to a more detailed scrutiny of the Egyptian. He consequently decided that "black skin and wooly hair did not suffice to characterize the Negro race".

Maspero Gaston, the director of the Cairo Museum from 1839 further propagated the lie. His thesis contended that such characteristics as large eyes, broad flat noses and thick lips were not typical of the Negro, but resembled the fine white races.

It became such that talk of whites with black or red skin no longer sounded incongruous - after all, they

started civilization. Ironically, in such places as the United States of America even today, a touch of the tar-brush, a drop of black blood no matter how snow-white your skin, qualifies you for blackness, for inferiority.

When Abbé Emile Amelinean excavated the tomb of Osiris at Abydoa, he discovered that the Egyptians painted their gods black, a reflection of their own race. He then went on to analyse the Egyptian thought systems and like Herodotus found an uncanny similarity to that of Platonic and Aristotalian ideas, such that the two sets of ideas could have originated from one source. However, Egypt was given no recognition, and to date wisdom and ancient Greece are synonymous.

There must have been a reason for this almost inexplicable behaviour of the white man, this seeking to either obliterate the black man, or reduce him to a pseudo-human state. According to Leo Frobenius, the European need for slaves and their seeking justification for their brutality in pursuit of human merchandise led them to rationalize that blacks were, after all only half human; that they were barbaric.

Another mistaken notion the European racists nurture is that since civilization started in Egypt, black people may claim racial superiority. Diop sees the whites as being overwhelmed by the possibility of actually being inferior to the black people, which has consequently led to the entrenchment of white racism.

When Ayi Kwei Armah set out to write his novels, he may have been conscious of the prevailing arguments on race, and may have wanted to bring them out in his fiction. On the other hand, as he dealt with historical issues and the interpersonal relations between individual characters in his works, he may have been forced to delve deeper into the issue of race as it permeated or informed both his and his characters consciousness. That he has made it a point to study Egyptology and hieroglyphics so as to understand the origins of the black man better, and the significance of the black people in history is telling. But what is even more important at this point is the theoretical background on which his work is based.

The proposition that Armah is conversant with the ideas of Frantz Fanon, and that he is influenced by these ideas becomes increasingly attractive as one reads both

the articles and books by these two scholars. In Fanon's work The Wretched of the Earth, but more particularly in his article on "Racism and Culture" ("Presence Africaine", Nos. 8, 9, 10) does a clear microcosm on race emerge : a microcosm that gradually fans out as it spans Why are we so blest, (1970) to The Healers (1978). Armah's is the artistic and stylistic restructuring of these ideas.

Fanon sees racism as part of a larger whole - the systematic oppression of a people. It is not an accidental occurence, but is rather a carefully drawn out plan by the racist to ensure the total annihilation of a peoples confidence in themselves, inculcating in them such a strong sense of inferiority as to render their oppressors, naturally, superior. Once the enslavement, the colonization of a people is complete, a new problem arises. That of identity.

The oppressed will imitate the culture, i.e. way of dress, mode of speech, and mannerisms of the oppressor, in the process aiding in the alienation of himself from what was originally his own so as to be assimilated by the new culture. But as Cesaire and Senghor found out, assimilation is never complete. Particularly when the

oppressor is white and the oppressed black. Sartre says it for the whites: "Our worthiest souls contain racial prejudice" (Wretched, 18). Racism sets people apart, "is what halts any blackman's whiteward progress" ("African Socialism", 17). And man only has an identity in a culture that recognizes him.

At the outset of this imbalanced relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, those cushioning myths are called in to play: that these people are only half-human, barbaric and cannot possibly possess the same faculties as the oppressor. Once racism has been thus justified, it becomes easy for those out on the civilizing mission, who by now "know their oppressed well", to indulge in all sorts of atrocities. Meanwhile, a people's culture is held in the "sustained death agony" ("Racism and Culture", 124) - dying, but not completely destroyed.

The colonizer is usually forced to use the local task force in his plans for development. Once the local people are exposed to industrialization and actually constitute the majority of the labour sector, they realize there is something wrong with a system that relegates them to the status of chattels. Racism is discovered. But now racism

sees the need to disguise itself, to appear in subtler but equally, if not stronger, forms because at all costs the superiority of the white man must be maintained.

The next rational step the colonizer takes is to accuse the colonized of being racist. This with the intention of making the colonized feel guilty for coming together as a people after all the colonizer has done for them. What he has done to them is marginalized. The colonizer even goes further to point out a few scapegoats in his own camp whom he calls racist in a bid to absolve the majority, thus proving that the colonizer is not at all bad. Yet "the truth is that a colonial country is a racist country", and one is either racist or not.

After the colonized peoples discover the truth about racism, these people who had denied themselves as a race retrace their steps to try and reestablish what they had previously. As happens in such moves, they involve themselves in a romanticization of their culture and traditions. Even what, in Fanon's words, have become "sclerosed, moribund". What happens is that this culture is now used as a defence mechanism against the foreign culture. It is "externally assaulted" instead of the

people seeking to restructure it internally such that it becomes an up to date tool for asserting their own destiny.

Once the colonized people start to exercise their freedom, once they begin to act of their own accord, no matter how misguided or disorganized, the fight against racism has been engaged. Fanon sees the end of racism as coming only through revolution, the result of which would be two independent cultures standing side by side on an equal footing.

The following chapters look into Armah's engagement in the Africans quest for a niche in his own, and the wider environment. Starting with The Beautyful Ones, the beginnings of racism will be traced, taking into account discrimination and the resultant inferiority, ennervation and disillusionment leading to a peoples determined search for an identity and consequent reconciliation to the fact of their being. The discussion will hinge on the histo-archaeological background provided by Diop, and Fanons theoretical foundation. These comprise a necessary point of departure for the understanding of Armah's treatment of racism in his works of fiction, as they constitute dialectic inextricably interwoven into, and underlying Armah's conception of racism.

CHAPTER TWO

ARMAH AND RACISM: WHY AREN'T WE SO BLEST?

Ayi Kwei Armah has for a long time been preoccupied with the issue of racism. This does not emerge as a major theme in his earliest works of fiction, for example The Beautyful Ones (1968) or Fragments (1969). Racism in these works is overshadowed by the more immediate and pressing concerns superimposed by neocolonialism. Armah consequently deals with its effects on his own people, the Ghanaians, and on Africans as a whole. Yet neocolonialism should not be viewed as apart from its cause - colonialism, and ultimately, as this chapter will show, racism.

The theoretical grounding on racism in Armah's fiction was articulated as early as 1967, in his paper entitled "African Socialism : Utopian or Scientific", in which Armah sees the seeds of racism as having been sown even before the colonial era, when the Romantic idea of the noble savage as inferior was propagated by scholarly Anthropological research. Yet in his first two works he chooses to foreground themes other than racism. A study of these works discerns an emergent pattern, a systematic building up of signs which in The Beautyful Ones achieve the symbolic status of "the gleam". This symbol spills over into Fragments, where a proliferation of brittle, shiny glittering trappings lay a firm foundation as manifestations of covert racism, and necessitate Armah's

return to this topic in later works, in particular Why are we so Blest, and Two Thousand Seasons.

The Beaufyful Ones is in effect the basis of Armah's successive works of fiction in that in it can be found the germ of ideas that later explode to full thematic prominence. One of these concerns is racism. Through a subtle working into the plot, "the gleam" develops into the all-pervading malaise of Fragments. This symbol is used to refer to all nature of corrupting whiteness. One finds, for example, the Atlantic-Caprice, a symbol of degeneration for the black society in that inside its walls - "an insulting white" (12), an unrealistic and pretentious mode of existence, (a mode aspiring to whiteness) is lived by wealthy blacks. In the same vein, Armah refers to the shiny objects in the Koomsons living room, their shimmering dress; we have the blinding lights of luxurious cars hurtling in the direction of the tall, shiny Atlantic-caprice... and Oyo's eyes drinking in the comfort and position offered by "the gleam".

Using "the man", Armah goes to great lengths to discredit the power of the gleam. But even "the man" admits that it is impossible not to appreciate the benefits derived from being in the light. This gleam signifies ill-gotten affluence and pretentions to

progress, and is contrasted sharply, albeit realistically, to the position of the common man. We have "the man" tortured by the accusing looks directed at him by the loved ones because he will not "learn how to drive". He is presented as helpless in the face of the gleam (8). His family lives in an extremely poor area and from the graphic description of the communal bath and latrine, one would be loth to perform ablutions here. Armah does not create a utopian ideal to detract from the gleam. If anything, after contact with the gleam, a return to the darkness becomes repulsive. Yet the man emerges out of the "protective" darkness: we read of "pure" darkness, the "sweet" dusk as juxtaposed with "the blinding lights, wild and uncontrolled... brutal lights... white with a wounding whiteness...". The choice of these adjectives is clear indication of the point Armah is driving home; the gleam by its very nature is destructive.

In The Beautyful Ones, there are stronger overtones that push racism to the periphery: those of power and money. In spite of this, Armah is clear on the fact that the aping of the whites is the ultimate cause of the thirst after these material things. The state His Royal Highness Brempong of Fragments attains after his frenzied international trips importing gleaming quantity cargo; he becomes "a white man. Complete!" (78). The use of the

metaphor in this completion highlights the self-effacing nature of acquisition and materialism. In "African Socialism", Armah points out that for all reasons engendered by history, the black man wants to prove himself an equal to the white. Brempong exceeds all expectations; his mutation through wealth is realized.

There are certain clear incidents which Armah uses to draw the attention of the reader to the racial polarity. Kofi Billy's case is a good example. Here was a man, one of the lucky ones, conscientiously doing his work, "work too cruel for white mens hands" (65) when one of the high tension wires operated by a "fresh Englishman" cut off his lower leg. The white man went on to say that Kofi Billy deserved his fate - it was of little or no consequence that a human being had lost a vital component of his anatomy, and that after this "incident" he could no longer work in order to sustain life. This "incident" eventually led to his taking his own life, a desperate deed, in his despair.

Armah's satirical turn in the description of the two black golfers - that game for the bourgeois - is executed with a stylistic ingenuity that draws its strength from unwonted contrast. Their attempt at camouflage - "Hidden in the group, in stiff, white uniform" - and their

language, so typically British upper class - "Jolly good shot..." is sadly amusing, painfully farcical. The race barrier remains firmly in place as the white men talk down to these senior service men using "steward boy English", an unyielding reminder that no matter how white the cloth, the skin beneath remains black. What emerges distinctly from this incident is the lengths the black men will go to even at the cost of making total fools of themselves, in order to be admitted into whiteness. Armah in "African Socialism" advances this argument to the point where the black man arrives at the "death wish"[1] (17) on realizing that he can integrate only so far and no farther into white society. The "death wish" is the culmination of the frustrated aspirations of the black man to attain the plane of whiteness or white privilege; a submission to the irrevocability of an artificially created present moment. The black skin becomes a curse.

Unfortunately, this does not remain an isolated incident. A peoples leader, the president himself aspires

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[1] Compare L. S. Senghor and A. Cesaire and the impetus behind the Negritudist movement.

to whiteness. As Armah puts it:

> After a youth spent fighting the white man, why should not the president discover as he grows older that his real desire has been to be like the white governer himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle (Emphasis ours, 92).

This flight into the castle of the white skin is a recurrent theme in all Armah's works. The emphasis on the noun "blackness", indeed Armah's use of the state of being black, underlines the negative qualities and inferiority with which this state is imbued. The situation is ironical, as Armah is quick to point out, in that any black person who seeks refuge in whiteness has no power unless bestowed upon him by the white world itself. This echoes Fanon's contention raised in the previous chapter that a people provide their own power base; give themselves an identity.

The president does not stand alone. In the residential area (and it must be noted that they live in "Residences"), they take on names Armah sees as "trying mightily to be white", in the same bid to find a niche in whiteness: Kuntu - Blankson... Binful... Fentengson... . Not only do these names manage to sound ridiculous, but in a typical Armah twist, those that contain meaning reflect

the stupidity of their proud owners. Ridicule reaches its peak with Attoh-White: utter-white - "Complete!" Undoubtedly, "there is something so terrible in watching a black man trying at all points to be the dark ghost of a European... " (81).

"The man" is Armah's chief protagonist in this work, and the tone he adopts is significant, as this creates one of the major differences between this and other works. His tone is studiedly bland, it even has a trace of humour, yet with an intense underlying commitment to the message. Ultimately, the realization that "Our masters were the white men and we were coming to know this, and the knowledge was filling us with fear first and then with anger... (and) despair" (81) summarizes the disillusion encountered on attainment of "the gleam". It becomes clear that this is a deeply rooted malaise whose causes boil down to racism.

In Fragments, the illness that begins as "the gleam" in The Beautyful Ones reaches epidemic proportions. Everywhere the intensity of light, the gleaming, shining things create a scintillating effect. In this work, Armah constructs a microcosm of Albert Schweitzer's infamous reference to Africa as the "younger brother" (Impediments, 7). He hones this down to fine detail, as in the

description of the two stewardesses at the airport in Paris. "One of them was black and wore a wig that had a single bleached strand leading its general dark brown mass" (54). This symptom of the ravages of racism is not exclusive to hair. In another incident, several dark Africans are depicted gawking in admiration at a black pair successfully bleached by AMBI-EXTRA skin lightening cream (122). The disease catches tragically early if the "Radiantway International Day Nursery", responsible for moulding the impressionable formative years, is the norm.

This work is Armah's quest to understand the black fascination with whiteness. We encounter the "new Africans", those almost white, the perfect example being H.R.H. Brempong. Not only is he a caricature of the pretentiousness to whitism, he wants Mensah to say he is meeting a white man. The word white is the "open sesame" of this society. As Brempong tells Baako, if he possessed no qualifications but was white, he would have no problems in getting a job. As it is, Baako is led a merry dance. Despite his immersion into the white world, he has resisted coming out white-washed.

As in Armah's other works, in Fragments the choice of names is both deliberate and potent. The head of Ghanavisism, for instance, is called Asante-Smith. Armah

links Asante, the dominant ethnic group and warrior spirit of Ghana to Smith, that name of the English commoner, but here held in high esteem as the white factor, the completer. To add insult to injury, this man himself so blind is the countrys prime visionary. He most arduously blocks Baako's attempts to delve into the roots of racism.

Akosua-Russel, the spearhead of literary emancipation and promotion of indigenous art forms is even more pathetic. At her peak, she sacrifices traditional myths on the colonial altar. Her poem "The Coming of the Brilliant Light of the New Age to Amosema Junction Village" (157) is disgusting: the blind reference to "limpid blue eyes", "shiny, flaxen hair", skin of "purest shiny marble" and even black damsels "blushing"; all this taking place "o'er adorning subjects" is painful. These images of whiteness are employed indiscriminately in a most incongruous manner, and magnify Akosua-Russel's self-hatred; her white love.

Armah provides the reader with an unpalatable case in modern factorship. That Boateng can only attack such pretence in a state of drunkenness as the man in The Beautyful Ones did on the subconscious level in dream sequences shows that these ideas are yet to be explored more deeply.

The cargo cult, that attraction to especially shining, gleaming goods from the West as if these would cover up a certain inadequacy, an emptiness in individuals is an obsession in this work. Bearing in mind the myths that have gone before, myths lauding the greatness, the purity and beauty of western civilization and simultaneously disparaging the primitivity of blackness, it is easy to perceive the beginnings of such cults. Baako returns home after five years in the West with knowledge to aid in the advancement of his people. That he only brings back knowledge is his big mistake, as the source is the issue. How dare he aspire to create, to produce? This is a special preserve for whites only. He should be content to bring back the brilliant products.

Yet in Fragments it is clear that Armah's overriding concern is with corruption, as is indicated by the meeting concerning Baako's scripts, "The Root" and "The Brand". "The Root" is about slavery, the destruction of black autonomy and violent superimposition of white culture. But what burns Baako out in its conception is "The Brand", whose theme is the corruption of a man-eat-man society.

Armah's handling of racism in The Beautyful Ones and Fragments differs from that in Blest and Seasons. This difference lies not only in emphasis, but also in style.

In the first two works, racism is a manifestation of a condition that proves malignant; it reads as part of the problem of colonialism. The white factor, which remains omnipresent is perceived not only as being detrimental to the wholesomeness of black people; it is utterly soul-destroying. The root cause of the malignancy can be traced to racism as evolved in the previous chapter, which serves as a basis for the superior position enjoyed by anything white. The blacks perception of themselves as inferior beings as already seen, is only possible through the corrosive contact with racism.

As early as The Beautyful Ones, a strong foundation for the exploration of this disease that subsequently permeates other works is laid. In his revealing statement "the man" already projects the anger his people felt on realization of their surbodination to the white man. In Blest and Seasons, anger crystallizes giving rise to an incisive communication that has racism as its raison d'être. The foregrounding of a topic that has twice been treated with a light, albeit persistent touch reaffirms C.L.R. James' statement that it would indeed be foolish to try and ignore the racial aspect. The language and mode of symbolism used is carved around the subject of racism in such a way that it leaves no doubt as to the issue being addressed.

When Armah moves into the alien environment of Blest, racism assumes greater and more overt forms as it is practised on unique targets by a large majority. Seasons goes even further back in a concerted effort to discover the underlying causes of the problem of racism. In this work, Armah embarks on a mytho-historic journey in which events are highlighted and analysed for the purpose of clarifying the nature of, and impetus behind racism. The rest of the chapter therefore hopes, by focusing on Blest and Seasons, to come to a fuller understanding of Armah's treatment and therefore, understanding, of racism. That Armah confronts this issue of race is important because much as we may try to overlook it, there is a tangible tension between the black and white worlds which, through the centuries has developed into a deeply-rooted psychological problem. Only through an open forum can we hope to come to terms with it.

Why are we so Blest?, considered Armah's most powerful work by some scholars, contains his philosophic basis. The visual symbol on the book jacket encapsulates the quintessence of the work. The yang-yin is the Chinese symbol of dualism which suggests that every mode must contain within it the germ of its anti-thesis, this anti-thesis being a complement, not a negation of the thesis. The Chinese see the white as representing the

masculine principle, energy and celestial influences. The black stands for the feminine principle, passivity and telluric forces[1]. The black and white dots in both spheres imply that there is always something feminine in the masculine, and vice versa. The sigmoid line is a symbol of movement and communication, implying the idea of rotation, which gives a dynamic and complementary character to the symbol. The circle in its entirety is the symbol of ALL - what Armah calls wholeness.

Armah takes this symbol and interprets it such that it represents his weltenschauung. The symbol is subsequently used on two levels. On one level, it is used as the basis for analysing such relationships as exist between the sexes, for example that between Aimée and Modin in Blest. Aimée here serves a twin purpose in that she is both a woman, and white. In her relationship with Modin there is a tension that defies the complementarity of the yang-yin. Aimée is an embodiment of the role defined by Busia of "woman as parasite" (89). Busia in her article

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1 The Encyclopaedae of Philosophy Vols 2 and 4 give a more detailed account of the philosphical significance of the Yang-Yin sign for the Chinese.

"Parasites and Prophets: The use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah's Novels' sees Aimée as "ego-centric, narcissistic, and cruel : the incarnation of all that is aggressively individualistic and destructive about the West..." (99). In this relationship there is a lack of both sexual and racial harmony. One might argue that sexual and racial harmony is eventually achieved. This in itself highlights the unresolved racial factor, which is punctuated by Modin's death.

In contrast is the relationship between Idawa and Isanusi in Seasons, which reflects an intertwining of the feminine and maculine principles into a harmonious whole. Idawa can be viewed as the prototype of what Busia describes as "woman as liberating prophet", a dimension Armah develops particularly in the character of Araba Jesiwa of The Healers.

On the other level, he gives the colours black and white a racial significance, such that their curving into one another represents an inter-racial ideal, where black exists side by side with white, playing supportive and complementary roles. This is an ideal negated by Aimée, and it is worth noting that Armah's works to date have not yet produced this total fusion of the black and white. The cultural element proposed by Fanon in "Racism and

Culture" has an immense bearing on this. Racism, in Fanons opinion, is truly cultural, the crudest element in any given structure. This is confirmed by Armah's failure to arrive at a reconciliation, though we do concede that it is only one element of the systematic oppression of a people.

In Blest, Modin emerges as the prime example of racist manipulation. He is sucked out of his indigenous cultural context on the grounds that he is different from his contemporaries, a separation of a people from themselves such that the mass remains in the morass while "the bright" are incorporated into whiteness. This token entrance into blest-ness ensures the continued dominance and superiority of one race over another. Education, the equalizer here acts as a tool for the division and debasement of a people.

In Modin's case, apart from the academic, close social contact with the sponsors is established, drawing him even deeper into the white milieu. Conflict arises when Modin refuses to concede to the blatant destruction of the cultural values that make him what he is. The attempt to alienate him from his people does not succeed as he refuses to see himself as vastly different, as being "a most unusually intelligent African - the most intelligent,

as a matter of fact" (Blest, 96). He is the target of the committee, a group of tired old white men whose lifeblood is almost dry, but who want to try their hand at playing God by moulding something out of this curiosity from Africa. There is even an "Africanist" in their midst, Professor (no less!) Jefferson - what better indication that the dark continent is finally being dragged from its cocoon. American acknowledgment being the acme, the pinnacle of recognition.

Despite the fact that Modin is wary of, and finally rejects the patronizing overtures of the committee, he does not extend his caution far enough. When he goes to the Africa Education Committee building to make his first contact who is, most appropriately, Mr. Blanchard - Mr. Whitener, he meets Naita - Nighter. Armahs consciousness of race in naming is here again ingeniously executed by drawing a contrast in roles. Mr. Blanchard's duty is to whitewash. Naita, the near-phonetic equivalent to Nighter, which denotes darkness or blackness can here be seen as a blackener. She is an African-American who has studied the nature and behaviour of the whites through association and her peoples long history of slavery and oppression in "The Land of the Just and Free". She warns Modin against trusting the white man: she has worked at the Education Centre and has probably witnessed cases of

Africans coming in dewey-eyed and being mangled in the relentless, crippling machinery operated by the white man for just this purpose. Unfortunately, he is loth to believe her, and her premature disappearance from her role as his mentor shows that the time is not yet ripe for the demystification of whitism. It also leaves Modin wide open to racist intrigue.

Not all of the Africans who come to America are as academically brilliant as Modin. An example is given by Armah of Nkrumah, whom he refers to as the "Anglo-American variant of the educated African". Nkrumah struggles through the echelons of class - to be a part of the blest, of the great American dream? Here was a system that underscored the importance of differences, ultimately in skin colour, and Armah goes on to see Nkrumah as having suffered the "'minority malaise', the anguish of the isolated black man in a world aggressively white" (22). This would result in a need to identify oneself with the very system, a subservient gratitude and self-debasement for getting recognition from the white society. Indeed, if one was not strong enough to overcome it, a submission to racism would be inevitable. When all barriers of class are down, race is ultimately used as the great divide.

There are many mediocre Africans helping to bolster

this myth, those afraid of falling back into the "communal dirt" (Blest, 82), and who therefore use education as the proud tool for their own destruction. The West consequently recognize in the African intelligentsia a challenge. The manipulation takes the form of what Fanon would call "La Mystification" - the phrase he used to describe the overt masking from the people of fraudulent activities by corrupt African leaders so as to benefit themselves. In this instance the pawns to be manipulated are the brilliant Africans. This is because once the intelligentsia have been duped, the rest are only too willing to be assimilated and incorporated into the "Great" and "Greater" i.e. European and American traditions, respectively.

The most dominant and persistent relationship in the work is that between Modin and Aimée, representatives of the two polarities. From the outset it is clear that they are on different levels of existence. Aimée's major concern is self-gratification. She is bored because she has worked out a formula for overcoming the challenges in her life, has even bedded an African head of State. Abundantly blest, she is now obsessed with her disability to attain sexual fulfillment. She is not alone in this. Armah makes it plain that this is a social problem (74), and Aimée and her peers go to absurd lengths to obtain

this release. At this point she represents the barrenness of her race, giving cause for the egocentric quest for succour from, and control of the black race fleshed out by Modin.

On the other hand, Modin presents himself for experiment because he needs the money, having rejected the scholarship, for day to day sustenance. These are the circumstances under which they meet. For the frigid white American woman, the opportunity to experiment with a real virile black African male must not be passed up. Neither Bombo Pakansa, the bungling president, nor Mwangi, the terrified houseboy are representative sample. Aimée has every intention of exploring the myth propagated about African male virility, a myth that gained currency during the days of slavery when white maidenhood had to be protected from the animal savagery of the black man. She has every intention of exploiting this virgin territory.

Modin and Aimée have a stormy relationship, as both are strong-willed, with Aimée believing that she is frigid, while Modin insists that her condition is a temporary state of mind caused by her rigidity, her inability to relax and surrender to her senses. This calls to mind the much abused platonic statement - in this case the Senghorian/Negritudist rejoinder "I feel,

therefore I am". Modin is not a purely sensuous creature, devoid of higher faculties; neither is the sensory realm an African forte. Yet in the relationship with Aimée, she is the chief articulator, the exponent of theories, the blessed. Modin remains the expert only in the physiological sphere. The use of the sexual metaphor in this relationship is of deep significance. Modin pours his life-generating juices into Aimée's "parched desert sands", unreciprocal in this would-be symbiotic act. Armah makes the statement in Seasons: "Springwater flowing to the desert, where you flow there is no regeneration... your future is extinction" (ix).

In his paper, Booth aptly describes the death of this relationship. As Aimée greedily drinks in Modin's pulsating life-blood in a parody of orgasm, even at this agonizing moment she persists in asking Modin if he loves her. She is not satisfied that she has successfully accomplished her mission of destruction until she hears it from the mouth of the destroyed that he is a willing slave, a lover of the destroyer. It is also important to note that even in her aroused state, Aimée fails to find fulfillment from four Frenchmen. With due regard to myth, the amorous nature of the French - their being the most romantic Europeans - should not be lost sight of.

The key question to ask here is, can Aimée be seen outside of her community, or is she the typical outgrowth from a destructive culture? Is she Armah's generalization of the ennui that enveloped Europe from the late nineteenth century, a reflection of those whom "having arrived" have evolved to the point where any would-be creative impulses are now channelled towards selfish carthasis, towards self-gratifying experimentation? Armah takes issue with this question, particularly as concerns a purportedly inferior race, in this case the black race, on which such experimentation is to be carried out. His concern is fuelled by an emergent typification in behaviour, where Aimée is an accomplice in the "wilful, obdurate refusal" to treat other people like men (Impediments, 121). This disregard for the black race escalates in Armah's unfolding of the various accessories to the fact; from Mike "the fascist" (Blest 79-81) and his espousal of the blesséd white pedigree (he is as generous as to admit a few token blacks into blessédness on the basis of class!), to General Wolseley, the "white conqueror" of The Healers (375), content to be lifted up on strong black shoulders with his feet not once touching black soil, a sure sign of his exalted position.

After great and painful deliberation, Modin has decided what he wants to do with his life. Aimée spares

herself the strain of going through a similar process, and makes his mission hers. She then takes over. Their external appearance, as Solo notes, is identical. But for skin colour, they are truly deracialized. Aimée is determined, in the typical bourgeois fashion, to fight anything bourgeois. This means living in a "revolutionary" hotel, rejecting her bourgeois inheritance, and bickering constantly when they are forced due to lack of funds to live off Solo. These potential revolutionaries are both ironic and unnerving in their persistent state of inactivity. They never do get to join the revolution, epitomized at the headquarters by such institutions as the unequal relationship between Esteban Ngulo and Jorge Manuel. Racism upstages sexism in that the inferior circumstances of the women at the Mansion (and after a revolution, too) are overlooked. Of greater urgency, and therefore of more significance to this work, is white racism in America.

Modin has journeyed hard, both physically and mentally to get to the revolution. On approaching Laccryville, there is no escaping the disillusion. As one goes deeper inland, the soldiers eyes get icier, indicative of a deeply ingrained hostility towards the indigenes, an awareness of the singularity of their own race. A question posed by the crippled man in the hospital comes

to mind: "Who gained? ... Who won? (Blest, 16). Racism is indeed firmly entrenched in this "colony only freshly disguised as a nation" (12). As Fanon reiterates in "Culture", every colonial country is a racist country, racism being a propensity inherent in its very system. The reluctance to give up a privileged position is overwhelming in the oppressor.

When the destruction of Modin is complete, Aimée reverts to the bourgeois money unabashedly to take her back to her native Denver, the land of the blest. She who was so revolutionary sees no point in continuing with the struggle for two reasons: in the first place, she was not committed to revolution and was simply indulging her ego as she had done earlier by embarking on an African adventure which had been motivated by boredom and a need to exploit. Secondly, the thread is unbroken and reinforced as she relentlessly pursues Modin to his death, which in turn becomes a victory over a force that could manipulate a vital sphere of her being. In this sense Aimée compares aptly with the chichidodo of Armah's The Beautyful Ones. This is the bird that hates excrement yet depends on maggots, which grow best in the lavatory, for its livelihood. In the same way Aimée finds her completion housed in the black skin that is Modin. It would be barely feasible for her to have any feeling for

the African revolution, herself lacking feeling in her areas of greatest sensitivity.

Modin's fling with Mrs. Jefferson (it does not merit the word relationship) is also based on the myth of African male virility, with white women seeking to fulfill unnamed desires from black men, any forseeable danger to the black man notwithstanding. Aimée goes much farther than this plundering of the continents manhood to its total destruction. This brings us to the central question: Is Armah saying that there can be no positive relationship between black and white peoples?

Solo, by interacting with, and reading Aimée's and Modin's diaries, gives us an insight into their relationship. He also has an affair with Sylvia, a Portuguese, but this is brought to an abrupt end by Sylvia's people. Solo is not of their kind. Solo has also sought revolution and been disillusioned. For him, the farcial nature of the entire neo-colonial structure has its microcosm in the hierarchical nature of the bureau. To begin with, this revolution that Modin so wants to join is disjointed, as shown by the lack of coordination between its headquarters in New York and this branch in Laccryville. It is also fired by questionable motives. Only those with something to gain, or failures

in society are expected to seek revolution; that is why Modin, so full of will to bring about positive changes, yet a virtual success in life, is rejected.

Revolution along colour lines can be detected in Armah's works even before its particularization in Laccryville. Armah ingeniously appeals to the sense of sight, and uses visual impact through the juxtaposition of dark and light images, which in terms of colour are black and white, to entrench the interracial disparity. Looked at broadly, what is introduced as "the gleam" in The Beautyful Ones is compounded by the ever-increasing brilliance of Fragments. In Blest, the yang-yin boldly declares Armah's manifesto. In the work itself, the higher one moves up in rank from dim obscurity, the brighter, indeed whiter, does one's uniform become. At the very top is Ignace Sendoulwa in immaculate white. The full impact of this is foregrounded by a structural manoeuvre that gives rise to lineation in prose (36).

The architectural structure of the office is also of significance in that it gives an insight into the psychological make-up of its users. It stands as a symbol of division as at the bottom, in a spartan office, Ngulo, the black brother concentrates on dull, unchallenging routine work. Manuel, a mulatto who is partly of the

Portuguese, luxuriates in the well-furnished apartment above. Manuel "the man" as Ngulo is "the shadow" does not believe in the revolution. When he refuses to let Aimée join the revolution, it is because she still has not mastered the discretion that is part of the manipulative nature of her race, and in her liaison with Modin might reveal the lack of substance and pretence that is revolution. Manuel is a hypocrite. He says himself:

> An African in love with a European
> is a pure slave. Not a man accidentally
> enslaved. A pure slave, with the heart of
> a slave, with the spirit of a slave... " (205)

Nevertheless, he keeps a white mistress, one portrayed as having a strong awareness of white destiny, and who takes Aimée under her wing on Aimée's completion of her task. Thus Manuel's almost casual dismissal of Aimée as a potential revolutionary, and his further refusal to relegate her to the Uniao National as this would mean certain death, can be seen as a protection of whiteness. The use of such ironical intrigue by Armah rescues the work from vulgar juxtapositions and intensifies the deceit. What emerges clearly is that there is no revolution here; just modern factorship geared towards the belittling and crushing of the African revolution. Even in our own attempt at revolution, the blessédness of establishing our needs and goals ourselves eludes us.

Solo consequently looks at Modin with the understanding eyes of a man who has tasted disillusion. In this sense, Armah uses him to point out the futility of interracial intercourse which would be based on love: love of the individual, as evidenced by Sylvia's betrayal of Solo for the sanctuary offered by her race; or of the African revolution, as discredited by Manuel, the mulatto coveting whiteness, and ultimately, Aimée. The issue of race proves stronger than love and brings us back to Armah's concern about the viability of race-free relationships. It is consequently evident in the Aimée/Modin duo how "they isolate the best of us, then push us back to childhood... a call to suicide" (Blest, 168-9).

Solo, a dormant creative writer, reflects Armah's disatisfaction with the pen as the sole tool for our liberation. In an interview with Igwe, Armah relates how he took to writing (for which he was trained) after failure to join the revolutions in Cuba and Algeria, but still sees it as "a very weak response to the enormous problems in Africa" ("Armah" 18). The creation of a Westward looking people, a people stamped with an inferiority complex by colonialisms racism is just one of these problems. Particularly for the intellectual, the revolution remains a mental exercise fraught with rationalization and objectivity in a constrained situation

that cries out for action.

Yet Solo is better off than those around him in that he has a means of generating an income. Armah presents a society of people living below the breadline, of fatherless homes and child beggars. All this as a result of service to a Metropolis for the amelioration and expansion of superior races. In Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin, the futility of such stoic endurance by a colonized people is underscored. The point being made here is, for whom is it possible to use others as pawns in a game to secure and prove ones own greatness? Which are these people so blest that to preserve their race it is in order to misuse, to annihilate even, another people? For such exploitation to be possible, the oppressor has of needs to have the means to oppress and suppress a people made subject in all spheres: the social, economic and political. When, to justify this kind of behaviour the dominant peoples use arguments based on such premises as the inherent inferiority of the subject peoples in certain areas, or their suitability for the battlefield, Armah raises questions.

Two Thousand Seasons goes right back to the cradle of white racism and its exploitative ways, and seeks to understand the nature of the initial contacts and

development of resultant relationships. This is a noteworthy contribution to knowledge in that Armah is not content to bask in racist colonial stereotypes, but is concerned enough about the distorted nature of our history and mythology to want to delve deep and come up with some truth. The consciousness Armah employs in his creativity serves him well in his projection of, rather than succumbing to, racism. Seasons adamantly advocates a rigorous morality, and what emerges is a roman à thèse dealing with the origins of social malaise, with racism as one of the cornerstones.

The importance of the enslaving of the intellectual mind, an idea that in order of publication has its beginnings in Blest, crystallizes in Seasons. Here is the realization that:

> "... the capture of the mind and the body both is a slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone" (52)

When the "Predators" and "Destroyers" first come to Africa, they are mesmerized by their greed and the abundance of what they seek - be it land, slaves or minerals. They hasten to plunder the continent, and in this they are aided by none other than the egocentric and stupid kings who are lured by rum, and "the gleam": useless trinkets, colourful cloths and white skins.

It is in the nature of Africa to treat unknown quantity with respect. This, the outsiders, without humility are quick to interpret as ignorance. These white men's demands, which to the sensible ear sound incredible - they desire a peoples subserviance AND heritage - to the kings ear is music indeed. What matters, his peoples freedom and comfort, as long as he receives gifts in return? Koranche is a case in point. He goes to absurd lengths to ensure the enslavement of his people. Kamuzu, seizing a similar and long-coveted position turns out true to type. Yet it is even more distressing in that they do not remain fictive characters, as this satiric analogy suggests:

> Osagyefo, courageous, skilled one who
> arrives to pulverize the enemy just when
> the enemy is exulting in imminent victory;
> Mzee, wisdoms own keeper;
> Kabiyesi, leader of men;
> Katachie, commander supreme! (Seasons, 269)

The liberated mind has to be approached differently. In these societies are to be found people who refuse to be part of the collusion between the king and the outsiders, who "see the disease, and understand it well" (314). These are the healers of Armah's last work to date. They find that they cannot, perforce, live in that society, since to do so would call forth their destruction as

rejectors of their own enslavement. The path of this rejection can be perceived in The Beautyful Ones. "The man" uses the dark, shadowy alleys to get to his mentor, "the teacher". This idea is pursued in Fragments, where are shadows in the environment, but of deeper significance are those in Baako's mind, disturbed occassionally, then more frequently by painful white sparks (230). This image is concretized in Seasons where Armah presents the symbolic "way": the way away from racism; the wholesome way. Strugglers after this path have been excommunicated from society, and have sought shelter in the dim recesses of caves in the forest, as for example Isanusi, Idawa, or the group of initiates. By The Healers, the Eastern forest emerges strongly as the culmination of all images away from "the gleam": a sanctuary for those fleeing the harsh glare and sycophancy of the Kings court at Anoa, at Poano, at Esuano. The Eastern forest looms large as a reaffirmation of the serenity to be found in blackness, a looking to "the rising" in sharp contrast to those "headed after the setting sun (where)... even the possibility of regeneration is dead" (Seasons, ix). This West, as embodied by Aimée of Blest is a burnt out shell, seeking to rejuvenate itself by drawing out of Africa.

The paradox of human nature is that even with the indisputable evidence gleaned so far, we are loth to see the truth for what it is. The Dovi problem is not

unique. He could not, did not want to believe that his own flesh and blood could turn against him. They were tempted by individual private comfort, and did. As Armah succinctly put it, "... just so short, so mediocre, so normal their vision was" (286). And they were not alone in this, otherwise how can one account for the resounding success of slavery. This lack of vision has had far-reaching effects on the black people. In Fragments, Armah points to slavery as a central part of our new culture with racism as an integral dimension (205).

The tactics employed continue to be as diverse as the outsiders are cunning. This leads to the indigenous peoples being convinced of the primitivity, the backwardness of their own culture and values. Eurocentric and Islamic myths take their place, and if those fail, force, which has never been applied more profitably, is used. That it is effective is confirmed by the fact that for centuries now the black man has been and is still seeking an identity outside of himself in the belief that it is finer. "Of what other use have Africa's tremendous energies been these many centuries but to serve the lusts of the whites?" (Blest, 170).

The tenacious tendency to serve these lusts is reflected in Myth Literature and the African World, where

Soyinka examines the motivation governing Armah's exploration of inequalities based on skin colour. He says:

> There is nothing to choose ultimately between the colonial mentality of an Ajayi Crowther, West Africa's first black bishop, who grovelled before his white missionary superiors in a plea for patience and understanding of his "backward, heathen, brutish" brothers, and the new black ideologues who are embarrassed by statements of self-apprehension by the new "ideologically backward" African. Both suffer from induced fantasies of redemptive transformation in the image of alien masters... (are) victims of a doctrine of self-negation" (xii).

The African is still willingly and happily hurtling along the road of self-destruction.

Seasons is a rejection of the "Eurocentric Incubus", and is a reaction to the various untruths propagated by the whites. Armah notably does not romanticize the past, and conscientiously seeks to present a ray of hope for a people whose racial enervation and willingness to succumb to other people's vision needs to be redirected. Thus Seasons does not read as:

> "a racist tract; the central theme is

> far too positive and dedicated, and its ferocious onslaught on alien contamination soon falls into place as a preparatory exercise for the liberation of the mind. A clean, receptive mind is a prerequisite for its ideological message, and there is no question that this work is designed for the particular audience of Armah's own race (Myth, 111).

Armah involves himself deeply in the issues he deals with because they are of grave concern. Scholars who claim intellectual objectivity may find this commitment indeed. A similar dedication caused Fanon to cry out in anguish

> And so, it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me (Myth, 134)

Armah engages in an explication of this meaning. If our social direction is to be governed by forces outside of ourselves, it becomes a worthwhile exercise to try and understand the origins of our enervation. Armah takes on a challenge as mammoth as it is sensitive. As we move towards understanding our present moment, unravelling the causes of long-existing prejudices and biases particularly against ourselves appears quite paradoxical, for we have come to accept the present moment. In light of this, any

evidence to the contrary, remembrance far surpassing the present rememberers (to use Armah's words) is bound to be open to varying mis- or interpretations. All this notwithstanding, Armah has thrown down the gauntlet.

Armah's choice of linguistic medium has been of immense interest to both critics and readers, particularly because of what may be viewed as an inversion of the norm: where black images assume positivity and white ones the contrary. Ngara in Stylistic Criticism has termed this the "decolonization" of the English language, but one tends to feel, as does Ngara, that Armah goes beyond a simple negation of the representation of a white or colonial world view as imposed on the African. His masterly manipulation of words is complemented by a projection of versatile images to carry ideas. This is a deliberate action given reason in Fragments where Baako says there is "nothing necessarily foreign in images, not like... words" (112).

Armah begins by removing the negative stigma that blackness has been imbued with since the days of slavery. Thus we find in many passages in Seasons reference to "the whitest deaths", "... drugged white in deathly happiness...", or "white destroyers". These phrases are not entirely of Armah's making, and have credence within

their cultural context. An exposed skeleton, for example, is white. The Western culture has yet to associate happiness with the colour black, and it is also a fact that the Europeans and Americans refer to themselves as whites. Armah's stylistic use of the constant repetition of these metaphors, and the occassional yoking of "white" to some unpleasantness perpetrated by natives of the European or American races creates an uncompromising symbolic destructiveness represented by the geographic West.

In contrast, one finds metaphors dealing with blackness, for example "... lifes' people... we, the black people" (13), "The water was so far we forgot the blackness of its flowing" (7), or of Anoa's beauty, "... her body was of a deep, even blackness..." (23). This imagery created around blackness is concerned with the revamping of a wilting aesthetic. The danger lies in its being misconstrued by a people so long and thoroughly steeped in positive images of whiteness that the very thought that something white could be destructive is anathema. His choice of the monochromatic dichotomy facilitates the development of dialectic. The dexterity with which Armah describes the inner beauty of black women, for example, lends them a depth of character and serenity difficult to surpass. Using the female metaphor, he employs special linguistic nuances to draw a vivid

contrast that throws into sharp relief his preoccupation with the theme of wholeness, of connectedness.

> Now from the gate... came 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. Her walk was like that of a beginning stilt-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 the space between her eyes... . As she came in there was space before her, space to her left and right, space behind her: her figure seemed the shape itself of loneliness. It seemed impossible that she could ever be together with any other being... the way the white creature moved, everything aggravated the sense of aloneness, created a desolation so thorough it would have been easy to imagine the presence of this singular apparition had blighted all surrounding life into rigidity; that the white creature infact existed only to perfect this general petrifaction... (Seasons, 186-7)

This disjointed apparition is contrasted to Idawa.

> There was a woman. Idawa was her name
> There are not many born with every generation
> of whom it may be said that they have a
> beauty needing no counterpointing blemish to
> make its wonder clear. The best moulded face
> may sit incongruous on a bloated bosom.
> Idawa had a beauty with no such
> disappointment in it. Seen from a distance
> her shape in motion told the looker here
> was coordination free, unforced. From the hair
> on her head to the last of her toes there
> was nothing wasted in her shaping - And her
> colour: that must have come uninterfered
> with from nights own blackness (Seasons, 109).

The first description is a lament: a devastatingly sympathetic portrayal of Bradford George's wife causing the reader to empathize with such intense aloneness, yet simultaneously feel a repulsion and repugnance for this isolation. By the use of such adjectives as pale, disjointed, discontented, desolate, we get a picture of utter dejection and waste: a senseless floundering. The description of Idawa, on the other hand, is a celebration. It offers one a sense of freedom and completeness. The fact of colour is clearly not the focal point: it appears as an addendum. Throughout the work,

infact, the word black as a qualifier or modifier is little used. Rather, Armah creates images of intense beauty and wholesomeness around the concept of blackness. It is clear from these symbolic presentations that what Armah is therefore fighting is:

> their (the destroyers) habit to cut off
> fingers from the hand itself uprooted
> from its parent body, calling each
> fallen piece a creature in itself, different
> from ears, eyes, noses, feet and entrails,
> other individual creatures of their own
> making (2).

This is not an exaggeration on Armah's part. As indicated in the first chapter, ethnological studies have shown the inability of white people to come to terms with, or penetrate the complexities of black existence, consequently leading to the falsification and suppression of historical evidence. This has had far reaching effects. Intrinsic differences have been blown out of proportion such that to date, the inhabitants of some of the countries in the Northern part of Africa pride themselves on being Arabs as opposed to Africans.

The dominant motif in Armah's works, and particularly in Seasons and Blest is that of reciprocity: "Receiving,

giving, giving receiving, all that lives is twin" (Seasons, xi). The "prologue" in Seasons outlines this clearly through a constant repetition of the words giving, taking, receiving, flowing, absorbing. Anoa in her prophecy also spoke in twin voices: the first a strident, berating voice foretelling death and destruction and the second calmly showing the people where they had gone wrong and calmly advocating a return to "the way". The yang-yin of Blest is the very essence of reciprocity. But it has been elusive, and is defied by a state of disequilibrium, brought about by situations where one faction, being white or near-white expect to do all the taking while the other gives, where this faction exploits and consequently oppresses the other.

Armah's ideal is projected by contracting the colours black and white in such a way that the illusion of fraternity is exposed, escalating gradually to reveal racism, for example as typified by Aimee. This juxtaposition achieves recognition due to the singularity of Armah's persistant pursuit of "where the rain began to beat us" (Impediments, 29). It is developed as it becomes increasingly clear that his search for a reciprocal ideal is thwarted at every turn by the uncompromising reality of selective blessedness.

The casting of such diametrically opposed forces makes conflict inevitable. Indeed, Armah depicts one group as having known plunder and rape, symbolized by the colour white: "whiteness indeed they have known; of our blackness they have yet to learn" (Seasons, xviii). "The way" is consequently symbolized by blackness, and is one of commitment to humanity and communion. Armah rises above the conflict, and we find suggested and hoped the synthesis of such forces, such that eventually the thesis and anti-thesis assume a duality, a mutuality resulting in the confluence of waters repeatedly referred to in Seasons, the confluence of peoples dancing one dance (Healers, 376).

The article on "Thanksgiving" (Blest, 80-81) boasts of a complex community that is indicative of advanced development for the blest. Yet this complexity sadly lacks a heightened consciousness. The Americans, the settlers, claim to have made the savage Indian paradise complex; in other words, they restructured a community through the extermination of a people and a culture. They now boast of two polarities; the existence of white superiority side by side with the mediocre rest. Only through a rediscovery of community can wholesomeness be restored.

It is true that Armah furthers his argument by using affective and evocative language that arouses varying emotions in readers. In his descriptions of, for example, the gluttony and excessive promiscuity of the Arabs coming in the wake of the rigorous self-denial and absolution during the month of Ramadhan, such juxtaposition serves to highlight the hypocrisy of the Arabs. The directness of his diction when he describes intercourse between persons, for example the sensitizing of Aimee by Modin, or the furtive encounters between Modin and Sandra Jefferson may make the reader wonder what Armah hopes to achieve by being so explicit.

When one looks at how sex has been used as a tool for exploitation, Armah's aim becomes clearer. In the Western world, even prior to the Victorian times the subject was taboo. One heard only of the "birds and bees". During slavery, numerous works attest to the fact that white males raised their females to a Virgin Mary pedestal and used the "base and sensuous" African women to satisfy all forms of lusts and sexual depravity[1]. When the white

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1 See, for instance Bell Hooks Ain't I A Woman : Black women and femininism. London and Sydney: Pluto Press, 1981.

women saw through the ruse, and evidence abounded in the many children produced, they also turned to the black males, who did not have a say in the matter and were at risk from their masters, for satisfaction. In this manner, the myth on black sexuality was concretized.

In Africa and the Novel (162), McEwan argues that such graphic detail is unnecessary; that to depict violence, a raised fist is more effective than, say, the memorable way in which Armah tells us of how John

> pushed the burning iron against the captives chest where the oil had been smeared and held it there a full moment. The tortured man yelled with pain, once. Smoke rose sharply from the oily flesh... raw exposed flesh (Seasons, 184),

or the description of the castration and brutal murder of Modin for that matter. In these instances, the five senses are all evoked so strongly, it creates a powerful mental image surpassing McEwanian expectations. Even the sixth sense that questions the reasons behind such atrocities is aroused.

Such thought provoking presentation, the raising of pertinent questions is vastly different from the arrogance of white scholarship that presents its perspective as the whole truth. As Armah says:

> We have not found the 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 (Seasons, 4).

He seeks to answer the question concisely posed by Soyinka: "What was the authentic genius of the African world before the destructive alien intrusion?" (105) Armah builds a forum for an honest exploration of this question.

At this point, the question of the audience to whom the work is addressed has to be answered. When Armah wrote The Beautyful Ones, most critics were angered by his excessive use of stench and filth to portray a budding neo-colonial nation. Such criticism was, not ironically, spearheaded by expatriate critics of the calibre of Prof. Charles Larson, author of the widely acclaimed The Emergence of African Fiction. As a visionary Armah had foreseen, and told his community of the consequences of corruption. Today, for most of the African countries, the chickens have come home to roost. To use Armah's uncompromising language, we are wallowing in the cesspool. And this is still the fact for most of the countries over a quarter century after independence.

This is pertinent in that Armah is now harping on our sense of inferiority. It comes as no surprise when he

receives the same accusation, that of over-effusiveness and licence in his use of language in addressing the unblest. Yet the readership should acknowledge, to use Achebe's proverb, that "he who brings home ant-ridden faggots should expect a visit from the lizards". The state of disequilibrium is one fostered not only by the perpetrator, but in time by the victim. Armah's duty as a writer demands that he confront this readership with its now hardened morality and sensitivity in an honest manner.

Fidel Castro gave a description of the attitudes from which such self-protective criticism emanate:

> Novels which attempt to reflect the reality of the world of Imperialisms rapacious deeds; the poems aspiring to protest against its enslavement, its interferance in life, in thought, in the very bodies of nations and peoples; and the militant arts which in their expression try to capture the forms and content of Imperialisms aggression and the constant pressure on every progressive living and breathing thing and on all that is revolutionary, which teaches, which - full of light and conscience, of clarity and beauty - tries to guide men and peoples to better destinies, to the highest summits of life and justice - all these meet Imperialisms highest censure (Towards the Decolonization, 90).

Armah's work falls into this category as he relentlessly pursues a healing mythology for his people. In this chapter, signs indicating the prevalence of an alien intrusion are traced as they control the lives of characters in The Beautyful Ones and Fragments. Oyo typifies the compulsive attraction to, and admiration of "the gleam" until the putrid odour of acquisition in the person of Brempong pervades her home. In Fragments institutions of learning, the media, and citadels of power and affluence such as the Atlantic-Caprice all emanate a white brilliance which impinges upon the consciousness of the people. Seasons and Blest consequently reflect an imperative return to both the origins, and practice of racism and mirror Armah's preoccupation with this subject; his refusal to let "le silence de chacun assure le repos de tous" (Blest, 181). Be it in the description of the degradation endured by a people during slavery, or the creation of such adversely powerful characters as Aimee, Armah's bombardment of the bastion of blestness is in the firm conviction that it is a universal prerogative.

CHAPTER THREE

AUGMENTATIVE PERSPECTIVES: THE CASE FOR REGENERATION.

"By every means necessary to free my people."

Malcolm X.

Having highlighted the way in which Ayi Kwei Armah traces the build-up of racism to the point where it attains epidemic proportions visible even to the undiscerning eye in Seasons and Blest, this chapter intends to consolidate his argument by looking at other works. Basing itself on the phenomenon of colonialism, the socio-economic implications of racism, particularly as discussed by Cabral in Unity and Struggle, and Rodney in How Europe Underdeveloped Africa are brought in to fortify Armah's thesis, which is in turn vindicated by a reality even more cruel.

Armah tackles the problem of race in two phases in a systematic quest and subsequent analysis of significant milestones in his mission of liberation. The first phase, as found in Blest is one of a ruthless and relentless destruction. In unravelling the deceit that surrounds the present moment, Armah seeks to get to the root of the seemingly natural imbalance based on so extraneous a premise as skin colour.

This is where, Fanon's "man of colour" steps in (Skins). His entire existence is governed in relation to beings and tenets at variance with the very essence of his existence. As in the portrayal of Solo and

Modin, the "man of colour" is not an initiator of events. Rather, his role is that of a slave. Even as he tries to extricate himself from their all-pervading clutches, the more thorough is his entanglement. In this work (Blest) is projected the powerful image of a destructive alien culture, and a black peoples encounter with it. It is riddled through with intrigue, with manipulation, with offensiveness.

With Seasons comes Armah's struggle to create a black perspective, of which The Healers is a consolidation. In this second phase, on realizing that Fanon's "man of colour" is not perceived as a being, that he has been obliterated by racism, Armah assumes the task of recreating him. This starts off with what eventually assumes mammoth proportions: the systematic recreation of "the way", a distinct mode of existence that finds its culmination in Armah's last work to date, The Healers. Armah achieves this largely through a manipulation of language in what would amount to negation by positivity, by lending positive attributes to black images. Indeed, it is the thrust of language that gives Armah's work that badge of commitment and, not surprisingly, bears the brunt of a lot of criticism from the white world. This reversal of images, as earlier stated, has been

termed racist, but it must be reiterated that it is the very initiators of the original image who deem it so. As misfortune would have it, they have illustriously pioneered Africa's literary criticism, Charles Larson being a case in point. In his rejoinder entitled "Larsony: Fiction As Criticism of Fiction" in which Armah discusses the role of the Western Critic in the development of African Literature, he puts Larson firmly in place.

The importance of Armah's stylistic manoeuvre becomes a focal point because he is conscientiously deliberate about diction, and equally wary of the pitfalls of racism. These facts are borne, first, by the way in which he consciously builds up the manifestations of racism in The Beautyful Ones and Fragments, such that they grow from being the norm to being a reflection of a brilliant discord in the black community. Secondly, the visual ideal represented by the yang-yin and its betrayal in the literary projection of unveiled racism is boldly dealt with in Blest and Seasons, leaving no room for doubt as to whom the racist is. There is nothing accidental about racism ("Culture" 126) just as there is nothing accidental about Armah's presentation of it. And Armah is a firm believer that all racism is racism

with no exceptions, since all show the same collapse, the same bankruptcy of man (Skins, 85). The uniqueness of Armah's position lies in the fact that, being black, even his autonomous existence is questionable. Nevertheless, his refashioning of the English language (though irksome to some) shows his determination to channel his creative impulses and artistic sensitivity to the wider African audience inspite of and through the very tongue of the forces he is up against.

Armah's determination notwithstanding, language inevitably carries its own burden in the form of tradition and culture. Yet Armah's reversal of linguistic points of reference must not automatically be assumed to encompass African culture and tradition, which have evolved over countless generations with a people, and are neither antagonistic to, nor an antithesis to the Western ethos. Because of the historical fact of colonization, the onus to shed racism is on the Imperialists, racism being a trait inherent in white culture, as Fanon emphatically emphasizes in "Culture". Consequently, Armah's task is threefold: to remove all traces of racism from a racist tongue by generating his own language to carry a new mythology and thereby surpassing racisms limitations; to give it relevance to his people, and

to recreate a people with a sense of dignity and worth.

In salvaging what he can from our historical wreckage, Armah refurbishes and establishes certain mytho-truths. For example the prophecies of Anoa. These caution a people to return to "the way" from which they have veered, distracted by all manner of evil. These come in the form of alien religions, instruments of power which simultaneously shew destruction, or the gleaming, glittering but worthless baubles of Western civilization. Seers like Isanusi are deeply depressed by their peoples deception, because to them the truth is so clear. Their mission is given contemporanaeity in The Healers, where Densu rejects outright corruption and political power that will necessitate the sacrificing of his people so as to satisfy the lusts`and greed of superior beings like Glover. In this work we find "the way" concretized in the wholesome lifestyle of the healers who dwell in the Eastern forest. A few good people also dot the open society. Armah makes no pretentions about his idyllic vision being easy to achieve. A people have strayed far from the correct path, and a return is bound to be treacherous and full of pitfalls, especially with a force which stands to lose from this return fighting the sojourners every step of the way.

Densu is not the only epic hero to carry Armah's vision. In Seasons we encounter a group of twenty young revolutionaries who feel called upon to actively fight the misguided path their community is treading. They are depicted as taking a stand against the fake alliance between their foolish king and the white visitors. The king, as aforementioned, is prepared to sell his people for paltry returns, while the visitors have no qualms about buying a people so as to misuse them and at the same time affirm white superiority. They are, after all, the initiators of this abhorrent exchange. The young revolutionaries stand against such inhumanity can be seen, for instance, in the action of Tawia, who prefers death to the disgrace of being a chattel.

When one considers the magnitude of our alienation which is backed by such factors as time, reduction of being and absorption to a point into a foreign culture, it becomes easy to understand why Armah's fight against racism is itself gladly mistaken for racism. A counter-attack of this devious nature is almost guaranteed to cloud the issue.

One might be tempted to argue that Armah's manichaen approach to the issue of interracial contact

renders his arguments chauvinistic. He, like Fanon, is motivated by a justified passionate hatred for human degradation on the basis of such phenotypical variation as colour, and an unshakeable desire for dignity and equality. Fanon argues that, particularly for a people experiencing the indignity of discrimination, it becomes unrealistic to begin by seeking compromise where none exists.

It can be argued that Amilcar Cabral, for example, looks at the colonial picture more impartially than Armah, because he does not neglect to bring out the humane side of the Portuguese colonialists, and the lack of cooperation from the natives. However, on examination of Cabral (Unity and Struggle), his argument emerges clearly. A degree of detail becomes necessary in order for the thrust of his thesis to be fully appreciated. Cabral sees the African in the Portuguese colony - he being one - as totally controlled by the colonialist in a system that he equates to Apartheid (18). The Africans, long removed from fertile lands, do not enjoy even the most elementary of human rights, and are victims of forced labour which one of the colonial Governors, Henrique Galvao admitted was worse than the most brutal forms of slavery in that only the dead escaped.

While the Africans in the Portuguese colonies live in misery, colonial settlers and companies amass wealth and capital, most of which is taken out of the colonies. As Cabral says, it would be a miracle indeed for Portugal, which was one of the poorest European countries with an illiteracy rate of forty percent to have a civilizing effect on any country. Yet their mission is one of "Civilization and Christianity". This mission is enforced by a vicious secret police, inhuman colonial administration, brutal soldiers and settlers militia.

In the schools, African languages are prohibited because of a policy of Assimilation. This is merely subterfuge, because as it is, hardly any of the local people get into the schools, and on the social level, rigid demarcations ensure the non-assimilation of the "assimilados", and the continued existence of ninety per cent of the African population in sub-human conditions. Africans are excluded from employment even in the most unskilled jobs, and racial discrimination is openly practiced (17). Cabral says, "for those who've lived under Portuguese domination for five centuries, their reign was evil, and where evil reigns there is no place for good" (19). This statement is made pertinent by the fact that this

evil reign was motivated by feelings of superiority over a colonized people on the basis of race. Cabral's statement of it in unequivocal terms belies popular reference to colonialism as a "civilizing mission", and foregrounds racism as the prime reason for all ensuing atrocities perpetrated by the Imperialists. The senseless shooting of a woman in Seasons (150) just so as to prove the facility and power of a gun is a minor example of this evil: life ceases to be sacrosanct.

Not only does Cabral's research help to fortify Armah's convictions. These facts also bring into sharp focus what might cursorily pass off as a casual affair turned sour. They lend depth and give dimension to Sylvia's seemingly irrational rejection of Solo in Blest. Even if she is unaware of the significance of their differences initially, Sylvia's people make sure they take care of their own. Maria insists that "she has no right to throw herself away like that" (55), and Solo is therefore not wrong in regarding himself as "void" (52). Yet Armah puts the rejection the Africans suffered at the hands of the Portuguese mildly. This rejection of a people and their culture is a reflection of the racism which at its most absurd prompted Salazar, the Portuguese leader

to declare that "Africa does not exist" (140). This was in an attempt to obliterate a people's culture, culture being the vigorous manifestation of the material and historical reality of a given society; in effect what, once crystallized, acts as a force against any foreign oppressive and dominant cultures as nationalistic liberation struggles.

It is barely feasible, therefore, to say that Cabral's involvement in the liberation of the African people's is objective in the non-involvement sense of the word. There is no way in which a committed call to usurp over five centuries of oppression could be that, because colonialism is governed by an irrational ideology and drives that need much more than subtlety to overcome. Given the forces that Cabral was, and Armah is up against, it would be ridiculous to look for compromise in such bleakness. Armah's work is a candid response to the signs of our times.

Fanon, unlike Cabral is concerned with the liberation of the individual, the reconciliation of the black person to himself as the mover of his own destiny. In his work Black Skins White Masks he tells us how it took him three years to begin the work, so incensed was he with emotion that he feared his

thoughts might burn the very paper. The difficulty of adopting a rational approach in the face of racism's irrationality is easily appreciated. A Tao proverb put it slightly differently: to act sincerely with the insincere is dangerous. But distancing oneself from the problem does not reduce the problem. Whereas Cabral narrates and analyses a situation pertaining to his immediate concern, the attainment of independence, Fanon analyses the inner workings, the psyche of an individual within and beyond the context of colonialism, who has been ravaged by racism and consequently needs to redefine himself. In thus centering on the individual, Fanon's psychological probings are as a result closer to Armah's literary exploration than Cabral's.

Both Cabral's and Fanon's analyses inevitably stem from the colonial experience that was responsible for the shaping of their awareness, and because of this, a look into the nature and impetus behind colonialism as the cause of the problem is imperative. Rodney in <u>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</u> describes it as a system of "foreign investments" by metropolitan powers. Once a foreign power has interests outside its own territory, it seeks to control the new area by exploiting the labour and natural resources so as to

obtain maximum profit. This it does by taking the raw material, manufacturing it, and injecting it back into the colony's economic market as finished product, creating the total impotence and dependency of the colony. When Baako in Fragments tries to fight this bondage by aspiring to produce something from his own ideas, and knowledge (as opposed to cargo) garnered from the West, it so goes against the grain that the society declares him mad and relegates him to an asylum. So complete is the enslavement of both body and mind to artefacts from the white world. Even his work on slavery is edited and filmed by one white, Scalder, so as to portray black brutishness and villainy and simultaneously absolve whites from any participation in this grisly act.

Baako's antithesis can be found in Brempong, with whom he is contrasted sharply on their return journey from Paris. Brempong is a faithful patron and consumer of a well established foreign market initially built on his sweat, and perpetuated by his patronage. It is a market that ensures the continued underdevelopment of his own country by crushing any incentives towards production and expansion, and raising its consumers to a class above those who cannot obtain these amenities, and thereby elevating

them, not to the deferential position that wealth was accorded in the African tradition, but to whiteness. On his return, a grotesque incident takes place. Brempongs sister's over-effusiveness in the welcoming of her brother by throwing her "glittering" kente for her "hero" to trample on, and the washing of his feet (shoes!) in champagne is ostentation enough. But added to this is that inevitable comparison to whiteness.

> "Eeeeei! Our white man, we saw you wave!...
> The big man has come again... Oh, they
> have made you a white man, complete!.
> Yes, praise him!... (of the kente) stamp on
> it, yes, great man, walk!" (78 - 83).

The satiric creation of this hideous situation highlights the bankruptcy of this society's faith in itself. This incident is mirrored in The Beautyful Ones when Koomson arrives in his plush, chauffeur-driven limousine to buy bread from the market women who continually refer to him as "big man". One seller even "sweetens her tones" thus: "My own lord, my master, oh, my white man, come. Come and take my bread. It is all yours, my white man, all yours" (43). The association of bigness, greatness, and even ecclesiastical worship of a human being in

equating him to whiteness places actual whiteness in a position confounding to the imagination. Not only this, it also underlines the other extreme; the total degradation and lack of self esteem of the black person so reduced. Armah lays the foundation for this extremity in Seasons. The colonialists chose as their kingpins the kings themselves. These guardians of a people were beguiled into surrendering all control over their subjects and territories through fair means or foul (150-6), leaving their people open to all nature of manipulation, and themselves mere symbolic tokens of a betrayed trust. Furthermore, and as Armah emphasizes, a trust reluctantly bestowed upon them by a people with no known tradition of kingship.

These manifestations of self-hate and love of the white factor are but projections of a relationship that grew out of an institution imposed upon a free people by Imperialism. Rodney also shows how they were engendered by colonialisms desire for control over the indigenous peoples governed by greed. Not only did the colonialists find it necessary, after a while to settle, but they also did so in the choicest, albeit occupied areas. As more and more colonialists poured in, there arose the need to justify the removal of indigenous peoples from the most fertile and

climatically suitable lands into smaller reserves where they could easily be controlled and made to work cheaply. One of the strategies used to ensure that they worked was the imposition of such taxes as "hut" tax in East Africa, and "sovereignty" tax in Guinea. Ironically, the reintroduction of poll tax in one of the former great metropolitan powers is today the cause of much protest and demonstration.

Since the indigenous people comprised the majority, it became necessary to propagate myths about the natural superiority of the whites, myths centred around one of their basic tools of oppression, Christianity and its manifesto, the Bible[1]. This probably explains the elevation of Brempong along Christ-like lines - the anointing of his feet with

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1 In his work Apartheid: Tragedy in Black and White, Gordon D. Aeschliman, an ex-priest of the Dutch Reformed Church gives a detailed account of the relentless misquoting and misinterpretation of the Bible by the "chosen people" for purposes of furthering Apartheid which is based on racism.

champagne - the adoption of the very weapon of their oppression, sadly, for deeper oppression. White prejudice further found the perfect excuse for their bias in skin colour, to date the very backbone of apartheid in South Africa.

Thus Rodney sees white racism as an integral part of the capitalist mode of production. But what may have started out as a purely economic venture (i.e. racism had a good reason to exist in that it served to boost the economy) in time became so institutionalized (as in the United States of America) that racism in some areas today exists for the sole purpose of oppressing black people[1]. Things have changed since C.L.R. James made his classic statement on class and race. For racists, the race question IS fundamental. Consequently, for those seeking truth, in order to understand our present and our neo-colonial relations with our former metroplises,

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[1] Walter Rodney in Ch.3 of <u>How Europe Underdeveloped Africa</u> gives a detailed analysis of this move from the economic to the racist reasons for the oppression of black people in the colonies.

our economic bondage is indeed important. But the additional contempt of Western bourgeois racism, that contempt that, according to Fanon, minimizes what it hates, cannot be taken lightly.

Evidence of this contempt abounds in Armah's works. It can generally be discerned in the self-hate developed by such characters as Estella and Koomson in The Beautyful Ones. Their daughter, Princess, is aptly named in accordance with their aspiration towards what Neil Lazarus terms as "Anglophilia and Governance". Asante - Smith, Akosua-Russel, Fifi (who though not yet "entirely" like Brempong, is well on his way) of Fragments are just a few of the characters whose self-esteem has been eroded. More specifically, in Seasons, Isanusi reminds the people of the incongruity of white generosity which is insulting in that they "(claim) they know what is good for us and we dont know it" (154). The foolishness of the kings may well have occassioned such belittling contempt, even from the well intentioned, but Modin's case is inexcusable. By white standards "one of the most intelligent Africans", his manipulation and the attempts to make him a factor for the beffudlement of his people, and not even by some bright-eyed whizz kids, but by tired old men run to seed emphasizes the

magnitude of the contempt.

Armah has developed a style uniquely his own, and this mode has been the bone of much contention. Particularly in the area of characterization, it has been posited that his characters are not "fully rounded". Palmer in The Growth of the African Novel refers to Seasons in particular as "sadly deficient in characterization" (234), yet here Armah is clearly dealing with a collective consciousness and historical reality that supercedes individuality. Undoubtedly, in the attempt to be all things to all people, one may end up being nothing at all. Characters in Armah's works are important in so far as they carry ideas; and this they do successfully. Some even become memorable because of the purpose they serve. Rama Krishna of The Beautyful Ones is a case in point. Armah's stylistic and metaphorical handling of him makes any further knowledge of him superfluous. His name is distinctive and representative; his habits, eccentric, his exit, prematurely timely. He chooses to disconnect himself from society, seeks an identity outside blackness, placing himself apart from "human connectedness... (which) is the great social cement that really holds..." (Impediments, 103). This isolation inevitably leads to his death. Armahs point

is that outside of society, man's life ceases to have both purpose and meaning. Krishna embodies the ancient words of wisdom found in Fragments:

> A human being alone
> is a thing more sad than any lost animal
> and nothing destroys the soul
> like its aloneness (6).

Armah chooses to walk an unenviable tightrope in dealing with matters so real. Yet he remains relentlessly brave in a five volume pursuit of the truth. Interestingly, Achebe in an essay entitled "The Truth of Fiction" (Impediments, 95) has been read by such critics as Booth ("Metaphor") as placing Armah in the school of writers of malignant fiction. Booth's interpretation of, and prescription to this taxonomy, this straitjacket that poses a threat to creativity fits in with his ambitious attempts to rewrite Armah's work (Blest) so that it conforms to his prejudices. He neglects to take into account the different philosphical faces, intersubjectivity of truth, or Western hegemonisms superimposition of definition. The choice of a truth is a writer's prerogative in the same way as is stylistic privilege, and indeed, there is none that exercises Armah's conscientiousness and thoroughness in his approach in all his works.

Seasons serves as a good example. Its purpose is twofold: it is a work written in response to various untruths propagated by the white world; it is also concerned with the reaffirmation of black self worth. These aims lend the work an historic inevitability and realistic outlook that are so potent as to be formidable. No redeeming literature is conceived in a vacuum, and literature has a duty to answer to the needs of particular societies at particular times. Armah responds to this need with a freedom and dynamism that defy what Soyinka terms as "the conditioning of the mono-criterion methodology of Europe" (137), a conditioning that deems any deviation from or improvement upon itself wrong. As already shown in Chapter Two, Seasons comprises a masterly telescopic sweep of history which Armah reinforces with language of rare poetic quality giving rise to versatile symbolism. Racism's strong presence is the result of a prevalence of a certain imbalance in society, and should not detract from the power of Armah's creative imagination.

Fanon has used such medical terms as "malignant" to describe racism. Nevertheless, racisms malignancy should under no circumstances be mistaken for malignancy on the part of Armah, much as the racist would like this, and particularly because it clouds

the issue. Indeed, it is ironical that we may be so couched in Western Imperialist ideals that even the most impartial of our intellectuals may not recognize, leave alone acknowledge their leanings. Achebe has not so long ago observed that "white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked" (Impediments, 8) Armah has dared to disturb "le repos de tous" (Blest, 181).

The implications of C.L.R. James' observation that we are still living under colonialism (Nkrumah, 28), stated over one and a half decades after the independence of most of the African countries, are far-reaching. A phenomenon like the issuing of scholarships to "the bright" so as to separate them from their people and place them on the pedestal of privilege, yet not on the rarefied plane of whiteness, for instance, gently severs the black man from his people and dulls his sensitivity and consciousness to the extent that he no longer identifies with "their" problems. Modin is a case in point, but he fights his impending alienation to the death. He refuses to be divided and ruled. This resilience, though eventually broken, and Solo's informed interpretation of it opens up an avenue of a future response better prepared and more militant in its battle for self and black

preservation.

Extensive and verified research by such noteworthy scholars as herein discussed lends credence to and provides a concrete anchor for Armah's uncompromising approach to this topic and in effect, to the proposal that racism is an unjustified and degenerate colossus. He is one of the first to acknowledge that Africa is rife with problems to which his writings are but a weak response ("Armah", 18). But when any victim comes up with the kind of shrewdness and revolutionary resolve mapped out by Armah in his works, then the OTHER begins to fear as the very foundation of their superiority is now threatened. Furthermore, if Modin, an intellectual, joins the revolution; if brain meets brawn, the bastion built by racism will slowly but surely begin to crumble, so for the moment it is in order to sacrifice Modin as the hour is not yet come. Meanwhile, it is imperative for the racist to discredit, to ridicule, to destroy so as to preempt and weaken any criticism of, and preserve the exalted position of whiteness. Some not so conscious Africans proudly support this <u>status quo</u>, and may be even louder in their derisive and discordant criticism. Consequently, it is not strange to hear self-directed racist remarks coming from the

Africans themselves, just so brilliant is racism's cunning.

The black man has been buffeted by myths of his own incompetence and lack of originality to the extent that he now finds it difficult to reconcile himself to ideas stemming solely from within. The system of assimilation (what Fanon commonly terms alienation) best helps in the examination of this attitude. The formation of Negritude as a movement is in itself a pointer to a honeymoon turned sour, though Negritude retains importance as the foundation from which discontentment with inequality and exploitation could be voiced. The theory behind assimilation stated that all human beings were to all intents and purposes equal, yet when it came to the crunch it was clear that the African fell far short of humanity as can be seen in the Portuguese example discussed by Cabral. That is why J.P. Sartre is correct in stating that a movement like Negritude had as its thesis the superiority of the white man. This was because the Senghors and Cesaires, proponents of this movement, experienced rejection at their peak when all that was left as the dividing line was not intellect or achievement, but colour. Thus Negritude was antithetical from the outset, and was to be used as a means to assert the fact that black people also WERE.

It would be inexcusable for Armah to rest his case here.

The time and circumstances may have called for this kind of assertion from a people who had neglected to equate blackness with inferiority. It must have been a daunting experience to find at the height of ones being that one was not. Yet it remains a fact that:

> (we are) not a potentiality of something, (we are) wholly what we are. (We) do not have to look for the universal. No probability has any place inside us. (Our) Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as black. It is. It is its own follower (Skins, 135).

One needs to be subjected to certain conditions before the need to assert one's being becomes apparent. Aggression in so doing may even be necessary, given the acquisitive, reductive and destructive nature of the white world as traced by Armah in an unfolding plot, the manifestations of which are evident in The Beautyful Ones, and Fragments and which are given vent in Blest and Seasons. To draw a parallel, in Nazi Germany, after years of watching plans for their annihilation being made by Hitler with his "Aryan master race" theory, some of the Jews still went to the

gas chambers gasping "it can't be true" (Malcolm X, 384). To allow ourselves to be pawns in a similar game, as Dovi soon found out (Seasons, 280-9) is not only ludicrous, it is suicidal. As it turns out, Dovi's folly is only a minor setback to the revolutionary quest for the Black advent into selfhood.

It is the racist who creates his inferior and therefore Armah, as of the oppressed is denuded of the power to be racist. The black man has, since J.P. Sartre's articulation, been said to react with an anti-racialist racism, and over time this has been used to cover all nature of black response to white racism. For a writer of Armah's calibre, the issue goes deeper than mere reaction of an antithetical nature. The overriding concern in his works of fiction is not so much the response of the black to the white people and society. It is much more fundamental. His major concern is with the question

of the wholesomeness of his characters[1], the quality of their interpersonal relationships, and ultimately, the cohesiveness of the society. As he says in Seasons:

> How inadequate the seeing that remains
> broken off, unconnected to any larger perception.
> How lacking in sufficiency the hearing
> unconnected to a greater knowledge.
> How stupid the utterance cut off from the
> higher understanding of the connected whole.

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1 As mentioned in Chapter Two, the word "characters" is here not cast in the customary three dimensional European novel mould, but used in the representative, qualitative sense where different traits lend themselves to the larger development of specific situations and ideas, giving rise to an integrated whole. Chinweizu in The West and the rest of us has observed that European imperialists want no new externally propelled developments in their own tradition so that our novelists can bury themselves in their archaic and vestigial branches.

> Monstrous the barrenness of people when outside the lonely cut-off self there is no connection with the whole (208).

After any encounter, one engages in an inward looking process to determine whether greater enlightenment has been reached through community, whether the person has grown. These encounters can be equated to the fusion of the annealing process. A thorough revamping.

This is because Armah's vision, rather than stagnating as reaction, as reverse racism after the fashion of the Negritudists or Neo-negritudists, is motivated towards an end. The confluence of peoples sought in Seasons (321) is realized in the "new dance" (Healers, 314) where a people are brought together in spite of and by white attempts to separate them. Like Fanon, (Skins, 122), Armah goes beyond the point of racial enervation and infuses a revolutionary zest for freedom and humanity into his people.

This emerges clearly in the portrayal of such characters as Isanusi, Modin or Solo. The journeys into the psychic alienation of these characters, brought on by societal strictures and constraints is illuminating. Through interpersonal relationships

their awareness deepens. When Solo, for example, is rejected by Sylvia, his romantic illusions are shattered as he is cruelly reminded of his blackness. But, and most importantly, this rejection by someone of a purportedly superior race on a racist basis does not curtail his aspirations. His disillusion is twofold in that he also comes up against the sham that is revolution. These experiences place him in the special position of understanding when irresolution and confusion of an even deeper magnitude in the person of Modin crosses his path. Solo may despair, but he also understands, and in this sense, racism has been demystified. Solo consequently accepts his impotence, not as the defeated would, but with a hardening of the entrails in an uncompromising refusal to reconcile himself to the position relegated him by vice of his colour. His active inactivity may appear paradoxical, but given his circumstances, his greatest strength lies in the fact of his knowledge, and his potential to disseminate that knowledge for the benefit of his people.

Such resoluteness characterizes Armah's firm refusal to concur with those who would desist from disturbing the calm. He wields his pen with an unparalleled determination to liberate his people,

encompassing in his regenerative vision the possibility of a unity embracing the entire human race, thereby surpassing racist chauvinism. And "what an utterance of the coming together of all the people of our way, the coming together of all people of the way!" (emphasis ours, Seasons, 321).

C O N C L U S I O N

Ayi Kwei Armah has succeeded not only in highlighting issues pertinent to and dealing with the vicissitudes of African society; the centrality of mankind in his nexus is clearly established. He agitates over humanity, especially where we encounter from some "a wilful obdurate refusal" (Impediments, 121) to treat others like men. The issues he tackles are not new and would not be memorable but for the honesty and artistic innovation he employs in discussing them. The magnitude of his vision is evidently remarkable. The meticulous and inevitable retracing of a peoples history and mythology on so epical a scale, and his boldness in dismantling untruth are laudable. For a long time criticism has remained prescriptive on certain "subjective" topics in literature, particularly those that are topical and have the potential to demand radical change. Racism is one such topic. Citadels of scholarship that demand that kind of protection need to be razed if scholastic honesty is to be achieved.

Armah's consciousness of race is attested to by his early research papers, essays and works of fiction. In "Masks and Marx", for example, he states the function of white racism, which has been the subject of this work. He sees it as:

> Manichaean in that it splits the world
> along racial lines, then assigns a negative, lower

> value to the worlds majority of non-Western peoples and a positive, superior value to the Western white minority (41).

His artistic works consequently evince a deep concern and strive to arrive at the truth of the matter, giving validity and depth to his experiences and findings. The degree of racial enervation in the face of myths based on prejudice and ignorance, and in the face of certain "truths" hurled at us as history causes Armah to be even more thorough in his communication. He does not vacillate in the realm of the abstract; as Soyinka says, "the greater the realism, the more dangerous it appears" (115).

With the introduction of "the gleam" and the juxtaposition of light and dark images in association with success and failure, affluence and poverty, white and black respectively in The Beautyful Ones, a broad base is laid from which the rest of Armah's fiction is projected. Things white, be it "the mans" unconscious attraction to the white University buildings from his schooldays, or Oyo's fawning admiration of the shiny objects in the Koomsons living room, are portrayed as having a swaying power over individuals; and the loneliness and isolation that characterize all who choose the way away from "the gleam", as for example teacher, shows that a certain morality of deep psychological significance has been

created and is manifest in this community.

As is pointed out in the second chapter, the idea of lightness going hand in hand with progress is introduced early into the childrens consciousness. "Radiantway" nursery has as its logo two light-skinned African children bathed in "brilliant" sunlight. A Eurocentric tradition is also propagated in the classroom as the children faithfully chant "Jack and Jill...". The "surfeit of brightness" (92) in Fragments reaches its zenith when certain blacks are ultimately subsumed into whiteness. Asante-Smith, Akosua-Russel, Kuntu-Blankson... Yet even at this point, as Armah tells us in "African Socialism", and as stated in Chapter One, "the thing that so brutally halts the whiteward progress of the African elite is racism" (17). The use of language as a barrier in the incident of the golfers is clear indication of this. In class terms, these blacks are by virtue of economic strength in the top echelons of their society (i.e. the black society). But when it comes to the question of race, they are uncompromisingly pushed back to their "place"; the white usage of "steward-boy English" is neither accidental nor unconscious. It is a firm reminder to the black person of the inequality enjoyed by those in a superior position.

Nevertheless, Armah succeeds in creating a language in response to such racist stereotyping. That he succeeds in presenting so diabolical a situation with a moral conviction is no mean feat. Racism is not an issue that invites impartiality, and this is propagated by the schools of critics who either attribute any response to the anti-racist category, or to purely antithetical negation. One of these schools, for example, consists of those who glory in the failure of Negritude as a revolutionary force. If one is of those discriminated against, the tendency to pool him with the antithetical category thus robbing his response of impetus becomes overwhelmingly strong. Armah transcends this slotting, takes the very tool of a people's oppression at his command and wields it so as to whip the oppressor with an ironical stroke of genius. The literary mind is faced with the challenge of questioning the monument so ingeniously founded on a lie, the monument that Armah insists on bombarding at a time when its founders are resting on their laurels.

The quintessence of racism lies in the existence of a susceptible group. When it is actually examined closely, one realizes that racism is not inborn, it is nurtured and cultivated by a people for social, economic and political purposes. In opposition to this is the reciprocal ideal

presented in Blest. The yang-yin is an all-encompassing symbol of complementarity and reciprocity that defies racism. In it can be found qualities that advocate a mutually beneficient alliance sadly betrayed by the actual interracial interaction within the text. The manipulation and contempt shown Modin, for example, is clear indication of a lack of respect for humanity. In this case, the whites, either as lovers or as bestowers of scholarships, are driven by a compulsive urge to separate and destroy so as to preserve the citadel of racism.

It is clear that Armah has devoted a lot of time to the issue of race, as evidenced by his research both in fiction and non-fiction. The artistic world he creates in both Blest and Seasons is reflective of a long period of historical transition. Not all the changes that have taken place, particularly on the African front, are positive. In fact some have proved so abominable that in presenting them in Seasons, Armah has been accused of "the fascination of the abomination" after the fashion of Conrad (Njoroge, 433). The situation is indeed abominable, but it must be noted, not of Armah's making. The emasculation of a people has nothing laudable about it, but with the demarcation along the colour line as its basis and motivation, it becomes even more contemptible. Dubois may well not have appreciated the magnitude of his

prophecy when he predicted at the dawn of the century that we would be plagued by the problem of colour. Part of the staggering metamorphosis has been generated directly by myths purporting to be truth. These myths are centered around the whole question of the superiority of the white man. Seasons is a direct reply to these myths in that in it, Armah reshapes the African universe placing the black man squarely at the centre of his reality. His linguistic innovation in presenting the black ethos enhances the singularity of the black cause, and its closeness in flavour to the traditional African blend strengthens the bond of identity.

In this thesis, the beginnings of what solidifies into entrenched racism are highlighted, and we are called to contend with Isanusis pronouncement that "the whites intend a lasting oppression of us" (Seasons, 163). The point here is that racism is not a temporary misdemeanor; rather, it is a calculated move designed to inculcate into the African lasting feelings of inferiority and admiration for the seemingly natural superiority enjoyed by whiteness.

Armah's stint at Harvard and in Paris serve him well as a backdrop in his understanding of the two-facedness of racism, and he doesn't hesitate to use his personal battles with racism to add substance to his work. All art

is given expression by the society and finds expression within the society. Armah proves himself a dynamic member of society whose creativity and imagination in furthering this art for the benefit of society is formidable. He immerses himself in the task of reconstruction by helping his people to overcome feelings of inadequacy through psychological reconditioning, and this finds its culmination in The Healers where he offers the reader characters wholesome and full of self-esteem: Anan, Damfo, Ajoa, Densu - to name but a few.

The circumstance of Armah's works - the fact that he responds to unpalatable albeit immutable truths about our existence - places him in a delicate position. More so because, as Griffin has pointed out (Black Like Me), the black man not only suffers discrimination from an alien source; he also suffers his discimination against himself. An outstanding American spokeswoman, Oprah Winfrey is a good corroborative example. She says that for a long time she was her own worst enemy. Growing up in the deep South, she wished she was white because of the

attendant privileges. Happily, Oprah[1] realized that the material manifestations of superiority ought not to be mistaken for superior humanity. Armah, too, particularly in The Healers rises strongly against both natures of discrimination, where his deep insight into the core of his redemptive characters produces such natural pride and awareness of self as to need no reaffirmation. To borrow Fanon's words, it IS.

It defies literary logic to accuse Armah of being a racist especially since he writes illuminatingly on racism. In his role as a writer, the onus is upon him to articulate in the best manner possible issues pertinent to his society. He does not advocate black superiority over white, and is motivated by the need to create an awareness of the liberties taken against the black man by the

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1 This was on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" Channel 4 Television (Scotland) 8.11.89. Oprah dedicated ten minutes prime time to clarifying her stand on the question of race, because as an influential public figure, her earlier statement that she wished she was white was deliberately being taken out of context, particularly for justifying personal submission to racism.

racist. Once the cause of the black problem has been identified, and with it the attendant emasculation which is an historical reality, Armah engages in the creation of a lasting solution to the problem. As earlier stated, and as Fraser has put it, "if in the process, individuals other than the (blacks) are slighted, this has to be accepted" (73). Only by some miracle can the white intrusion into the black world be removed without so much as a dent onto whiteness because of the parasitical and corrosive nature of their infiltration. In exacting the pound of flesh it may be necessary to draw blood. And Armah remains merely the visiting lizard (albeit a conscientious one), not the bringer of the ant-ridden faggots, to cite an Ibo proverb.

As has emerged, Armah's approach is radically different from that of, for example, the Negritudists in that his point of departure is the black man, not the white. This shift in emphasis imbues his work with infinite possibilities for the black man, the crux of which is his control over his own destiny. The black man's centrality in his universe defies racisms relegation of him to the periphery of a white dominated world, and is an open threat to the existing world order. This "historical inevitability" (Soyinka, 107) is borne by the worldwide focus on events surrounding the possible

disintegration of Apartheid in South Africa today. The policy, formulated in 1948 and based on separate development as dictated by various shades of colour is even stronger today than at its inception, as evidenced by the near-fanatical fervour displayed by its supporters. That Apartheid could become an institution and government policy in our modern world, not only in South Africa but also in a superpower, the United States of America (the land of the Just and Free), as well as being the unstated norm in many other "free" societies makes Armah's work disturbingly pertinent. It also explains the vigour of some expatriate criticism against his works in the light of the threat posed by his literary revolution.

Armah's response to the question of race is characterized by a systematic and analytical style that is a reflection of his commitment. He concerns himself mainly with inculcating into the black people a positive attitude towards themselves, and evolves a vision progressively redemptive and regenerative. This vision is neither confined to, nor advanced as an exclusively black prerogative. Ultimately, Armah creates a forum whereby through an understanding of the motivation governing racism, man can transcend it and emerge with both dignity and humanity.

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