

**AYI KWEI ARMAH'S INTELLECTUALS  
OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE**

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## Abstract

*Ayi Kwei Armah is a living Ghanaian novelist and cultural activist. His life and body of novelistic experiments show a meticulous preoccupation with Africa's present cultural crisis. His seven novels to date, in addition to his autobiography entitled The Eloquence of the Scribes (2006), all illustrate a relentless intellectual campaign for articulating the ways in which the "right" and committed intellectuals can be singled out from what he takes as multitudes of pseudo- or parvenu academics. For Armah, a carefully devised and administered educational system should form the basis for a reformed African ethos. This article explores Armah's call for renovating the present educational philosophy that aims to promote a new idea of Africa. Constructing an authentic educational system is justified by him through the need to supersede the devastating effects imposed by and instituted through colonial education. Below is an attempt to debate Armah's deconstructive approach of the colonial educational pattern. Similarly, viable prospects of a change of perspective are reviewed. In founding schools throughout Africa and granting scholarships in metropolitan universities to African students, Armah thinks, colonial powers only meant to maintain control, even after the end of their direct occupation.*

Keywords: educational system, Western education, social transformation, African intellectuals

## Resumo

*Ayi Kwei Armah é um romancista e activista cultural ganhês. A sua vida e o conjunto dos seus romances revelam uma profunda preocupação com a actual crise cultural africana. Os sete romances publicados até à data e a sua autobiografia, intitulada The Eloquence of the Scribes (2006), ilustram um incansável activismo intelectual na procura de um compromisso entre os intelectuais "verdadeiros" e engajados que os destaquem daquilo que considera serem as multidões de arrivistas pseudo intelectuais. Para Armah, um sistema educacional assente numa planificação e administração cuidadas deveria constituir a base para um renovado ethos africano. Este artigo explora o apelo de Armah para uma renovação da filosofia do sistema educativo com vista à promoção de uma nova ideia de África. Armah justifica a construção de um autêntico sistema de ensino pela necessidade de superar os efeitos devastadores que foram impostos e instituídos pela educação colonial. Este artigo constitui uma tentativa de debater a abordagem desconstrutivista de Armah do modelo de ensino colonial. Simultaneamente abordam-se as propostas que advogam uma mudança de perspectiva na área do ensino. Na opinião de Armah as potências coloniais, ao inaugurarem escolas em todo o continente africano e ao concederem a estudantes africanos bolsas de estudo para universidades europeias, pretenderam manter o controlo sobre as populações colonizadas mesmo após o fim da ocupação efectiva.*

Palavras-chave: sistema educacional, educação ocidental, transformação social, intelectuais africanos

*A college in West Africa for the education of Africa youth by African instructors, under a Christian government conducted by Negroes, is something so unique in the history of Christian civilization, that wherever, in the civilized world, the existence of such an institution is heard of, there will be curiosity as to its character, its work and its prospects. A college suited, in all respects, to the exigencies of this nation and to the needs of race cannot come into existence all at once. It must be the result of years of experience, of trial, of experiment.*

(Blyden, 1888, p. 82)

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## Introduction

Ayi Kwei Armah is a contemporary Ghanaian novelist who, for a period of more than four decades, has stayed vocal and consistent against Western education and its legacy in the continent of Africa. His *debut* novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), has established him as a major African writer along with Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi Wa Thing’o. In reading his seven novels to date, it becomes clear that Armah pays a special attention to the ways in which intellectual characters (not common individuals) conceive of themselves as Africans. The present article examines the ways Armah situates art in society, politics and history. It similarly evaluates his emphasis on education as a remedy to the African predicament by confronting this emphasis with the critiques of various cultural theorists.

For Armah, an intellectual renaissance in Africa cannot be generated unless authentic African intellectuals – he prefers calling them at one time: “cultural workers”, at some others: “system-makers” – combat the Euro-centric and potentially destructive reflexes that shape and define neo-colonial schools. Instead of being rewarding and liberating, Western education is seen by Armah as an institutional machinery that indoctrinates African minds in submission to Western power and blinds the same minds from ever aspiring to a just world order. According to him, without a conscious deconstruction of this institution’s festering viruses, there is little hope for Africa’s cultural revival to come about. The next step in his epistemic process of liberation involves conscious ground preparation for founding a just organizational social order. Armah here dispenses with the revolutionary alternative as he thinks it not only wasteful and superficial but also suicidal. Conversely, the novelist’s evolutionary outlook (as opposed to revolutionary perspective) confers a well-planned corrective agenda and thoughtful implementations in the already existing school system. Finally, Armah narrows his search till the readers are able to locate the space where an African intellectual

can exercise power by averting the “sabotage” of the mind exacted by Western education, while also reversing its inhibitive influence. In line with Gramsci’s concept of “organic intellectual”, Armah opts for a category of intellectuals called “collective intellectuals”. Such intellectuals seem to be his messiahs, the category of people mostly qualified to found the new Africa and be its subjects.

### **The social structures required for an African renaissance**

*I know I can't work outside a home, a society. And I'm realistic enough to seek a friend likely to know the way there. One's society should be a source of strength, not a constant drain on one's energies and self-confidence.*

(*Osiris Rising*, p. 110)

In their commentaries over his work, Armah’s critics do not usually go beyond stressing the importance of education in his project of cultural awakening. It is true that educated characters are mentioned to be the category of people carrying Armah’s project, but little is mentioned by critics beyond the fact of qualifying them as intellectuals or educated. Armah, contrary to the way most critics read his work, does not limit himself to showing the category of individuals capable of achieving his most needed objectives. If we consider Kwame Ayivor’s paper entitled “«The beautiful ones were born and murdered»: Armah’s visionary reconstruction of African history and the Pan-Africanist dream in *Osiris Rising*”, the work of rehabilitation of the African self along authentic lines is exclusively trusted to intellectuals. Nevertheless, when it comes to the ways such intellectuals may start this enduring task of self-transformation and of defining the kind of institutions they would use for that purpose, Ayivor offers but little in elucidating this point. Although he focuses on *Osiris Rising* (1995), Ayivor briefly considers instances of *KMT in the House of Life* (2002), *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *The Healers* (1979) and he finds almost nothing beyond “...indigenizing the European method of interpreting African history and historiography” (Ayivor, 2003, p. 37). Instead of approaching the institution which carries a promising potential for change, as suggested from the title of his paper, this critic chooses to focus on how relevantly the writer matches his ideological convictions with an artistic formula he thinks fitting. At this stage in the article we try to account for that lack by addressing the following questions: what kind of social structures or institutions does Armah’s group of intellectuals deploy in order to proceed for positive change? Why does Armah try his remedy

by deploying the university and not the military, knowing that earlier in his career he once opted for the latter? What does the university as an institution carry in terms of potential for affecting positive social metamorphosis?

To start with, the university is Armah's institution for effecting the desired social change. If intellectuals can ever meet and discuss plans, it is inside higher learning institutions like the Teacher Training College in *Osiris Rising* and the University campus in *KMT in the House of Life*. Upon her arrival at the imaginary state of Hapa, Ast wonders which institution appeals best to her friend Asar. Knowing him from their students' days in the United States, she is almost certain that his heart and soul vibrate only in the direction of social change in Africa, and that can only take place within the institution of school.

Where might she find him now? In the bureaucracy? No, not Asar. [...] Farming. She could imagine him in a cooperative farm group, but he's often said it would take an eon to convert people back to the intelligence of ways lost in such pain. A factory? With his education he would be pushed into some graveyard of the soul, a managerial niche or the insane asylum. Teaching? Possibly. Yet his belief in the existing educational system was not great. To work within it he would have to locate some area of hope, some interstice where an innovative teacher might work to turn a few students away from the laughingly called the system's alienating viruses. Working in the educational system in preparation for the remaking of a devastated continent, a people destroyed: that was possible, barely (*Osiris Rising*, pp. 16-17).

Working as a teacher is portrayed as Asar's second nature. Everybody who knows him as closely as Ast would judge that Asar will make an excellent trainer. Nevertheless, Ast's certainty about Asar's natural inclinations did not come as his first choice after he finishes his degree. Asar had first to experience the freedom wars in Southern Africa before hitting on his passion for education, or renewal by means of gradual change. Experimenting with the revolutionary actions has proved to be Armah's initial choice too. In "Our Awakening", Armah recalls that: "...I write books because I tried to do something more useful and failed. And since I've been trained to write, I do that as a defence against total despair" (Armah, video lecture, 1990). What is evident is that Armah at one stage had been seriously thinking of the revolutionary option as a means of implementing social change. Presently he no longer finds it practical.

In *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), henceforth *WASB* for short, the principle character Solo comments that revolutionaries, like Modin, are romantics who abandon reason and pursue lofty ideals through violent means. That violence is portrayed as exhibiting a corrupting influence of the ideals. Working under

the pressing conditions of revolutions corrupt ideals like justice and egalitarian ethics. Revolutionaries, according to the same logic, are narcissists, moved by their dreams to the extent that they turn adamant to the "cracked promises and the maimed bodies of lost believers". Armah demonstrates that revolutionary process, even when it succeeds in achieving its immediate political objectives, creates unnecessary victims that impairs its initial undertaking. By force of habit, the first ideals, those related to founding justice in society, become diminished once the heroic/military side of the struggle starts to be a structure of little significance, justifying undeserved access to privilege and power. Unlike the self-doubting writer, who "before I can put one word a thousand objections rise up in my mind..." (WASB, p. 13), revolutionaries are portrayed as insensitive to suffering, and as such they are but poor leaders. "Their entrails are hard" and quite logically, it is expected that they are incapable of assessing the full cost of their "toughness" in human terms.

Armah's cynical approach to revolutionaries is extended to a higher level as he describes them as suicidal and self-erasing. In the end, he condemns the revolutionary path of seeking social change as wasteful. *Why Are We So Blest?* partly carries in its background reference to the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962) that put an end to French colonialism. Solo, the principle character of the novel, lives for sometime in Algiers and has some working knowledge with the quality of life of ordinary Algerians soon after independence. Solo meets the ex-freedom fighter at the time when he is recovering in one of Algiers' hospitals. Inside the hospital library, "the one-legged man", who is an ex-freedom fighter in the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale*, confesses to Solo that he sees himself as "l'essence". The cryptic phrasing: "*L'essence de la révolution, c'est les militants*" is suggestive. The French word, "l'essence", is a pun, as Solo establishes a little later. It stands both for "that which is essential; and l'essence, petrol" (WASB, p. 26). In order to devise what he has in mind, he draws "a diagram of a vehicle moving up a steep incline from one level stretch to another". In addition to the meaning of the image, the ex-militant suggests that "The militants are the essence. But you know, that also means they are the fuel for the revolution. And the nature of fuel... you know, something pure, light even spiritual, which consumes itself to push forward something heavier, far more gross than itself". The imagery of the fuel is rich with meaning, and together with Solo's drawing and commentary, one gets Armah's final stand from revolutions and social change resulting from violence. For the ex-militant proceeds that "The truck represents society. Any society. Heavy. With corrupt ones, the opportunists, the drugged, the old, the young, everybody, in it. And then there are the militants... But they themselves are destroyed in the process" (WASB, p. 27).

It is interesting to reflect on Armah's final position from revolutions as outlined here knowing that the fictional elaborations of his characters are to a large extent autobiographical. Armah's initial confidence in the practical value of revolutions and the military struggle made him throw away a Harvard scholarship. As he details in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006), Armah's career bears a strong resemblance with Solo's in *WASB*, for he then honestly believed that Western education is essentially imperial, non-egalitarian and destructive for Africa and its peoples. And in order to reverse this situation, Armah, exactly like Solo, abandoned his studies in Harvard and desperately wanted to enlist in a revolutionary movement in Angola. Ironically, the representatives of that revolutionary movement obliquely distrusted him from first interview and left him interminably waiting in Algiers for three months all due to his supposedly bourgeois status, that is, the Harvard background. Traumatized by such a rejection and the dream to actively participate in the liberation of Africa, Armah indeed got hospitalized in Algiers where he very probably met the ex-FLN militant.

That is what explains how he novelist carries on the same uncompromising attitude towards revolutions to *Osiris Rising*. Asar, the protagonist, is an ex-freedom fighter, a revolutionary who fought in Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and Guinea. His discussion with Ast uncovers serious critique *vis-à-vis* any revolutionary work and the reasons why. For Armah revolutionary change cannot be promising, particularly as a long term strategy facing up hostile international structures:

Working for a movement under fire, he [Asar] said, you don't spend much time in the abstract. Specific problems confront you all day. Eventually, though, some of us concluded that what we were fighting to create was not a socially just society, only a radically reformed society. What we were creating was in each case just a neocolonial society with racial barriers slightly lowered. At first it was confusing, the fact that some countries had to take up arms merely to achieve neocolonial status. But revolutionary rhetoric was in the end insufficient to forestall the realization: the societies we were fighting to make would remain structured in hierarchal unjust ways (*Osiris Rising*, p. 116).

Asar shows that he is aware that the experience of dismantling the colonial structure is by no means a small or an insignificant one. According to Armah, crude forms of colonial power equations have been found as too embarrassing and were eventually altered. Nevertheless, that formal power shift does not automatically translate the professed egalitarian aspirations characteristic to any revolution's ideology. In some situations, the conditions of the newly indepen-

dent, and due to internal strives get worse as they often amount to civil wars. Hence the reason why Armah seeks an in-depth reflection in order to establish working alternatives and venues for social change; meanwhile he pushes aside the revolutionary option as self-defeating. By categorizing the revolutionary dynamics as a process that gradually extinguishes its ideals and purity, Armah concludes that revolutions are not as liberating and enhancing as they are usually portrayed. For him, the amount of waste and the expensive cost in human terms both immediately and in the long run disapprove of the logic that justifies revolutionary action. For Armah, the revolutionary path, even when necessary, outlives its utility and becomes a justification for brutal power structures. That is why the ex-militant's very first words to Solo in *WASB* are a three time repetition of the phrase "Who gained?", expressing his manic-depression, and perhaps regret for taking part in a revolutionary course at all.

Because revolutionary change is pushed aside on the ground that it is only ephemeral and wasteful, Armah in real life turns to writing which he seems to take at the same level of seriousness as revolutionary action. In fiction, however, Armah seeks education as a means for his project of cultural awakening. He makes use of the already existing institutions of higher learning which he plainly denounces in *Why Are We So Blest?* as imperial, hierarchical and anti-egalitarian. When deeply considered, such a position cannot be a contradiction or a naive miscalculation. In *Osiris Rising*, and according to Seth's portrayal of events to Ast, Asar came back from the revolutionary war in the South to work at "the lowest of our tertiary institutions" because "...Teacher training colleges here were set up to absorb border-line cases. Kids unable to make it into secondary schools. Or into the university". It is interesting to remind readers that irony is a chief fictional instrument deployed by Armah. Processed through the ironic filter of this statement, the reader realises that Seth knows the extent to which Asar is serious about social change. He knows that Asar could apply for a post at "some top university abroad, say Emerson, to spin theories understood by three other academics, worldwide" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 32). Asar's choice to work at Manda is presented by the writer not as a naive wish to liberate his consciousness in a sporadic and confused way. Rather, that choice looks springing from a deliberate and well-thought out action plan to reverse the authoritarian and hierarchal drives of the world's social structures.

An in-depth reading of *Osiris Rising* should reveal Ast's remark about the time when she was wondering over Asar's whereabouts (soon after her arrival in the state of Hapa). After hitting on the possibility of having him teaching at some state school, she imparts to herself the conviction: "To work within it [the exist-

ing institution of education] he would have to locate some area of hope...". And the hope Ast speaks of relates to any genuine means to cultural regeneration. When studied closely, that same hope comes to be matched with two conditions. First, it has to be practical and not too abstract as all that is theoretical seems to be "incurably committed to the servicing of European power". Second, since it has to be done via the stressing of "fresh ideas and new habits" so as not to replicate the inhibitive effects of the institution. Here it appears that what is at stake is an in-depth analysis of Africa's current situation by Armah. For him, an immediate and brutal change would be fruitless because it would only have a superficial impact on society. Positive change is due to be planned and systematized. In other words, while the educational alternative has to reverse the ideals and ethics of the present social order, it has to be institutionalized, i.e., functioning through reliable channels, so as to be effective. Asar operates with the presupposition that the transmission of values is accelerated when it is affected via already existing institutions.

Furthermore, focusing on the education of "border-line cases", the way Seth pejoratively refers to "school drop-outs" implies a choice of gradual and long-term change. Seth knows that Asar's new shift, when well-administered, stands for a new organizing principle, and cannot be just the result of a confused or despaired vocation of the defeated. In joining a teachers' training college, Asar has decided to work with what Seth would more explicitly call the least fortunate sections of the students' community. They are the ones the least likely to be subjects to the "system's alienating viruses" in the sense that promotions and higher posts in the hierarchal order will not be reserved for them. Netta informs Ast: "But teaching here is low-grade work. Capable people flee it. Only the trapped remain" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 78). For Asar, the potential of these graduates is gathered from their supposed hopelessness. If he is to work with them, he presumes that the results will be inciting, particularly in the long run and contrary to Seth's expectations. At one occasion, he invites Ast for a week of supervision work: "All over the country. Assessing trainee teachers doing practical exercises" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 158). Asar aims for the revitalisation of culture, for its inculcation into their daily routine. It is known that "in psychology, apparently repetitive behaviours are assembled into traits of personality" (Smith, 1998). With Asar's careful monitoring, new, counter-inhibitive and constructive habits will become part of the future teachers' life. Consequently, each graduate will help in his or her own way in implementing these liberating habits among their future classes.

Armah insists on the fact that innovation stays the key word. During one of Asar's tours in Hapa's many districts, Ast attends a lesson given by one of the col-

lege teacher-trainee. She gets first hand feedback concerning Asar's techniques and their results. The lesson is about choices and options. By not interfering, the teacher-trainee allows students to choose and decide through secret ballot their own representatives. They are given some elementary exercises in democracy by implicitly inculcating formulas like "teacher knows best" as questionable. Asar's educational perspectives are meticulously tailored to challenge the philosophical foundations of the school as an institution:

What is taken for granted as knowledge in the society comes to be coextensive with the knowable, or at any rate provides the framework within which anything not yet known will come to be known in the future. This is the knowledge that is learned in the course of socialization and that mediates internalization within individual consciousness of the objectified structures of the social world. Knowledge, in this sense, is at the heart of the fundamental dialect of society. It programmes the channels in which externalization produces an objective world (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, pp. 83-84).

In spite of their apparent harmlessness, formulas, like "teacher knows best", are assessed as value-laden. Asar thinks that "teacher knows best" reproduces mini-dictators. Put differently, the schooling system in its capacity to determine what is knowable and what is not, is an institution that not only structures the social world but also *reproduces* it. Armah's objective, one may observe, is carried on through the assurance that while one is reproducing, and seemingly reinforcing the system, one can exercise his or her philosophy to favourably alter it. As Berger and Luckmann suggest, the magic of positive social transformation can take place while fresh minds are in the midst of facing "the objectified structures of the world".

Now even if this line of thought seems convincing from the outset, it still has to address the issue of how to effectively outsmart or minimize the unwelcoming outcomes of the objective structures of the educational institutions, particularly that Armah presupposes that schools are negatively set. Asar's teacher-trainee has been able to uncover the mental structures inhibiting his pupils, thus putting them in positions to account by themselves their real needs. As this step is liberating and important, it further enables these pupils to acquire a critical attitude which empower them to supersede the inhibitive influences of the entire schooling structure. For apart from what looks like Asar's own superficial and naive musings about inculcating positive habits and egalitarian spirit, what frequently sets the mood at schools is that: "...the mental structures evident in their classified output, that is through the structures of the educational institutions as much

as through direct teaching the schemata that structure perception, appreciation, thought and action are inculcated and imposed" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 29). Pierre Bourdieu's background in following the implications of the school system in as far as it reproduces certain societal norms and structures can be helpful in shedding light on Armah's work. According to Pierre Bourdieu, what gives the educational system its power and ensures its perpetuation is its unusual combination. For the system is propelled by means of reconciling two opposites: "mental" or "subjective structures" as well as "objective" or "organizational" ones. Bourdieu submits that while it is possible to transcend the mental structures with some conscious efforts, it is also increasingly challenging to even notice the organizational structures. Moreover and in the rare cases where such objective structures are detected, they appear overwhelmingly irreversible:

While we should bear in mind, in opposition to a certain mechanistic view of action, that social agents construct social reality, both individually and collectively, we must take care not to forget [...] that they have not constructed the categories that they implement in this construction. The subjective structures of the unconscious that carries out the acts of construction, of which academic evaluations are but one example among many, are the product of a long, slow, unconscious process of the incorporation of objective structures. It is thus the objective structures of the educational institutions [...] and, through the homology that binds them, the structures of social space that, at least negatively, orient acts aiming at preserving or transforming these structures (Bourdieu, *ibid.*, p. 29).

In presenting new attitudes animating his ideal college life, Armah does not overlook providing some practical examples of the transformation of subjective structures taking place on and off campus. True, Armah does not maintain that these measures are sufficient to result in a radical change; he rather maintains that such steps represent a handful of gradual measures he calls them necessary "preparatory work". Indeed Armah might be questioned about the extent to which this "preparatory work" does not stay vague, unstudied and left to chance. After an uneasy campaign, the administrative board of the school finally agrees to pay African professors travel expenses to any part of Africa, on a par with the expatriates' "home leaving" allowances. Formerly, this used to be a privilege for expatriate staff only. Thus, African faculty is encouraged to connect with other African educational institutions. Equally, housing cooperatives for faculty are expanding. As they little expect governmental agencies to provide them with housing facilities, faculty members are shown to have taken the initiative. The condition where Hapa government becomes inconsequential in the lives of Hapa individu-

als is a measure for the success of Asar's initiatives in stimulating a constrictive culture. Willie Abraham, in *The Mind of Africa*, explicates that the true measure of culture is a situation where it "...unit[es] the people in common beliefs and attitudes, or at least, in tolerance for certain beliefs, actions, and values, *culture* [then] fills with order that portion of life which lies beyond the pale of state intervention" (Abraham, 1962, p. 27). The architecture department joins in and sets plans for beautiful, inexpensive and well-built flats. Five sets in the form of an open rectangle, each set has two houses designed to save plumbing. Armah is careful to present that his example for positive social change does not stay exclusive to the educated, for part of the change touches Manda's ordinary inhabitants. The fishing cooperation is a project worth considering. In consequence of survey on the fishing community of Manda, Asar and his students find that 75% of the profit goes to somebody who does not fish yet owns the fishing boats. The fishers had but a few options. The cooperative with investors from among the community of fishers has undertaken the task of solving their problem. With a bank loan and efficient organization, fishers can taste the fruits of their labour and make their dreams come true: they are now sharers in the business. Furthermore, they now own their apartments and, most interesting of all, they are well ahead of payment deadlines set by the bank.

Again, these innovative and practical measures do not remain imaginative fancies exiting only in the writer's mind. In reality though, Armah uncovers in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* the story from setting his publishing house in Popenguine, Senegal. After levelling some blatant attacks against major European publishing corporations, accusing them of robbing him from authorial rights while themselves thriving, Armah set plans to have his own publishing cooperative. The cooperative is known by its official name as *Per Ankh* and Armah expands on how all partners benefit from this thriving business and are all engaged in a win-win project. But in order for such rudimentary or "preparatory work" to be successful, Armah insists that they have to observe the need for interconnection with the far reaching reasons and implications with each situation at stake. Here Armah carefully stages his scheme so that the activity of noting such interconnection remains the only condition that Western education is unable to meet. Asar carefully watches his words; indeed, he appears not to be interested in explicitly and publicly exposing the government's poor performance. As a neo-colonial government, it is a made up construct whose focal point is remotely-controlled from the metropolitan "centre". For him, any remedial strategy should target international institutions like the UN, IMF and the World Bank. Asar seems earnest that the political, economic and cultural union of the African continent through the pre-

supposition of a continental identity should never be processed as a demagogical trademark tailored for electoral rallies. His tireless efforts express the conviction that the peoples of Africa will make no progress if they hold on to neo-colonial identities, Nigerians, Angolans, Senegalese, Ghanaians, etc... He calls for an intellectual campaign that is predicated on a working awareness with the rest of social structures and the ways in which such structures can be reversed to advantage. Asar calls for the day when the majority of Africans can realise the fragility of the social structures that function unsteadily on an unstable ethical basis. Ast, perhaps with the naiveté of the new arrival, reads Asar's outlook as revolutionary. Asar thinks that all he and his colleagues are aiming at is "preparatory work" for a social transformation:

Do you need a name for it? I'd say it's a matter of bringing up generations of conscious Africans with democratic *working and living habits*. *Not rhetoric. Habits. Live, day to day practice*. The daily work of people capable of examining the World Bank, the UN and the IMF and seeing through them as inherently undemocratic institutions wrecking the lives of millions they're unaccountable to. If we could move a generation beyond the notion that voting for politicians is democracy enough; if we can reach the point of refusing to have our economic lives run by dictators in banks and boardrooms, we can say we are working (*Osiris Rising*, p. 117 - Emphasis added).

The central point Armah wants to emphasize in this debate over institutional structures is the need to push the liberating dynamics so that unjust organizational structures do not impinge on the lives of the multitudes. Asar's perception offers hope as it succeeds in finding a way to extricate Africans from the clutches of imperial control. Ast reminds Asar of his former refusal to beget children. The metaphorical input of conceiving offspring is a further indication about Armah's personal transformation. Asar's reasons from rejecting procreation then were "Structures. Just the idea of bringing children into such an intensively structured world used to horrify me". It comes as a natural attitude for him to dedicate his efforts to "...intelligent people [who] want to change the way this society is organized". Ast discovers that Asar has changed his minds as he becomes ready to conceive: "Years ago all I saw was injustice triumphant. So I suppressed the urge to procreate. I'm moving beyond that now" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 121). Only when the reversal of unjust social structures becomes a foreseeable option can Armah's fiction be said to be liberating and empowering. Even Seth seems to realise that the change he mostly feared has indeed taken place, which is why he stages Asar's murder near the end of the story. Again, with Armah, the reader is not requested

to wait for the destruction of the unjust world order to see the new one dawning. Armah seems to imply that with working knowledge and a vocation for active endurance, "the Asars" of Africa will be simply unstoppable. When Ast reminds Asar of Seth's threats on his personal life, he answers her ironically: "Why not wipe out the future before it wipes him [Seth] out? ... He can't stop the future" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 115).

### **Armah's idea of the new African in modern Africa**

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Given Armah's staunch commitment to Africa's cultural awakening, readers can easily notice that in almost all his novels Armah sets the standards that define the men he thinks are responsible for bringing about this awakening. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the example of the principle character famously known as "the man" can be articulated as the author's attempt at sketching the category of the new Africans needed for the task of cultural renewal. In the bleak worldview of that first novel, only honesty, patience and refusal to trade with one's moral principles seem to feed the man's resilience and keep him going. In *Fragments* (1970) and *Why Are We So Blest?*, Armah switches to shedding light on cases of misled African intellectuals who, though honest and resourceful, remain marred by a misleading consciousness because initially they are inadequately acquainted with their history and roots. Here the pull of Diop's argument about the alienating effects of Western education can be easily spotted in Armah's text. Diop attests that "...this climate of alienation finally deeply affected the personality of the Negro, especially the educated Black who had an opportunity to become conscious of world opinion about him and his people. It often happens that the Negro intellectual loses confidence in his own possibilities and in those of his race..." (Cheikh Anta Diop, 1974, p. 25). In *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*, readers are brought to witness the birth of Armah's "Renaissance men". Isanusi and Densu's exemplariness and abiding commitment to cultural renewal remain a little vague since the flow of the drama seems tailored to leave no clear interpretation of the outcome of their life search. Their experiences appear too evanescent to allow the historical metaphor to be propellant towards its desired end. Perhaps the setting of the two stories makes it a little confusing for some readers to seriously consider how Armah's visionaries can react to similar conditions in the present. However, in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT in the House of Life*, Armah connects in plot past activists with present ones. Readers are called to observe that these past and present activists are one gush of energy. Differently put, the would-be "awakeners", "system workers" or "cultural workers", as Armah variously

calls them, have only to seek past “footsteps” and join their efforts with those already traced from the past to put an end to the present cultural lethargy. The idea of qualifying African intellectuals who can affect a renaissance as “system-makers” comes in *KMT*, exactly when Armah openly criticizes the perpetuation of the colonial education in the African present and accuses this education for its disabling agency to produce “system-makers”: “They would not be trained for system-making professions” (*KMT*, p. 67). Past and present endeavours are joined in the hope of conflating the identities of each, demonstrating that cultural awakening cannot be interrupted by little difference in chronological setting.

Following his call to “cultural workers”, Armah insists that neither African politicians nor academics (not every learned individual in Africa) can activate the desired change. Politicians, in the rare cases when they are not ridiculed like Koomson, seem to be barred from starting an overall cultural renaissance because they seem to work under the heat and pressure of electoral mandates. So seems to be the case of revolutionaries who often work under pressing conditions, allowing no time for rational and long terms plans. As a result, political activists together with revolutionaries are swollen by the fast rhythm that characterises modern life; they cannot afford the necessary time to concentrate on lasting cultural awakening. It seems that in Armah’s analysis African politicians, from colonial times till the present, have not been able to envision an egalitarian ethical, economic and political system. Armah explains this unhappy state of events as a consequence of the kind of education these politicians received in the first place. Here is a situation similar to what Pierre Bourdieu would call *school-mediated* kind of system reproduction (Wacquant, 1997, p. xiii), where African students during colonial times sought their formal training in Western schools and assume by virtue of such schooling elite and managerial positions once the colonial powers formally left. Perpetuating the colonial power game, with its strategies of exclusions and inclusions, can be safely advanced as the principle cause behind the writer’s dissatisfaction with African politicians. But contrary to what Armah here presupposes it is not a matter of direct complicity. Based on extensive experimental work, Bourdieu estimates the process of generating what is more or less the same governing elite through education as “symbolic violence”. By “symbolic violence” Bourdieu refers to a situation where “...the dominated always contribute to their own domination”. Unlike Armah, Bourdieu’s analysis helps in reflecting on this complicity by observing: “...the dispositions that incline [members of the dominated section of community, or African politicians] toward this complicity”. Although Bourdieu qualifies such a complicity “an active complicity”, he instantly clarifies that “it does not mean that it is conscious and

voluntary ... [the dominated are complicit] only insofar as they deprive themselves of the possibility of freedom founded on the awakening of consciousness" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 4). *Habitus*, to Bourdieu, structures the social world and it is structured by the social world. The constraints *habitus* causes to the mental structures *do not determine* thought and action (that is, the social world). For thought and action are constrained because *habitus* only suggests what a person thinks and how a person should act, but according to Bourdieu, people are not forced. They will not act blindly according to *habitus*. They usually act on what Bourdieu calls "practical sense" or "fuzzy logic". As graduates of colonial schools, African politicians, even when they surpass what Bourdieu calls the constrains of "the mental structures" cannot easily escape what Bourdieu calls *habitus*; that is, the crippling effects of the organizational or "objective structures" of the world.

Armah's uncompromising account of politicians and political activists is extensively elaborated in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006). The coolness of the tone in the following excerpt might be seductive, in the sense that it gives the illusion that Armah has moved from the early visceral, and perhaps far-fetched, portrayals of politicians and nationalists of the 1970s to what can be judged as cool and articulated assessments. The tone has indeed been leveled, but the import, the result of the same old visceral approach, has been preserved all the same:

Our problem is that we think our politicians can lead us, but politicians cannot be Africans – yet. An African identity is not a five-year plan. It is a long-range necessity, required sustained, intelligent, determined planning. That is work for cultural workers, the kind of intellectuals who can spend twenty, forty years working on a problem, so systematically that after they die, their colleagues can continue their work, at higher levels (Armah, 2006, p. 238).

Armah denies politicians an African identity because they seem to fall below his standards for qualification. In the final analysis, politicians for him seem to accept, willingly or not, the rules of the present unjust world order to be set. In the rare cases where these politicians are not interested in boosting their individual careers, and motivated with well-meaning intentions, they are fated, according to him, to fail simply as a result of being subjects of Western education.

Armah posits that since Western schooling is premised on a hunger for domination and profit, its structures automatically, if not dismally, exercise self-deprecatory reflexes on African politicians. As a result, they are portrayed by the writer as individuals who place no strategy to outsmart such structures, and in the few instances where they exceptionally do, they judge it as unpractical and keep perpetuating "the killing system". Seth in *Osiris Rising* functions as these

politicians' spokesman. Fanon is categorical in his attack of post-colonial national bourgeoisies, and Armah does not only share this Fanonian perception but also elaborates his findings in a new and unprecedented way. *Osiris Rising* can be read as a fictional elaboration of Fanon's ideas.

The national bourgeoisie will be quite content with the role of the Western bourgeoisie's business agent, and it will play its part without any complexes in a most dignified manner. But this same lucrative role, this cheap-jack's function, this meanness of outlook and this absence of all ambition symbolize the incapability of the national middle class to fulfill its historic role of bourgeoisie. Here, the dynamic, pioneer aspect, the characteristics of the inventor and of the discoverer of new worlds which are found in all national bourgeoisies are lamentably absent (Fanon, 1967, p. 210).

Doubtful of the role of the African bourgeoisie, Armah portrays Seth as a security boss, not a politician, which is a further indictment suggesting that so called African politicians are not politicians at all. Armah suggests that Africa is run by parasites, contracting security militia men in order to ensure their unpopular clinch of power. Just after he detains the newly arrived Ast (Asar's soul mate) on account of the "subversive" article found in her handbag, Seth explicates that the article bears the sign of a "subversive secret society" that was active during slavery times. When asked what he finds troublesome in a group that only fought to end chattel slavery, Seth uncovers his imperial affiliations: "You mustn't think slavery was an inhuman practice in Africa". He even takes Ast's derisive remark "You belong to the «African slavery was beautiful» school of thought" as a real compliment. He is not moved even when she accuses him to his face of serving the interests of the metropolitan West: "That makes you a subcontractor in the defence of Europe and America". Readers can easily detect that there is a conscious attempt from the writer to demonize Seth, portraying him as a freak who takes serious accusations as compliments. This trend of demonizing immoral characters, which as it progresses further on, risks sacrificing thematic depth by offering simplistic, if not caricaturist, portrayal of people and events. One can witness how Seth accounts for Africa's political independence. Readers again detect the same provocative explanation and once more Armah succeeds in not leaving critics speculating about the way he reads present ruling elites in the continent:

It's a layman understanding to consider independence a revolt against white power. We – the authorities in Africa – we accept the framework established by the Western powers. There was only one thing wrong with colonialism. It denied

responsible Africans participation in the managing system. At the elite level, independence solved that (*Osiris Rising*, pp. 35-36).

Even if Seth does not react to a direct accusation of collaborating with imperial powers, one believes that in reality no African politician will openly and happily boasts of his supposed collaborationist mindset. Through his answer, Armah paints the entire African political elite in black as he presents them as irremediably non-African. In dealing with each trait of his personality as maintained by the writer, one concludes that Seth is indeed an immoral character. Such a critique is reminiscent of Fanon's inflexible assessment of the third world national bourgeoisie. But to strips Seth from his identity as African, presuming that this latter has been seeking education to consciously transmute colonial power into a neo-colonial one, may easily be judged as imprecise. True, the means for this transmuting has been schooling, that is, grades and diplomas offering expertise and service. Readers notice that apart from the doctorate Seth did along with Asar at Emerson, he has added what Netta pejoratively calls: "...esoteric degrees. A doctorate in criminology, quickie post-doctoral titles in espionage, something heavy in counterinsurgency, and rows of credentials in intelligence work. He'd found the levers of neo-colonial power" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 76). It is true that without these degrees, Seth would have found it impossible to escalate the administrative ladder and become the most powerful one in Hapa. His degrees function like a "rite of passage" or more relevantly what Bourdieu calls "the rite of institution", since the degrees do not only demarcate "a before" and "an after" but practically "...differentiate between those destined to occupy eminent social positions from those over whom they will lord" (Wacquant, 1997, p. x).

In line with his reproach for the political factions ruling independent Africa, Armah in *Osiris Rising* and *KMT* derides another category of educated Africans, academics. From their positions as part of the neo-colonial educational elite, academics are not only portrayed as incapable of devising a plan to give independence its true meaning, but are the ones who practically demean it. Given their survival instincts and inclinations towards safe areas in the hierarchal structure, academics develop critical distances from their subject matters only as an excuse to not get personally involved. The "good" or "politically correct" academic is the one who locks himself in the ivory tower. Involvement in an issue is encouraged to be antagonistic to the very definition of an academic. Netta, in *Osiris Rising*, warns Ast (her hostess) that the intellectual she is dying to meet is an atypical member of faculty. Unlike most of the rest of academics who "analyze [...] social problems days in, days out", Asar "doesn't make a career of analyzing problems. He proceeds to put his conclusion into practice". Appalled at such type of aca-

demics she meets everyday, Netta adds to the newly arrived Ast: "Here educated people use their intelligence to avoid risk, to accumulate power, money, privilege. We call it security. That makes our choices sound less cowardly, not so greedy. But Asar used his gift to design a high-risk life" (*Osiris Rising*, p. 71). Netta's lowered tune translates the fact that the author has modulated the angry reactions and name calling spotted in the early novels. Netta adds that Asar could easily thrive by opting for opportunistic venues within the existing social order.

The magic ability to fly high above famine, inflation, civil war. The charmed life while the continent burns. Money. Politics. The bureaucratic trip. Local directorship in multinational corporations. Diplomatic posts. Lucrative positions in international organizations to fight illiteracy, disease, whatever. Money traps, such jobs are called. That's where the African elite soul is headed (*Osiris Rising*, pp. 76-77).

Such an attack on parvenu academics, or those whom Netta categorizes as "pseudothink tank for dollar-eyed African intellectuals", disqualifies the highly-educated from being "cultural workers". In addition, Armah dismisses them as fake intellectuals. For Armah, intellectuals have to earn their names, and the only way of earning that name has to go through their conscious revival of culture.

We notice that in *KMT in the House of Life* Armah's assault against pseudo-academics escalates to become downright categorical. The derisive memo outlined by the main character, Jengo, entitled "CONFERENCITIS", underlines Armah's attempt at ironically deriding the negative motifs of African academics. Instead of clarifying the issues under study in seminars and conferences, parvenu academics, according to Armah, are increasingly encouraged by financing bodies to mystify and make problems look insoluble. Mystification takes place by stressing the necessity to observe a given issue as an existential instead of historical phenomenon. Poverty, when taken as an example, is circumspectly articulated to appear like a precondition for Africa, while every effort to alleviate or reduce it, is monitored to look like a waste of time. Not unexpectedly, the language is orchestrated to be descriptive, exclusive of any genuine analysis since that would entail a remedial action plan. That is the reason why recommendations at the end of each seminar are intentionally addressed in vague terms, stressing nothing except the need for endlessly lengthening the study so that it can be carried on in upcoming conferences. Meanwhile, the jargon of the seminar is impressive, so only a handful of academics can follow; non-specialists are intentionally baffled by opaque and mystifying effects of the scientific jargon. Similarly, five star lodgings and roundtrip fly tickets are arranged for participants, turning a given conference to a perfect occasion for academic tourism. The overall arrangement of higher edu-

cational institutions keeps academics, in Armah's view, handmaids to the political puppets in the service of the imperial world structure. As long as their duty is "neither to understand the world nor to change it but to adjust comfortably to it" (*KMT*, p. 92), academics pose no threat to the existing social structure, and in return, they are rewarded with postdoctoral fellowships, allowances, trips and stipends. Furthermore, one can observe that while some of this criticism can be valid, the gloomy portrayal and accusations freely levelled at academics as collaborationists seem to mystify instead of seeking to clarify what is really at stake in the politics of education in Africa. Pierre Bourdieu's remarks prove useful and provide practical insights. Seeking legitimacy of their domination, government bureaucrats together with academics are interested in the massive stupefying of their respective communities. As a result, they

greet projects aimed at the restoration of culture whose sole virtue is that they comfort those privileged with cultural capital, whose narcissism has been wounded by the revelation of the common foundations of their distinctive delights (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 5).

Perhaps, Armah's reason from having an unfriendly stand *vis-à-vis* politicians and academics is the fact that they seem to him entirely unconscious to the adverse effects of Western education. What is counterproductive, for him, is their inability to be system-makers. At first reading it seems that if the quality of system-making had been given sufficient elaborations in *Why Are So Blest?*, as it is the case with *Osiris Rising* and *KMT*, a number of critics would have saved their reproaches *vis-à-vis* Armah's attack on Western education. An example about such critics is Albirton Norman Spencer who sees that "The problem with Armah's approach to the struggle for national liberation is that *he is so obsessed with the betrayal of opportunist elements among the leadership* that he overlooks the genuine radicalization that takes place among the population as a whole" (Spencer, 1985, p. 231). An in-depth approach would still establish that Armah with time has modified only the wording, while the content stays practically the same. The elaboration of what looks like smart vocabulary: "system-makers" and "cultural workers" is not followed through with inciting analysis. Armah is not ready to submit that not all African politicians and academics are part of an unjust global structure. Indeed, Western education either blinds such elite members from envisaging a world order based on non-competitive and non-hierarchical structures. And even if such elite members escape being blinded and realise how entrapped they are, the chances of having this Western educated elite work for an egalitarian world order are judged by Armah as insufficient. But Armah presents his

African politicians as incorrigible lackeys since the idea of a classless society simply does not appeal to Seth. This perhaps rightfully accounts for what Armah sees as the sabotaging influence of the Western education Seth as a student and many African elite members receive. But Armah's problem is that he sees this sabotaging influence going on for ever beyond repair and constraints to the extent that Africa ends up having only parasitic leadership.

It is true that Western schooling (through entrance examinations, grants selections and scholarships nomination) accustoms students to rivalry and competitive trends of thinking. In active life, negative drives of such sort function as models for violent elimination of rivals, hence the source of political instability and economic retardation. Exactly the same analysis is put by Olusegun Adekoya when reviewing Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*. "It is not patriotic zeal to serve or correct mistakes of civilian government but the lust for the perquisites of office and privileges that makes the armed forces desire political power" (Adekoya, 2006, p. 16). In other words, Armah is right in pointing at these competitive attitudes as sources of instability, hence jeopardizing focus on true nation building. But in stressing that these negative attitudes and destructive tendencies shape and define the political life of a given country to the extent that suspicion and contention become the norm and the rule, here Armah appears untrustworthy. Caught by the impinging yoke of Western education, positive change among warring elites, in Armah's view, cannot be processed as a natural flow of forces within struggling elites. What is perhaps inadequate is that for Armah, such competitive structures are the personification of evil, and as a result, well-meaning intellectual activists will be better off if they simply stay at home and reject drawing alliances with other social groups and seek help from the media. In the social world, in which Africa is a part, "offspring from the cultured fractions of the bourgeoisie [when they] accede to posts of corporate or political responsibility [through education combine] are powerful sources of change within the field of power..." (Wacquant, 1997, p. xvi). Put differently, positive social change cannot just happen; it has to be engineered through acts of social emergence in public life with all what this emerges entails. But Armah seems to read every attempt at social emergence, like making alliances, as conspiratorial and hence counterproductive.

Furthermore, instances of Armah's imprecise outlook of how social change could operate can be spotted in the way he sets the standards for his intellectuals in order to qualify as "cultural workers". Given his sincere wish to positively influence the cultural climate in Africa, Armah sees that intellectuals have to be "system-makers", that is working gradually in order to shape a living and constructive culture. But in stressing the need for political science, and the quality

of “system-making”, Armah offers no indication where they can be found, or the kind of experience these would-be system-makers should gain before finally qualifying as “system-makers”. Armah gives the impression that his “system-makers” are his beautiful ones whom Africa should again wait, there is no indication how long, for their birth. Witness how he mythically (if not, effusively) insinuates the belief that Asar should be processed as a naturally born “system-maker”: “Interested or not, Asar was a winner. Something the SSS [Seth] was dying to be, but couldn’t be” (*Osiris Rising*, p. 75). The dramatic import of such mythical portrayal is that in Asar’s case no schooling was required to qualify as a system-maker. Put differently, experiencing the hustle and bustle of the world; considering even mediocre beginnings and shortcomings, form little part in Armah’s outlook. Almost all attention is on demonizing Western education on the ground that it fails to train African students “for the system-making professions”:

They would not be trained for system-making professions... The system was neatly structured to habituate the African colonies to the simple and thankless export of raw wealth, not the complex lucrative business of its processing. There would be no point in training people destined to live as colonial subjects in Political Science or Philosophy. Such system might produce system-makers, and there was something turbulent about the talents of system-makers (*KMT*, p. 67).

Such trend of thinking is pursued even when he provides an account of the leaders’ performance since the beginning of Western training of African elites:

The recent history of Africa reveals leaders who failed to create thinking, self-sustaining communities. Some failed because they did not have time, they were killed. Some failed because of luck of opportunity. But some also failed because they did not have any real desire to empower the powerless. Because they saw in the powerlessness of those who raised them to power a source and they were afraid that if they empower the powerless, there will be no body who need them, bearing them up. At any rate, these leaders have tremendous work thrust on them. They were too busy to address certain fundamental questions regarding our awakening. That is why although we have had such wonderful leaders, many of us are still asleep (Armah, 1990).

The positive aspect in this account is that not all leaders are lackeys in the pay of either colonial or neo-colonial powers. Discovering genuine leaders and outlining their obligations is a complex mechanism which Armah takes pains to reflect on. He explicitly notes that in analysing the African crisis one cannot miss the factor of leadership, that is, leaders “who failed to create thinking,

self-sustaining communities". The leaders who can get Africa out of the present cultural crisis would be the ones willing to remedy the failure of the previous leaders. Even when he tries to remain objective and provide an accurate account of African leaders – as shown through their classification into three principal categories, not the usual two: angelic versus devilish – Armah's tone still feeds on the politics of blame, the one motivated by a deep sense of guilt: his own misconceived guilt about how helpless he still is to really affect some promising difference in the continent of Africa. Indeed, Armah notes that the true measure of adequate leaders is how she or he will raise public awareness. But it seems that he stays unconsciously evasive of any suggestions as to how to find these leaders-intellectuals that would uplift the consciousness of their people and still manage to lead against all odds. Instead of shedding lights in this direction, readers can follow how Armah's focus gets perverted to peripheral reflections over egos and legacies and how these leaders' histories should be written for posterity. He thinks that would-be leaders will risk becoming no leaders at all since sharing knowledge transforms the leaders and the led into one operating body, where there exist little distinctions. He further aspires that once knowledge becomes an everyday commodity, there would be no place for leaders with egos to boost. But in order for this to happen, there have to be intellectuals ready from the start to leave public scene; that is, they are willingly self-dismissive once their historical task is achieved.

In connection with Armah's efforts of founding responsible leadership in Africa, it would be not too farfetched to review the views of Edward Wilmot Blyden, proffered more than a century ago. In the epigraph of this chapter, excerpted from a chapter entitled "Aims and Methods of Liberal Education for Africans" Blyden sounds, perhaps, more objective and reasonable than Armah as he acknowledges Africa's need for assistance by Western learning. He also concedes that the labour resulting from that Western assistance cannot be immediately productive for the advancement of the continent. Blyden trusted that by the time Africans reach the stage whereby they can be able to develop their own schemes in education, generate forward looking leaders while they gradually free themselves completely from any possible constraints and inhibitions. Interestingly too, is that in Blyden's analysis there is not the slightest suggestion about underground conspiracies and founding fathers' ill intentions, like it is with Armah. Blyden also submits that Western education extends hasty and hazy awareness about Africa. But this "evil", as he qualifies it, is the result of no ill attention from the part of the school curriculum or its designers. Instead, Blyden attributes this lack, not to conspiracy, but simply to ignorance:

The evil, it is considered, lies in the system and method of European training, to which Negroes are everywhere in Christian lands subjected, and which everywhere affects them unfavourably. Of a different race, different susceptibility, different bent of character from that of the European, they have been trained under influences in many respects adapted only to the Caucasian race. Nearly all the books they read, the very instruments of their culture, have been such as to force them from the groove which is natural to them, where they would be strong and effective, without furnishing them with any avenue through which they may move naturally and free from obstruction (Blyden, 1994, p. 87).

Cultural historians may attribute this difference in approach as answerable to different historical contexts: Blyden's was the time of intensive military European intervention in the continent and as a result he was under increasing pressure to adopt a passive approach, while Armah's has been that of regaining political independence and as such he is, in some degree, justified in adopting his uncompromising stance. Armah thinks that with the massive inculcation of some inherited egalitarian principles, Africa can afford to ignore the technological progress together with the economic and political world order engineered by the West. Whether this is a tenable and realistic preposition is a question that deserves more attention on Armah's part.

Now the reason why Armah's portrayal of the impact of Western schooling on Africa can be easily qualified as not totally adequate principally lies in his characterization. This latter shows little trend towards dramatising actions of individuals who are supposed to illustrate Armah's project. There is enough evidence to suggest that the characters' interest in essentializations keep their assessments superficial. The reason is that they indeed only eschew the praxis of some ideas in the face of social realities. Again, there is a conscious attempt from the writer to simplify complex situations and complex decisions and present them in black and white. If characters are either demonized or deodorized, then certainly depth is dispensed with and essentializations remain the writer's resort to fill in the remaining blanks. Asar and Jengo, like Densu and Isanusi are probably too idealised characters. If the writer intends them to be role models, then he risks finding almost no audience to take seriously his socio-cultural project. The new Africans of the modern Africa are, to borrow from the title of the writer's first novel, his own beautiful ones that are again *not yet born*. And in order to get born at all, they are supposed to be prepared for the ways of the present and highly-competitive world. In other words, they have to learn through their mistakes like all well-meaning people do, and from time to time fall short of the *beautiful* ideals they carry. Indeed, here lies Armah's notable flaw: he forces a socio-cultural pro-

gramme into protagonists like Isanusi, Densu, Asar and Jengo without portraying them as fallible or imperfect human beings.

In this connection, Armah still cannot tolerate even experimenting with the idea that as positive social change does not come through armed revolutions, still it cannot come through a divorce of the beautiful ones from social reality. The Manda school of teachers seem to prefer working almost exclusively among themselves and with people like themselves, turning the campus into a far-away island where it is presumably free from Seth's corrupting influence. Asar's point of departure for positive social change has perhaps to take into consideration the presupposition that "...social strategies are ever determined unilaterally by the objective constraints of the structure any more than they are by the subjective intentions of the agent". Instead, experience has shown that:

...practice is engendered in the *mutual solicitation of position and disposition*, in the now-harmonious, now discordant, encounter between 'social structures and mental structures', history 'objectified' as fields and history 'embodied' in the form of this socially patterned matrix of preferences and propensities that constitute habitus (Wacquant, 1997, p. xvi).

Armah's 1976 move to Lesotho, where neighbouring South Africa was in utmost agitation against the apartheid regime, could have enabled him to closely reflect on the South African situation and its struggle for freedom. The Lesotho experience does not clearly leave its marks as Armah's dramatic import has been little modulated to genuinely benefit from his move in his post-1979 novels. In *The Eloquence of the Scribes*, Armah refers to the Lesotho teaching assignment as fruitful on a number of levels. First, he had personal contacts with Mofolo's family and that has helped him to understand some important dimensions in the story of that legendary leader, *Shaka*, together with the circumstances arising from the first publication of this work. Second, he showed his part in training an engaged Soweto group of activist poets. His surprise and admiration for the group is rendered in a style that is perhaps celebratory: "That community had created an itinerant poetry troupe, a part of the revolutionary movement whose chosen work was to travel through the oppressed country disseminating the message of coming freedom in the form of poetry and music" (Armah, 2006, p. 123). His last two novels give the impression that they have benefited from that Lesotho stay and the example set by the ANC liberation struggle against apartheid. In theory at least, Armah is aware of the complex collaboration between different elite factions adopting their organizational skills to fit the need of the struggle. He includes an intellectual training free from the inhibitive reflexes, the ones

he presumes are caused by Western education. Despite some shortcomings like the one related to characterizations, Armah's novels offer useful insights into the ways in which Africa's social transformation and its renaissance can be successfully conducted. One solid conviction readers cannot afford to miss is his stress that the formation of intellectuals of the renaissance cannot be left to chance or in the hands of imperial educational institutions because that will be just counterproductive.

Armah's intellectual protagonists show no intention to work and mix with other intellectuals, traditionalists, students and ordinary people. In the context of apartheid South Africa, ANC activists, according to Raymond Suttner resort to the principle of "collective intellectual" in their fight. In his study of the formation of the African National Congress intellectuals, Suttner notes that the ANC (the African National Congress) has been aware of the need to merge its activists' intellectual, political and organizational efforts with other social organizations, not necessarily exclusive to the academy. In this connection, Suttner elaborates:

In the context of the ANC-led national liberation movement, the concept of the intellectual may be said to apply to individuals created through various processes, some inside the ANC and allied organizations, sometimes deriving from the outside, through more conventional institutions, such as universities. In deploying intellectual skills derived from these conventional institutions, it has not been a case of simply applying that knowledge and training. These professionals have needed to undergo various intellectual transformations within the organization(s) in order to perform tasks related to national liberation, to give them the skills that are organizationally specific (Suttner, 2005, p. 118).

As a requisite condition for its success, the ANC's intellectual framework emerged as a blend from a variety of social forces of which academics are only one part, and by no means the very important one. As the ANC realized the need to joint efforts and make alliances with multiple players not necessarily all sharing an exact or obsolete ideology for its success, it would be indeed inspiring if Armah staged a story where dedicated academics harmoniously interspersed with students, traditional historians and other camaraderies and circles for yielding the category of "collective intellectuals". Armah's Manda group and the fishers cooperative are excellent starting points in order to find what Antonio Gramsci calls "organic intellectuals", and the party's cohesive elements. Without such intellectual elements that supply focus and direction, the party would stay disorganized and full of socially dysfunctional players: "the political party for all groups is precisely the mechanism which carries out for civil society the same

function as the state carries out, more synthetically and over a large scale. In other words, it is responsible for welding together the organic intellectuals of a given group – the dominant one – and the traditional intellectuals” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 15).

As a further condition for the formation of these “collective intellectuals”, Suttner observes that the ANC has been conscious about the need to project its liberating dynamics for the long run. Short terms politics had been assessed as self-defeatist. Without the cumulative efforts or what Armah judiciously calls “preparatory work” for solid future collective action, present leadership would not possibly operate and would be obliged to start with preparatory work. In his study, Suttner notes that the Mandela generation and the final coronation of the ANC as a major, and later, the ruling party in South Africa should be understood as the tip of the iceberg, stemming from a century-long struggle for freedom and equality. One former ANC activist and prisoner at Robben Island recalls that it is the education he received by fellow party members in prison that enabled him and the rest of illiterate activists to project their efforts as part of a long term design for liberation. Daniel Montsisi, a leader of 1976 Soweto uprising recalls:

The Island was a political education for me. Firstly, we discovered a deep comradeship through discussion with the older leaders, and a deep respect. Before I went to the Island my understanding of the Freedom Charter was not thorough. There I had the time to look back at history... It was like putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle which had been missing all along. We delved into our history. We discovered that we young people were not the first to take up the fight against apartheid, but a new part of a developing project (Suttner, 2005, p. 137).

Put differently, the proof of having accomplished necessary training as potential collective intellectuals is the extent to which they are ready to realize that the struggle can be long and arduous, like the one related to the South African context, seven to eight decades.

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## Conclusion

This article advances the idea that while Armah’s account of intellectuals and the educational system that generate such intellectuals can be inspiring, that account remains an oversimplification of the actual problems facing Africa. While some elements of Western education, like the competitive and exclusivist reflexes are indeed harmful, history proves that without European learning, Africa could not afford to face up modernity in its most brutal facets like the slave trade and

colonialism. As the epigraph to this article illustrates, neutral observers cannot deny that it is thanks to Western education that Africa has been able to achieve and move, however imprecisely, with her developmental challenges. Early in his career, Armah adequately dispenses with the revolutionary alternative as means of culturally transforming the pitiful present of Africa. For him, only a sound educational system can promise the reversal of the unjust social structures inherited from the colonial era. The benefit of working with border-line cases is their immunity from the crippling effects of the objective structures characteristic to the educational system. Here one can observe that Armah's drama is more in favour of polemics where instead it should opt for clarity and analysis. For Armah's neither appreciates some of the positive imports of Western education, nor is he satisfied with the ways in which academics and politicians work in order to outsmart or minimize its inhibitive influence and launch Africa's cultural regeneration. Armah's intellectuals of the African renaissance appear to belong to that school of thinking whose main difficulty is its inability to process and evaluate larger quantities of updates than it feels it can handle. As the novels considered in this article clearly illustrate, Armah can be qualified as a self-styled realist who often equates imagination with wishful thinking and mistakenly sees that wishful thinking as a viable way to address the realities of present day Africa.

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