

UNIVERSITE GASTON BERGER DE SAINT-LOUIS



U.F.R. DES LETTRES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES

DEPARTEMENT D'ANGLAIS

Parcours : Littératures et civilisations

## MEMOIRE DE MASTER

# Identity Crisis in Postcolonial African Literature

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Année Académique: 2021/2022

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to:

- my late grandmother. May God welcome her soul in paradise.
- my dear parents who did not spare any efforts to take care of their children in very difficult conditions. Health, peace and long life to them!
- to my husband, a good man and a wonderful father.
- to my late friends Cicilé Ba and Thierno Kane. May their souls rest in peace.
- to all the members of my family from The Gambia and Senegal.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation could not have been completed without the various forms of assistance and help from many people. First, I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Khadidiatou Diallo, an open-minded and available supervisor, for her patience, her generous assistance, and her encouragement in the course of my work. I want her to know that her teachings have shaped my interest in African Literature.

I am greatly indebted to all the teachers of the Department of English for the quality of the teaching I have received. They have challenged me and urged me to develop my intellectual curiosity and my taste for good literature. I strongly hope I will not deceive their hope in me.

I am particularly grateful to all my friends and classmates who helped me psychologically through this work: Aminata Cissé, Cherif Assane Ba, Jaysuma Janneh, Pape Demba Kane, and Cheikh Mbacké Sene.

I will not end up without reserving a particular thank for my husband, my friend, my teacher, Dr. Mamadou Ba for always being present with readiness and great devotion to help me deal with all situations.

To anyone whose name is not mentioned here but, in my heart, I am grateful to them. Thank you so much and may God reward them all!

## INTRODUCTION

African social fragmentation is a central and controversial theme which has been dealt with by African writers. Their major aim was to depict the social changes that occurred in the African continent caused by historical events. Slavery, colonialism, and, independences have much exposed Africans to other cultures. The consequences of imperialism are isolation, marginalization, and more specifically, non-integration from society.

Formerly, African societies were somehow well organized as can be seen in Chinua Achebe's first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, with the depiction of the Ibo society. Likewise, Ayi Kwei Armah's two novels *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, put the stress on the social fragmentation that deeply disrupted Africa. This has engendered alienation and loss of identity on Africans.

The critical focus made on African postcolonial literary works lies on its richness. The use of stylistic devices and relevant themes to convey messages is a clear justification of the importance of literature, in the context of social unrest and cultural crisis. Identity is a polysemic concept. It is tightly linked to history because it is a combination of experiences, memories, beliefs and values that create a person's sense of self. Moreover, identity expresses the differences between people. Hence, the focus on African identity. So, we will limit ourselves to and deal with postcolonial Africa writings for the simple reason that it may allow us to be in a status to show mostly the cultural, political, and economic issues that impact the development of the continent from slavery, colonialism, and days after independence.

To the question "what is my identity?" or even more precisely "who am I?", the answer may not be that easy for some people. So, considering this complexity and

the importance of this issue, many writers did great efforts in their research in an attempt to elucidate the concept.

According to *the Harrap's Dictionary*, identity refers to the qualities and attitudes a person or a group of people have that make them different from other people. Usually, it is said that it is the environment that determines the person. Thus, individual identity is shaped by the social entourage. Consequently, identity is undoubtedly very important for an individual since it is, to some extent, a sort of torch that enlightens one's life providing them with a certain sense of direction or purpose.

Dictionnaire de Sociologie le Robert defines identity as

something in which I recognize myself and which the others distinguish me. Identity is always related to signs by which it is considered, at the same time, as affirmation of likeness between members of an identical group, and difference with the 'others' (264)<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, we can understand that the concept of identity does not only establish differences between communities but it also exposes individual particularities from the society a person belongs to. It is indeed paradoxical in itself because it means at the same time "sameness" and "distinctiveness".

Amin Maalouf, in *In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong*, argues that identity itself cannot be compartmentalized because it is a mixture of many components that is indeed unique to everyone. He states in the introduction: "Every individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbors them with difficult choices" (*INI*, 4). This statement illustrates the

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<sup>1</sup> Le mot identité désigne ce dans quoi je me reconnais et dans quoi les autres me reconnaissent. L'identité est toujours attachée à des signes par lesquels elle s'affiche, de sorte qu'elle est à la fois affirmation d'une ressemblance entre les membres du groupe identitaire et d'une différence avec les « autres » (Our translation)

complexity of the issue of identity because it shows how individuals differ one from another.

In addition, identity is at the heart of existentialism. For many existentialists such as Albert Camus (*The Stranger*, 1957) and Jean Paul Sartre (*Existentialism in Humanism*, 1946), identity is self-constructed. They reject the idea that an individual is identified with their race, linguistic group, parents, siblings or countrymen but rather, believe that one is identified only with their actions and creations. That is why Jean Paul Sartre said that “man is nothing other than what he makes of himself” (1946, 22). As a consequence, if we are to refer to the existentialist ideology, we would definitely say that culture does not have any impact on the personality or the personal behavior of an individual. Likewise, social beliefs, ethnicity, religion, language and other experiences of life have nothing to do with personal identity.

Yet, in parallel, the anti-existentialists put forward the following thesis stipulating that the milieu in which we live determines the qualities and the attitudes of ours. In other words, each aspect of society has an impact on our behavior. Even the language we speak, whether it is acquired from our studies or not, may modify or improve and even enrich our identity.

The African identity is also shaped by different elements, specifically the events which have occurred on the land. Arab and European Imperialism constitute the components of a mixture, as Maalouf underlines it. In other words, considering there is no pure identity, the African identity is made of its background, race, tribal affiliation, religion etc.

African identity is mainly characterized by the idea or the sense of community with a strong consideration of the collective rather than the individual. That's why in Ayi Kwei Armah's novels, the point of the individual and society is emphasized to show the extreme importance of the community as a whole. Armah's concern

in portraying the dissociation between an individual and his community is to reveal the cultural alienation and the identity crisis befalling African society.

To be more precise on this field of identity, we find it necessary to put the emphasis on Africa and its literature. For so long now, African intellectuals are working on reconstruction of Africa's history. In an article entitled "Claiming the Wholeness She Had Always Been Denied: Place and Identity in Michelle Cliff's Novels *Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*" Anke Johannmeyer considers that to ignore one's past is to ignore one's place in history (2005, 22). This means that knowing one's history is extremely important for the purpose of knowing one's identity and oneself. The latter being dynamic, it includes one's past, present and future. It is in this sense that Amin Maalouf writes that "Identity isn't given once and for all: it is built up and changes throughout a person's lifetime" (2000, 23). Moreover, knowing one's cultural identity is also important. In fact, cultural identity is simply a part of people's self-conception and self-perception that is related to their society. Homi Bhabha talks about "cultural hybridity", through the combination of one's culture of origin and the one acquired during the process of hybridization. In fact, hybridity is a kind of superior cultural intelligence owing to the advantage of in-betweenness, the straddling of two cultures and the individual's consequent ability to negotiate. Therefore, basing on what intellectuals have about this concept of identity, we personally say that identity is what is at the same time visible and invisible. It is what differentiates and makes the uniqueness of an individual but at the time what makes the commonness of a community.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) *Fragments* (1970) and *Osiris Rising* (1995), Ayi Kwei Armah is conscious that culture synthesis is inevitable. Yet, his main concern is that the African must be very conscious of his identity. For that, a spiritual return to the roots is necessary. Consequently, this agreement



is, first to be rooted in one's culture and then be opened to other cultures as Senghor suggested.

The study of the African identity crisis is based on postcolonial African literature. The choice in general is not fortuitous since there is a great generation of writers who contribute a lot to the rehabilitation of one's history. Moreover, they are on a continuous struggle for the Africans' awareness for the purpose of knowing who they are and be proud of it but also to be aware of their responsibility.

Armah's first novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is a story about an average Ghanaian who is a worker in a railway office. The man, the protagonist of the story, tries to keep some moral values in a country where corruption and embezzlement have indeed become rampant. This is a difficult and even impossible challenge. The unnamed protagonist, the man, has lost hope in a context of disillusionment, dissatisfaction and bitterness which engenders evils such as corruption or even prostitution.

In *Fragments*, Armah gives us a more painful portrayal of the situation in Ghana. It goes deeper into corruption and its effects on individuals. The plot of the story revolves around Baako, the main protagonist who returns after spending five years abroad studying creative writing. Unfortunately, his life in his country will amount to a series of disappointment and harassment. Hardly has he recovered from a nervous breakdown in the United States when he sank once again into another depression under Ghana's social pressures.

Despite dealing with the struggles of independent Africa and the lingering effects of colonialism in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*, the novel *Osiris Rising* reveals a most optimistic vision of Ayi Kwei Armah about the future of Ghana and Africa, in general. Based on Africa's oldest myth: the Isis and Osiris myth, the story revolves around Ast, a young African American woman who expresses a particular desire to know more about Africa but mostly, to rediscover

her true African identity. Raised by Nwt, her grandmother, Ast becomes conscious of her historical roots. With Nwt, she is taught how to read the ancient Egypt hieroglyphs from which she draws the desire to know more. Thus, the novel is essentially about her quest for identity.

Armah's three novels expose the deep impacts of tragic historical events on the continent. But they also urge Africans to become conscious of the need to be culturally rooted and re-build their identity.

The objective of this work is to show the significant and negative process of change in post-independence Africa: cultural alienation of individuals from family and community, betrayal, fragmentation, loss of cultural values and failure of political leadership. Moreover, the purpose is to show the importance of identity and its impact on individuals and communities. To accurately work out our dissertation, we have chosen to base our work on theories such as new historicism and postcolonial criticism.

Literature can be a reflection of the historical evolution of societies. New historicists believe in the importance of the text; they also analyze the text in relation to history. To understand a given work, we need to take into account its historical context. Consequently, new historicism is relevant to establish the relation between African history and postcolonial literary works in order to reinforce our understanding of the current condition of Africans.

Likewise, postcolonial criticism can be very interesting and useful on this study because the works are part of postcolonial products. Edward Said made it clear in his famous work *Orientalism*, postcolonialism aims partly at deconstructing the history made up by European colonial powers and at rehabilitating the true image of Africa with its different cultures and myths.

This work is divided into four chapters each of them composed of two sections. In our first chapter entitled Cultural Alienation we will deal with the Loss of social and cultural values first and then the Clash between cultures. This chapter will consist in making a tableau of the contact of African indigenous with the colonizer and how both managed to coexist. The result from this analysis will lead us to the second chapter of our paper which is entitled the Sociological and psychological impacts of identity crisis. In the latter, we will examine first Materialism and then Corruption as results of the failure of African independence.

In our third chapter, we will describe the condition for a positive political change that involves nothing but economic improvements and independent political ideologies. This chapter is also divided in two sections: A new African Identity and The African challenge through art and creativity.

The last chapter of our work will consist in dealing with the study of the narratives through characterization. In this part we will first deal with the different characters who symbolize the loss of identity and disillusionment and then tackle the characters embodying Africanity.

## CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL ALIENATION

In *Nations nègres et culture*, Cheikh Anta Diop defines culture as “the only serious, truly impassable wall between the outside world and us” (1979, 102)<sup>2</sup>. This means that culture is what separates and differentiates us from the external world because we differ in many ways: clothing, speaking, eating etc. It is even said to be “the values, ceremonies and ways of life characteristic of a given group”<sup>3</sup>. It is the basis of any organized society. It describes and distinguishes the way of life of people from one society to another. Hence, it is the civilization and social behavior of a particular people or society.

Cultural aspects of change are affected by internal and external forces that modify or even suppress social and cultural values. In the external way, culture can be influenced through contact between societies which may also produce transformation in cultural practices. In effect, when two societies are in contact, there is inevitably an interaction at many levels, including the cultural one. This is all the more obvious as culture is very dynamic. This is confirmed by Clifford Meesua Sibani who states:

Culture is dynamic because all cultures change overtime, changes take place in response to such events and phenomena as environmental pollution and crisis, intrusion of migrants and cultural diffusion, or modifications in behavior and values within the social system (2018, 60).

Through the process of acculturation, individuals and societies change. This happened to many local people and also the Diaspora during the process of colonization but also with the impact of immigration. This is what we can refer to as alienation, when people feel like foreigners in their own society. In his article “Karl Marx’s Theory of Alienation”, Roudro Mukhopadhyay defines alienation

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<sup>2</sup> le seul rempart sérieux, vraiment infranchissable, entre le monde extérieur et nous (Our translation)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.encyclo.co.uk/local/20212> accessed 16/11/2021

as “the feeling of an outsider or feeling a sense of isolation, strangeness, or feeling of having no external connection” (2021, 1).

When tracing back the causes of alienation, many of us obviously point out colonization. However, we should not forget that what brought alienation in Africa is mainly linked to her contact with a new world of merchants. The latter were Arabs who were known as traders. They were also conquerors who embodied capitalism during the Arab trans Saharan trade with mostly the exchange of some pieces of gold. It undoubtedly ended with using humans themselves as cargo. Therefore, all these events constitute the roots of the alienation of colonized people whether in Africa or in the West Indies because the colonial entrance in those territories was in fact full of fearful methods which unfortunately weakened the social organization of local people.

Basically, this conquest consisted in turning into colonies the former African empires and kingdoms and in establishing new rules in favor of the foreign power. This form of control and exploitation is what makes Aimé Césaire states in *Discourse on Colonialism* that:

Neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule of law. To admit once and for all without flinching at the consequences, that the decisive actors are the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocery and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, appetite and force, and behind them, the baleful projected shadow of a form of civilization which, at a certain point in its history, finds itself obliged for internal reasons, to extend to a world scale the competition of its antagonistic economies (*DC*, 2).

This assertion is definitely the summary of the basis of imperialism. It describes at all levels the dimensions and the reasons behind the whites’ presence in Africa.

### **1-1: The Loss of Social and Cultural Values**

The loss of social and cultural values is part of the most important themes developed in African literature. The confrontation between European and African

patterns of thought led to a confusion and disillusionment followed by a disintegration and subsequently a fragmentation of African societies. As a result of this cross-cultural contact between the two different cultures, that of Africans has been assimilated. This is asserted by Micheal Crowder in *The Story of Nigeria*:

The period 1906-1912 is one of the most crucial in the history of Nigeria, for it marks both the beginning of the rejection of standards and customs that had endured almost intact for many centuries. It was the first time that Nigerians were subjected in a large measure to western influence, which in the next fifty years were to have such a great effect on Nigerian society. [...]. Christianity as the official doctrine of the pagan areas [...] new forms of administration and justice were introduced. Finally, the western way of life was made available [...] as a result of the spread of missions [...]. So this period [...] was in effect the beginning of a new silent revolution in Nigeria (1966, 33).

This summarizes the history of the Western invasion in Africa. Africans have lost most of their cultural and social values and have tried to gain new ones. Thus, there is a great difficulty in defining the social, cultural, political, economic and religious identities of postcolonial societies because of the fact that African postcolonial generations are deeply assimilated.

Ayi Kwei Armah's characters and the titles in *Fragments* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* do not only embody the loss of cultural values but they also reveal the clash between the past and the present: the basis of African traditional values.

African societies have tried to resist foreign forces, but that was unsuccessful for the simple reason that white men have installed school and church. The latter are one of the methods elaborated to establish another direct contact with the indigenous. These instruments of alienation allowed Europeans to bring Africans to abandon their customs. They shared the idea that school and church are important to facilitate the assimilation process. George Hardy's arguments, quoted by Jean Getrey in *Comprendre l'aventure ambiguë de Cheikh Hamidou*

*Kane*, can be illustrative since he shows the different strategies to corrupt the African soul:

We have only in our disposal a limited number of means to change the primitive people of our colonies and make them be as much as possible devoted to our cause and useful for our enterprise. The surest way is to take the native from childhood, to obtain from him his frequenting us assiduously and adopting our intellectual and moral habits, in a brief way, to open schools for him where his mind is shaped in accordance with our intentions (1982, 78). [My translation]

Ayi Kwei Armah pointed out the importance of the effects of education on the local people. For instance, in *Fragments*, Ocran is disappointed to see students choose other subjects than traditional artistic issues. He believes he could make some of those students be the exception. That is why, in a conversation with Baako, Ocran states:

I don't understand...I've six, maybe seven students pass through my hands who really had something, and I hoped they would want to do good work. Artistic work with clay, ebony, paint with textures, shaping things to say what is inside themselves. You were one. But the best, I've never been able to make them understand. You all go off to the Physics and Medicine and that stupid Law and things like that (*Fragments*, 79).

Education is the core of the change in African societies because all these studies brought the colonized to ignore their cultures and traditions and adopt European ones. Europeans, through education, inculcated to Africans their lifestyle. That is why, in *Ambiguous Adventure* it is said that the foreign education was a new and efficient form of war the colonizer had adopted.

Education as a colonial instrument presents the values and texts of English as universal and turns the minds of the people to a new order. In addition, with the advent of white men, there is a loss of social values such as communal harmony, self-respect and respect of aged people. That is why in *No Longer at Ease*, it is shown that the Nigerian youth has lost some of its moral and cultural values. In fact, in their society, culture is associated with a valorization of the past, traditions, communal support, but more, loyalty. The main protagonist Obi Okonkwo, like

Baako in *Fragments*, struggles between traditions of the world in which he was born and the conventions of a changing society being caught between two worlds.

The advent of the missionaries in Africa and the establishment of an alien church in the area caused a gradual encroachment on the traditional pattern of African way of life. In those societies, people used to live in large family with all their relatives. In “African Cultural Values: The Past, Present and Future”, Sunday Awoniyi explains:

The value that traditional African societies place on communalism is expressed in the sharing of a common social life, commitment to the social or common good of the community, appreciation of mutual obligations, caring for others, interdependence, and solidarity (2015, 8).

Unfortunately, because of social change, it became a fashion to reject or dismiss local things in favor of foreign values. The changes ultimately transform social and cultural institutions, rules as well as concepts. Thus, this will inevitably impact society because there has been a process of change that modified the social structure in its entirety. In this sense, Tim Murithi points out in his article “African Approaches to Building: Peace and Social Solidarity”:

[colonialism] forested a sense of separation from one’s culture. It promoted the doctrine that the European culture and way of life were superior to the African. The effect of this was to begin the process of dismantling the cultural norms and values which informed African society and thus it begun imploding the social solidarity which existed in most regions prior to colonialism (2006, 11).

Society in the colony is no longer something created or maintained by the African natives, but rather an imitation of the colonial power of the society. The political and social disruption of the old African societies shows the deep effectiveness of the process of westernizing African societies.

The enfolding of this new faith resulted brainwashed Africans who consider themselves inferior. The following words of the African American Mohamed Aly in an interview can be taken into account because they illustrate how white



minimize the blacks and make them feel inferior: "...how come that everything is white? Why is Jesus white with blond hair and blue eyes? Why does the Lord supper all white men? Angels are white, Pope and Mary...". In his article "Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction", Ayi Kwei Armah goes further and declares through the following statement:

...as far as prejudices go, Western assumptions about Africa are well known...It's enough to point out one key western idea, and the way to all the other pet assumptions of western racism lies open: Africa is inferior, the West is superior (1976, 14).

The establishment of Christianity upon Africans for the simple pretext of civilizing them could not have been without consequences. The latter is undoubtedly a trauma on African people. From this, one can understand or consider this new religion as not only an institution of exploitation and dehumanization but also of humiliation of the majority. Christianity challenged so well traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and lifestyles.

Besides, this loss of social and cultural values is also seen in the choice of people's names. People have become culturally alienated to the extent that they would change their names for European ones. Armah writes in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*:

Here and there the names had changed. True, there were very few black names of black men but the plates by the roadside had enough names of black men with white souls and names trying mightily to be white. In the forest of white men's names, there were the signs that said almost aloud: here lives a black imitator. MILLIS-HAYFORD...PLANGE-BANNERMAN...ATTOH-WHITE... KUNTU-BLANKSON (BO, 126).

The assertion above shows the mentality of Africans who feel so inferior to the white that they tend to reject their name, their identity. In Africa, the names are a cultural identity marker. It is an important tool in African culture that is used to convey meanings and more, it shows the cultural identity of society. In *Naming*,

*Identity and the African Renaissance in South African Context*, Mbali Aldromeda Machaba states that from names “one can learn the various cultures that have been present in a particular place, and have an understanding and the appreciation of the history of a place” (2004, vii). Thus, in traditional Africa, names have stories behind them. If we look in the ethnic groups, local names often reveal some information about the bearer: the day or time the baby is born, the circumstances surrounding the birth... Therefore, there are several factors that influence the choice of names. Some illustrations can be found in the Akan culture. For instance, in *Fragments*, the names of the characters bear significations related specifically to the Akan customs and traditions: Naana means ancestor or grandparent, Baako means one person, Araba means born on Tuesday, Efua means born on Friday etc. In *A Grammar of the Fante-Akan Language*, W. T. BALMER and F. C. F. GRANT explain that names are given to children according to the day as well as the order of birth<sup>4</sup>.

However, certain families give their children Christian names as they have adopted the Christian religion brought by the contact with European cultures. In some cases, certain individuals deliberately decide to change their African names into European ones they find more modern and in. In other terms, they are victims of the clash of cultures that makes them feel inferior to the Europeans.

## **1-2: Clash Between Cultures**

Exploitation was not the only aim of colonizers upon Africa. Their will was indeed to impose their cultures on the colonized. This resulted into a clash between European and African cultures. Cultural clash is a conflict that occurs

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<sup>4</sup> Therefore, a child born on Sunday would be named “Kwesi” (male) or “Akwesiwa” (female); a child born on Monday is “Kwadwo” (male) or “Adwowa” (female) (64). As for the order of birth, the first child is “Aakū” (male) or “Aakūwa” (female), the second is “Enu” (male) or “Enuwa” (female), etc. (1929, 100).

when different cultural values and beliefs clash. In other words, it is a conflict caused by existing differences in cultural values.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* deal with the clash of cultures. The effects of the slave trade and colonization have changed the mentality of Africans because their expectations of certain behavior from their cultural background are not met. Mental slavery or loss of identity can be considered as a result of the contact of the two worlds. This mental slavery weakens completely the ties that link a community because people who are mentally enslaved are culturally weakened. Consequently, the issue of identity and the fragmentation of African societies is partly the transformation of the mind.

The colonized people were not given the chance to choose patterns from what constitute the western culture. Nevertheless, they have been obliged to assimilate other customs and beliefs. When we talk about a clash, more precisely that of different cultures, the result one may apprehend might be a hybridization through which every individual from different environment profits. However, this assertion from N. O. Mimiko reveals a very different perspective:

The social fabric was completely devastated and a new culture of violence was implanted. Traditional African systems of conflict resolution were destroyed and, in their places, nothing was given. The democratic process, rudimentary though it was, but with great potential as accompanies every human institution, was brutally uprooted and replaced by the authoritarianism of colonialism. A new crop of elites was created, nurtured, and weaned on the altar of violence and colonialism armed with the structures of the modern state to continue to carry out the art and act of subjugation of the mass of the people in the service of colonialism (2010, 641-642).

One of the most effective theories about this cultural contact is what Homi Bhabha calls "The Third Space of Enunciation" in which he proposes a third space as a common solution for cultural differences. This simply means that, instead of having changes of the entire structure of society, changes must occur within society. Explaining the notion of hybridity in his work *The Location of Culture*,

Bhabha explains the “Third Space” as a place of enunciation to experience multiculturalism. He argues:

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willing to ascend into that alien territory [...] may reveal that a theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity (1994, 38).

This illustrates that the point of colonization was not to create a “Third Space”. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and part of *Osiris Rising*, the image portrayed by Ayi Kwei Armah reveals a chaos in the Ghanaian society in particular and the African society in general.

The African communities that live in western countries are people caught between two worlds. Ayi Kwei Armah and Chinua Achebe have dealt with these subjects in their works *Fragments* and *No Longer at Ease*.

Baako and Obi Okonkwo have travelled abroad to continue their studies. Then, they come back to help their communities find a way to development. Unfortunately, on their return, they did not find their landmarks in their society. They return and find a society completely fragmented, where cultural beliefs are mostly trampled.

In *Fragments*, Baako's manuscripts that aim at awakening Ghanaians and Africans in general are rejected by his community. In fact, the manuscripts deal with issues related to the history of slavery. Asante-Smith, his boss refuses and rejects the project. He is part of those who consider African cultures as obsolete and those are considered to be “... a free, independent people. (They are) engaged in a gigantic task of nation building. (They) have inherited a glorious culture and that's what (they are) ... here to deal with.” (*FR*, 147). The contact of African culture with the other weighs a lot on Africans since it has led them to believe that theirs were insignificant. Asante-Smith proceeds further:

I know what the trouble is with you. You're too abstract in your approach to our work. For instance, what you have just said has nothing to do with our people's culture-all this slavery, survival, the brand (*Fr*, 147).

Asante-Smith and others like him confuse African and European cultures. The cultural confrontation between different beliefs leads them to lose their memories: amnesia. They have come to believe in the presumptions about everything being negative in Africa. Nana's following words are evidence of the change in Africa because she feels like a stranger in her own society:

That night I saw more things to astonish me in this place and to make me feel how much I have become a stranger here, because these are things whose meaning I will never understand before the time of my going comes (*Fr*, 10).

Naana who is Baako's grandmother represents traditions and has a different way of seeing things and because of that her thoughts are always rejected. She fails to make herself understood in a society to which she no longer belongs. Ayi Kwei Armah tries to show through the character of Naana how African traditional social, religious and cultural beliefs are regarded in postcolonial societies. Whatever Naana says or thinks is not considered meaningful by the family. Thus, her thoughts are merely put aside. Naana can be compared to Granny in Buchi Emecheta's book *The Family* because both grandmothers are misunderstood by their grandsons and grand-daughters.

In addition, in *Fragments*, the clash of cultures appears through Naana's life vision and that of her family. Naana is a very loyal and committed defender of traditional spiritual values. Unlike the other members of the family, she is not attracted to material goods. She is committed for the revival and respect of values. Her vision of life is summarized in the opening monologue of the novel:

Each thing that goes away returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again. That is the way everything goes and turns around. That is how all living things come back after long absences, and in the whole great world all things are living things. All that goes returns. He will return (*Fr*, 1).

Naana airs these words on the eve of Baako's journey to America. On the occasion, she practices all prayers necessary to appease the spirits of ancestors. She herself leads the libation ceremony. The objective of the ceremony is to ensure the safety of Baako abroad.

Cultural aspects of change justify the cultural fragmentations in African societies. With the impact of emigration and social and cultural loss, postcolonial societies compose citizens of two worlds which Ayi Kwei Armah's novels did not fail to demonstrate. The example of Baako and Naana can be taken into account because both live in two different worlds.

Consequently, the process of change is likely to have an impact on the relationship between the individual and the society but also in family disintegration. The cultural conflict resulted some psychological and sociological impacts on individuals.

## CHAPTER 2: THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF IDENTITY CRISIS

The role of African writers as Armah is not only to preserve the past of Africa by recreating it and transmitting it to the future generation. They have also the duty to make African people aware of the loss of integrity and cohesion in their societies. Such a task is not easy for it requires a diagnosis that can reveal the different symptoms of a fragmented society. Ayi Kwei Armah's novels portray the disintegration of African societies.

After independences, newly elected African leaders who were believed to restore hope, took over. They became greedy, monopolizing power and embezzling public wealth. That is why they owe a reputation of having a mentality based on the quest for materialistic wealth.

By alluding to the roots of identity crisis or social fragmentation, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Osiris Rising* aim at revealing the amnesia of Africans. In other words, it shows how they have become materialistic and corrupted. Materialism and corruption are controversial issues in African literature. They constitute a furrow ploughed by so many African writers who depict post-independence African society.

The attention of some literary critics was drawn by Armah's first two novels *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*. Amnesia, in this context, is an after-effect trauma caused by slavery. It has led African people to become materialistic because at times of the trade, Africans would 'sell' their fellows to foreigners in exchange of materials. It is what Ken Saro-Wiwa considers as a symptom of social fragmentation. His essay about *Fragments* can be taken as a relevant point given that it shows how African society is fragmented because of slavery and colonialism; but also, it gives the elements that corroborate it.

Slavery and colonialism have been occasions for the Europeans to impose and affirm their cultural superiority to Africans. As the latter blindly followed and believed in the notions of “center” and “periphery”, it became easy for the white men to show them a new direction or to impose a new way of living. The latter constitutes a quest for power and prestige by being able to afford worldly goods.

This adoption of foreign culture to the detriment of theirs, seems to be the root cause of identity crisis and social fragmentation in African communities. The traditional values which harmonized social life in Ghana are ignored. People are no longer guided by the past, but by a slavish worship of things they do not produce.

### **2-1: Materialism**

According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, materialism is “a doctrine that the only or the highest values or objectives lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress”<sup>5</sup>. *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* defines “materialism as the attitude of someone who attaches a lot of importance to money and wants to possess a lot of material things”<sup>6</sup>.

Materialism cannot go along with social cohesion. In “What Psychology Says About Materialism and the Holidays” published by the American Psychological Association and which is an interview with Tim Kasser, the latter states:

be materialistic means to have values that put a relatively high priority on making a lot of money and having many possessions, as well as on image and popularity, which are almost always expressed via money and possessions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/materialism>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/materialism>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2014/12/materialism-holidays#:~:text=Kasser>  
(accessed 12/11/2022)



It is a preoccupation upon material. It can be associated with treating others in a manipulative and selfish ways. Yet, it is quite obvious that materialism is something somehow new to Africans. In precolonial Africa, despite having an ‘imperfect society, people were mostly concern with honesty, loyalty, and solidarity. In an article entitled “Reflections on African and Western World Practices and Responses to Materialism”, A. O. Ojeleye states that it is a “philosophy of the Western culture which holds that only the material world exists. The concept of materialism states that it is money, not God that makes the world go round” (2018, 180). In fact, through the slave trade, it has been undoubtedly taught to Africans to become materialists given that they have been enslaved and colonized by Europeans who used them as beasts of burden in their plantations. To reach their goal, the occident would bring very cheap goods such as mirrors or guns and so on to exchange with some Africans they would use on the American plantations. Consequently, it is because of materialism that many European countries dominated people.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and in *Fragments*, the materialistic behavior of some characters is meant to draw the reader’s attention to the actual change that has occurred in African communities. For Ayi Kwei Armah’s characters in particular, wealth is regarded as important. In *The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah*, Robert Fraser sums up this situation in Ghana as follows:

The characters of *Fragments* exist in a world where the balance between persons and objects has been upset. Traditionally in Africa there has always been a considerable reverence for certain kind of objects, seen often as the seat of spirits or endowed with curative or malevolent power. Yet this reverence was never directed towards the more physical substance of the object but rather to certain mysterious power held to occupy it. Now, however, this deep faith in the indwelling power of essence has been supplanted by an abject awe before the mere stuff of the object itself (1980, xiii).

Fraser’s words illustrate that this materialism pervading the Ghanaian society does not spare the spiritual order. Materialism is a widespread phenomenon in

Ghana. No layer of the society is shielded from it. Even Naana, the staunch defender of spiritual and moral values falls prey to it. She says:

My spirit ran with a haste not chosen by itself, making of itself a joining path between too many things forever changing chape and size and color and above all unfixed in their meaning – rushing like an antelope near the end of its hunting, speeding this way and the other and almost caught again before it could come to rest and flung with heart-burning speed always in search of a refuge it could not reach; until my soul screamed its terrible tiredness, gave up the rushing, unending journey and at last found rest in despair, not trying again to regain the larger meaning and the peace that can come from the great understanding. (*Fr*, 197)

That is why Derek Wright asserts in “Ritual Modes and Social Models in African Fiction” that “the society’s materialism leaves no loophole for spiritual” (1987, 201). Wright even cites Priebe who compares the Ghanaian society to a sick body:

We are aware of a symbolic invasion whereby the society in its pervaded materialism is seen as the locus of a spirituality necessary for the society’s regeneration. The cancerous tissue of a sick person will react to a cure in exactly the same way any healthy tissue will react to a disease. In both cases the tendency is to expel that which is foreign to the organism (1987, 200).

These words lay bare the illness which is destroying the soul of the Ghanaian society, which is in a lust for material goods. However, Priebe is optimistic and thinks that for their salvation, the Ghanaian people need to resort to spiritual values. The latter seem to be the only solution to overpass the gap between the morally conscious people and the materialistic ones.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, according to Oyo, the man’s wife’s true salvation is in fact the blinding gleam of beautiful and new houses, the shine of powerful new Mercedes cars, the scent of very expensive perfumes, and mass of new wigs. The latter symbolizes that feeling of inferiority in people. It reveals how some African women deploy so much efforts to look like white women. This is another psychological and sociological effect because it is not only in the minds but it is also a trend in the society.

This illustrates the connection that Ken Saro-Wiwa has well established between slavery and materialism. He considers materialism as one of the traumatic effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For him, “Ayi Kwei Armah’s second novel, *Fragments*, etc. constitutes his exploration of the twentieth-century effects of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, of which that materialism is a symptom.” This simply means that the rush towards worldly goods by African peoples proves not only Africans’ connection with their history, but it also proves the social identity crisis and the disintegration of their communities. So, in such communities, people deploy their efforts only to become wealthy.

Materialism manifests itself through the way people regard the “been-to” with very high esteem simply because of the material goods they are able to afford from their journeys. Indeed, people in African societies go abroad in order to get enough money for them and their families so as to gain prestige in their community.

Everybody does their best to make goods whatever the means may be. So, it might be very disappointing to have a “been-to” coming back home without any cargo of private properties for his or her family. This is Baako’s case in *Fragments*. He returns home after a five-year stay in the USA only to find his country, Ghana different from what it used to be. Like the rest of Africans, the Ghanaians used to live in somehow cohesive societies where the position one occupies never depends on the wealth, but rather, what mattered most were traditional values such as honesty, solidarity, responsibility, courage, etc. The changes that Baako foresees in his society makes him feel like a stranger in his own society.

As a “been-to”, what was expected from Baako’s arrival was material goods such as cars, money... Instead, he came back with only a type-writer, a guitar, a suitcase, and a tape recorder. For his family and relatives, such a “been-to” is

useless. This is confirmed by Baako himself through a discussion he had with his friend Juana:

“What really happened?”

“You don’t have to be told. The cargo, that’s it, really. Do you think the traveler should have come just like that? Who needs what’s in a head?”

“You’re accusing yourself again. You’re not a criminal. You were trying to do something. It isn’t wrong just because people say it is.” (*Fr*, 190)

Even Brempong’s euphoric return contrasts with Baako’s unannounced arrival. In fact, Baako is the opposite of Brempong. This is due to the fact that the former is not absorbed with this myth of the “been-to”, while the latter is old in the matter. He is always claiming to know England inside and out. While on the plane to Accra, he makes several trips from the rear to his seat, jibing seemingly at Baako who tries well to avoid him. Through his discussion with Baako, we realize that Brempong has well prepared his return home:

Where in Ghana would you find a thing like this? Sharp eyes. I bought it in Amsterdam, at the airport, actually. Beautiful things there, Amsterdam. Tape recorders. I took one last year, and it has never given me any trouble... You just have to know what to look for when you get a chance to go abroad. Otherwise, you come back empty-handed like a fool... But if you come back prepared, there’s nothing to worry about (*Fr*, 45).

This quotation testifies that Brempong is the real prototype of the “been-to” as seen by the Ghanaian society. His wife wears magnificent wigs. He himself declares that he has a car, a tape recorder and a freezer that can even contain a whole animal.

On his arrival, Brempong’s people roll out the red carpet. He is welcomed by lots of people including his sister. Pieces of Kente, an expensive cloth in Ghana, are laid on the ground for him to walk on. Armah’s description of Brempong’s arrival is so graphic that it reflects accurately the Ghanaian society. This arrival quickly turns into a big ceremony with his people pouring champagne. This is highlighted in the following passage with the words from Brempong’s sister, Sissie:

Set him down. Give him to me. Let me embrace him, my precious brother. Hei, hei, let him see his sister, me... Ooooooh my own brother... you have come, you have come again to me... The champagne! The champagne! Bring the champagne (*Fr*, 56).

On hearing these words, we may have the impression that Brempong is being venerated by his people. It is obvious that in a materialistic society, money is the only power. People are considered important only when they have money. That is why the welcoming of Baako differ from that of Brempong. The narrator goes further and asserts:

A strange scene greets him as he strides into the arrivals lounge. Three tough-looking men in jumpers with their cloths banded around their waists were holding Brempong high above their heads. Around them, a large crowd of the hero's relatives struggle to get close to him, shouting, some singing in the ecstatic, emotional confusion (*Fr*, 56).

From the depiction above, we realize that Brempong is no more equal to the others. He is their white man. The “been-to” sees himself kept out of the group because the others consider him no more as a black man. Unlike Brempong, Baako is marginalized for resisting all the attempts of becoming a “been-to” for his society. However, when we have a closer look at this situation, we come to realize that it is not Brempong himself who is given the warm welcome but rather his cargo. Brempong's sister, Sissie, asks the people who came to welcome his brother to move back and not kill him with their tuberculosis. She proceeds as far as saying that the air in Ghana is polluted. In fact, her opinion of pollution shows the dependence and the narrow-mindedness of the Ghanaian people. The latter tend to mystify America and the West, overlooking and even ignoring everything that belongs to their society.

This myth of the “been-to” is so entrenched in the Ghanaian society that the majority of the people are not willing to sacrifice themselves for their own community. They claim that creation takes too much of their time. The important thing is no longer production, but consumption.

Nothing seems to work in the country. Baako is compelled to go from office to office to get an answer after he has submitted his papers to the authorities. In fact, most of the Ghanaian people lack that sense of patriotism that Baako wants to install into them. The issue of the sterility of Africa is also posed in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*. This novel tells the story of a snobbish man, El Hadji Kader Béye who gets married, but unfortunately on the night of his wedding, he came to find out that he has the *xala* (he is impotent). In relation to the story of El Hadji, Maryse Conde writes: "Xala goes far beyond the frontiers of Senegal. It is Africa as a whole which cannot produce anything fruitful... It is a devastating satire of the new Senegalese bourgeoisie, greedy, selfish and basically unable to create anything great and lasting" (1978, 98).

Ghanaians kept on building hopes on their cargo instead of taking responsibilities as the solution for their development. Through their works *Fragments* and *Xala*, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ousmane Sembène have sent a warning note to all the African people to get rid of economic impotence and to work hard for the development of their continent.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the nameless protagonist is despised by his wife Oyo because of his rebuttal to follow what the Ghanaian society considers "the normal way" to obtain wealth like his friend Koomson. In fact, Oyo envies Koomson's wife Estella for living in luxury thanks to the money her husband gets from extra sources. So, the man is within a society composed of people like Koomson.

Materialism becomes something really insidious. For example, in the first chapter of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the conductor spends his time smelling notes and coins. He feeds his eyes with admiration for those who gave him a cedi and would tell them that they are great men. The description made by Armah about the cedi and its smell gives us another aspect of the Ghanaian society. It is

a society completely decayed. As strange as it may be, the conductor enjoys the smell of the cedi, because there is something in the people which urges them to run after material goods. As stated in *Fragments*, it is a kind of natural appetite, “Position, power, cars, wigs, houses, money. If they lost those things, they’d get sick with their own emptiness” (*Fr*, 192). The following passage from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* shows the degree to which people are materialistic:

If you come near people here, they will ask you, what about you? Where is your house? Where have you left your car? What do you bring in your hands for the loved ones? Nothing? Then let us keep quiet and not get close to people. People will make you very sad that you do not have a house to make onlookers stumble with looking, or a car to make every walker know that a big man and his concubine have just passed. Let us keep quiet and watch (*BO*, 93).

The greatness of an individual is characterized by his wealth unlike in traditional societies where the emphasis was put more on moral values (honesty, dignity). In this case, the character of the man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a perfect example because he is underestimated, even though he is a telling image of Africans who remain unperturbed by the white man’s legacy. He is not among those who say that “money is life” (*BO*, 87).

We then realize how infectious materialism is in the Ghanaian society and even in Africa in general because it appears like a disease which has gained way more. The following passage from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* highlights it:

The land has become messy of destroyed souls and lost bodies looking for something that could take their pain and finding nothing but those very people whose pain should have been their pain, and for whose protection they should have learned to fight (*BO*, 65).

The corpulence as a physical aspect is another important characteristic of materialism. In fact, people become fat for the simple reason that they only nourish their bodies to the detriment of their souls. Consequently, they become fat. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the visit of the man and his wife Oyo

at Koomson's is depicted as such: "[he] looked obviously larger than the chair he was occupying" (*The Beautiful Ones*, 130). Through the perspective of the character of Koomson, we realize that Ayi Kwei Armah is making a picture of the African leaders. He describes them through the following statement:

The man, when he shook hands, was again amazed at flabby softness of the hand... ideological hands, the hands of revolutionaries leading their people into bold sacrifices. And yet these were the socialists of Africa, fat, perfumes, soft with the ancestral softness of chiefs who had sold their people and are celestially happy with the fruits of the trade (*BO*, 131).

To draw the attention of the reader to the existing connection between African leaders' weight and materialism, the narration puts the emphasis on physical appearance: "the fatter lawyers and the fatter politicians" (*The Beautiful Ones*, 90) with "their prosperous looking bellies" (185). Here, the point of highlighting so much on their physical aspect is to expose them as thieves of public wealth. Ngugi wa Thiong'O *Devil on the Cross* is a telling image of African legislature and government. It portrays the influence of international culture and currency in the lives of Africans. Ngugi made a harsh and satirical depiction of the thieves and robbers. The latter symbolize both western countries and African leaders. Local leaders serve foreign masters and allow themselves to be manipulated. That is why it is said that "... In some ways, such conditions are even worse than colonial conditions because they keep the imperialistic truth hidden from the people."<sup>8</sup>

Consequently, materialism is a trait of cultural crisis because it can yield to temptations such as briberies or embezzlement. People can be inclined to resort to corruption to afford wealthy goods for themselves and their relatives. Materialism played a consequent role on the fact that Africans lose a part of their culture which is very compulsory for any community because, as Odeleye states,

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gradesaver.com/devil-on-the-cross/study-guide/symbols-allegory-motifs> (accessed 11/19/2022)



“It is associated with a tendency that considers material acquisitions and physical comfort as more important over and above spiritual values” (2018, 180).

## **2-2: Corruption**

In a society where the phenomenon of corruption is present, people care more about individual interest than public interest. Such a society is very likely to lose its social cohesion. Corruption is noticeable at all levels of the Ghanaian society.

It is defined in the *Meriam Webster Dictionary* as a dishonest behavior especially by powerful people. It is, like materialism, an aftereffect of imperialism. It is an evil which has been causing consistent harm to the African continent. In fact, it has brought not only disorder, but also selfishness and violence. It influences wrong doings among people. According to El-Rufai quoted by David O. IYANDA in his article “Corruption: Definitions, Theories and Concepts”, corruption covers

a wide range of social misconduct, including fraud, extortion, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, bestowing of favours to friends, rigging of elections, abuse of public property, the leaking of official government secret, safes of expired and defective goods like drugs, food, electronics and spare parts to the public, etc. (2012, 40).

Most of traditional values are threatened because people have developed a sense of greed and a desperate desire for material acquisitions. Money becomes a source of disconnection between people. It influences people to get engaged in acts that may cause harm, discomfort, and even misfortune others. Corruption, through money and mostly material possessions, cause separation among members of the same community. This is the case of Koomson and his likes who separate themselves from society they consider inferior. Thus, this is alienation within their own community.

This causes anger and frustration because, as Cheikh anta Diop states, “the cultural cement that unifies the disparate elements of a people to make them into

a whole, by the particular slant of the feeling of historical continuity lived by the totality of the collective” (1991, 212). So, people turn on themselves and on each other, trying to vent their anger as illustrated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*:

We blame them, as we blame ourselves and every other thing that was there to be blamed. What can people do when there remains only so much meaning in their lives and that little meaning is running so irretrievably away with every day that goes? What can people do? We were defending ourselves against our friends as if they were animals (BO, 76).

The social cohesion which was the biggest strength of African societies is then undermined as a result of frustration and also what Armah calls “victim anger” (BO, 69). In fact, the family system is not at the core of social life in *The Beautiful Ones*. Rather, it is at the periphery. Except the Man, his wife, mother-in-law, and children (and also the Koomsons), every other character is a lone body in the world without any meaning and purpose. This is a precise point through which Armah shows how western culture has engulfed traditional family values. But also, he shows how individualism has displaced the cohesiveness of the extended African family structure.

The representation of individual against society is done on purpose by Armah. Individuals in his novels (for example, Baako Onipa, the man and the Teacher) represent part of Africans who are already conscious or awakened. They represent Africans who have chosen not to use fast and illegal means of success. This can be illustrated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by a song in Radio Ghana that says:

Those who are blessed with power  
And the soaring swiftness of the eagle  
And have flown before,  
Let them go.  
I will travel slowly,  
And I too will arrive (BO, 51).

These few lines talk about someone who travels slowly. It says that those who are blessed with speed, let them travel fast. In other words, it means that some prefer to use slow but lawful methods of achievements, while others prefer to use fast and illegal means of success. The other part constitutes the masses who still need to be awakened. Brempong and Koomson belong to the category of the “happy few”. Thus, corruption is somehow a sign of a fragmented society. It is a trait of cultural crisis.

Armah uses his characters to depict a Ghanaian society deeply corrupt. In fact, the misuse of the authority of the police is undoubtedly an effect of corruption. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the messenger who comes to see the man says he has won a lottery. The man suggests him to go to the police station as he is not sure to receive the money. But the messenger responds that this would cost much money if he went to the police station because “this is Ghana”. The following paragraph proves that what the messenger said is quite frequent:

Once when the man was travelling to Cape Coast three different policemen had stopped the little bus and asked the driver for his quarter license. The driver had not bought it yet, and each of the policemen had said him, in front of everybody, ‘Even cola gives pleasure in the chewing’. In each case the driver had smiled and given the law twenty-five pesewas and the law was satisfied. There was only one way (*BO*, 95).

Armah highlights it also in *Osiris Rising* through the following statement: “There is a social problem. This country has a growing middle class, with an appetite for money.” (*OR*, 134). From these testimonies, we can understand that there is a separation of the community into different classes. Armah’s idea about African socialism can be taken into account because it somehow shows how social class emerged in Africa. In his article “African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?”, he believes that

African Socialism performs a function for the post-independence nationalist leadership similar to that performed for the colonial administration by the ideological twins Christianity and “the white man’s burden”. Both serve to justify and hopefully to elicit enthusiasm

on behalf of the same authoritarian power structures passed on to the nationalist leadership by the colonialists... (1967, 28)

From this assertion, we realize that African socialism is simply a creation of class in African society. Classes exist in Africa and “there are spectacular differences in standards of living and access to privileges and services provided through the use of the common wealth of the States” (1967, 29).

Apart from the police authority, other authority due to corruption is visible in other sectors. This is the case of the supervisor of Space Allocations in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* who was a

...bursar at one of the Ghana national secondary schools... he had regarded his job as an opportunity he had won for making as much money as he could as quickly as he could, and his handling of the school's finances had soon made his intentions clear (*BO*, 109).

This assertion is an example that describes a trait of cultural crisis. It reveals how selfish most Africans have become. This behavior questions Nyerere's idea of Socialism as an attitude of mind because according to William E. Abraham “African Socialism was intensely humanistic. It was not a narrow economic doctrine, but a socio-political one. Each was responsible for all, and all were responsible for each” (2015, 187). Nyerere's theory about African Socialism is well detailed in his Ujamaa which means familyhood or brotherhood. In *Ujamaa: The Basis of African Socialism*, he states that it promotes the spirit of community in order to foster love, cohesion and service so that even

a millionaire can equally well be a socialist. He may value his wealth only because it can be used in the service of his fellow-men. But the man who uses wealth for the purpose of dominating any of his fellows is a capitalist. So is the man who would if he could.<sup>9</sup>

In *Fragments*, on his arrival in Ghana, Baako already faces difficulties in finding a job. The man to whom he gave his file at Ghanavision is called the Junior

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<http://web.archive.org/web/20190726110429/http://www.nathanieltturner.com/ujamaanyerere.htm> (accessed 11/19/2022)

Assistant to the Secretary of the Civil Service Commission. He is among the "... so called elite of pompous asses trained to do nothing" (*Fr*, 81). Instead, they expect and accept bribes from people. Baako being unready to give him any money, the Junior Assistant does not pay much attention to him. As he has no choice, Baako is obliged to ask his friend Ocran for help. This is illustrated by Brempong's who says: "You have to know people. Big people, not useless people. Top Officials who can go anywhere and say do this do that for my boy. But when you present your black face like their own, there is no respect" (*Fr*, 47).

Baako came back to his country to find out a society with a solid presence of capitalism but also real demands which undoubtedly seem to tell him that the only key to open the door of success is definitely corruption.

Like Baako and the man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ocran would rather prefer to live in a society where none of these symptoms is noticeable. However, he unwillingly intervenes for Baako to get the job. He explains how sick the Ghanaian system is:

It isn't even that things are slow. Nothing works. There are dozens of organizations, supposed to take care of and that. But if you want anything done you have to go running all around these stupid organizations themselves (*Fr*, 81).

The only aim of this specific kind of corruption is to have the concerned person feel indebted to those who "help" him. Consequently, whatever the latter asks him to do, any service whether something good or bad, it will be done.

Armah's portrayal of African society through a micro representation of Ghana proves that corruption has become something irresistible. It means that, even those responsible of law making have failed. This is simply because they are corrupt. They take hold of the continent and appropriate public funds. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, this is the case of Abednego Yamoah who has been

selling government petrol for himself, but so cleverly there is always someone else, a messenger, a cleaner, to be jailed, never Abednego. The whole world says he is a good man, and the whole world asks why we are not like him (*BO*, 96).

Corruption appears as something rather normal in African countries to such a point that those who refuse to take bribes are mostly despised by their relatives. This proves how impacted African psyche is. That is why Edward Lobb states in “Armah’s Fragments and The Vision of the Whole”:

The individual who wishes to restore order and a sense of justice in the society are hurt by the impact of the shattering of the larger meaning of the social order and moral vision. This leads to conflicts from within and without (1988, 49).

From this assertion, one can understand that those who do wrong are somehow protected by society. Because they are wealthy, they are not held to account. Hence, this hinders economic, political and social development. Moreover, it is a barrier to good governance but also basic freedoms such as freedom of speech. Ayi Kwei Armah goes further in proving how deep corruption is installed in the Ghanaian society. He writes in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*:

That has always been the way the gleam is approached: in one bold, corrupt leap that gives the leaper the power to laugh with contempt at those of us who will plod on the daily round, stupid, honest, dull, poor, despised, afraid. We shall never arrive. Unless of course, we too take the jump (*BO*, 96).

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Koomson is part of those who take the jump because he lives in a pretentious lap thanks to the bribes he takes. By counting the salary Koomson receives after he joined the Political Party, the man was surprised. He could do nothing but drop the paper to realize that what he saw was corruption, public theft indeed. Yet, within society, Koomson is admired, praised, whereas the man is despised by his mother-in-law and his wife Oyo for his refusal to take bribes that could allow her to obtain material goods like Koomson’s wife, Estella. Unfortunately, in a society like that, people like the man are considered as

the foolish ones... who cannot live the way it is lived by all around them, those who will stand by the blowing river and disapprove of the current [because there] is no other way and the refusal to take the leap will help absolutely no one at any time (*BO*, 181).

Corruption is one “disease” among many that have caused the loss of identity in African societies where corrupt people are those black men called whites, those who are selfish enough to have forgotten the sense of commonness. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* there is a paralysis that seizes every individual in the country. It then makes them impossible to act or resist the system. Almost on every chapter or page the reader’s senses are assailed by what Emmanuel S. Zumakpeh describes as “Powerful images and visions of corruption, rottenness, disease, castration, vomit, and excrement, as though the rottenness of society is no longer merely a spiritual thing but a physical reality that engulfs everybody” (1992, 9). This is a way for Armah to show his repugnance for the system that emanates such moral decay.

The fact of having a nameless protagonist in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is done on purpose by Armah. The lack of identity may be due to the fact that the man is unable to identify himself with the current Ghanaian society where he lives because it has lost its core values. Even Baako cannot. Despite the fact that he has been given a name, he still cannot take himself as a member of the new Ghana.

Because of corruption, both the man and Baako live in fragmented societies with identity crisis, where they are alienated and considered as outcasts. Oppositely, Koomson and Brempong are regarded with high esteem and considered as members of a community in which they are regarded as white men. This is illustrated in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by the bread seller who states: “My own lord, my master, oh, my white man, come. Come and take my bread. It is all yours, my white man, all yours” (*BO*, 37).

Armah’s satirical representation of leaders through the character of Koomson is the same in *A Man of the People* where the story is told by Odili. From the

beginning of the novel, Odili is portrayed as a young teacher who is waiting for the Minister of Culture. The latter is named Chief Nanga. He is very much loved by people. Yet, he is very corrupted. Of course, Odili is very frustrated by the fact that people love Chief Nanga despite his corruption. He states:

I wish for a miracle for a voice of thunder to husk the ridiculous festival and tell the poor contemptible people one or two truths. But of course, it would be quite useless. They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man has used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you as my father did---if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth (*MOP*, 2).

Nevertheless, the young Odili becomes very delighted by Chief Nanga when he remembers him as a former student back when Chief Nanga was a teacher and not a politician and has invited him to his house in the city. Here, what Odili wants to reveal to the reader is that politicians do change over time. When they get to power, they tend to forget the speeches but also the promises they have made. The majority of them get into politics to survive because they would achieve fast and illegal success. Thus, for them, power necessarily means having access to wealth through bribery and embezzlement or squandering public funds. So, it has become a way of getting rich. In his work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon points out:

Scandals are numerous, ministers grow rich, their wives doll themselves up, the members of parliament feather their nests and there is not a soul down to the simple policeman or the customs officer who does not join in the great procession of corruption (1963, 167).

From this statement, one can clearly deduce that African leaders are the destroyers of the continent. The incommensurable damages inside African societies have been caused by the leaders' blind lust for money and power. That is why, in *Devil on the Cross*, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O points out:

Reap where you never planted, eat that for which you never shed a drop of sweat and drink that which has been fetched by others. Shelter from the rain in huts for which you have never carried a single pole or thatching grass, and dress in clothes made by others (*DOC*, 101).



This statement from Ngugi is another evidence of the selfishness of African leaders. Another characteristic that shows presence of corruption is during election campaigns when political leaders show their selfishness, their thirst for power, and their corrupt deeds. Because they are aware of the lack of electoral punishment of corruption, they misuse public office for private gains. Voters, due to their general distaste for corruption are expected to sanction politicians. However, the results at the end show that the electoral punishment of corruption is rather soft. Armah writes in *The Beautiful Ones*:

Everywhere and always, the word is faster than the deed... African politicians love flashy scenes of highfalutin words. That is only a partial explanation. More important is the historical fact that in a very radical sense the nationalist leaders of Africa have found themselves sucked into the role of *hypocrites*, actors involved in a make-believe situation (BO, 28).

In Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, this phenomenon is noticeable. In the novel, a poor man explains how he has been fired for not being able to give his boss a bribe. Then, he goes back home with the intention to enter politics. The author relates political experience: "So he came home to taste politics. And he had himself in Politics mixed and stood for election. He was succeeding but only his rivals had money to give and he had not. So, he failed" (*The Voice*, 61).

The author, Gabriel Okara depicts a very common practice in Nigeria that shows how corruption is a trait of cultural crisis. Politicians buy peoples' votes. This act prevails bribery but also dishonesty. It is one of many reasons why politicians never respect their engagements. They seem to be transformed into capitalists who put materialism above everything. They are only concerned by their self-development.

The fragmentation of African societies is a phenomenon which has interested Ayi Kwei Armah. So, he dealt with it his first two novels. Both *Fragments* and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* have shed a light on the psychological symptoms of the African social disintegration. Most of the Ghanaian people have become

materialistic. They have developed a maddening rush towards material possessions. This let them to resort to corruption to make money. Materialism and corruption go well with individualism because they weaken the social ties between the individuals.

This depiction of a Ghanaian society with these symptoms seems to be a pretext for Armah to alert the Africans about the urge to rebuild a new African society. In fact, for the majority of characters in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, there is no hope. Even for the Man's friend, Teacher, the hopelessness in this situation is exasperating. His personal experiences have given him an especially keen but despairing view of Ghana. As he is asked whether he has any hope about the present state of situation, Teacher gave a categorical answer:

No. Not anymore. Not hope, anyhow. I don't feel any hope in me anymore. I can see things but I don't feel much. When you can see the end of thing even in their beginnings, there's no more hope, unless you want to pretend, or forget, or get drunk or something. No. I also am one of the dead people, the walking dead. A ghost. I died long ago. So long ago that not even the old libation of living blood will make me live again (*BO*, 61).

These words, coming from the Teacher, the one who is at the same time wise and intelligent, sound like the death-kneel for Africa. Even the traditional spirits of Gnana abandoned the country. They do no longer respond to the rites of libation and sacrifices. The Ghanaian society seems to be drifting apart with no clear vision of where it is going. Certainly, it is bent on a course of self-destruction. That is why Teacher points out:

"I see a long, long way", he said, "and it is full of people, so many people going so far into the distance that I see them all like little bubbles joined together. They are going, just going, and I am going with them. I know I would like to be able to come out and see where we are going, but in the very long lines of people I am only one. It is not at all possible to come out and see where we are going. I am just going" (*BO*, 41).

This inability to see where to go or to draw a proper course of where they want to go is the real tragedy of modern Africa. So, with this prospect we are facing,

people who are weak-willed chose the easy option which is suicide instead of fighting. Therefore, materialism and corruption generated psychological disintegration of African people through premature decadence.

### CHAPTER 3: CONDITIONS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The 1950s-1960s was the decade of hope during which African countries gained independence. African writers who were born in that period were anti-imperialists. This explains the optimistic writings of the period. Those African writers produced artistic works which show that Africa had its own history, culture, and civilization that were equal if not superior to those of the imperialists.

The rise of dictatorship throughout Africa in the 1970s brought back the political, economic and social practices of colonialism. The age of independence witnessed an emergence of social classes that resulted a disappointment among many intellectuals who hoped and believed in a possible new African era. Thereby, writers produced artistic works in which they denounced post-colonial African society. Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* represents that period. In the book, he argues that the reason of Africa's problems lays in the new leaders' lack of moral directions.

After more than half a century of independence, Africa, one the richest continents, is lagging on the way to development with social, political, and cultural collapse. After knowing the reasons of these collapses, it would be interesting to look for solutions to Africa's post-independence identity including economic and cultural drops. The conditions are the means that would enable us to get rid of the difficulties and restore the African cultures. Ayi Kwei Armah has given proofs of the link between social fragmentation and the loss of one's culture. An important number of local values have been dropped in favor of foreign ones.

The aim of the restoration would be to cure the Africans of the inferiority complex and materialism that have led to violence and corruption. Thus, African societies would only recover if they are ready and determined to build a leadership that prioritizes moral considerations. In other words, they must reconsider an African renaissance as suggested by Cheikh Anta Diop through an ethical leadership,

which, according to Innocent A. Daudu, is essentially “an influence relationship between leaders and followers, where the leader portrays moral considerations, critical thinking, visionariness, right actions and the capacity to sustain of an environment to for justice and equity” (2016).

### **3-1: Quest for a New African Identity**

African people were considered nature folks who were thought to have no history. From then, Africans were compelled to forget who they are. They have fallen victim of the clash between cultures and that of the imperialists. In fact, Africans have been taught to deny any existing type of African culture. This is expressed by Cheikh Anta Diop who wrote in *Nations nègres et culture*: “Under cover of science, the goal is to make the Negro believe that he has been responsible for anything, not even for what exists in his homeland” (14).

The consequence of this situation is the disintegration of African societies because western historicism did not hesitate to use scientific arguments to implement their ideologies about the world history. For instance, Hegel’s view of history of the world has no place for Africa. He believed that Africa is a “non-historical part of the world that is yet to exhibit any idea of freedom. To this end it was just a mere piece of land with pathetic beings that fed on roots, herbs and the milk of camels” (2018, 306). It is in this sense that, in *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngugi states that to change these ideas, an emphasis should be laid on the revival of African cultures as “economic and political control of a people can never be complete without cultural control...” (DM, 93). In the same way, in order to deconstruct African history from western historicism that claims that Africa has no history because so much of its past was not documented, Cheikh Anta Diop in his works *The African Origin of Civilization, Myth or Reality*, and *Nations nègres et culture*, as challenged and even changed the direction of attitudes about the place of Africa and its people in history.

In this postcolonial era, committed writers engaged themselves as pathfinders to restore a new African identity. Ayi Kwei Armah's first two books allude to this. They urge African people into going back to Africanity in order to have their continent reconstructed as Cheikh Anta Diop suggested. For Cheikh Anta Diop, Africanity is what make the African an African in terms of identity, culture, names and rituals and so on. In fact, there are plenty of things that we do that ensure our Africanity, stance us apart from the world and show that we are African.

In *Fragments*, the main character's concern seems to be the reconstruction of the African societies. Baako certainly knows what matters with Ghanaian people. It is mainly about their psychology for imperialism have brainwashed them. The white men's use of school has had consequences on the colonized people and their offspring. In fact, the use of this tool has been done willingly. It was necessary for the invaders to cut off the ties and be able to impose themselves. This is what we can refer to as the divide and rule policy which reminds us of the Berlin conference. Ngugi wa Thiong'o corroborates this in *Decolonizing the Mind*:

Berlin 1884 was affected through the sword and the bullet. But the night of the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard. The physical violence of the battlefield was followed by the psychological violence of the classroom (*DM*, 9).

The damages caused by the imperialists are mostly in the mind. Mental slavery makes people unable to identify themselves with the society they belong to. So, there is a need for Africans to go back to their roots in order to rebuild solid ties for the reconstruction of African communities. In *Osiris Rising*, Ayi Kwei Armah states that "Returning to your roots means you need to wash your selves, your bodies, your behavior, clean of all those centuries of dirt" (*OR*, 142). This simply means that we need to combat the Eurocentric and destructive reflexes that shape and define our society, we need to redefine the systems that constitute a community.

If such a thing is done, African people will not only be able to show that their continent is far from being a cultural *tabula rasa*, but they will also be able to react against the false image given to Africa. More, they will show that Africa has a rich history, contrarily to what is usually said by some Europeans like Hugh Trevor-Roper. He points out that

Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is largely darkness, like the history of pre-European, pre-Columbian America. And darkness is not a subject for history.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, this opinion will be undeniable if the people keep on having blind eyes. Blindness appears to be a way of giving up the fight while Africa needs committed people for its reconstruction. In *Fragments*, Naana's blindness symbolizes those Africans who have preferred not to challenge the trouble with Africa; the inefficient socio-political systems. In fact, she is blind, but not of ignorance. She refuses to see the modern world for it is only a composition of broken things. She realizes that her cherished values are not accepted by this generation. The latter include both her family and society. Naana of course feels very neglected and useless and thinks that she is ready to leave the world. By this she means that "When there is no use, the spirit in us yearns for the world of the spirit" (*OR*, 195). According to Naana:

Things have passed which I have never seen whole, only broken and twisted against themselves. What remains of my day will be filled with more broken things. Had I not given up trying to understand, to gather all this confusion together in my spirit and to see which way it was going, my blindness would have been insufficient pain for me, and to it would have added my own madness (*OR*, 196).

In this passage, she expresses the effects of cultural and social decadence and how it has heightened her desire for the long crossing to the other world. She summarizes all the different issues raised in the story. She highlights here all the

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40420910> (Accessed 10/10/2022)

different issues raised by Armah which include the result from cultural contacts and the actual unethical leadership.

The construction of a new African identity needs not only consciousness but more determination from people who are involved; what is justified in *Osiris Rising*:

Slavery took you, took her, took him, took every one of you, plucked you root and branch and fruit and flower, and lost you in the western world. Slavery westernized you. It is up to you, if you want to break from slavery, to return to your roots (*OR*, 142).

Considering the context of post-independence, slavery in this case would refer mostly to the mental state of Africans which Armah thinks is high time to decolonize. In *Decolonizing the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’O proposes language as a means to “a people’s definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, indeed in relation to the entire universe” (*DM*, 1). The choice of language here is made for the simple reason that “in colonial conquest, language did to the mind what the sword did to the bodies of the colonized”. So, the first step of any possible change would be based on language. Citing B. W. Andah and K. Bolarin, O. B. Akpomuvie states:

the cultural milieu of a people is a major factor in the development process of that society. The totality of values, norms, attributes and beliefs of a society shapes that society’s social, economic, political organization and inculcate a general feeling towards development and related issues (2010, 289).

From this assertion, we can understand that culture is a pillar of any social and economic transformation. Therefore, any of those theories of development that reduce the importance of cultural factors have revealed themselves liable to reproduce indifference, alienation and social discord.

With this perspective about the importance of language in the rehabilitation of African identity, what approach should be adopted. In other words, how should Africans proceed in using language as the key starter of the change? Since language helps one express their feelings and thoughts, it is then high time



Africans introduced local languages into educational system because language is directly linked to culture. This is proved by Isidore Okpewho in *Call Me by My Rightful Name* through the words of his main protagonist:

Language is a strange thing. I haven't been very long, but I am beginning to understand there is a lot more to language than words. It is the whole culture of the people, with a lot of history and tradition locked into it (2004, 157).

Through this, we can understand that language can facilitate not only the communication among members of a community but it would also enable Africans to learn more about their history, past and traditional values. So, it helps Africans be more conscious of the fact that no language and no culture is superior to theirs.

Cheikh Anta Diop has dealt with this question of language as well. He believed that there are three important factors that contribute to the formation of individuals cultural identity: a historical factor, a linguistic factor and a psychological factor. In this case, in our quest for a new African identity, we must consider this statement from Cheikh Anta in *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* that writes:

Every attempt to reinforce or to modify the cultural personality must consist of carefully studying the appropriate mode of action on these three factors. Perfect cultural identity corresponds to the full simultaneous presence of these factors in the individual (1991, 211).

This proves the importance of history, mindset and language in the reconstruction of individuals. Moreover, in this quest for a new identity, Africans must focus on the field of education at early age. This is proven by Cheikh Anta Diop who states:

The review of the historical and linguistic factors as constituent elements of cultural personality brings to light the necessity for a total recasting of the African program of education in the fields discussed above, and for a radical centering of these on Egypto-Nubian antiquity, in the same way that the Western educational system has its foundation in Greco-Latin antiquity: there is no way more certain, more radical, more scientific, more sane and salutary to reinforce the African cultural

personality and, consequently, the cultural identity of Africans (1981, 215-216).

This statement illustrates overall the ideology of Ayi Kwei Armah in *Osiris Rising* with the reconstruction of the African identity through the educational system as an inevitable process. Armah developed this through the perspective of Asar who believes that the process has three important steps:

One, making Africa the center of our studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientations to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. Three, giving our work a serious backing in African history. The last would mean placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome (*Osiris Rising*, 104).

This shows that, like Cheikh Anta Diop, Armah believes in “the reinstatement of Ancient Egypt at the center of African history and culture” (*Osiris Rising*, 215). So, this is very important because it “requires serious studies of Ancient Egyptian heritage” (*Osiris Rising*, 216) which would contribute to the rehabilitation of African history, falsified by the imperialists.

Concerning the reforming of the educational system, the issue raised was to prove the importance that there exists in Africa some literary traditions. The purpose here is to show that what was referred to as fake by the imperialists was a truth which could be sustained by publicly showing the real events that were reshaped through the history of colonization. This is shown by Asar and his companions in the principles for a new approach to literature that they proposed. The fifth principle in fact illustrates the restoration of literary traditions in Africa. It stipulates that:

The production of written literature is not a modern innovation Africa owes to the West. It is an ancient and indigenous skill once fully possessed, lost under conditions of dehumanizing distress, now retrieved in different forms, under different circumstances (*OR*, 220).

From this, one can understand that there exist literary productions in Africa then which Cheikh Anta Diop has proven in his works about the existence of Black

African history. This is illustrated by the sixth principle in *Osiris Rising* which states:

here is a millennia-old literary tradition in Africa, both oral and written, in which literature fulfills a definite function in the enterprise of social construction. Within that tradition literary artists were skilled, professionally trained craftspersons (*OR*, 220).

Self-determination but mainly self-knowledge is inevitable if we are to reconstitute a new identity. Africans must be well aware and much determined to be able to stand up for the redefinition of the African people. For that, a ‘historical conscience’ is needed. Africans must seek to know and live their true history well because it will allow them to distinguish themselves from others. That is why, Cheikh Anta Diop states that “the historical conscience, through the feeling of cohesion that it creates, constitutes the safest and the most solid shield of cultural security for a people” (1981, 212).

To rehabilitate the ancient Egypt to Africa it would be necessary to tackle important studies on the African and Egyptian people in order to identify their main characteristics. These studies would help intellectuals to identify who are the Africans and the Egyptians in order to show what was proven by Cheikh Anta Diop about the history of Africa. As suggested in *Osiris Rising*, this is why Asar and Ast decided to return to Africa, to help build its nations starting from an educational system where the focus would be Africa and its history. That is why J. Aning states that:

The solution to Africa’s developmental problems does not lie in rejecting white and accepting anything black but in judiciously selecting the best in both cultural settings. Armah himself demonstrates in *Osiris Rising* that education can be reformed through the restructuring of courses and syllabuses to play a crucial role in liberating Africans from poverty and disease (2010, 113).

Ayi Kwei Armah’s main aim like many African writers who belong to his generation is to shake people, the masses and make them be aware of the various difficulties they are encountering. For that, they should go through the awakening

of those masses by helping them realize and understand the realities they are living. In other words, the African people must be more concerned with their identity crisis by undertaking serious actions that would enable them to change the realities in which the colonial domination have put them so as to know who they are and why because, as Cheikh Anta said, “What is essential for a people to have a better orientation of their evolution is to know their origins, whatever they may be” (1979, 15)<sup>11</sup>. This is why Ast in *Osiris Rising*, decides to come to Africa. Despite the fact that she lived in America, considers herself as having an African origin but more as a real African. The consciousness Ast has of her Africanity is mainly what pushed her to come back to Africa in order to better acknowledge the African people’s history.

Ast’s homecoming is a quest for her identity. Yet, the depiction Armah has made of conscious Africans such as Asar, Ast and Tete means that this quest for identity should not be limited to accepting one’s African origins. Rather, it requires a coming back to Africa on the purpose of finding out adequate elements which will contribute to the discovery of historical truths. The returners can have a very good impact on those they found inside the country because they raise consciousness, they bring new light on issues that are happening in the country, but also, they can bring a new perspective, new vision. Ast, as an example, has a real impact on those she found in that country because she brought what she learned from the United States. However, she did not find what she was hoping to find because she thought she would find a society fairer than the black American society she left, which was not the case. She finds injustices that are happening at the political level. This is the reason why she joins in the struggles that were launched by those she finds at the university.

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<sup>11</sup> Ce qui est indispensable à un peuple pour mieux orienter son évolution, c’est de connaître ses origines quelles qu’elles soient. (Our translation)

The return to the roots presented in *Osiris Rising* by Armah can be regarded as a quest for the meaning of life but also as a self-discovery. This is illustrated through the characters of Tete and Ast. The latter is convinced that coming back home is not sufficient. She believes that she has to undertake important deeds that would contribute actively to the changes in Africa. She says: “I want to work in a society I belong to... America isn’t home for me” (*OR*, 24-25). This shows how aware Ast is when it comes to her Africanity and how eager she is to undertake any action in order to complete her quest for identity. In parallel, Tete has already started the process of self-definition or self-knowledge. Her eagerness originates from her consciousness that in the future she will have to transmit her knowledge to the coming generations. The following passage illustrates Tete’s idea: “Someday I, too, would become an ancestor, and some child would ask questions about me, about my generation, about what we did, what we left undone, and why” (*OR*, 255).

These words from Tete justifies how important oral traditions is within the African society. Whether is it stories or songs, oral traditions played a crucial role in traditional communities. Through these songs and stories, people and mainly children acquire some values from what is said about the great heroes of their nation. Moreover, while they can entertain, songs and stories bear strong moral values and messages which show to African people that there is beauty in their culture. That is why in *Osiris Rising* Armah suggested in the recommendations for African studies:

That the African studies faculty, working with students majoring in the discipline, establish research projects in Oral Traditions for the collection of local data and the exchange of copies of resulting texts, tapes and videos material with similar research centers throughout Africa, with a view to building up a systematic documentary basis for ongoing research (*OR*, 221).

For Armah, the return to traditional values aims at raising a historical consciousness and showing how wrong Africans are to overestimate the western

culture so as to recover their background. The past is full of different elements that makes its beauty, as the following passage from *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* suggests:

Each movement and each growth, each such thing brings with itself its own nature to frustrate our future judgement. Now, whenever I am able to look past the beauty of the first days, the days of birth, I can see growth. I tell myself that is the way it should be. There is nothing that should break the heart in the progressive movement away from the beauty of the first days. I see growth, that is all I see within my mind (BO, 62).

Armah has shown the extreme importance of history for a society. Moreover, he believes and advocates a total revision of those ideas that tend to erase the existence of literary traditions in Africa. Hence the necessity to re-evaluate the curriculum of disciplines that are to be taught. That is to say, there must be a balance in the curricula that should more concern African history and literature. This is illustrated by the following recommendations made by the Manda Group in *Osiris Rising*:

That in overall syllabus design, a constant effort be made to observe a 50-25-25 weighting for African, eastern and western components respectively... That in the distribution of texts and time, a 50-25-25 balance be maintained for African, Eastern and Western inputs respectively (OR, 222).

By revitalizing African literary traditions, the aim is to put an end to the distortion of the historical truth. That is why Armah tries to demonstrate that there is link between literature and history. Consequently, to be able to put an end to those distortions, it is up to the Africans to stand up and fight for themselves, for the future of their nations. This can be achieved if only African leaders take into account the different factors suggested by intellectuals like Cheikh Anta Diop but more if they consider to redefine the educational system: only then will we gain a new African identity.

Besides, Armah and other African writers have decided, in their quest for a new African identity, to base on their creativity as artists. That is what makes the

uniqueness of their works because it takes into account a specific audience: Africans.

### **3-2: The African Challenge through Art and Creativity**

Art is defined by *The Britannica Dictionary* (online)<sup>12</sup> as “something that is created with imagination and skills and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or feelings” while creativity is defined as “the ability to make new things or think of new ideas”. Art and creativity are linked because creativity is found in art. For instance, we think of art, whether it is music, drama or writing as examples of creative ideas.

In postcolonial Africa, art and creativity have been means of struggle and denunciation. When we talk about creativity in postcolonial literature, we refer to the ability of African writers to transform their technique of writing, to change the structure of their texts by taking into account those who would read them: the African people.

Early in the 1960s, a debate opposed two different groups of intellectuals. It revolved around the use of the English language or the African languages in postcolonial literary works. The first group, with writers like Ngugi, have a strong belief for the unique use of the African local languages. For them, it was a way to fight against the European assimilation. For Ngugi, it was a choice already made. This is illustrated in *Decolonizing the Mind* by his following words:

I would attempt a novel in the very language which had been the basis of incarceration. I would reconnect myself not to the Afro-European novel of my previous practice but to the African novel of my new commitment (*DM*, 71).

This attests Ngugi’s uneasiness about the English language and it is the reason why he adds “I knew whom I was writing about but whom I was writing for?”

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary>

(DM, 72). To this interrogation, we understand that by writing in European language, the people for whom Ngugi is struggling for would not be able to read him. That is why he suggests, still in *Decolonizing the Mind* that:

Kenyan writers have no alternative but to return to the roots, return to the sources of their being in the rhythms of life and – speech and languages of the Kenyan masses if they are to rise to the great challenge of recreating, in their poems, plays and novels, the epic grandeur of that history (DM, 73).

On the contrary, the second group intellectuals which was mainly composed of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ayi Kwei Armah to name but few, advocated the opposite. They suggested, instead of using only African languages, to stick on the English language. This choice is made not to oppose the other group but to use the foreign language in a different way. That is to say, their attempt would be to transform in their works the foreign language in a way that it will fit into the target audience. By doing so, they reveal their creativity as artists.

In fact, the process of transformation began by the inclusion of African languages into their works by using some African words. Thus, the content of their works became a combination of both. It is through this they reveal their own creativity.

Through an analysis of style, we realize that Ayi Kwei Armah is conscious of what he wants to say and how he wants to say it. In the process through which he transmits his ideas, Armah's art and creativity is well exposed and the result at the end is what we have today in his writing: artistically accomplished works of art.

In each of Armah's novels, there is uniqueness. This uniqueness comes from the way Armah puts together various stylistic techniques along with his intellectual but also emotional attitude on the subject matter he treats. The form of his first novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, bears characteristics that differ from the others.



First of all, we notice that the novel tells a story that highlights the transformations in the Ghanaian society in post independent era and also the impacts these changes have on characters. Through the quality of description in the novel, we realize that Armah pays great attention to the language he uses. Armah evokes the experience of the Ghanaian society through a poetic language which is tight, symbolic and imagistic. The following paragraph from *The Beautiful Ones* can illustrate this:

Outside, the night was a dark tunnel so long that out in front and above there never could be any end to it, and to the man walking down it was plain that the lights here and there illuminated nothing so strongly as they did the endless power of the night, easily, softly calling every sleeping thing into itself. Looking all around him the man saw that he was the only thing that had no way of answering the call of the night (BO, 47).

This quotation is an image of corruption and how it is deeply seated in society. Armah uses words such as ‘the night’ which is dark, to refer to corruption as an evil.

Secondly, Armah criticizes the Ghanaian society from one individual perspective. This helps us get an insight into Armah’s interpretation of the function of literature because he had made the choice to look at the society from a worker’s point of view in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. He creates this character in a way that he represents the largest group of the working class. So, from this, we can say that Armah regards his novels as a way of conveying messages, more, a way of teaching. By relating the events through the eyes of the protagonist the man, Armah urges us as readers to emotionally identify with the man and his aspirations as a good example, good citizen. That is why he says

For the man sitting on the desk opposite, all the cool sadness seemed able to do was to raise thoughts of the lonely figure finding it more and more difficult to justify his own honesty. How could he, when all around him the whole world never tired of saying there were only two types of men who took refuge in honesty – the cowards and the fools? (BO, 51).

Thirdly, we notice a contrast in the content of Armah's writings. Contrast is a device that is very often used in characterization. But, Armah uses it in the very structure of his novels. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Osiris Rising*, Armah has beautifully contrasted short sentences with long sentences, as well as long paragraphs with short ones and even long chapters with short ones to show exactly the fragmentation of life in Ghanaian society. For instance, in *Osiris Rising*, the first chapter entitled Nwn is short, while the following one entitled Nwt is long. This technique appears in the novel from all twelve chapters. The same thing can be seen in *Fragments* as well. All these aspects demonstrate the social and cultural disintegration of African societies.

By alternating long and short sentences, Armah puts an emphasis on the issue he raises. So, when he has long sentences that follow each other, Armah would break them with commas in order to provide the reader with a chance to see the point he wants to stress. This is the symbol of a fragmented society where we no longer know what to stick on. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, this can be illustrated by the following extract:

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 they who would be our leaders, they also had the white men for their masters, and they also feared the masters, but after the fear what was at the bottom of their beings was not the hate and anger, we knew in our despair. What they felt was love. What they felt for their white masters and our white masters was gratitude and faith. And they had come to us at least, to lead us and to guide us to promised tomorrow (*BO*, 81).

In this extract, the first two sentences are long, but in the second one, there are commas acting as resting points because make the sentence easy to read. Besides, we notice that after each of these three commas, there is a stress that falls on the word "they". This is done on purpose by Armah to help the reader be aware of the anger behind the speaker's tone.

In *Fragments*, a comparison between Baako and Asante-Smith is useful for it will show the difference between these two. The first one shows creativity. He did the best he could to join Ghanavision on the purpose of reaching and reminding as many people as possible about the past of Africa through his writings. As for Asante-Smith, what matters the most is money. The best way for him to have it is by praising leaders, telling them only what they want to hear. The following words from Brempong confirm the lack of creativity of Asante-Smith:

a person like Asante-Smith, he knows people. Besides, he is clever. One of his own drinking friends says he has the sweetest tongue in all Ghana for singing his master's praises. It's the truth. And it does not matter to him even when the masters change. He can sing sweetly for anybody who *dey for top* (Fr, 46).

Baako's musical and writing creativity is opposed to the sterility of Asante-Smith. In fact, here, creativity should be understood as what is in the head, his belief to use his training to participate in building his community. The creative impotence of Asante and his like worsen the state of mind of their people because he has "the sweetest tongue in all of Ghana for singing his master's praises" (p. 46). Baako acquired knowledge that allows him to want to contribute in his nation building. This is shown in this discussion he has with Brempong:

"(...) After graduation I went to a workshop. It ended last week."  
"A workshop?"  
"Yes."  
"You are..." Brempong hesitated, "an engineer..."  
"A workshop for practicing writers and producers," Baako said.  
(...)  
"Mistake," Brempong said with an expression between distaste and exasperated concern. "It's a bad mistake you've made. You've put yourself in a very bad position."  
"I don't see what else I could have done. I have my certificates, if they want to test me..." (Fr, 46-47).

In *Fragments*, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Osiris Rising*, Armah has uses African words be they titles of chapters or names of characters, all have meanings that alludes to Africanity and African identity. In *Fragments*, all chapters have heading and titles written in African language. They serve as guides

understand the content and the ideas Armah develops. For instance, there is a chapter entitled 'akwaba' meaning 'welcome'. In fact, it refers to the return of Baako in Gnana and how he is welcomed by his family, by society.

In addition, the contrasting use of short and long sentences as well as the structure of paragraphs in *Fragments* are all symbolic like in *The Beautiful Ones*. Even the chapters do not have the same length. Some are long and others shorts. This contrast in the structure is used by Armah to show how fragmented the Ghanaian society is. The following passage illustrates this:

Everyone who goes returns. He will come. He will be changed, but we shall welcome him as the same. That is the circle. There has been a lot of cruelty done, but nothing has been done so grave that in this case the circle should be broken (*Fr*, 3).

If we analyze the others chapters, we will see that the titles are good indicators of what Armah is really dealing with in the novel. The chapter entitled 'Iwu' which mean 'death' is appropriate because it describes the death of Araba's child; the death of the link between Baako, his sister Araba and his mother Efua but more it symbolizes the disintegration of society. Therefore, all other chapters are similarly treated. They can be understood only when we get to understand the meaning of their titles.

The same technique is also seen in *Osiris Rising*, where the title of the book itself and the titles of chapters also stand as guides to properly understand the content of the work. Even the choice of the names of characters (Seth, Asar, etc.) is part of the author's creativity because names reflect in a way the ideology of Armah in the novel which is mainly the return to the roots, the study of the link between ancient Egypt and Africa. That is why the headings of the chapters and the characters bear names that are linked to ancient Egypt like Ast, Asar, Nwt, and so on because Armah is advocating a dynamic consciousness of history. It is in this sense he says: "We propose a rational definition of the African people: historically, all the continent's inhabitants before Arab and European invasions of

the last few millennia. We advocate the reinstatement of Ancient Egypt at the center of African history and culture” (OR, 215).

The way Ayi Kwei Armah manages to combine his writing craft with different techniques makes his novels different one from another. It also reveals his maturity as a writer and the evolution of his own insight. This can be understood only by reading his works because there is a huge difference on the way he develops his ideology in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and in *Osiris Rising*. In fact, he has moved from a setting of a Ghanaian society in his work *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to a large area in *Fragment* and then came back to Africa in *Osiris Rising*.

Consequently, the quest for a new African identity requires different steps but more, different factors that should be taken into account. It implies first a good political management with ethical leaders who are committed to matters of the continent; second, a re-evaluation of the education system is to be considered as well because with a new curriculum, young Africans will learn more about their continent’s history and be able to take decisions in the future. In addition, African writers like Armah decided to use their creative skills in the struggle to obtain a new African identity which includes the sole use of African local languages or having a mixture of the African languages with English language because, as Armah writes in *Fragments*:

We are not after the slave-foreman power that, under the killer’s continuing rule, is blind ambition’s hollow prize. We are after the intelligent understanding of all or realities, not simply the politics of power. We are after intelligent action to change these realities. For we intend, as Africans, to retrieve our human face, our human heart, the human mind our ancestors taught to soar. That is who we are and why (OR, 10).

This quotation summarizes the idea of Armah on the quest for a new African identity and how it can impact on the continent, on individuals. However, Armah

has not succeeded is this quest because most of African countries failed to abide by the solutions he proposes.

Through his narrative style, Armah has used two categories of characters to better portray society. This helps the readers identify themselves with different characters from the book.

## CHAPTER 4: NARRATIVE STUDY OF CHARACTERS

According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, characterization is defined as “the artistic representation (as in fiction or drama) of human character or motives”<sup>13</sup>.

Whether it is in a novel or a play, the presence of characters plays an undeniable role. Characters are the center around which a story revolves. This aspect of narration helps to understand a writer’s ideological stance because it is part of the major elements by which the writer manifests his or her satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction. According to *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a character is

The fictional representation of a person, which is likely to change, both as a presence in literature and as an object of critical attention, much as it changes in society. Ideas of the place of the human in the social order, of human individuality and self-determination, clearly shift historically; and this is often mimed in literature by the relation of characters to actions or webs of story. The idea of character often attaches, therefore, to the personalizing or humanizing dimension of literature (...). Yet, individual identity is often partly an attribute of social interaction, of the play of the social drama; this too is mimed in the dramatic character of much literature (2005, 24).

According to this statement, a character in a novel does not only represent a mere human being or a person. It is a representation of specific ideal or symbolic stance in society. In other words, a character is a representation of a whole socio-political system.

To deeply understand what a character embodies in a novel, it is necessary to have an analysis of the character’s relations with other characters in the work. In other words, a character in a novel is defined according to the role it plays and the relationships he has with other characters. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Osiris Rising*, two categories of characters can be

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<sup>13</sup> “Characterization.” Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/characterization>. (Accessed 11/12/ 2022)

distinguished. The first one is a group of characters that are victims of alienation while the second group represents Africanity.

Through these categories, the writer suggests his position about the socio-political situation of his country. Indeed, to express this deep identity crisis, Armah makes his works with a minority group of uncorrupted leaders and a majority group of corrupted people. The corrupt leaders can be considered as symbols of a pessimism as for the future of Africa.

#### **4-1: Characters Representing Pessimism**

Quoting Gerald Brace, Peace Ibala Amala states: “(...) one of the greatest charms about narrative is ‘the representation and revelation of human behavior’” (2013, 32). Ayi Kwei Armah’s depiction of characters reveals the Ghanaian society’s behavior. His technique of characterization distinguishes characters who perpetuate corruption and destruction against the morally upright in the novels under study.

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Yet Born*, the central theme is political mismanagement. Koomson is attributed all the negative aspects as a corrupt citizen. The narrator describes him as a suit: “The sharp voice inside the car makes one more sound of impatience, then subsides, waiting. The suit stops in front of the seller, and the voice that comes out of it is playful, patronizing” (*BO*, 37). When as a reader we first meet Koomson, he is described by what he wears as if he did not have an identity:

The suited man looks around him. Even in the faint light his smile is easy to see. It forms a strange pattern of pale light with the material of his shirt, which in the space between the darkness of his suit seems designed to point down somewhere between the invisible thighs.  
‘Hell-low,’ says the smile to the invisible man of the shadows, ‘what are you doing here? I almost didn’t see you.’  
‘Going home from work. At first I wasn’t sure.’  
A pale cuff flashes, and the suited man looks at his watch and just murmurs something to himself, very low. ‘By the way,’ he says, ‘we’ll



be over to see you soon, Estie and myself.’ (*The Beautiful Ones*, 37-38).

It is only later that ‘Koomson’ is referred to by his name. This a symbolic representation because the suit is an image of the foreign culture that illustrates how assimilated some Africans are, how attached they are to materials but more specifically to European ones.

Koomson is portrayed as somebody who is not serious-minded. This can be illustrated by the scene in which he goes to visit the man and drinks with clumsiness at one gulp the beer he is given:

He raised his mug dramatically and took a gulp, then exclaimed, imitating the man on the boards, Ah star. When the mug came down it was empty and a small stream of beer was running down the party man’s lower jaw (*The Beautiful Ones*, 132).

As he gets excited, he starts telling a story about a public speech he attended. The narrator points out the ignorance of many African politicians who hardly know anything about their countries’ economic growth. According to G. Ojong Ayuk, “he does not hide his corruption or lack of dedication to public welfare, but with a kind of amoral innocence, ridicules those that put ideals before their own comfort” (1984, 36). However, despite the level of ignorance that Koomson displays, his society still respects and admires him simply because he is rich. That is why G. Ojong Ayuk argues that

in the public view, Koomson is the real hero of Takoradi; he has a new Mercedes, a well-stocked liquor cabinet, a large house...values are essentially material. Accordingly, a hero is someone who amasses a substantial lot of wealth and the means by which he has obtained them are irrelevant (1984, 36).

Moreover, Koomson is interested mainly in the display of irrespective wealth because he knows well that it is not a secret for people that his wealth is ill-acquired: “Koomson walked over to the big radio in the corner and turned the receiver on. A voice like thunder shook the air and Koomson slowly turned down the volume. There is nothing to beat a German set; he said” (*BO*, 147). Ayuk

explains that “Koomson’s wealth has been produced by the illegal siphoning of public funds but in Takoradi this is no reason for shame” (1984, 39). Consequently, Koomson is the symbolic representation of post-colonial African leaders.

Like Koomson, the character Seth Spencer Soja in *Osiris Rising* is also an embodiment of post-colonial African leaders because it is through them that Armah shows the challenges of leadership development in Africa. Also known as Deputy Director, Seth is a character who only runs after the personal satisfaction of his instincts. He attempts to rape Ast several times and has charged Asar for crimes he did not commit. Thus, he is like his mythical namesake in the Kemt: “he may be impotent when it comes to creating something useful. But he’s capable of enormous destruction” (OR, 208). According to Omar Sougou,

Seth and the power structure behind him endorse the values of the sold-out national bourgeoisie... Seth is depicted as disease impotent rapist, humiliated in his rape attempt on Ast which also has allegorical overtones. His impudence refers us back to Sembène’s lampoon on native bourgeoisie in Xala. Seth embodies repressive regimes intent on neutralizing those working on democracy, and threatening and framing their adversaries. In his treatment of the evil forces supportive of Seth’s plans and action Armah stresses the neocolonial hold on culture and education (2001, 137-138).

Thus, we can see that Sougou has provided a useful analysis of the character of Seth who represents the brainwashed Africans who believe that the beauty and greatness of Africa’s past in only the imagination or invention of some African intellectuals. Truly, in a conversation with Ast, Seth states:

African traditions are against subversion. In our traditional societies each class had a status. So did every individual. That was harmony. But the secret society that used the ankh sign or whatever you call didn’t even have an internal hierarchy (OR, 36).

What Seth means here is simply that Africans cannot rebel to any kind of oppression. Hence, they are passive because they never punish the political leaders through their behavior nor do they attempt to overthrow or undermine the

political system. Koomson and Seth Spencer are characters through whom Armah denounces African leadership as a symbol of African identity crisis.

Apart from these two, there are other characters that embody negative aspects of African society. Among them we have Brempong and Oyo. Brempong is a character who manifests signs of greed and self-interest. He symbolizes people who consider corruption as normal. In a conversation with Baako, Brempong informs him about materialistic expectations of society. He goes further and makes Baako aware that he does not look like a *been-to*:

‘I wasn’t sure either. That you were a fellow Ghanaian. You look different somehow’.

‘I never thought I looked different’.

‘I don’t mean facially. But, you know, how you’re dressed, how you walk, you don’t give the impression that you know you’re a *been-to*. When a Ghanaian has had a chance to go abroad and is returning home, it’s clear from a distance he’s a *been-to* coming back’ (*Fr*, 74-75).

The typical behavior of a *been-to* is well highlighted through Brempong’s character. Cecil Abrahams confirms this by describing Brempong as a “caricature of Western decadence” (1977, 356). Moreover, Armah depicts the cargo mentality of Ghanaian society through Brempong but also the negative attitude of people who normalize corruption like Oyo, the man’s wife. Cargo mentality is a perception of society about materialistic possessions that every *been to* must bring from abroad.

Oyo represents unhappy married women. She always has the feeling that she deserves better in life. She does not understand the reasons why her husband, the man, is not willing to use his position to make life better or luxurious for their family. She urges the man many a time to act in a corrupt way. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the narrator describes Oyo as a dynamic woman because she constantly harasses her husband who refuses to embrace corruption in their favor and she makes him feel that he is nothing but disappointment. She is

portrayed as being very materialistic to the point that she does not even care about her husband:

(...) and in his restlessness, he rose and went out very quietly through the door, and his wife sat there not even staring after him, not even asking where he was going or when he would come back in the night, or even whether he wanted to return at all to this home (*BO*, 47).

Like Brempong, Oyo thinks and sees everything that is foreign as the best. She apes at white culture, that is the reason why before the visit of Koomson and his wife, she tries so hard to stretch her hair: “Oyo put the comb back among the coals, then lifted up her head and said, ‘Of course it is painful. I’m just trying to straighten it out a bit now, to make it presentable.’” (*BO*, 129).

According to Adeoti, Armah, presents a “pessimistic evaluation of Africa’s prospect for progress against the backdrop of instability, poverty, corruption, crude accumulation and annihilating consumption” (2007, 2). Yet, his artistic works are useful for they raise awareness and help better understand the trouble with African societies with realistic characters such as Koomson, Brempong, Seth Spencer, Oyo and many others. These are characters through whom Armah denounces African unethical leadership as a trait of African identity crisis. On the other hand, Armah has portrayed different characters that embody Africanity and hope.

#### **4-2: Characters Embodying Africanity**

In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, the unnamed protagonist, the man shows a profound sense of honesty, morality, and uprightness. He is a character with moral convictions that are different from those of his loved one. His lifestyle is different from that of the larger society who have taken a jump towards gleam. That is why, it is said that in the society where the man lives “he was the only thing that had no way of answering the call of the night” (*BO*, 47). The man symbolically represents the one and only hope of positive change in society,

alongside with his friend the teacher, a character who captures the pessimism of Armah and who has a clear perception of the origin and nature of society's crises:

Life has not changed. Only some people have been growing, becoming different, that's all. 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 governor himself, to live above all blackness in the big old slave castle? (*BO*, 92).

From the beginning of the novel till the end, the man refuses to abide by the norms of his society. He is portrayed as an example of a moral and a decent member of society. He refuses to join their corrupt practices because he is aware that this gleam kills the soul. Consequently, in this type of society, an honest man is seen as someone who is naïve, stupid, but mostly as someone who is insensitive to the needs of others. This situation makes the man feel confused:

The man moved from the table and lay down on the bed pushed into the far corner of the hall and closed his eyes, but failure would not let him rest in peace. Arguments and counteraccusations that had run many times round and round just underneath the surface of his mind now rose teasingly and vanished again beneath his confusion (*BO*, 46).

Just like *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah's *Fragments* also represents characters that are similar in certain aspects. The protagonist Baako presents some traits that are similar to those of the man. Baako is described with an acute sense of morality, honesty, and uprightness. That is why, Pallavi Bhardwaj writes that "Baako, like the man in the *Beautiful Ones* is an island of sanity in an ocean of madness" (2015, 50).

Baako, like the man, despises corruption. He is not among those who believe and take as normal the cargo. The latter illustrates the materialistic state of mind of the Ghanaians. That is why, he is seen by society as

a *been-to* who returns from the United States of America to his family's disappointment, not with the fruits of the Golden Fleece like cars, money electronics and so on, but with a type writer, a guitar and a suitcase. In a society where education, especially that acquired in Europe and America, carries a special value as the means to economic prosperity, social influence and political power... (*OR*, 8).

Moreover, while he was working at Ghana Vision, many sets of televisions were brought there. The sets were supposed to be distributed to people who live in rural areas. However, high personalities like ministers snatch the materials instead of giving them to the population. Thus, society seems to be blinded to the point that all what people care about is how to use their positions for personal gains at the expense of national development. It is at this point that Baako's character is interesting because he is represented as an individual ready and eager to use the knowledge acquired abroad to help build his community. He is an example for the young African generation to learn how to impact their community.

Beside Baako, there is another character named Naana. The latter is Baako's grandmother. She is the symbol of pre-colonial Ghanaian values, ideals, and traditions. Throughout the novel, she struggles to upkeep traditional values but unfortunately, ends up pursuing a lost battle. She lives in loneliness among her children and grandchildren. She says:

I am a person no more but for them it has too long been an annoying burden. I am old and of no use to anyone... I am such a mouth that continues to eat pepper and taste salt. I am such a mouth joined to an end that runs with taste, pending others' love that has long since disappeared (*OR*, 12).

Naana is totally aware that even her existence is no longer welcomed in her family. Through her, Armah wants to reveal how society has changed by putting an emphasis on the past and the present. The essence of Armah's use of such character as Naana is to emphasize the important role those elderly women play as heads of family. As stated by Zipporah Ampofo and three others in their article "A Tool of Success: A Critical Content Analysis of Naana's Character in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*", they play roles such as "advisors, as meditators between the living and the dead, and as custodians of traditions and cultures..." (2020, 24). She supervises traditional practices like the performance of the libation to see Baako off and the naming of the child. She says:

The heavy sound made me fear for Baako. But I remembered how perfect the words had been for his departure and his protection, and I was happy inside myself that I had taken the drink from Foli and given the ancestors their need. The circle was not broken in any place. They will protect him. How can it then be said that he will not come? (OR, 11).

In African societies in general, it is commonly known that elderly people have a language full of proverbs, myths, and wise sayings. Ampofo and his allies argue that “the use of the character of Naana enriches Armah’s *Fragments*” (2020, 24). In addition, thematically, Naana is the object the prologue and epilogue of the story. Consequently, she appears as a social commentator, presenting and giving insight into the main theme and the associated ideas to the reader that are alienation of the individual from society, social decadence, modernism versus traditionalism.

Another example of character who distinguishes herself through her yearning to know her African roots is Ast. She is a young and well-educated woman who travels to Africa from America. Her aim is to contribute to the improvement of Africa using all her academic training she learn in the United States. This can be illustrated by the following words from *Osiris Rising*:

She wrote her thesis on identity and social justice in the philosophy of Ancient Egypt. By graduation time her search for knowledge of self, of self within universe, had led her through a flow of changes, some so generous with knowledge they made pain worthwhile in the end. The search accelerated her decision: to return (OR, 8).

She represents the diaspora which, according to Armah should come ack to help rebuild the continent. Armah has used a plethora of female characters who represent specifically “Africanity”. This option to have many female characters is because he wants to urge women to contribute to the liberation of Africa. Among them, we have Nwt, the grandmother of Ast and Ama Tete.

Like Naana in *Fragments*, Nwt can be considered as a memory transmitter. It is thanks to her that Ast got an African name: “Ast found out it was Nwt who had

resisted the family's desire, at her birth, to name her after some European saint, and given her the African Ast, most intelligent divinity, as namesake" (*OR*, 7). She is also the one who initiated Ast to the hieroglyphs, awakened her historical consciousness and gave her the 'ankh', that is the symbol of life. This is illustrated by the following words:

Nwt taught her to read, as her fourth birthday gift. At ten Ast wanted a bicycle. Nwt promises her one if she'd let her teach her to read ancient Egypt hieroglyphs. Her parents called the bargain mad, but it opened doors to her soul (*OR*, 7).

In the same line, we can put Ama Tete who symbolizes the memory of people. She was taught by her grandmother about deeds of the former generations. She says:

I liked to hear her talk of my parents. I thought of them like friends who went away, leaving no message for me. But my grandmother talked like she carries messages from them just for me... It wasn't only my parents she brought close to me. My parents' parents also. The world changed from an empty, abandoned place, into a space where, no matter how far back or forward I went, I met relatives, friends... She helped me see that I had live connections going as far back into the past as the beginnings of life (*OR*, 255).

She is the perpetuator of oral tradition and is committed to teaching the history of their people. These are the most prominent females in *Osiris Rising* who are portrayed as liberals because they are characters with a great insight and participate actively on the continent's progress. That is why, Eric Edi states:

With the importance he gives to female characters in the novel, Armah reinforce the idea that the liberation of Africans cannot be without the liberation of African women. The African women, despite the extreme poverty and injustice, which victimize them, continue to be the core of African societies by their activities of mothers, nurtures, healers, and so on. Therefore, it is inadmissible that strategies for African development continue to the voices of those who are the major victims of morality, the AIDS pandemic, genital mutilation, illiteracy, poverty rapes, and forms of sexual discriminations" (2007, 130).

From this assertion, one can consider that the emphasis Armah puts on these characters shows the important role women play in society. This proves Armah's



literary artistry that is his ability to create different characters that are for or against the institutions, for or against traditions and culture in general. Consequently, the two types of characters that Armah has depicted represent the African society.

The characterization in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Osiris Rising* clearly establishes Armah's choice between good and evil or between light and darkness. Those who represent good are presented as admirable people because they represent the African traditional values and, Armah wants them to be seen as example of the society. The forces of evil are portrayed in a despicable way because they represent the bad side of society. For example, Baako, the man, Naana, Ast, Asar, and Netta are depicted positively and they represent Armah's notion of change. Koomson, Brempong, Oyo, and Seth represent the existing values of materialism, but also, they illustrate the hypocrisy, nepotism, lack of patriotism of some post-independent leaders.

## CONCLUSION

Postcolonial African writers have shown what African societies have become through history. Their novels were published when most of African countries had access to independence. The development of the analysis on identity crisis (both cultural and political identities) based on some pre-colonial and postcolonial literary productions from outstanding authors such as Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, has shown that African societies have been experiencing a process of change. African societies have lost or at least transformed some fundamental aspects of their social organization and cultural identity as a result of events such as slavery, colonialism, and emigration, but more of their political mismanagement. The consequence of this is their cultural alienation.

In the development of our analysis, we have discussed how cultural fragmentation has affected the individual and the community. This is seen with the different conflicts between members of the society who have opposed ways of understanding things. That is why we mentioned the clash between cultures in the body of our analysis. The conflict that first emerges is the clash between Africa's past and present which is a result of cultural aspect of change, but also how people from different generations understand. Through the analysis of different novelists from different countries, one can see how colonialism has succeeded in making the young generation reject all that is about religious and cultural beliefs of their ancestors. These generations have no longer respect for what was believed to make the beauty of African traditional society. Consequently, this is the beginning of fragmentation of African societies.

Moreover, we have shown that African intellectuals have tried through their novels to make people aware that things have fallen apart, following colonial scrambling in Africa. Specifically, Armah in his novels tries to make people pay more attention to the fact that morality and materiality, or socialism and capitalism have been fragmenting postcolonial societies in Africa. Besides, they are

promoting misunderstanding between the individual and society. Because of that, Baako's disintegration from his family clearly means his misunderstanding of his people's attitude towards material quest. In addition, his confusion at the end illustrates the clash between the individual and the community, but mainly between morality and materialism.

Armah's objective is to denounce social and political identities in post-colonial Africa. In his novels, Armah's main characters have failed when they tried to fight or oppose the bad way their society experience life. This failure of Armah's protagonists make one believe without any doubt that he is a patriot whose main concern is to show, like most African writers, why the African continent is not yet in a position to get rid of evils. As a result, the sun of neocolonialism, through the change of cultural aspects and economic exploitation, will continue to prevent Africa from 'resting in peace' in the shadow of political independence. Indeed, the latter cannot be achieved if it is not rooted in the social and cultural realities of Africa as it was suggested by great intellectuals such as Cheikh Anta Diop and Ngugi wa Thiong'O.

Being conscious of what have been plaguing Africa since the early days of independence, we have shown some solutions through the analysis that are likely to result in positive change. Among the solutions, a quest for a new African identity is more interesting if we take into account the interconnectedness between society and politics. In *Osiris Rising*, Armah lays the emphasis on that solution. He argues for a reconstruction, but also for a change in the most important field that contribute to the recovery of a new African identity: education.

African literary arts, whether written or oral, are capable of generating a stimulus for change by suggesting different perspectives of existential problems and their solutions. That is why, Wole Soyinka reminds us that "one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of a social

direction” (1976, 56). Armah is one of the writers who is stuck to the trajectory of Africa’s history and has developed deep philosophical reflections on ‘the trouble with Africa’, before and now through a realistic characterization. His works interrogate the nature and causes of, and possible solutions to the problems facing the continent, which are mainly historical, sociological, political, and ideological. In almost all his works, we are presented different ideas, but also possibilities about development. For Armah, development is not just about military prowess or industrialization, it goes beyond that. For him, development includes a strong social system that promotes equality, enlightenment, freedom, secularity, self-reliance and self-worth. Hence, the creation of an African personality that is not burdened by the past, that is able to confront the present and the future with confidence and self-knowledge. We have identified in our dissertation a discourse in Armah’s writings, from pessimism denounced by critics to optimism and a belief for possible change.

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