AYI KWEI ARMAH'S ESSAYS:

STILL THE VAIN NATIONALIST COMBAT

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Abstract

The essays aggregate as an argument against colonial domination, still. It combats, in the typical nationalist spirit, anti-black racial prejudice and other abuses of the colonial system. These abuses are, though, of the superstructure of capitalism which defines colonialism. The nationalist onslaught leaves the capitalist material base in which colonialism roots itself un-stoned; indeed strengthened, rendering the combat much ado about little. Armah relays in these essays anti-European sentiments, which, present in his third novel, *Why Are We So Blest?*, get striking in the later novels. The essays drum up further this overt racism while advertising supercilious impatience with African scholars and politicians who do not share the self-evident truths that the essays serve.

CONNECTIONS FROM THE EARLY NATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

We recall the renewed energy that nationalist reaction to colonial domination garnered throughout the colonial world, notably in Africa beginning from the inter-World-War years. We recall, on the literary front, the early tones set by René Maran's *Batouala* (1935). Joining in the fray, later in the decade preceding the independences, are Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, then also, with soft pads, CamaraLaye, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka... Earlier echoes occur as a frame of reference launched by Léopold Sédar Senghor, AiméCésaire and Léon Gontran Damas, Negritude, which they celebrate in their writings. Negritude responds to anti-black racism generated by way of, not just legitimising, but diverting attention away from, the capitalist economic base in which colonialism roots itself. The fight against colonialism gets reduced to arguing, not against the capitalist economic base of colonialism, but against colonial propaganda by blowing up, as counterpoint, values that set Africans apart from other peoples. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his introduction to Leopold Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésienègre et malgache*(1949), adopting the same perspective protective of capitalism, strives to hush the incipient racism of negritude with that *tour de force,* named "racisme anti-raciste", that seeks to get negritude to pass as reactive racism (therefore tolerable, even acceptable) responding to an original unjust racist proposition. The introduction, entitled 'L'Orphée noir', then projects a future synthesis that results in a world without racism.

The central thesis of Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism* (1964) also plays up Africans as a people, homogeneous, shorn of class distinctions and conflicts, ranged against colonialism. *Consciencism* proposes a framework for the challenge of ridding Africa of colonialism. Its start point is the triple heritage in Africa's contemporary profile mapped as the traditional African, the Euro-Christian, and the Islamic. The traditional African is characterised as egalitarian, humanist: a quality it derives from its

ancestral communalist social political structure. That quality conflicts with the Euro-Christian and Islamic components of the heritage. The framework, named consciencism, is distilled out of the harmonisation of the three components of the heritage which stands the ancestral egalitarianism of Africa as driving force. This should result in the creation of a socialist society which is distinguished by same fundamental egalitarianism of communalist Africa.

Fanon's Manichean project in *Les Damnés de la terre*(1961) restores the antagonism of the colonial situation which, n'en déplaise a Fanon, feeds negritude. This antagonism, for Fanon, is irremediable, or rather can only resolve itself in the elimination of one of the opposing terms. And, from his perspective, itis the colonial, white component that has to be eliminated: « Détruire le monde colonial c'est ni plus ni moins abolir une zone, l'enfouir au plus profond du sol ou l'expulser du territoire[1] » (p. 29).

Ayi Kwei Armah, in *Why Are We So Blest?*, (1974) carries further Fanon's Manichean project. In this novel, the white world or racial whiteness is posed as inherently evil. Black people are poised for destruction because they are irretrievably attracted to this evil. Unless… it is uprooted through revolution, which, declared impossible in *Why Are We So Blest?*, is enabled in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), *The Healers, Osiris Rising* (1995). The goal is to break the stranglehold of Europeans, the white race, on the African continent and on African minds.

THE ESSAYS

i. AFRICA DISMEMBERED

The two sets of essays, *The Eloquence of the Scribes* (2006)and *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* (2010), blaze a 'revolutionary path[2]', amplifying the cri de cœur carried in all of Armah's novels. The project is to mobilize Africans as a whole against on-going destruction wrought by Arabs, then Europeans, also presented as classless, homogeneous entities. They are aided actively by the mindlessness of significant numbers of Africa's political and intellectual elite who are targeted in sneers such as: 'From the perspective of any reasoning African, the system looks utterly senseless' (Ayi Kwei Armah, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent,* 13). There are then Africans who do not reason!

A novelist's thinking filters through narration. It shows too, less indirectly, through the narrative function that gets exercised as comments by the narrator behind whom critics may discern an authorial voice. The essay format allows an author to engage directly with the reader and to work to win him or her over to ideas that he or she, as author, sets to canvassing. Armah emerges from behind his novels to propose a blueprint for the 'African revolution' projected as 'the completion of that unfinished business of our social, economic and cultural emancipation'. This of course is going over Fanon's project in *Les Damnés de la terre*(1961) to achieve true decolonisation. The ultimate target is 'scrapping (...) the Berlin design in favour of a unitary African design'. The essays address two foci: posing the current state of undesirable being in which Africa and Africans find themselves; and then the way out of this wrong state of being.

Africa has, for centuries, been subjected to sustained invasions by Arabs, then Europeans. These invasions resolved themselves into the Berlin Conference, 1885, at which, Europeans united cut up

Africa and shared the pieces among themselves. They named this operation the 'partition of Africa'; or less charitably 'the scramble for Africa'. It translates concretely as the appropriation of Africa's physical space by Europeans[3]. The splintering of the continent into what the text names 'nation-states', maintained at all costs, helps the 'Berlin design'. The concept of 'nation-state' is Trotskyist, developed, of course, out of the application of Marxist theory (that Armah cannot stand). Trotsky represents the nation-state as an anachronism in the imperialist phase of capitalism where production, distribution, exchange, consumption and also exploitation (underlying them all) happen across national boundaries. In Armah's essay, the concept 'nation-state' is abstracted out of its wider application and made to apply to Africa only. In Trotsky's Marxist perspective, the socialist revolution led by workers of the world (victims of capitalist exploitation) cuts across boundaries, nullifies the nation-state worldwide.

The next major feature of the relations with Europe and 'Arabia', the essays postulate, is the conditioning of African minds to accept this state of affairs: the dismemberment of the continent and the fragmentation of Africa's peoples. Led by their political and intellectual elite, Africans are showing as willing collaborators of the European drive to use Africa's material and human resources to enhance Europe's prosperity. Echoes of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), unacknowledged,are clearly discernible here.

The political and intellectual elite has been fashioned out of an educational system deliberately conceived to turn its African products against themselves, the better to collaborate with the European project. (The term 'European' is systematically preferred to white people, presumably to offset the charge of racism, nonetheless a leitmotif of the essays). The African products/victims emerge from the conditioning machine that colonial, which is to say, European education is. Colonial education keeps its African victims away from knowledge of the intellectual resources accumulated in Africa's past which have all it takes to salvage and re-shape Africa. What the Western-educated African acquires instead is a dependence on the enslaving European world outlook configured to facilitate 'the theory and practice of European supremacy' (*RDC*). What the text ignores is that colonial education is configured as a key element of the superstructure of capitalism which colonialism is. Its function is fashioning its African as well as other clients into assets for the defence, protection, enhancement, perpetuation of capitalism. The fundamental consideration is not race; it is economic. The success of colonial education, in this wise, has been near-total. The pull of race leads the essays into a fixation on the subjective: what *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* identifies as the disorientation of the African mind owed to what it names as 'spiritual dogmata' specified as Christianity, Marxism and Islam. *The Eloquence of the Scribes* bemoans the cultural disruption/alienation in Africa's Sahelian society that induces the perception that Islamic values and practices, are 'somehow 'African and indigenous'. This ignores that Indonesians, Turks, Iranians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Afghans, Chechnyans…, no less than Sahelian Africans, consider Islamic values and practices as indigenous. *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* is particularly virulent towards Marxism which is not helped by having its roots in Europe and so getting profiled as European, in consequence Euro-centric, which is to say, inimical to Africa. The text catches the major proponents of Marxism making disparaging remarks about Africa and Africans. These remarks inspire the characterisation that

> Marxism, in its approach to the non-European majority of the world's peoples, is demonstrably racist—racist in a prejudiced, determined, dishonest and unintelligent fashion (82: 24).

Hegel, recognised by Marx and Marxists for his contribution to the development of thinking, comes in for a particularly acerbic attack. He is 'proto-Nazi' for having provided an intellectual basis for the colonial enterprise (*EOS*, 164). But colonialism is driven by economic forces not by any person's ideas. In Armah's racialized perspective, imperialism, colonialism and apartheid are labels designating same phenomenon: European dominance from the 15th to the 20th centuries (RDC, 14). The hard reality though is that imperialism effectively keeps Marxism out of curricula in Africa, in fact worldwide. In reflections outside of the school system, imperialism no less effectively, marginalizes Marxism as a framework for cognizing reality or combats it in all ways. Nevertheless, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* picks out what it names 'African Marxists' as a significant force, central to the affliction holding Africa back:

> (…) for members of the African elite, Marxism has saving qualities. It allows individuals to acquire reputations as revolutionaries while, in fact, they are busy building a life of unproductive consumerism for themselves, and elitist privilege for their children, thus expanding the human base of Eurocentrism in Africa. Marxism enables elite Africans to do all this at the slight cost of the energy invested in talking. Cold betrayal in practice, fiery revolution in words. (p. 115)

The charge does not rest on any empirical evidence. In any case it serves imperialism to keep at bay the only framework that is antithetical to it. The essays serve to entrench imperialism while purporting to combat it. The coup d'état that the American CIA orchestrated[4] to overthrow Kwame Nkrumah's administration in 1966 needed legitimization. Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1967), which depicts Kwame Nkrumah's entire effort at post-independence reconstruction and development as one load of 'shit', contributes to that legitimization. *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* reproduces Armah's preface to the Per Ankh edition of the *Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born.* That preface tries a sanitized reading of the novel. The shit image doesn't show once, nor any of its variations. Indeed, Armah attempts some damage control in this preface by evoking 'artistic challenges' he faced creating his story, leading to placing 'clear emphasis on descriptions of situations, locales and scenes'. But these are formal considerations that cannot be excised from the wholly retrograde message of the novel. Generally, though, the profile of Kwame Nkrumah that shows in the essays has none of the obscene smear that adorns the pages of *The Beautyful Ones Are Not yet Born. The Eloquence of the Scribes,* in places,holds up his nationalist ideas as worth working to enhance, as it runs down vile European rulers who jailed him for insisting on using 'African resources not to enrich European corporations and African stooges but to create prosperity and meaningful work for Africans, in Africa' (*EOS,* 14). Still keeping out the 'shit', *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* settles on some racialist explanation for Nkrumah's overthrow. Thus, Nkrumah had started off with an un-African identity, marked, among other traits, by his readiness to make 'the old slave castle in Accra (...) his new seat of popular power'. He attracted the attention of the CIA 'when he looked as if he might be groping his way towards African solutions'. No evidence is adduced to support the gloss over historical reality. In any case, *The Beautyful Ones...* had fulfilled a purpose, unwittingly or however: the legitimization of the coup (call it the 'Berlin design').

In that wise, Ali Mazrui's article entitled "Kwame Nkrumah: The Leninist-Czar" (1966) lends a hand to imperialism. As also the Legon Society on National Affairs, with its bi-weekly organ, *The Legon Observer,* founded in the immediate aftermath of the coup, which for years systematically campaigned

to undo everything that Nkrumah stood for. Minor signals occur as Peter Omari's *Kwame Nkrumah, The Anatomy of a Dictator* (1970); and A. A. Afrifah's (one of the 1966 coup leaders) *The Coup in Ghana* (1966). This last work is prefaced by Dr. K. A. Busia, Nkrumah's arch political rival, otherwise celebrated by acolytes as the consummate democrat. As Nkrumah's replacement as head of state of Ghana, he was to fall victim in 1972 to the principle of military coup d'état which he upheld in his preface to Afrifah's book.

The overthrow of the Nkrumah administration propelled Ghana back more firmly into the embrace of imperialism. It set to systematically undo Nkrumah's nationalist project. It set in motion a process, that has not stopped, of privatising, divesting—meaning selling off—often for a song, hundreds of publicly-owned enterprises. Imperialism morphed in the process, fronting to date as donors, as development partners. What *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* terms the 'Berlin design' gets reinforced, not fought. The essaysadvertise a revived will to fight it and locate the ultimate intellectual resource for fighting it in the ancient civilisations of Africa.

ii MAÂT, THE ALL-AFRICA LIBERATING PRINCIPLE

The essayshold out that Africa has the framework it takes to fashion a modern society, 'humane, non-racist, democratic, and African'. We note that the race perspective raises sheer African-ness into a value; and is consistent with what Armah expresses in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* as a lifelong aspiration 'to be an African, to think as an African, to live as an African'. Above all, the new society will be free from the European clutches set by the Berlin design. However, the African worldview, in a first take, shows as illusive. This is in the essay—'Pseudostatements, Counterstatements and Statements'—that holds up Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* as an exemplar of African authenticity:

> Wole Soyinka has not attempted a definitive definition of the African worldview. There can be no such thing, since under the best circumstances, an African worldview has to be a constantly self-developing reality. (p. 264)

It is not possible then to determine what it is, or how it gets applied. We note in any case that this representation of the African worldview attempts to apply the dialectical method exemplified in Marxist theory. The dialectical method takes off from the proposition that all things are subject to change. From that premise, it seeks to cognize things as they change. Thus the world is made up of, not objects done and finished, but of processes in which things apparently stable keep coming into being and disappearing (Maurice Cornforth, 1978). The dialectical method achieves a finite elaboration in Hegel, same Hegel that the essays berate. Marx joins the dialectical method, thus elaborated, to the materialist mode of reflection and achieves the discovery in thinking: dialectical materialism. This is how Léon Trotsky, a foremost Marxist, explicates the method of cognising things as they change:

> Dialectical thinking analyses all things and phenomena in their continuous change, while determining in the material conditions of those changes that critical limit beyond which 'A' ceases to be 'A' ...

This is saying that there is a quality identifiable as 'A'. It stays as such, not illusive, even in its motion, until it gets to the critical threshold at which it ceases to be 'A'. What Armah delivers in *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* is an indeterminable representation of what it calls the 'African worldview' which makes it wholly unusable.

The text, in another breath, affirms the existence of an all-Africa framework. It is named *Maât.* It is a 'rational principle' which 'ancient Egyptians followed in their quest for truth, justice and balance'. While not being illusive, it still is not quite available for application since it is having to wait for that critical mass of Africans 'literate enough to read about it' (*RDC* p. 293) and ready it for application.

Armah's project defines itself as a 'cultural liberation' (p. 145). This stays the struggle at the superstructure to the exclusion of the economic base of society. The cultural liberation will have the African worldview retrieved and appropriated for use out of narratives such as other peoples have constructed for themselves. Examples of such are the myths of ancient Greece and Rome, Chinese and Japanese myths, the Jewish *Torah,* the *Bible, The Koran* of Arabs. That, in spite of common racial, cultural and skin peculiarities, each of these societies respond to global capitalist imperative, does not get raised in the essay. Set against these other traditions, as more valuable, are 'the mythic narratives of ancient Egypt' which are the oldest in the world and above all African. It has all the features of revolution, communism and the sought-after social economic formation that Europeans have put a patent on and which sum up as egalitarianism. When Marxism identifies the phenomenon of communalism in non-European spaces, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* contends, it is quick to put it down as 'communistic' or 'primitive communism' (*RDC,* pp. 68; 82). The essay is unaware that Marxism does represent communalism as the first configuration of human society anywhere and at any time. Armah's representation of it excludes it from Europe. As a matter of fact, Engels' footnote of 1888 to the *Communist Manifesto,* does recognize communalism or primitive communism in Europe:

> In 1847, the pre-history of society, the social organization existing previous to recorded history, [was] all but unknown. Since then, August von Haxthausen (1792-1866) discovered common ownership of land in Russia, Georg Ludwig von Maurer proved it to be the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history, and, by and by, village communities were found to be, or to have been, the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland. The inner organization of this primitive communistic society was laid bare, in its typical form, by Lewis Henry Morgan's (1818-1861) crowning discovery of the true nature of the gens and its relation to the tribe[5].

Armah's essays hoist a determination to show the world that 'we Africans' have it, that we have always had it, as part of what Senghor calls 'the sum of the values of the black world'. It is located in Ancient Egypt. The essays, Armah, are intolerant of members of Africa's intellectual and political elite found wanting in knowledge of Africa's cultural resources or yielding to Eurocentric opposition to 'the rediscovery and creation of positive African values' (*Remembering the Dismembered Continent* p. 117). Aimé Césaire gets screamed at for not knowing that we also are a race of inventors. And there are others:

> The common weakness of Nkrumah, Senghor and Mbiti is that they had no accurate knowledge of African culture, never having studied it seriously'. (RDC p. 298).

The essay connects Ancient Egyptian lore with the traditions of the griots of the great 'empires' of modern day Sahel. A good part of them are also still waiting to be unearthed. A bit of what they are worth is revealed in D. T. Niane's *Soundiata ou l'épopée mandingue.* Armah fashions, out of this single reconstructed snap of the glory that Africa was, a set of critical criteria for studying African literature. The first of these is 'Identity and craft credentials'. Identity is naturally black racial identity. The canons are applied in illustrative examples that uphold Wole Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African Worldview* while rubbishing John Mbiti's *African Religions and Philosophy* and *Equiano's Travels*.

Of these canons only the race factor is retained for the reviews of the two books with which the black 'brother', Barrack Obama, launched his bid for the presidency of America: *Dreams from My Father,* (2004) and *The Audacity of Hope*: *Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006). These reviewsblank out class considerations that otherwise define social being in all class societies. The reviews eulogise 'brother' Obama, holding high his promises of a better world under his leadership. The race perspective does not allow the perception more consistent with the real that candidate/President Obama's constituency was, has been, is, not Africans or African Americans or Blacks, but the ruling oligarchs of America.

At all events, the all-Africa liberating framework is not quite available yet for use.

iii. 'AFRICA MUST UNITE'

A necessary condition for attaining egalitarianism/revolution is unity. 'Change would come in the form of unity' (*The Eloquence of the Scribes* p. 101). Efforts to argue the necessity for African unity preceding the discovery of it by the essays are not mentioned. These include Kwame Nkrumah's *The Autobiography,Africa Must Unite* (1963) and *Consciencism* (1964); and those of popularizers like Bob Marley... Armah of course plays on the word 'member' in the title he gives to the collection 're-membering the dis-membered continent'. The point then is not just to recall what used to be a single unit; but also to put back together what has been splintered. *The Eloquence of the Scribes* and *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* make the imperative of unity into a trait which is carried by the African as part of the configuration of his or her persona. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973)talks of 'what is in our [African] nature' (x). The essay occurring in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* as 'Niane—Retrieving Buried Tradition' uses a line from D.T. Niane's *Sunjiata ou l'épopée mandingue* to buttress the claim:

> I know how the black people divided into tribes.

The line echoes thus social memory referring to 'a past, a beginning, during which society was unified, not divided, and explicitly non tribal' (*EOS p. 179*). This brazen assertion recalls Frantz Fanon's claims, in *The Wretched of the Earth,* for the African peasantry. It has, as second nature, a penchant for decolonization and the readiness to use violence, a necessary tool for liberation, to wrest it. It is

therefore, in the African context, the truly revolutionary class. As opposed to the personality make-up of the African city-dweller, corrupted by the ways of the White man, who is ready to betray the African cause and collaborate with the oppressor. Such traitors are named 'disoriented Africans' in *The Eloquence of the Scribes,* and 'alienated Africans' in Wole Soyinka's *Literature, Myth and the African World.* These emotional effusions are not provided any factual support. The founding of the bigger Asante entity is given as an example of the natural penchant for unity that Africans carry.

> In the Akan narrative of the founding of the Asante Kingdom, we have a collection of weak, scattered tribes coming together to form a new type of society, with a new identity affirmed through an oath that placed a taboo on references to tribal identities.

Asanteman does not translate Asante Kingdom. Kingdom is indicative of feudalism, therefore of a class socio-economic formation. Asanteman, as at the point of the colonial incursion, was very much classless, communalist. Land the major element of means of production, was not yet an object of private appropriation. We note the glide, in the quotation, from Akan (the bigger unit) to Asante (which is a chip from the bigger block). Indeed, Asanteman is a mini constituent fashioned out of a small selection of sub-micro entities of a bigger Akan. This bigger Akan stretches all the way into Côte d'Ivoire. Thus Asanteman excludes other Akan groups such as Twifo, Brong, Kwahu, Akyem, Akuapem, Akwamu, Mfantse, Agona, Ahanta, Nzema, Sefwi, Agni (Aonwi), Baoulé. And also Denkyira, enemies of the Asante. The Akan themselves are only a micro-chip of the bigger, if you like, African-ness. The conception of the Asante union carried in the quotation above forces a unity where none exists. At all events, the essays urge a replication of such examples of unity on a continent-wide basis activated by significant numbers of enlightened Africans constructing the building blocks that should coalesce into an 'active sense of continental identity' (RDC, p. 101). Unity, resting on a common racial identity, is a sine qua non of the African revolution. But the African revolution cannot be conceived outside of world revolution that projects society beyond capitalism into socialism. Revolution thus conceived dissolves boundaries separating nation states worldwide, not just in Africa.

iv. REVOLUTION

The Eloquence of the Scribes carries Armah the author's own efforts at connecting with the 'African revolution' as conceived by the essays. We discover that (*Why Are We So Blest?*)vain search for *a* revolution that is African is in fact a transposition of Armah's own personal search. The People's Union of Congheria (UPC) was historically one of the Angolan nationalist groups engaged in armed struggle against Portuguese colonial rule. It is one such (some say Holden Roberto's Front for the Liberation of Angola, less nominally progressive) that Armah tries in vain to connect with in Algiers named Laccryville in the novel. The question that raises itself on reading the novel and the essay is what it is Modin Dofu or Ayi Kwei Armah found in that Angolan group to determine that it was revolutionary and worth the personal sacrifice they invest in it. Kwame Nkrumah, in the 1940s, gave up his doctoral studies in philosophy (see his *Autobiography,* p. 49) in pursuit of a movement he was spearheading to rid Africa of foreign rule as colonialism was perceived then and also as Armah's essays that follow over half a century after portray it. Decades later, Armah and still later his creature, ModinDofu, treading a similar path, abandon their university studies in pursuit of the African revolution that turns non-existent. Armah, in the essay entitled 'Myth, Literature and the African Child' (*EOS),* waxes dreamy and self-congratulatory

about his decision to place the African revolution first. Solo Nkonam (Armah, on hindsight) picks out the irony written all over the movement that Modin Dofu (Armah) tries to connect with in Laccryville, the city of tears, of a failed revolution. As Solo Nkonam observes, the structures of privilege that distinguished the colonial system, have been carried into independent Afrasia (Algeria). And UPC, prosecuting an armed liberation struggle has nothing revolutionary about it either. Nkonam's judgement is based on the evidence of skin colour, the attraction to whiteness which is leading black people to certain destruction.

On the walls of the office are pictures illustrating the revolutionary armed struggle. The uniforms worn by the freedom fighters are of a deep green khaki which gets lighter with the rise in the rank of the officers. The top leadership position is filled by Ignace Sedoulwa. His uniform is immaculate white! The office of the Union of the People of Congheria in Laccryville has an upper floor and a lower floor. The lower floor is occupied by the dark skinned African who does the base but real chores of the office. The Upper floor is occupied by the light-skinned African who is also the head of the office. His work consists in receiving suave visitors and toasting whiskies with them. Inequalities are caught nestling right within the struggle to end inequality. The conclusion, for Solo Nkonam, is hard to resist: ''The arrangements made for fighting privilege were themselves structures of privilege" (p. 114). The inhibiting factor, unavoidable, is race/skin colour: black African attraction to whiteness. Hence the conclusion: 'Our disease is ordained'. What has been thought of as the Afrasian (Algerian) revolution has not been. And the signs are all too clear that the Congherian struggle, as all other African efforts, will miss egalitarianism that defines the African revolution.

At the personal level, Armah's practice of revolution consists in having sought, like his creature, ModinDofu, to be part of a revolution that is happening. Like Modin Dofu, he is denied entry into the 'revolution', with, Mrs Dickson, white woman (!), playing the deus ex machina to avert, for him, certain fatal consequence. Armah reads the experience as failure to be a revolutionary. Which failure left him the only other practice attractive enough for him, second best: that of creative writing. Since the narration does not indicate any involvement in the practice of revolution, failure cannot be read as an outcome. The problem though is that revolution does not get characterized.

This is how the label 'revolutionary' is stuck on the group of young artists, poets, who contact Armah for help in upgrading their technical skills. They 'introduced themselves as anti-apartheid activists from Soweto', an 'itinerant poetry troupe, a part of the '*revolutionary'* movement whose chosen work was to travel through the oppressed country disseminating the message of the coming freedom' (emphasis added). Indeed, Armah hurries, rather, in sticking on the group the accolade of revolutionary. He locates them, these young poets, 'barely out of childhood', at 'the cutting edge of revolution in South Africa'. (*RDC,* p. 124). Clearly, reading anti-Apartheid agitation as revolutionary is a plain abuse of concept. Apartheid was no more than a super-structural encumbrance, and therefore a nuisance to capitalism in South Africa. Black majority rule, bourgeois parliamentary democracy, enabled by the scrapping of Apartheid, has provided a much more auspicious framework for capitalism to thrive in, in South Africa. As in the rest of independent Africa.

The text, characteristically, recognizes in Lumumba a true African revolutionary that Europeans and Americans (not imperialism, not capitalism animated by a class of private owners of means of

production) did not allow to be. What qualifies Lumumba for the accolade is his resolve 'to using African resources to improve African wellbeing'. This resolve never got tested. But, the text notes this quality as one of the reasons 'advanced by his killers' for eliminating him, on orders converging from Brussels, Washington, Paris and London. The text is silent on the class force—that of the ruling bourgeoisie of global capitalism—that the cities cited represent, and which Lumumba did not threaten fundamentally. It is the racial element that gets played up: Lumumba was an African leader 'committed to *African* (as opposed to *European*) control of *African* resources for the achievement of *African* prosperity' (emphasis added).The title of the chapter bearing on Lumumba is not without significance: 'Lumumba—African Dream, European Nightmare'.

Mandela gets raised in *The Eloquence of the Scribes,* on about same pedestal as Lumumba: African leader with a consciousness and commitment 'to emancipate Africa from the destructive European machine' (p. 70). A change of mind occurring in *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* gets him lowered for shedding eventually his commitment to African emancipation in return for perks he and others like him could derive from collaborating with the Apartheid system (p. 18).

The essays leave the reader with a worrying impression of revolution defined in race terms: in terms of a struggle to rid Africa of European domination and oppression. However, the prime mover that change should tackle is not race, rather ownership of means of production at the global level. Victims of this system are not exclusively African: they cut across national, racial boundaries.

v. SANKƆFA: TOWARDS THE GOAL

The essays hold out revolution then as about achieving equity, egalitarianism, for Africans within the exclusive African space, rid of European encumbrance. These are features that Nkrumah's *Consciencism* identifies as the fundamental principles animating Africa's ancestral social political structure, communalism. The goal is to re-institute them to compose the new society. All we need is one back-step and we are there: Sankɔfa. And this is the message of *The Eloquence of the Scribes* and *Remembering the Dismembered Continent.* The pictorial illustration, found in a rendering of that iconic bird, in full flight, looking back, adorns the front cover of the 2010 Per Ankh edition of *Remembering the Dismembered Continent.* But this is attributing ownership of communalism to Africa. Sankɔfa is silent on the economic base of the new society, above all the mode of ownership of means of production that distinguishes all socio-economic formations irrespective of their location in time and space. In any case, the designations Europeans, Europe, Africans, Africa obscure classes and struggles among them present within these entities, as human social-economic formations.

Léopold Sédar Senghor gets cruelly mauled in the essays on his characterization of negritude. Negritude, Armah screams, merely passes on 'European' racist prejudices about Africa. But Senghor's enterprise, if we abstract his procedures for getting there, is about eulogizing Africa, and affirming indeed that it has values that the centres of colonial power will no doubt find indispensable:

> Car qui apprendrait le rythme à un monde défunt des machines et des canons ('Prière aux masques')[4]

i

Rhythm in the line has to be read as evoking the humanist values of communalist Africa that should give life back to the otherwise powerful world rendered moribund by the very means that enabled conquest and occupation. His younger compatriot, David Diop, more violent in his strictures against colonialism, equally represents Africa as having values that should humanize the conqueror/occupier/the white world.

> La vérité la beauté l'amour […]
> C'est tout ce qu'ils ont perdu frères
> Et qu'ensemble nous déroulerons sur le chemin du Monde. ('La route véritable')[5]

It is the same thinking that, in Armah's essays, makes African gods into benign beings, a force for good, not for mystification and deceit, like all other gods. Unlike all the others, African gods, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* postulates, 'are growth goals, markers, stations of the mind in motion towards achievement' (p. 70). *Two Thousand Seasons* has them, along with associated 'prohibitions', 'created to measure growth.' These gods exude a force for goodness recognizable in the chain linking the living, the dead and the yet unborn. This is how *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* flags this Africanism:

> The writings of the ancient Egyptians indicate that they thought on the whole that answers to such philosophical life queries could best be found if the living maintained unbroken contacts with their ancestors, and also remembered that they were members of the society yet to come. (p. 201)

Senghor does not get that far back to ancient Egyptians, but he expresses in his poetry thoughts that carry the same linkages that Armah swoons over:

> Femme, allume la lampe au beurre clair, que
> causent autour les
> Ancêtres comme les parents, les enfants au lit ['Nuit de Sine'][6]

These linkages are celebrated equally in Kwame Nkrumah's *Consciencism.* Otherwise we encounter, in the matter of African spirituality, a different kind of conception and experience in *Les Soleils des Indépendances.* Here, African deities, like all other deities, offer a framework for cheating and duping. The narrator in Ahmadou Kourouma's novel scoffs at claims of rectitude made for Islam and African traditional religion. The disclaimer in Armah's essay that situates African gods at the 'most mature level' of society, does not help to adjust to the distortion (embellishment) of reality (African gods) wrought by his nationalist perspective.

Marxism considers that the world is made up of no more than physical objects; and their reflections in the human mind. Engels states it as 'things and their mental images'. Physical objects are objective reality or primary reality; mental images of physical objects are subjective reality or secondary reality. There are mental images that have no physical referents. Spirits, gods, deities, supernatural beings, as products of whatever imagination, are secondary reality or subjective reality. In fact they have no physical referents. African gods cannot have an identity fundamentally different from others.

vi. AFRICAN SOLUTIONS

The argument of the two sets of essays leads to examples of concrete African solutions to African (not human) problems. Thus an Africa specific worldview at the disposal of Africans allows for solutions not-far-to-fetch to electoral challenges. Then follow elaborate directives about achieving free and fair elections the African way. Are these directives coming out of empirical studies of the current set-up? And what is wrong with current set-up? And what is there in the current set-up that these directives are aimed at fixing? What economic base of society are these directives set in? Or are these directives just speculative, logical inferences generated in the mind of the author unconnected to concrete situations?

There is an equally quick look, amounting to a quick fix, at current beleaguered African economies. The way out is to 'create decent living standards for the electorate at large'. It spells out as constructing an economy which is dynamic enough 'to create wealth for the electorate' (*RDC* p. 257). This of course is silent on the mode of appropriation of means of production and of surpluses generated by the productive effort. 'Wealth creation' is one of the befuddling concepts bandied about by the international financial systems fronted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* here appropriates and passes on the neo-liberal framework that connects directly with the Berlin project so virulently decried in these essays. The essays are clearly enmeshed in a dubious combat.

Again *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* tries its hand at solving Africa's energy problem on a continent-wide basis. It consists in ordering solar panels in numbers estimated on a continental scale. That should force the unit price down. Then Africans are urged to engage in a contractual arrangement to have our young people trained by the suppliers as technicians to mend the panels and eventually create same. Who will these suppliers be? The same Europeans of the Berlin project? And all we should ask for are technicians? Not personnel capable of theorizing? And do we need to go out there to find them?

The directives suggested for dealing with the selection of continent-wide problems are hardly a recipe for ending dependence, for kicking the Berlin design.

vii. PROPERTY RELATIONS AS DETERMINING FEATURE OF ALL HUMAN SOCIETIES

The essays elevate Cheikh Anta Diop and Théophile Obenga, scholars deservedly renowned for identifying Ancient Egypt as black African. The essays hold them up as exempla of true African-ness for having found out accurate information on the Africa specific framework. There is though, as mentioned, quite a bit of the whole Africa specific framework waiting for others to unearth and ready for exclusive use by Africans. But the proposition that "mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, science, art, religion, etc" (Engels) is true of all human societies, black, white, beige, yellow, red… of all times and spaces. The decisive point is not the skin colour or race of who uttered the statement; rather the quality of material yielded by the thinking. That human societies of all times and spaces are composed of a mode of production and a superstructure. That the mode of production is primary, fundamental, and the superstructure a derivative of it. The superstructure is the world of ideas and social political institutions arising therefrom. The superstructure carries the distinguishing feature of the mode of production typified by the mode of ownership of means of production. Its chief function is to protect, enhance and to perpetuate the mode of production

and its distinguishing feature, the mode of appropriation of means of production. These are economic forces independent of human will, as Marx underlines in 'The Preface...' Slave owners in a slave mode of production are not bad people for possessing slaves. The thinking of Plato and Aristotle, reflective (defensive) of the material conditions of life (the slave mode of production) fit within the superstructure of that mode of production. Plato and Aristotle are not morally reprehensible for not having fought against slavery. The *Eloquence of the Scribes* roundly condemns them for not having had 'the radical intelligence to see through the injustice' of the slave mode of production. It is remarkable though that the reference to ancient Greece and Rome is recognition that the slave system does manifest itself as European/white slave owners owning European/white slaves; not exclusively as European/white slave owners owning African/black slaves. The defining moment of social being is not race, is not skin colour, is not religion. It is how groups of individuals relate to means of production.

Thus a more discerning conception of colonial education fits it into the superstructure of colonial society, of the society over which the colonizing power holds sway. The class interests served are those of the ruling bourgeoisie of the metropolis, owners of the major means of production in the metropolis as in the colonies. What we find ourselves serving as education in Africa currently is a carry-over of colonial education. Its purpose ensures that we, the products/agents of this educational system, protect, work to enhance, and seek to perpetuate capitalism, now in its highest phase of imperialism.

To achieve this purpose, it matters little wherever the African intellectual had his formation: in America, in Europe, in Asia, in Latin America, at Legon, Cape Coast, Harvard, Achimota, Dakar, Groton, Mfantsipim, Dompoase Senior High Shool…. He or she is raised to be supportive of imperialism. Thus the terms Western education, European education, 'European ideology' do get misleading. What the terms obscure is bourgeois education or bourgeois thinking serving imperialism. Its victims are working people who are Africans, Europeans, Americans, Latin Americans, Asians. Some thinking, reproduced in the essays, represents European working class victims of imperialism as privileged, wearing golden chains. But if they are chains, does it matter whether they are of base or precious metal? The nationalist perspective that chases after skin colour and race and nationality, as does the perspective in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* and *Remembering the Dismembered Continent*, is a truly helpful diversion for imperialism. Imperialism will readily smile at the creation, as the essays canvass, of a single African language, of an African equivalent of the Jewish *Torah*, or the Arabic *Koran* or the Euro-Christian *Bible.* They are all powerful elements of the superstructure that reinforce the grip of imperialism on global resources. As indeed the fact of all Arabs speaking a single language and worshipping a same Allah through a single set of holy scriptures hasn't made the teaming masses of working people in Arabia any freer than the teaming masses of working people in Africa and elsewhere from the strangle hold of imperialism. Imperialism does have class allies that it counts on and uses in Arabia, in Africa. These may be concretely members of the class of owners of means of production or people outside of such a class but who have a mental orientation that is supportive of imperialism.

CONCLUSION

At work in these essays, is a nationalist perspective which is primary for being overtly racist. Its goal is ridding the African continent of imperialism (not named as such) blamed on Europeans, not on social economic forces. The vehicle for achieving this is the all-Africa worldview which should respond, toe-to-toe, to the enslaving European worldview. The African worldview, at one moment refuses definition;

at another, it has yet to be confectioned out of remains to be fetched out of history and archaeology. At all events, it is not wholly available for use. What is available of it allows for determining its capacity to re-gain egalitarianism, *sankɔfa*. Above all it enables the re-membering of Africa which is a condition for attaining the goal of egalitarianism. Unready, as it is, the African worldview shows ways out of selected challenges facing Africa. The ways proposed lean on the malevolent European powers being combated. The perspective canvassed is the same that drove the nationalist movements in the former colonial world. It carries naturally same inadequacies. It misses out on the economic forces driving the malaise of our contemporary world: capitalism in its imperialist phase. The nationalist perspective targets rather secondary factors: the superstructure showing as institutions and discourses that demean Africa and Africans, fashioned, among others, to divert contending energies away from the source of it all: imperialism.

NOTES

[1] Destroying the colonial world is quite simply abolishing one of the two zones. It is burying it deepest underground or throwing it out of the territory. (My translation).

[2] The expression is borrowed from the title of one of Kwame Nkrumah's essays out of his years in Conakry: *Revolutionary Path.*

[3] Armah's angry characterization of the partition of Africa is present already in a speech Kwame Nkrumah, in his *Autobiography (1959),* records as having given in Monrovia, Liberia, in 1952, over half of a century earlier. What the partition has made of Africa, he recalls having said 'indignantly', is a *c*ontinent 'divided and subdivided, partitioned and repartitioned (…)' looking 'like a patchwork quilt each colour representing the interest of a foreign power.' (p. 152) Armah does not refer to it or is unaware of it.

[4] See *The Great Deception* that carries CIA declassified information on the coup d'état against the Nkrumah administration.

[5] Quoted in Marx, K. & Engels F. (1959), *Critique of Political Economy,* retrieved from Marx Engels Internet Archive.

[6] For who would teach rhythm to a world defunct of machines and canons (My translation).

[7]All of that they have lost brothers
And all of that we shall, together, roll out on the ways of the world (The True Road) (My translation)

[8]Woman, light the clear oil lamp
So the Ancestors around us may talk
As parents do when children fall asleep (Sine by Night) (My translation)

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