

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Wounded Psyche of Africa: Fragments

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Abstract:

Fragments is a vehicle of self-discovery trying to define African identity and enable Africans to rediscover their cultural roots. Armah throws adequate light on the crucial problem that cries for immediate solution. Baako's nervous breakdown occurs because of weighty expectations of family and society. He lost clarity of vision in the quagmire of expectations imposed upon him. Once he begins to feel that their way of expectation is right, he loses his grip on his own sanity. Thus, it is not possible for an ordinary Ghanaian to fulfill these substantial desires. African society is in transitive motion; it needs protection from western ethos.

Ayi Kwei Armah's second novel *Fragments* (1970) with thirteen sub-titles portrays an exclusive and cohesive delineation of wholeness. A fragment fundamentally is an account of the themes of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* like corruption, exploitation, social injustice and acquisition of material wealth by crooked means. While corruption is understood and occasionally surfaces in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, in *Fragments* it has become much more mercenary in its manifestation, and is even taken as an established norm by the Ghanaian society.

Fragments presents the most vivid picture of materialism, ostentation, corruption, greed, selfishness and irresponsibility choking contemporary Africa. Armah's poignant vision of alternative values is praiseworthy having the inherent potential of taming the tide of disorder in the continent. Critics have seldom accorded recognition to the significance of the novel in Armah's oeuvre. Gerald Moore concedes that the novel "will eventually establish itself as superior to *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in quality, profundity and originality" ("*Armah's Second Novel*," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 69). The novel's pre-eminent position within the whole corpus of postcolonial African fiction in English has not been reckoned, yet *Fragments* is a "feat of imagination, one of the few novels in English ... that deals in any compelling way with the maladies that have come with the colonial encounter" (Ogede, "*Patterns of Decadence*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 529).

Baako Onipa, the male protagonist is a well educated man with a clear vision who is a man ahead of his times with responsibilities that tower above those of the average members of his society. He has a voice that refuses to be muffled while articulating his strongly held views. He finds himself in a society that is immersed in corruption adhering to unethical values, is directionless. He is involved in a selfless and corrective crusade for social redirection and leads a vanguard that warns the society and offers unsocialised advice to those in power to restore sanity in postindependent society thriving on wrong values.

Fragments presents characters that are similar to *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* in certain respects. Baako is the pathetic victim of the colonial mindset of his family. Unlike his family and society, he does not consider his national culture in any way inferior to western culture. Though in the contemporary Ghanaian society, the big car and the big house have emerged as symbols of success and status, Baako rejects all these values and concepts by opting for an imaginative and spiritual pursuit of creativity. He is a budding artist, like Man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, but is rejected by his family and society at large and is forced into a lonely, isolated existence in an asylum. Baako, thus, manifests the failure and despair of an African in the post independent Ghanaian society that has come a long way from the tradition bound native society. In this new urbanite society the values have verily undergone a change - sycophancy, blackmail and bootlicking have become the order of the day - and under such conditions one is expected to either accept servile complacency or sink into pessimism. Baako refuses to submit to these social pressures, consequently the society labels him insane.

In *Fragments* family is a microcosm of the society on the whole, as the traits of greed, self-interest and narrow-mindedness manifest themselves through different individuals, namely Efu - Baako's mother, Araba - his sister, and Foli - his uncle. Besides, there is Naana - the protagonist's blind grandmother, Juana - a psychiatrist and Baako's girlfriend who act as moderating influences for the troubled psyche of Baako. Among these women Baako becomes a toy as he fights helplessly to stick to what he believes is right. Efu is presented as his greatest problem, the main obstacle in his effort to maintain his own values and realize his potential as an artist.

The significance of the title of the text is reflected in the precolonial wisdom and traditional thinking of worldly-wise Naana. "The larger meaning which lent sense to every small thing ... has shattered into a thousand and thirty useless pieces. Things have passed ...

never seen whole ... What remains of my days will be filled with more broken things" (196) refers to the mythical experience of Naana. Robert Fraser interpreting the text in religious terms avers that "the thirty pieces" of "a thousand and thirty useless pieces" symbolize Juda's betrayal of Jesus (The Novels of Ayi Kwei Armah 30). His far-fetched interpretation in religious terms does not hold good in this context. The fact is that text achieves its wholeness, not through its religious implications but through the concerns of the individuals confronted with a demanding family and society.

The shattering impact of the larger meaning of social order and moral vision is felt by individuals who are in search of order and social justice. This leads to conflicts from within and outside. When family, the miniature representation of society, adopts an unsympathetic posture to the individual's righteous efforts, it often ends in mental unrest or violence. This is demonstrated in the novel through the characters of Baako, his grandmother Naana, and his Puerto Rican psychiatrist girl friend, Juana. The individual's effort to live a meaningful existence underlines the need for a just social order.

In Fragments internal and external fragmentation of African society is vividly described. The African society is degenerated in the presence of social disorder and indistinct ideology. Man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Naana and Baako in *Fragments* struggle to preserve their cherished values and ideals swimming against the tide, consequently they become victims of conflicting aspirations within. Man overcomes and continues with his tirade, whereas Baako gives vent to occasional nervous breakdown, and Naana sees rescue in her death-wish. The opening passage of the text sets the theme in right earnest: "Each thing that goes ... returns and nothing in the end is lost. The great friend throws all things apart and brings all things together again... All that goes returns. He will return" (1). The threat to body and soul looms large in "an overturned world in which all human flesh was white" (11). Naana is confident about Baako's return as the ceremony of creating the circle had been performed for his safe return.

Baako, a young man of twenty six goes to New York for a professional course in Creative Writing. He is expected to return home after five years stay in New York but he arrives unannounced having cut short his stay in Paris. The return of a "been-to" (47) promises a bright fortune back home. Baako's return, however, does not pave way for such a bright future either for him or for his family. He fails in the role of a "been-to" on his return, a "been-to" in the contemporary African society is expected to bring fortunes to the family that will alleviate the social standing of the family, therefore, the "been-to" is looked upon as a demi-god and offered special treatment by the society.

On his return journey Baako meets Brempong, an obnoxious Ghanaian, whose only concern is in showing off the possessions he has acquired in Europe. He suggests Baako: "There are important things you can't get to buy at home. Every time I go out I arrange to buy ... suits ... I got two good cars on this trip" (45). Later he tells Baako that he doesn't give the impression of a "been-to" because when "a Ghanaian has ... a chance to go abroad and is returning ... it's clear from any distance he's a been-to coming back" (47). The conflict in Baako is initiated when Brempong comes to know that Baako is returning home empty-handed, save for a "suitcase, portable typewriter, and guitar" (38) for his personal use and his manuscripts. Brempong familiarizes Baako with the expectations from a "been-to": "I don't see the sense in returning with nothing" (53) hinting that he should have acted in accordance with the expectations of his family and people. "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, and all the time you spent is a waste, useless.... But if you come back prepared, there's nothing to worry about" (45).

Baako's light luggage is suggestive of his revolt against the practice whereby the Africans who travel abroad are made to yield to the pressure of expectations "to come back, laden with all the wonders of Western technology: radios, stereo equipment, refrigerators, deep-freezers, and cars" (Peterson, "Loss and Frustration," Kunapipi 57). The contrast between the two worlds of Baako and Brempong is strikingly brought out in the manner of reception they receive on their arrival at Accra airport. This is evident by the gaudiness of the scene at the airport where a mob of people are waiting for Brempong, their new Christ, whom they refer to as their man and anoint him by pouring an expensive bottle of drink over his shoes and then giving him an expensive cloth to walk on. "Come, my been-to ... Walk on the best ... Yes it's kente [Italics Original] ... tread on. Big man, come!" (59).

The grand welcome accorded to Brempong on his arrival at Accra airport indicates the neo-Ghanaian society aping western ways and manners. The society adulates him for the same material prosperity which he tries to acquire at its cost. Baako also witnesses the inflated welcome accorded to a group of white experts who are received at the airport and are given precedence even over the natives like Brempong. Brempong plays a "dizzy game" (61) to receive respect from his family and community. He offers his relatives and friends what they need and gets in return what he wants. Brempong finds in the game "an easy potency" in which he has nothing original to show, nor any eagerness "to create" (61). The waiting crowd goes into raptures at his very sight; his sister's ridiculous high sounding praise shows how the entire community treats him as a demi-god. On his part, Brempong appears to be a man "caught happily in the center of his crowd like a man who had looked so long to just some such beautiful sort of trap" (61).

Baako wonders at the greed and hypocrisy of the people around Brempong and realizes that the "words and ceremonies were the mere outward show of power and joy hiding impotence" (62). For him, it was like "an invitation into a pretended world" in which everything is "happily given, happily taken, so completely accepted that there had hardly been any of the pretenders to whom it could have seemed unreal" (61). For Baako, this reception is a "desperate inflated game" (61) that accentuates his loneliness and a sense of fear invades him at the thought of facing his family. He warns himself that "he would need to be the careful one" (62), while cautioning himself repeatedly, he examines his own changing self, "impotent sometimes, growing, sometimes strong, confused, often weak, changing, many things by turns" (65). The entire Ghanaian society has been colonized mentally as well as physically.

Armah uses the black bourgeoisie as a case study to examine the question of alienation of the African elite. The ones who should lead the struggle for the emancipation of Africa from the clutches of imperialism have themselves become a part of the problem rather than its solution. One of the ways that project this problem manifests itself in the way some Africans like Brempong strive to look like whites - they bleach their skin and dress and speak like whites. This mimicry and imitation manifests the Africans' acceptance of the

false notions of European superiority. Thus, Brempong - "the prototype Ghanaian been-to" - (Yankson, "The Eagle that Refused to Soar," Asemka 53) makes it a point of duty to permanently appear in dark suits and his wife with a "wig" (41). Trapped in his inferiority complex, Brempong shows Baako a shiny lighter he is bringing home from Europe and asks: "Where in Ghana would you find a thing like this? ... I bought it in Amsterdam ... Beautiful things there ... has never given me any trouble" (45). Ruled by the belief that his country is inferior to Europe, every time he goes abroad he buys all he needs. Like he informs Baako when they meet on the plane bringing them home that he has got "two good cars on this trip. German cars, from the factory, all fresh" (45).

This simple factual detail portrays "the adoration of the assimilated native for the tantalizing products of the conqueror" (Ogede, "Patterns of Decadence," *Modern Fiction Studies* 535). It underscores the paradox characterizing the alienated natives like Brempong who long for, and adopt the trifling products of western technology promoted by the erstwhile colonial masters as the only "authentic" (181) things that make life meaningful, but they discard the essential human values of meaningful life. This, for Armah, is the source of tragedy confronting postcolonial societies. The Ghanaian middle class has not only imitated western manners, they also have adopted western names as well. This rejection of African names for European names marks a cultural transmutation, western names such as James, Henry Williams, Hodgson and Richard are nothing more than a ridiculous caricature of self. To Brempong his name, "Henry Robert Hudson Brempong" (43) signifies his status and social identity and he is taken aback by Baako's retention of his African name "Baako Onipa."

Colonialism has affected not only the family life but also the Ghanaian community. People are aware of the awfulness of life around them but they are "only concerned with digging themselves a comfortable resting place within a bad system" (31). They deliberately close their eyes against the knowledge that their useless lives are part of the slow dissolution of their peoples, doomed to an extinction started long ago. Fragments, thus, indicates the changes in the neo-society passing through a transitional phase. Hypocrisy, greed, avarice are the new key words. It is assumed that everything that comes from the white man's country is of great value and importance. One who has visited a foreign country is a "white man", a "big man" and a "hero" (56) imbued with power. The likes of Brempong mastered these mantras of success; the likes of Baako are in a state of flux. Le Vine comments on the impact of the west on African society:

... the colonial period in Africa ... produced several trans-territorial political cultures that survived the transition of independence and continue to affect the internal and external policies of post-colonial African states. (*Political Leadership in Africa* 4)

The change is slowly disintegrating the values of the African clan. Some try to reinstate these values by driving away the new influences like protagonists, Baako and Naana, but to the majority of people the rightness of the old values does not matter. Resultantly the Africans are beguiling themselves with these new flaunted values and unwittingly, the native culture and values are being crushed by the Africans themselves.

Armah exhibits biting bitterness for the plague of dependence arising from Africans' deference to European customs and traditions. Baako defies the practice whereby the "been-to" gains employment at home while still abroad through the influential relatives, acquaintances and contacts. He invokes Brempong's derision who tries to brush away the illusions that Baako might be entertaining about ready employment on the basis of his merit and qualifications on his return to Ghana. "It's a bad mistake you've made. You've put yourself in a very bad position ... If you were an expatriate, a white man, it wouldn't matter. You'd have things easy, even without real qualifications ... But when you present yourself with your black face like their own, there's no respect. You'll see" (47). Thus the subversion of a "been-to" in the portrayal of Baako posits the need for change in an average African's mindset who is still mentally colonized.

Efua articulates in closer form a mother's expectations from her son in the Ghanaian society. Having practical and realistic orientation, she thinks she knows the society better than Baako, an idealist, but ironically, she is responsible for the destruction of her son. Araba, though younger than Baako, is portrayed as a self-centered being. Soon after Baako's return, he saves the life of his sister, Araba, who gives birth to a premature baby. He gives his blood in order to save both the mother and the child. Araba had five miscarriages earlier, acknowledges that Baako's arrival augured well for her: "Now ... it is such a good thing, your coming.... Other blessings will follow" (85), but the happiness proves short-lived because she loses her son during the "outdooring ceremony" (86) itself.

The distortion of rituals and ceremonies for personal gain and convenience reflects upon the Ghanaian society passing through a transitional phase. Araba and Efua are compelled to prepone the outdooring ceremony from the normal eighth day to the fifth day of the baby's "homecoming" for materialistic constraints. They believe that the ceremony held more than a few days after payday would be useless because it would not fetch enough or desired money and their primary concern is to capitalize on the ceremony. Baako tries to stop them by asking are you "so pressed you have to make money out of the child?" (88).

Baako and Naana represent tradition and ancestral wisdom; they are against this outdooring ceremony, but fail in the pursuit. Naana knows that as per tradition, the child is still in the "keeping" of the spirits and they should not hurry "dragging him out into this world for eyes in heads that have eaten flesh to gape at" (97). However, Naana is more helpless than Baako in preventing them from proceeding with the ritual. She knows that their planning is not good for the child and warns: "You know the child is only a traveler between the world of spirits ... he must be protected. Or he will run screaming back, fleeing the horrors prepared for him up here" (97).

Baako's warning and Naana's forbidding come true when the child dies during the outdooring ceremony itself. Naana analyses the problem more clearly and tries to posit it in the larger perspective. For her, the killing of the child is the result of their loss of faith in the "wisdom of those gone before" (199). The abuse of rituals results in the death of the child, she wonders, "what new power has made them forget that a child too soon exposed is bound to die? ... The baby was a sacrifice they killed, to satisfy perhaps a new god" (199). The new god they have found is much like the white destroyers who began the destruction of people long ago. The statement that "great haste to consume things ... have taken no care ... to produce" (199) can be viewed in this larger historical perspective. The

colonized mentality of Efua and Araba is built on distorted values of the Ghanaian society. The outdoor ceremony of the child is an extended metaphor in the sense that it forewarns the impending doom destined for sensitive individuals in the wake of spiritual mutation. It can be safely inferred that Armah wishes to uphold African tradition and manners.

Armah sees the destructive role of his female characters as sometimes part of their love. Efua emerges as the archetypal mother of Freudian psychology in this conflict. She has had hopes from the darling fruit of her womb, dreams that would take "no cognizance of his manhood and individuality but would rather destroy him ... Hers is Soyinka's blood-love, the type Dehinwa's mother and aunt exhibit in *The Interpreters*. This type of love is so possessive ... that it smothers rather than hastens the growth of the child into a separate individual" (Ola, "Ayi Awei Armah," NSAL 8). In the moving scene in front of the incomplete house that Efua had set up hoping that Baako would complete it, she begs forgiveness: "I was hoping you would ... take joy in the thing ... and finish it.... Forgive me ... I won't accuse you anymore. It's over now, Baako.... We can go home now" (179). But Efua, like Oyo in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is forgiven, for she is able to analyze her mistakes that have been instrumental in Baako's nervous breakdown. Efua's confession hints at the positive quality and her transformation indicates the change in mindset suggesting her decolonization.

One of the serious results of the cultural and intellectual colonization is the cultivation of a dependent cast of mind, conditioned only to imitate. Armah satirizes this attempt by elaborating the "ape" in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Ostentation and apemanship manifest the loss of one's Africanness. The natives imitate the hair styles, clothing, make-up and speech to change their African appearance. For instance, Efua is seen lost in utter admiration of a couple on the calendar whose skins have become bleached into a forced yellow-brown by "AMBI-EXTRA [Capitals Original] skin-lightening cream.... Around them several darker Africans stood ... all open-mouthed with admiration of the bleached pair" (87) is part of the same mentality built on distorted values.

"Ambi-Extra" is just one of undesirable products of west that has found its way into the Ghanaian consumer market. Through this product, natural African beauty is contrasted with the artificial signifiers of beauty. The mentally colonized Ghanaian middle class has an incurable wish to identify themselves with the west. This aping class is criticized as "parasitic", "unimaginative", "lacking in initiative and having nothing better to do than to take on the role of the manager of Western Enterprise" (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* 140-154). According to Ogede, for Armah the matter of grave concern is the way these elites "reinforced the roles of colonial apemanship, slavish imitativeness, and sham man" (Ogede, "Patterns of Decadence," *Modern Fiction Studies* 535).

Colonialism ... adulterated Africa's way of mind and unhinged the 'method' of the African psyche and cracked the African soul which ... led to the rootlessness and alienation of the African from himself. (Qtd. in Rai, "The Wounded Psyche of Africa," *Recent Commonwealth Literature* 121)

Naana, in the novel represents the precolonized African values, traditions and ideals. The contemporary Ghanaian society is fragmented in the absence of any distinct ideology and blind pursuit of material things. Naana and Baako invariably struggle to retain their traditional ideals but they wage a lost battle. In her old age Naana lives a life of loneliness among her children and grandchildren. "I am a person no more ... but for them it has too long been an annoying burden" (2). Her consolation, however, comes from realization that she will soon be joining the ancestors in the next life. There is no communication between her and her children and she knows that this world has no room for her and that she has become "the remnant of something that passed by and was immediately forgotten [They see me as nothing at all] ... I myself am lost here, a stranger ... in a town of strangers" (195).

Naana lives out her last days in such ridicule, a lone voice representing the interest of the ancestors in a changed world that hardly pays them any homage. She plays the part of a seer, or chorus commenting on the general disease of society, and the particular tragedy about to befall her family. Naana foretells the death of Araba's baby and also warns Baako of his own imminent tragedy, but both Baako and Naana were too helpless to alter the course of events. In her blindness she sees those truths which are denied to people with the power of sight.

Her seeing eye is a spiritual opposition to the blind seeing eyes around her. (Peterson, "Loss and Frustration," *Kunapipi* 53)

In a flashback Naana's blind eyes visualize the parting scene, the day Baako had left for overseas. Owing to the awareness born of her isolation, Naana has had a premonition that her grandchild will suffer loneliness and isolation resulting from physical displacement, she avers: "Sometimes I know my blindness was sent to me to save me from the madness that would ... have come with seeing so much that was not to be understood" (10). Her way of apprehending this world is a traditional one and the traditional ceremonies and rituals are of great significance and meaning to her. The tradition, she represents is that of a precolonized Ghana, now almost completely lost, completely forgotten.

Baako, the "traveler", becomes a victim of the materialistic aspirations of the family which are "filled with the mass of things" (198) only. The new born child of Araba meets his death in the hot wet embrace of people who have forgotten that fruit is not a gathered gift of the instant but seed hidden in the earth and tended and waited for to grow but they have become busy in "reaching ... new things and newer ways to consume them" (198). The child falls victim to the materialistic schemes of the family concerned with immediate present only.

Naana in her visionary thinking and Baako in his vocation are creators. She identifies herself with Baako when she says: "Happy event if in his future there is yet something hidden that will reveal itself with time, though that will be long after I am dead" (199). Baako, in turn, identifies himself with the child whom he had saved by donating his blood: "He looked past her at the baby ... Babyhood, infancy, going to school ... the thought of a person having to go through the whole cycle again brought back his nausea" (86). Naana herself says that the child belonged to him, "the child is yours to look after.... The blood that flows in Araba is yours, Baako, and the child is yours also if it is hers" (98). Like the child, Baako's arrival is unexpected and like "the child traveler," Baako is offered as sacrifice to the "new god."

Naana's blindness has been employed as a satire on the "eyed" people. It is one of the ironies in the text that without eyes she sees more than anybody else. But endowed with voice and speaking ability, she speaks little: "If I see things unseen by those who have eyes, why should my wisest speech not be silence?" (2). Naana is completely shattered because of violence in many forms which she feels could have been avoided. She paves initially the way for Baako's return and then laments that all hopes have been shattered. Naana survives to see the return of Baako, her spiritual companion, and the birth of new child in the family, but when they are driven to a state of breakdown - both in mental and physical terms - she wishes to leave this fragmented world and welcomes death as the only way out of this sordid condition of life.

The lines: "THE TIME [Capitals Original] has come ... and I too am ready to go... When there is no use, the spirit ... yearns for the world of other spirits ... the spirits themselves hope and wait for the new one coming" (195) reflects Naana's sense of disillusionment with life. She is ready for her death having realized "it [is] useless to try and make them see my blind suffering and to cry to them for help" (196). Naana's comments on the postindependent condition of the country, most specifically, on the general disease of the society and the chaotic condition of her family reflects the postindependent chaos and confusion in the society.

Naana's voice is the voice of the wise elder who has witnessed the ideal past that is threatened. She laments the erosion and distortion of African civilization by an alien system of values and reveals her respect for the order under seize. The role of ancestors in the African society holds a place of eminence and reverence. The African American writers such as Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor and others have incorporated this tradition in their writings. Armah substantiates this belief through Naana who seeks the reinstatement of Africa's trampled tradition to reestablish the superiority of the sense of community over the base desires of the individuals.

The novel begins and ends with the mythical narration of Naana, but Naana's marginalisation in her family, as well as society, and her subsequent wish for death is symbolic of the loss of link between the present and the past. She is the last link with the old traditions and cultures, the link with the legends of past and a mode of life almost on the brink of extinction. The tradition and values for which she lives are no longer revered. The narration that unites the novel "stands as an ironic and defiant affirmation of order and rhythm in the face of the madness which the narrative seeks to contain" (Johnson, "The Middle Passage in African Literature," *African Literature Today* 73).

The criticism of bureaucracy and officialdom is presented in Baako's search for employment, a pertinent reflection upon the modern Ghanaians predicament. Social inequality clutches Ghanaian society, for there is destitution on one hand and surfeit of the people on other. In Basil Davidson's opinion "a truly independent country must be able to ensure its talents" (*Black Star* 173). Baako pinned a lot of hopes on Ghanavision, but is soon disillusioned with it. Ghanavision is synonymous with the corrupt regime of the state and just a mouthpiece of the Head of State. Asante-Smith, the Director, is nearly thirty one but "already he is the boss of the whole corporation ... has the sweetest tongue in all of Ghana for singing his master's praises.... He can sing sweetly for anybody who dey for top [*Italics Original*]" (46). The slavish sycophancy is only a mask to cover up the inability to formulate constructive ideas. The rejection of Baako's creative scripts and constructive ideas is an extension of this slavish sycophancy.

The Ghanaian government and bureaucracy are hesitant to accept the qualified black expatriates. These black expatriates present a threat to the white metropolitan personals whose presence was to ensure "the maintenance of a lasting system whose existential core is a superior-inferior relationship between metropole and province" (Armah, "A Mystification," *Pan-African Journal* 141-145). The paradox is that the African elites like Brempong know that the system in operation is evil but in their opportunistic desire to entrench power and influence within the set up, they are prepared to serve it at the expense of the nation.

Armah's aspirations as a creative writer are suggestive of creative writer's role in the postcolonial Africa. A misfit in the eyes of society, Baako takes to writing, offering critiques of men, manners and contemporary Ghanaian situation which is not comprehended and appreciated by the Ghanaians. In one of the most disturbing scenes in the text, where Baako is ill with fever yet continuing to write in his notebook, Armah brilliantly sums up the dilemma of the writer in contemporary Africa, where he is not fairly understood by masses: "I've been talking ... but ... no one seemed to understand" (189). Efu asks him what he is writing, his reply is something that "occurred to me ... You wrote it to yourself ... her voice musing. Thinking he had made himself plain enough he added nothing to help her.... Did you write things to yourself?" (158-159). Compelled by his idealistic thoughts, Baako resigns from his job and consigns all his scripts to flames.

Armah no doubt explores the theme of women as lovers and saviours. Fragments however, leaves the reader with chilling feeling of loneliness and helplessness of the creative individual who attempts to realize his potential in a society that understands pompous ostentation as the only value worth living for. Armah provides no answer to the problem. Perhaps, Africa has no room yet for people with Baako's type of ideal vision.

The vision is there ... whether it will be realized is the problem. The only consolation lies in the struggle ... the bond of love ... holds the only hope of temporary salvation ... the negative aspects of the feminine in the Oyos and Efuas must be resisted ... since woman is both destroyer and builder. (Ola, "Ayi Kwei Armah," *NSAL* 10-11)

Naana and Puerto Rican Juana thus, partake in the process of healing and creation while Araba and Efu are on the destructive end. But the stress always remains on the woman as the fountain head of inspiration, love and fertility in the process of self-discovery. As a sensitive individual Juana finds Baako much closer to her own inner self and she cannot reject his offer of friendship. She understands his 'painful ability to see so clearly.' Juana shares the positive vision of Naana and provides a silver lining in the sordid drama of greed and spiritual mutation. In a society full of dreams of "heavy things" (3) Juana craves for the loving and soothing human touch, "the hunger for which continued in her in spite of everything" (13). This sustained search for meaning in their surroundings eventually unites Baako and Juana. Juana tries to heal Baako's psychological wounds hopefully awaiting Baako's recovery. Juana wants to live in an atmosphere free of social barriers and needs loving assistance that would enable her to get over the scars of her broken marriage and broken home. Juana remains lonely and unhappy until she meets Baako, and from their conversation they discover that their

dispositions are similar; they are both sensitive and passionate people who deplore the materialistic ethos of society that denies individuals their dignity as humans. They are further united in their determination to rid society of its oppressive codes of conduct.

The corruption and moral depravity prevalent in the society is contrasted against Baako's pragmatic thinking with idealistic connotations. Baako finds himself entangled in a tricky situation, the slide towards greed and easy gain is the general trend and he wishes to go "against a general current" (103). The society of *Fragments* is similarly run by the so-called elites who are trained to do nothing. Their centre of interest is disproportionate sharing of nation's wealth which creates socio-economic dichotomies. To Baako's dismay, he learns that the best medical care and facilities are provided exclusively for VIPs in Government hospitals while the rest of the people, the masses, the "broke people" (76) go to the old, ill-maintained and underequipped wards. Given this situation, one is not surprised to hear the Principal Secretary telling Baako: "This country doesn't work that way. If you come back thinking you can make things work in any smooth, efficient way, you'll just get a complete waste of your time. It's not worth bothering about" (83).

Armah holds the view that false socio-political structures are responsible for the corruption of people; rather than the people themselves. Amidst this sterility lies the assurance that some day "the deadly seriousness people here invested in these external things ... would crack and ... sense of inner worth" (13) will eventually win, for he believes that the average African possesses the divine power for good, but this virtue needs to be initiated and substantiated. Baako's experiences in finding employment are frustrating but in a larger context signify the Ghanaian predicament. What he eventually discovers is that in his country, efficiency, scholarship and creativity are shunned while incompetence and ignorance are acclaimed, and god-fatherism and palm-greasing are better credentials than sound professional qualification and experience. No wonder mediocrity reigns supreme and this applause for mediocrity leads to "a hopeless picture" compounded by the fact that there are not too many literate people and even "literate won't read" (80). As a result, lethargy is encouraged and Gariba "a potentially good producer ... learned not to insist on being productive" (132). Even husband-wife relation is strained in contemporary society for Araba uses her "secret weapon" (89) to make her husband yield to her. Juana also feels the need for flight which urges her to leave the "whole aborted town" (12) just to get out of the nauseating thought that she is here in "another defeated and defeating place" (12).

In *Fragments* the obstacles to the work of such innovators appear insurmountable because indolence, mental torpor, mediocrity, greed, selfishness, and avarice are like diseases endemic in the continent ravaging all classes of society. Baako, like Man in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, is an island of sanity in an ocean of madness, for he is the one who has failed to contribute into the dominant system of life. Misunderstood by family and friends, working in a medium which seems of little importance among national priorities, he overcomes insurmountable odds. Naana suggests that the only release will be exile to soothe his strained senses. Naana's last comment on the world concludes the novel that we are "still clutching the useless shreds of a world worn out, we peep behind the veil just passed and find in wonder a more fantastic world, making us fools in our own eyes to have believed that the old paltriness was all" (200-201). Naana's role in the final moments of the text is Armah's most important image that expresses the wisdom of self-regeneration. She promises to support Baako after her death: "When I go I will protect him ... if my strength is not enough I will seek out stronger spirits and speak to their souls of his need of them" (198). This is the spiritual force without which man is pitilessly vulnerable to antagonistic elements; for Armah this force is not a mythical solution to Africa's practical problems but an injunction that conscience should be the guiding spirit towards attaining freedom from materialism, affectation, corruption and other similar kinds of ills that plague Africa.

In present scenario, the individual and the community are under great stress, striving hard to redefine their identity, individuality and collectivity. Being heirs of traditional and modern world they face many a problem, sometimes a dilemma and sometimes a crisis. The individual is distorted in the colonial world, faces the problem of redefining his place in his society in which he lives because the symbols of his identity are disturbed to the extent that "they no longer give reliable reference points to locate themselves socially, realize themselves sentimentally and declare (to self and others) who they are" (Juneja, "Post-Colonial Novel" 14). The Africans have to struggle hard to regain their lost identities. Armah believes that the work of the exceptional individuals would be made easier if the oppressed people expand their consciousness in context of their situation and join the crusade to liberate, with emphasis on African essence and African origins.

In *Fragments*, even more than in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah gives expression to some of the key obstacles militating against development in postcolonial Africa. In offering solutions to these problems, he advocates communal solidarity of the visionaries, and at the same time he views the problem in global context, as illustrated in Juana's role. A more rewarding approach to decolonization, likely to achieve even more lasting results, would be for the underprivileged people of the third world in general to unite in a common onslaught on postcolonial forces of disorder.

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