

**THE POSTCOLONIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SELECTED WORKS OF AYI
KWEI ARMAH AND BEN OKRI**

BY

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “The Postcolonial Dimensions of the selected works of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ben Okri” has been carried out by me in the Department of English and Literary Studies. The information derived from the literature has been duly acknowledged in the text and a list of references provided. No part of the thesis was previously presented for another degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

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CERTIFICATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled “**THE POSTCOLONIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE SELECTED WORKS OF AYI KWEI ARMAH AND BEN OKRI**” by **TSUZOM MAWO NDAKOTSU** meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature of the Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated first to the ALMIGHTY GOD who made it all possible. And to my Late parents ISAIAH ABOM and EUNICE MAGAWOA LARUBA, who God has used to bring me into the world. Also, to my wife CAROLINE and Children MOYO, BANYA, EGIGANYA, MIDENYA and WANYA as well as my grandchildren JASON WUWASOKO and JESSE SOKOAGA. They gave the family support that contributed in a silent way to the success of this work.

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ABSTRACT

*Postcolonial literature, which made its strong impact on the literary world since Edward Said's Orientalism (1979) has found a convenient space in the critical analysis evaluation of African Literature because it is the thematic superstructure of the literature of the Third World and has come to widen the scope of analyzing the literary contribution of the formerly colonized nations to the world of letters. In particular it has provided the voice for these nations to express their shared experience and re-examine their relationship with the former colonizers. In this regard, African authors have kept the pace with the rest of the world as they have become unfettered and free to tell their story from their own perspective, based on the colonial experience and ironically achieving this by exploiting the novel form, usually considered to be a genre peculiar to the West. The selected authors for this study Ayi Kwei Armah and Ben Okri are among those who have successfully done this and in the process they have not only respectively re-focused attention on the glory of pre-colonial Africa but have also sustained the tradition of modern African writers of keeping the searchlight on the post-independence political elite. Also in the same tradition, the authors have made very strong social and political messages that touch on the very lives of the millions of Africa's underprivileged. Armah goes beyond the continent when his theme is focused around race and pan-Africanism which are issues well within the ambit of postcolonialism. In this study, the two selected novels of Armah's **Why Are We So Blest?** (1972) and **Two Thousand Seasons** (1979) are analysed against postcolonial issues of race and identity; while Okri's **The Famished Road** (1991) and **Stars of the New Curfew** (1989) provide the background against which urbanization and identity are examined. These issues generally overlap, confirming the researcher's conviction that Bhabha's theories on ambivalence and hybridity have become inescapable legacies of postcolonialism.*

*These theories were also reference points in the analyses, in spite of Armah's fierce advocacy for Pan-Africanism and what can be perceived as this anti-racism. Okri's portrayal of characters and environments confirm the rootlessness of individuals and the dilemma of urbanization. The three stories selected from Okri's **Stars of the New Curfew** possess those characteristics of postcolonial experience which makes them suitable for analysis in their down – to – earthness.*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Postcolonialism deals with the relationship between the erstwhile colonizer and the colonized, describing “the culture affected by the imperial process as well as the new cross-cultural criticism, which is characterized primarily by its resistance to the colonial ideology” (O’Brien, 1998). It is an academic discipline which, when taken as a genre of contemporary history, creates the space for re-examination of modes of perceiving cultures of both the viewer and the viewed. This academic nature also makes it a critical theory which facilitates the analysis of such themes as feminism, linguistics and, of course, postcolonial literature which portray the subjugation of the colonized peoples.

Postcolonial theory is suitable for the discussion of postcolonial culture especially that which has been influenced by colonialism as it addresses such issues as cultural identity, race, gender, ethnicity, art, history, anthropology philosophy, linguistics, slavery, resistance and its suppression, religion, and indeed effects of colonialism (past and present) (Ashcroft et al, 1995, 1998; Childs and Williams, 1997; Lawal, 2012). Postcolonial theory sometimes defends what does not really exist by persistently calling attention to it, thus working towards its actualization (Childs and Williams, 1997). However, this ideal has been accepted by the formerly colonized peoples who see in it something emancipatory, a tool for demystifying western imperialistic stereotypes. After all, postcolonialism, as Xie (1997) pointed out, arose out of the historical need to deconstruct residues of old colonialism and withstand neocolonialism “which has shifted the battlefield from the political and military unto the cultural terrain” (Xie, 9).

This study rests on the premise that postcolonial literature defines its standpoint from the position that writers articulate and celebrate the society while maintaining some of the connections forged during the earlier relationship such as socio-economic, linguistic and cultural ties, in contrast to colonialist literature in which writers (mostly from the colonizer – nations) defend imperialism and colonized people as justification for perceiving them as inferior beings who need the colonizers' superior qualities to guide them to acceptability. In the process of defining and establishing a colonial identity, postcolonial literature created a base for indigenous decolonization whereby writers explain and analyze the personal and societal experiences of imperial subjugation.

Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) for instance is an example of subaltern people's reply to the colonizer – country's misinterpretation of their cultural life. Postcolonial literature as a body of literary writing responds to the intellectual discourse of European colonization in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. It addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of cultural societies, especially the political and cultural frontiers of literary criticism which continue to expand as literature is constantly analyzed from new perspectives. Postcolonial discourse as a result has come to assume a paramount position as a viable analytical tool for assessing the novel form. African literature has established itself in the literary universe and the application of postcolonial discourse has revealed that even the novels of Achebe, the leading figure in modern African literature, can be explicated within the realm of postcolonialism. This indicates that extensive and intensive exploration of postcolonial themes has exposed the existence of a gap and incompleteness in knowledge with regard to African literature as some key strands are yet to be fully explored..

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Armah and Okri are two authors whose works stand out prominently in African literature and have been extensively analyzed from various perspectives. Even then, as the frontiers of literary criticism continue to expand, it is inevitable that some incompleteness would be observed in these analyses, which implies that there is a gap in knowledge. Some aspects need to be further explored in order to enrich postcolonial criticism of African literature. This is true of the literary analysis of the works of Armah and Okri, which are being explored in this study based on the propositions that:

- i) The novels of Armah and Okri are axiomatic of the postcolonial legacy of displacement and hybridization and can thus be contextualized within the postcolonial discourse space.
- ii) Concern with postcolonial legacy has unarguably bestowed on the novel form an African character suitable for exploring an interpolated discourse of African experience.
- iii) Postcolonial theory is a viable tool for analyzing how the novel signifies postcolonial experience.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to show that there is an existing gap in the analyses of the works of Armah and Okri, from the postcolonial dimension that focus on key issues like individual and group identity, race, and the effect of hybridization and urbanization on individuals. This is premised on the conviction that postcolonial discourse has given new meanings to African works by insisting that formerly subjugated peoples should be

evaluated on their own terms and based on their experiences which postcolonialism has conveniently provided. The objectives of the study are therefore to illustrate that:

- i) There is an affinity between the novels of Armah and Okri and the designation of the postcolonial experience.
- ii) As committed writers, Armah and Okri signify the African experience as manifestations of the connection between power, inequality and domination.
- iii) Identity, race, and tradition are implicated in the failure of African countries to become modern nation states.
- iv) Postcolonial discourse is a viable analytical for assessing the novel form.

1.4 Significance of the Study

African literature has enjoyed wide critical attention over the decades and has been extensively analyzed within the context of Marxism, structuralism, realism, feminism, etc. but the postcolonial dimension to these analyses lack the desired depth and reach i.e. many more issues arising from postcolonial theory have not been properly looked into, for example. the postcolonial legacy of displacement and hybridization. The individual in society, for instance, is an angle that needs to be examined more intensively. In comparison to Asian literature, African literature has not been sufficiently subjected to postcolonial discourse as can be seen from the acclaimed works of Said, Bhabha, Spivak and several others. In other words, there are still many more areas in which African literature can be analyzed. Hence, this study will contribute to the expansion of knowledge of African literature.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The observed paucity of critical works on Armah and Okri within the context of postcolonialism makes this study imperative. As a matter of fact, their works have been examined from several perspectives which have done much to highlight their social and political relevance. Armah's themes portray societal ills exemplified by the excesses of the elite while Okri's focuses more closely on individuals in the society. Armah's nationalistic spirit is reflected in such his earlier novels as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969); *Fragments* (1970); *The Healers* (1979); while his racial sensitivities are expressed through his characters (as in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979). Okri's novels and short story collections (for example *The Landscapes Within* (1981); *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) capture contemporary issues like corruption and disillusionment. These are all issues confronting post-independence African countries.

1.6 Scope and Delimitation of the Study

Armah and Okri are well recognized in the literary world. Since the publication of their first works (*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), and *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) respectively), they have produced works no less critically acclaimed. However, for the purpose of this research, the scope is limited to two novels of Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and, and Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989), the latter a collection of short stories from which some titles ('Worlds That Flourish' 'In the City of Red Dust', and 'Stars of the New Curfew') were selected. These, along with the novel, suit the study's explication of postcolonial themes like hybridization and identity. Similarly the selection

of Armah's work fit into the analysis of such postcolonial issues as race and identity. These interpretative approaches provide the background against which the works highlight the human being living on the periphery of the society as an individual rather than just a stereotype or symbol of the oppressed and the deprived, often referred to as "the masses".

1.7 Methodology

The methods of research applied to this study is qualitative research that is, explanation and interpretation which are applicable in research areas where the topics under research require the examination of complex relationships or intricate patterns of interactions (Imoisili, 1996; 76). The research undertakes a critical interpretation of the primary texts by way of investigating areas and situations where postcolonialism affects the individual in the society. Primary sources are the selected works of the authors being studied; secondary sources are critical works in journals, published and unpublished conference/seminar papers, theses and other papers as well as materials downloaded from the internet.

1.8 Chapter Structure

The first chapter of this study, covers the introduction to the work, comprising of the background, statement of the problem, significance of the study, justification of the study, aim and objectives of the study, research methodology; a section on the literary background to Armah and Okri as postcolonial African novelists; and a brief discussion on the postcolonial dimensions of the works of Armah and Okri. Chapter Two comprises of analytical framework and literature review; while Chapters Three and Four focus on

the analyses of the authors and the works selected. The focus of Chapter Three is the two selected novels of Armah sub-titled “The Ambiguities of Race and Identity Relationships in Armah’s *Why Are We So Blest?* and *Two Thousand Seasons*” while Chapter Four appraises two of Okri’s works under the subtitle: “Identity, Urbanization and Hybridization in Okri’s *The Famished Road* and *Stars of the New Curfew*. Chapter Five is the summary and conclusion of the study.

1.9 Armah and Okri as Postcolonial African Novelists

Armah’s portrayal of Ghana in his novels reveals deep disillusionment with the elite, beginning with his first work *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969).

Armah compares the Black regime that succeeded the White one and concludes that the former is merely cloaked in a gleaming whiteness that is nothing but filth-producing, possessing a cleanness which has “more rottenness in it than the slime at the bottom of the garbage dump “(*The Beautiful Ones* p:44). The elite undoubtedly, is the target of the author’s ire. Nanna (in *Fragments* 1974) cannot but be bitter about the elite’s insatiable appetite for materialism which is

The same long destruction of our people when the elders first... spilt their own seed and raised half against half, part selling part to hard-eyed buyers from beyond the horizon breaking, buying, selling, gaining spending till the last of our men sells the last woman to a passing white buyer and himself waits to be destroyed by his great haste to consume things we have not taken care to produce. (*Fragments*: 284).

The emergent post-independence elite, even as products of nationalist struggles, have failed as correctors of past centuries of degradation as they imbibe alien cultures and resort to primordial sentiments to justify their misrule. As shown in ‘*Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), Armah believes that White-Black relationships are shaped by the colonial

model of exploitation and servitude which is enthusiastically embraced by the new leaders:

“He, African artist, seduced by European aestheticism into borrowing its techniques to lament the betrayal of its own race himself becomes a parasite and betrayer” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 221).

Armah’s earlier works such as *The Beautiful Ones*, *Fragments*, etc. reveal his nationalist feelings-as he portrays his country’s elite as betrayers of and predators on their own people. Later works like *The Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *The Healers* (1979) though set in Ghana, have a clearly obvious Pan Africanist outlook. *The Healers* is a mix of fact with fiction about the fall of a celebrated empire (Asante). The communal characters are the traditional medicine men (healers) who see fragmentation as a deadly disease among the people, and thus take it upon themselves to rouse the people from their long slumber and prepare them for the task of cultural and intellectual resistance against the colonizers.

Armah’s main concern here seems to be the creation of a pan-African agency that will embrace all the diverse cultures and languages of the continent. Some critics like Fraser, 1980; Lazarus, 1990 contend that Armah presents racist and simplistic views in his works when he portrays all that is black as good and all that is white as evil and corrupt. Some have faulted his fictional portrayals of a new sociopolitical order in Africa as vague and unrealistic, while there are others who have accused him of being too idealistic to inspire real change. These may be due to his strongly-held conviction that the institution of slavery is born out of racism not commercialism. *TwoThousand Seasons* (1979) and *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974) on which this accusation is obviously based can

be read in a different way, the former being seen as a call to pan-Africanism as it celebrates “the way, our way”.

The re-invention of history as a depiction of the destruction of the African continent consequent upon Western incursion is the focus of *The Healers* (1979). As Fubara observes, in the book, Armah delves into philosophy of healing, a process of completely ridding the people and the system of devastating forces that appear to have not only maimed but also ruined Africa (Fubara <http://dx.Doi.Org./10.4314/tv1-v.5011.5>). In Mtshali’s view, *Two Thousand Seasons* characterizes Africa as a diseased continent with the road, or an authentic connectedness to the central theme of the novel the diagnosis of the many diseases that inflict Africa.

So much can be interpreted as the focus of Armah’s works as he is consistent in bemoaning the plight of Ghana and in indeed, Africa, which portray his nationalist and pan-Africanist commitment. Where his key characters are not Blacks (as in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) he leaves the reader and the critic in little doubt as to where his sympathies lie, which lays him open to criticism of being a racist, while others may see him as a black nationalist. This also extends to his portrayal of women: he is anti-feminist where white female characters are concerned. While his black women are heroines (like Anoa in ‘*Two Thousand Seasons*’ (1979), their white counterparts are villains or at best sexual explorers or exploiters (like Aimee and Mrs. Jefferson in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972). Generally, his white women are sex objects or targets of black revenge against their race.

Armah, the pan-Africanist, the revolutionary intellectual is not only concerned with diagnosis of the African past that should be the model for the present and the future,

a united Africa that collapses geo-national political structures bequeathed by colonialism, but also playing a role Soyinka suggested some time back with the statement that one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of social direction (Soyinka, 1976:106).

Okri's works are set in England and Nigeria but the focus is more on the latter, obviously choosing to highlight the political, social and economic conditions in contemporary Nigeria showing how oppression and corruption pervade the lives of the people and grinds them down. In the pages of his books we encounter images of disease, filth, poverty, stink, rotten sewage and bodies, power failure, slums etc. all of which capture urban Nigeria at its worst. Corruption is celebrated and is spotlighted through characters like Madam Koto, Jeffia, etc. who are contrasted with the wretched poor. The young characters like Omovo, (in *The Landscapes Within* 1981) and Jeffia go through a growing-up and coming-of age process which opens their eyes to the world around them. Jeffia, the spirit child of a rich man realizes that his father's wealth is acquired through corrupt dealings. Omovo executes paintings that capture the corrupt world around him as if propelled by some powerful inner force.

Okri employs African myth and folklore emphasizing on spirituality and mysticism to portray the society from the view point of an urban humanist. The stories in *"Incidents at the Shrine"* (1991) focus on individuals trying to survive or at least mentally escape-the violence and squalor that characterize their daily existence yet they do not surrender or admit defeat: rather the writer draws attention to their survival by his refusal to focus on destruction of African societies and values by colonialism. His strategy is to minimize the significance of the colonial masters and maximize the

experience of the formerly colonized subjects. However, he implicitly explores the ongoing cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in postcolonial Africa.

Critics have emphasized Okri's use of modernist conventions, though some have also noted his restrained use of stream-of-consciousness—a subtle style that hangs between Virginia Woolf's and James Joyce's more aggressive experimentation with modernism. Critics Ayo Mamudu and Abioseh Michael Porter conclude that Okri's novels attempt to break from the tradition of social realism, which has dominated the African novel since Achebe, to modernist conventions. (Bennett, 2002). *Stars of the New Curfew* (1986) shows how Okri has developed a uniquely African sense of postmodernism which derives from his variant of African folklore style, not an imitation of the European postmodernist technique. Critics like John C. Hawley and Olatunbosun Ogunsanwo argued that Okri's works are postmodern because they mix genres and cross cultural boundaries. *Flowers and Shadows* (1980) and *The Landscapes Within* (1981) blend realism and modernism which are used to explore the effects of modernization on urban Nigeria. According to them the style is reminiscent of the conflicts in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) retold from an urban perspective but whose focus is not on the colonizer/colonized confrontation with the modern social, political and existential conditions that are the legacies of colonialism. Omovo, the protagonist in *The Landscapes Within* (1981) uses art as a way of creating sense and meaning in an uncertain world and discernible in the work is the political engagement of social realism augmented with the type of aesthetic engagement which characterizes modernist texts.

The Famished Road (1991) and *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) both stress the problems of cultural nationalism, as Azaro, the protagonist, undaunted and unbowed continues his fight against spirit forces. Okri, the nationalist, has no faith in the notion that the future development of Africa must lie in the political action as hoped by Achebe (in *Anthills in the Savannah* 1988) hence turns Africa's problems into self-examination. In order to forge a better future for Nigeria and Africa, Okri urges Africans to look at their past and learn from their predecessors' mistakes. It is the failure to do this that makes him denounce the new black elite's complicity with the white colonizers which has continued to dog the continent since independence. He acknowledges the humiliation of colonialism and racial prejudice but blames Africa itself for the cause and urges solution from within. As Mahmutovic (2010) pointed out, "Okri . . . describes Nigeria and Africa in general as the quarry of infinite riches which are squandered by spiritually sterile elites (both indigenous and colonial) who have switched to the worship of new imperialist gods" (Mahmutovic: 7-8).

It is acknowledged that the West African novel of spiritual outcry started with *The Interpreters* (1965) but the tradition is taken one step further by Okri who introduced the unusual perspective of a spirit child as narrator (Azaro in *The Famished Road* 1991) which in many ways signaled a new dimension to African literature. Okri combines myth and Western literary traditions, giving surrealistic deals that make such works as *The Famished Road* and *Songs of Enchantment* (1993) unique in their combination of the techniques of realism, modernism and African oral traditions a mixture that creates a powerful dialogue between Europe and Africa. Bennet had described *The Famished Road* (1991) as "clearly a literary tour de force that virtually defines the vanguard of

contemporary African literature”. Quayson, (1997; quoted in Mahmutovic, 2009) had earlier remarked that Okri’s style is a metaphor for the reality of African cultural factors in the struggle to achieve a coherent understanding of their place in the world”.

It is almost impossible to discuss the works of Okri’s to the exclusion of magical realism. This poetics, initially peculiar to South America has become established in postcolonial discourse, and as Faris remarked:

It is not too much to say magical realism constitutes the most important trend in international contemporary fiction. Its widespread distribution particularly among novelists like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, and Ben Okri, among others, who have made the world at large their homeland, suggests that it constitutes a discourse for a kind of international literary diaspora, a fictional cosmopolitanism of wide application (Faris, 101).

The narrative strategies of magical realism have been acknowledged as a decolonizing poetics which permits new voices and traditions to be heard within the main stream. Faris opined that in addition to its disruption of realism and reimagining of history, perhaps another reason why magical realism has played an active role in literary decolonization is that many of its texts reconfigure structures of power and control (Faris 111). Slemon also added his voice, remarking that read as post-colonial discourse, magic realism can be seen to provide a positive history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity. Much earlier, Brenda Cooper had expressed her views on the genre of magical realism in African literature as “thriving on transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity. She noted: “such zones occur where burgeoning capitalist development mingles with older pre-capitalist modes in postcolonial societies and where there is the syncretizing of cultures” (quoted in Barker, 2008: 10). This appropriately fits the location of Okri’s works: Nigeria where the old always clashes with the new.

This research is an in-depth examination of the topic of the study focusing on such key issues like: postcolonialism and literature, propositions on which the study is based, viz, that the works of Armah and Okri, are axiomatic of the postcolonial legacy of displacement and hybridization; bestowal on the novel form an African character by postcolonial legacy, postcolonial theory as a viable tool for analyzing how the novel signifies the colonial experience. It also explains the major motivation of the study as the need to fill an important gap in the well-critiqued works of Armah and Okri within the context of African literature. The study also extensively discusses the analytical framework that gives the theoretical prop to postcolonial literature and briefly profiles the authors-Armah and Okri, as postcolonial African novelists.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

Because postcolonial literary studies itself is a convention studying the aftermath of the colonizing powers (A. Sekula, 71) analyzing the writings of African authors like Armah and Okri within the context of postcolonialism is not only apt but also inevitable. Both writers produce literature that fall within a significant period. In spite of the skepticism over chronological interpretation of the “post” in the theory, there is a consensus that it nevertheless serves as a historical marker for the period after formal decolonization.

Moreover, even though some critics do situate some of Achebe’s works within postcolonial literature in spite of such writing being rooted in colonial or pre-colonial times, it is Armah and Okri among some others, who as second – and/or third generation African writers, that clearly belong to the post-independence period. Thus their themes as well as scenes reflect their societies that emerged after colonial rule.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial discourse is a theoretical, analytical and literary resistance to colonialism and imperialism in all ramifications. It facilitates the dismantling of existing established Western stereotypes of the colonized peoples whereby past distortions are corrected and reconstructed from their (i.e. colonized peoples) own viewpoint. The colonial enterprise had as its backbone the dominant ideology of Western superiority and the accompanying cultural oppressions, which was indeed justified as an altruistic mission to “civilize the natives” and remold them in the European image – based on those ideas inspired by such European supremacists as Joseph-Ernest Renan, the French

philosopher who wrote the book *“La reform intellectual et morale (1871)* and G. F. W. Hegel, a German philosopher in his essay, *The African Character (1930)*, Hegel’s point of argument was that some cultures lagged in their development and needed Christian-European stewardship to mature towards civilization. Colonization, to which postcolonialism is a response, was defended by its protagonists, wherein Bello-Kano (2002), (quoted by A. Sekula 2007: 62) remarked thus:

Europeans were considered cultured because they were the best: blacks were inferior because they lack reason. Europe and reason, race and nation became synonymous so that Europe was thought to be the centre (metaphysical and physical) of the world, where Reason, Feelings, Love, Imagination, Geist, Spirit and the like had come to full maturity. The non-European, on the other hand are said to be inferior and savage.

Thus postcolonial literature seeks to deconstruct Eurocentric notion of the superiority of Western thought. The concept of postcolonialism deals essentially with the effects of colonization on cultures and societies. Even though there is no consensus on what the context, scope and relevance should be, and it has been subjected to various interpretations as a critical ideology, one fact is established: postcolonialism is not simply a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. A critic, Simon During (1990) suggested that ‘postcolonialism’ should be seen as ‘the need, in nations and groups which have been victims of imperialism to achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images’ (Xie, 1997: 7).

This position is, however, rejected by critics like Linda Hutcheon, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, who posit that there cannot be an “uncontaminated” or “indigenous” postcolonial theory. Hutcheon, for instance, argues that “the entire postcolonial project usually posits precisely the impossibility of that identity ever being “uncontaminated” because postcolonialism designates a subversive discourse within Eurocentric culture

rather than outside it. Spivak, on her part, suggests “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value seeking” instead of constructing indigenous theories of ignoring the last few centuries of historical involvement; while Bhabha advocates the shifting of the focus from the colonized/colonizer confrontation by adopting the Derridian difference on postcolonial terrain, re-branding the colonial subject and colonial discourse in terms of the in-between (Xie, 7).

Yet another set of critics-Ella Shobat, Anne McClintock and Arif Dirlik see those other critics as downplaying contemporary power relations. McClintock, for instance, posits that the term ‘postcolonial’ is a premature celebration of the pastness of colonialism; while Dirlik sees postcolonialism only as a progeny of postmodernism, and postcolonial critics’ most original contributions consisting in their re-phrasing of older problems of third-worldism in the language of post structuralism. Although he gives postcolonial critics credit for engaging “in valid criticism of past forms of ideological hegemony”, he blames them for covering up “contemporary problems of social, political and cultural domination”. Like McClintock, Shobat objects to the use of the term post colonialism which implies that “colonialism is a matter of the past”, insisting that global hegemony persists in forms other than overt colonial rule. She argues that the term would be more precise if it were “articulated as a ‘post first/third world’s theory, or ‘post anti-colonial critique’. Her argument though, presupposes that the postcolonial ideology is a chronological label, which it is not.

Their rejection of the term ‘postcolonial’ is premised primarily on its rather disheartening interpretation of “after the demise of colonialism” even though Gyan Prakash insists that “the postcolonial exists as an aftermath, an after-after being worked

over by colonialism” (Xie, 8). Whatever the argument, the historical situation of post colonialism as a concept falls within the period “after the colonial era” because as Xie (9) argues postcolonialism rose as a result of this historical need to deconstruct residues of older colonialism”. He posits that postcolonialism, designates an anxiety to move beyond Eurocentric ideology, beyond colonist binary structure of self-other and ultimately beyond any form of racism. Prakash noted that postcolonial discourse benefits from Derrida’s and Foucault’s deconstructive readings of Western thought, which may explain why critics like Dirlik insist that postcolonialism is a progeny of postmodernism and that post colonialism began “when Third World intellectuals have arrived in the First World academe” though the credit for the movement of colonial discourse into the First World academe and into literary and cultural theory goes to Edward Said who, following Foucault’s belief, declared, “Power and knowledge are inseparable” (<http://www.scribd.com/search? Cat=solrrq=post+ colonial+ theory+ presentation>). Alex Calinicos also linked postcolonial thought to postmodernism.

Despite the concerns of critics such as San Juan, Aijaz Ahmad and Ella Shobab, postcolonial studies continue to be imagined by postcolonial critics as a form of intellectualism that is particularly political. Leila Gandhi, for instance, argues that postcolonialism’s proposal for a non-violent reading of the colonial past through an emphasis on the mutual transformation of colonizer and colonized, and its blueprint for a utopian inter-civilizational alliance against institutionalized suffering is indeed, salutary (Jefferes et al 2006)). If therefore, some critics view postcolonial discourse from the political platform, it stands to reason that Marxists resent their exclusion from it, even though Mishra and Hodge (388) have defended that on the premise that postcolonialism

has evolved along lines that make a connection with Marxism even still difficult. That notwithstanding Neil Lazarus still expressed his anger thus:

The fact that postcolonial studies should have constituted itself as an arena of scholarly production within which Marxism occupies a very marginal status obviously poses a special problem for Marxist readers and writers whose specific investments and stockpiles of knowledge tend to remain unrecognized and undervalued in the field. (Mishra and Hodge: 389).

This sentiment is understandable against the background of Marxism being the antithesis of capitalism and (by implication) colonialism, which ought to have made its ideological credentials unimpeachable. That is why Lazarus sees the postcolonial theory as a write-off and that postcolonialism itself suffers lack of a systematic theory. His position is shared by Benita Parry and others who see a contradiction in postcolonialism in that it is a concept that advocates a return to historical memory as a people without a sense of the past, which can also not redeem their present. She (Parry), however, concedes that there is a common ground, which is modernity wherein she sees . . .

. . . a simultaneous commitment to the philosophical discourse of modernity and to its unique critique, the extraordinary command and respect (of foundational postcolonial theorists like Fanon and Cesaire, and writers like Achebe and Rushdie) for the European humanists (or bourgeois) canon existing alongside an equally extraordinary knowledge of other cultural works, social projects, and historical experiences, the necessary consideration of which cannot be accomplished on the provincial soil of European (or bourgeois) canon (Mishra and Hodge, 390).

Even though Marxism challenges postcolonialism of what may, be on ideological grounds Mishra and Hodge would have wanted the Marxists not to reject postcolonialism outright (as Aijaz Ahmed has done) but rather engage it on its own ground. Ahmed (Childs and Williams, 1997), accused Anne McClintock (herself a critic of postcolonial theory) of inflating the term postcolonialism to such an extent that “all territorial

aggressions ever undertaken in human history are included under the same heading” which would render the term analytically useless, whereas the definition of the postcolonial by Ashcroft et al (1989) is “. . . to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day . . .” because “there is a continuity of preoccupations” throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (Childs and Williams, 1997).

Much as historicity should be down played in the explication of postcolonialism, it would be impossible to ignore its historical perspective. Jan Mohammed, for instance, sees it as two different periods: dominant and hegemonic. But this rather neat situating is further complicated by Slemon who declared:

Definitions of the postcolonial of course, vary widely but for the concept proves most useful with a post-independence historical period in once-colonized nations but rather when it locates a specially anti-or post-colonial discursive practice in culture, one begins in the moment that colonial power inscribes itself into the body and space of its others-and which continues as an often occulted tradition into the modern theatre of neo-colonist international relations (Childs and Williams, 3).

Appiah, like Aijaz Ahmed, stands at the other extreme of the debate. His view runs contrary to what many key proponents argue in favour of postcolonialism. He stated thus:

Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a comprador intelligential, a relatively small Western-style, Western – trained group of writers and thinkers who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism as the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer, their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other and for Africa. (Childs and Williams, 18).

In contrast to this view is the rather mitigating, less belligerent view expressed by Mishra and Hodge that postcolonialism is a homogeneous category, either across all

postcolonial societies or even within a single one. “Rather it refers to a typical configuration which is always in the process of change, never consistent with self”. It is the homogenization of postcolonialism that so irks Appiah-and which Slemon, Ashcroft et-al, and other critics have been accused of. A middle ground to his suggestion by Childs and William is a model divided between oppositional and complicit forms, the former being the type that appears most strongly in post-independence societies, while the latter “is an always present underside within colonization itself”-pervasive but not universal (Childs and Williams, 19). They envisage a “new” postcolonialism, not fixed on questions of national independence but somehow a type which would become the literary dominant of postcolonialism. Aijaz Ahmed’s thinking is that postcolonialism is unacceptable because it apparently privileges colonialism as the structuring principle of other people’s histories, while in Anne McClintock’s view it implies commitment to a variety of Western concepts, all of which have troubled histories. The term is objectionable to her because it reinserts and recentres colonialism. (Childs and Williams: 20).

In spite of these rather strong views there are certain things that postcolonialism is not: it is not historical; it not an adjunct of postmodernism; it is not just a creation of a group of intellectuals. Postcolonial theory, as we have seen, embraces other contemporary critical theories ranging from feminism, post structuralism, postmodernism and even elements of Marxism- a multidisciplinary which certainly gives postcolonialism the complexity that seems to characterize it. But this does not mean that it lacks a systematic theory as Lazarus and Parry averred. It is just that its various theories see it from more than one perspective. Although, it is acknowledged that the

origin of postcolonial aesthetics lies in Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), its theory is rooted in Edward Said's *Orientalism*. (1978) His theory rests on the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, hence his "Us and Them", "self/other" binary relation which he argued, characterizes the relationship between Europe and its former colonies. The relationship generated cultural representations that are social constructs which are mutually constructive and cannot exist on account of each other, because each exists on account of and for the other.

In serving the colonial type of imperialism, the "Us and Them" paradigm enabled European intellectuals to misinterpret the Oriental world as inferior and backward, irrational and wild in contrast to a Western Europe which is superior and progressive, rational and civil. In the later work *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said analyzed a Western culture that has historically energized imperialism i.e. former colonial empires and control of resources of the people by a colonizing country. Here, the "same" (no different from the "Us") which Europe and the West has constructed, and the other which is the savage, primitive, non-European, as a mysterious and duplicitous "Other", which acted as a means of stabilizing and affirming the identity of the imperialist power. With this scenario, the task of postcolonial theory is to highlight the complex relationship between culture and imperialism, so as to show how imperialism created and excluded any overt reference to its practices.

Homi Bhabha popularized the terms "ambivalence" "mimicry" and "hybridity". In postcolonial discursive theory, ambivalence describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterizes the relationship between colonizers and colonized. Mimicry is an important term in postcolonial theory which describes the ambivalent

relationship between colonizers and colonized. It manifests when colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to ‘mimic’ the colonizer’s colonial habits, assumptions and values, resulting not in a simple reproduction of these traits but in a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer which can be quite unsettling. The mimic persons are almost the same but not like the colonizers. Mimicry’s contributions to postcolonial analysis are its subversion of the colonial master’s authority and hegemony. Hybridity is the interdependence and mutual construction of colonizer-colonized subjectivities, the contradictory and ambivalent space of cultural identity, the lack of unity and fixity in the meaning and symbols of culture. It is a kind of negotiation, both political and cultural, between the colonizer and the colonized. Bhabha, feels that the postcolonial world should valorize spaces of mixing; spaces where truth and authenticity move aside for ambiguity. This space of hybridity, he argues, offers the most profound challenge to colonialism(<http://www.scribd.com/search?Cat=solrRq=post+colonial+theory+presentation>).

Gayatri Spivak redefined the term “subaltern” within the context of postcolonialism to mean everything that has limited or no access to cultural imperialism. She also introduced such terms as “essentialism” and “strategic essentialism” to describe the social functions of postcolonialism. Furthermore, she developed and applied Michel Foucault’s term “epistemic violence” to describe the destruction of non-Western ways of perceiving the world and the resultant dominance of the Western way of perceiving the world. There is much similarity between her ideas and Said’s’ “Us and Them” binary relationship but Bhabha sees them as too complex, complicated and intertwined for easy isolation, in spite of the disruptive effect of that relationship on the colonized peoples.

Postcolonial theory is suitable for the discussion of postcolonial culture, especially mediated culture influenced by colonialism. It addresses matters of cultural identity, race, gender, ethnicity, art, history, effects of colonialism (past and present), anthropology, philosophy, linguistics, slavery, resistance and its suppression, migration, identity and religion. (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Childs and Williams, 1997; Lawal, 2012: 21). Postcolonial theory may be idealistic in some ways as it defends what does not really exist yet but by persistently calling attention to it, it is working for its actualization (Childs and Williams, 1997: 7). Nevertheless, this ideal has been embraced by the Third World most of which had experienced colonialism as a theory of emancipation and a means of dismantling entrenched concepts of Western imperialist philosophy.

Postcolonialism's many scholars and critics have continued to expand what the concept stands for. For instance, Shohat (1992), McClintock (1994) Mishra and Hodge (1991) called attention to the problematic of its theory in the chronological positioning, while noting that the theory itself lacks a definite methodological frame and serves only as a melting pot of other theories such as modernism, postmodernism etc. In any case, what is not in doubt is that postcolonialism is engaged in the dismantling of the idea of superiority of the West over its colonies, its philosophy, culture and civilization over others which is what the theories espouse in various ways. This dismantling is to be achieved through a systematic and intellectual redressing of the aftermath of the colonial encounter.

These poetics are the working tools of postcolonial analysis as they arise from the various interpretations of the theory. As A-Sekula (2009: 59) pointed out, the contemporary urban African is a creature of mixed traditions-in the mode of Bhabha's

hybridity. He is the sort portrayed in Okri's works—a creation of what was acquired from the colonial experience and his rural roots as well as through the influence of other cultures that converge in the city: a product of the 'collision of the urban polyvalence and emergent identity of the contemporary Nigerian society'. His characters, as Mahmutovich (2010:1) pointed out "no longer has access to rootedness and meaningfulness. They feel thrown or fallen into an inhospitable world in whose making they have not participated and which for the most part controls their development",

2.2 Literature Review

Armah's versatility ranks him among one of the most reviewed writers. His prodigious works include essays as well as many novels, most of which are Afrocentric, a trend that intensifies with every new publication. It is thus natural that his works always attracts criticisms and reviews.

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born (1968) was published almost exactly a decade after Ghana's independence, which coincides with Armah's own "coming of age" as a writer and was obviously conceived during Nkrumah's regime. The novel, like some other contemporary works "focuses on the sterility, corruption, and economic stagnation of an indolent ruling bourgeois whose chief task is to protect the investments of the entrepreneurial European prototype which it caricatures" (Wright, 1990: 29). For example, Baako in *Fragments* (1969) is caught in a dilemma. He returns from abroad, with an American education and filled with moral idealism, to a society that is westernizing but lacking in focus. Both the individual and the society are victims of interaction with the West and even though are at opposite ends, they are products of same system and its corrosive legacy. As remarked by Mazrui (quoted by Adeoti).

African societies are marked by conquerability, docility, malleability and fundamental inferiority . . . [and] the elite took over power from the colonialists, rather than dismantling colonial structures of social injustices oppression merely preserve them for opportunistic end” (Adeoti, 2005-3-4)

They are all creations of the encounter with the West but are caricatures of moral values.

In *Fragments* (1969) as well as some other works of Armah’s such as *The Beautiful Ones Are No Yet Born* (1968), *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972), *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979), *The Healers* (1979) there is evidence of variety in specific themes and narrative technique, but Adeoti detects one common factor: Armah’s attempt to grapple “with the trajectory of the continent’s history” which makes his work “biographical, sociological, political and ideological in orientation” (Adeoti:4). Armah also projects himself in some of his characters like Baako in *Fragments* (1969) and Modin in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) in his criticism of the type of education the West has imbued Africa with.

This ambivalence is reflected in the heroes’ frustration with the elite they interact with. The anonymous and nameless protagonist in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) is a creation of such dilemma of ambivalence. As Adeoti noted:

His motivation for movement is ironically not so much a striving to make things better, but a psychological response to failure ‘that would not let him rest in peace’ (46). His life shows how herculean a task it is to steer clear of corruption in a society with distorted social values. Essentially, he is a one-dimensional character who is not potent enough to challenge things around him (Adeoti: 7).

The character has similarities with Baako who returns from America - without the foreign material things his people expect of him and who he further disappoints by not utilizing his foreign-acquired education to join the elite club who use such as the means to

economic prosperity, social influence and political power. He is thus a failure, despised and rejected by family and colleagues.

In spite of thematic near-homogeneity, Armah's writings reveal qualities that range in variety to capture several elements of postcolonialism. In those works, the colonial past reflects upon, or even influences, the present: almost as if the societies operate in a continuum or "history repeating itself" albeit in a different way and under different circumstances. The former is described by Wright as "essentially a therapy and an exorcism", "a healing catharsis which prepares the decolonized mind for the planning of radical alternative to the societies left by the imperialists" (Wright, 38). This description aptly captures what is discernible from these works, which is, a reconstruction of a glorious African past. In the latter, a civilization is intruded upon and consequently destabilized or even outrightly destroyed by forces from without (Europe) and from within (collaborators). *The Healers* (1979) taps from history: the British conquest of the Asante Empire in the 1873-74 wars, and like *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) is an attempt at reconstructing history from the African perspective, in a more objective way, away from the Eurocentric distortion that only serve to justify colonial intrusion and the consequent destruction of subjugated peoples.

In the case of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) Armah reveals his disgust with the ruling class, both traditional and colonial, which preys on its people and his passionate attachment to pan-Africanism which he seems to believe to be the panacea for the ruinous legacies of colonialism. But in truth, this supra-patriotism is an ideology that seems to ignore or gloss over the disparateness of African societies and non-homogeneity of races within the continent, which makes his advocacy for a new sociopolitical order in Africa

look unrealistic and rather utopian. He seems, also, to have overlooked the fact that the “predators” in the novel refers to Arabs, whose habitat extends to the African continent.

However, that does not detract from what Kakraba (2011:48) describes as his “soaring commitment to good governance and the retrieval of African traditional values”. His works are described by Chidi Amuta as “novels of historical construction” [which] are meant to fight what he considers to be the injustices and atrocities perpetuated over the years by foreigners and also by Africans on Africans. He projects an ideal, which, though, unrealistic, is shared by analysts like Ogede (2000:4) who explained that “Armah’s fight can be defined as a radical quest for a new direction that can change the fortunes of Africa and the black people”.

Also, “*Two Thousand Seasons*” argues Kakraba “is a fight not only to rehabilitate Africans’ battered image but also to liberate it from slavery, distortion, and dislocation, its unique cultural identity” (Kakraba: 49); and of course, for a reconstruction of the history of slavery on the African continent. Kakraba is convinced that Armah’s novels, particularly *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *The Healers* (1979) are: “premeditated instruments of resistance, transformation and liberation [and] are counter discourses to colonialism and Europeanism” (Kakraba:59). Also Alexander and Theophilus (2011:257) note that he “does not criticize only Arabs and Europeans, who are historically the major facilitators of the slave trade but also some Africans”. They observe thus:

An objective analysis of the situation gives credence to the ambivalence evident in most of Armah’s works. Among the several factors identified by him as being responsible for the under development of Africans, as Adeoti (2005:4) pointed out is “the adoption of a sociopolitical formation that is dependent on Europe and America; exploitative economic system controlled by the West, assisted by a parochial self-centered elite pre-occupied with the accumulation of material possessions, and Western

oriented educational system which has produced a bureaucracy characterized by inefficiency, inconsistency, nepotism, etc.

There is also a consistent mood of pessimism in Armah's works from the very beginning, even where the attempt to reconstruct and rehabilitate Africa's past is central to the themes, and even in spite of the bitter resentment against the Arabs and Europeans as the historical despoilers of the people through slave trade and, later, economic hemorrhage, the part played by Africans as collaborators both then and later, does not escape censure. Africa's history is replete with intertribal wars which inevitably opened the way for slavery, including the domestic variety and internal colonialism. These were a prominent feature of pre-colonial Ghana, including the much celebrated Asante Empire in *The Healers* (1979) according to Perbi, a historian, who observed that slavery was not a cultural importation.

As Kakraba (2011:50) pointed out "she (i.e. Perbi) argues that in pre-colonial Ghana voluntary and involuntary subordination and subjugation existed that was not only tantamount to, but approximated in certain ways the characteristics of Western slavery". However, she concedes that Armah was right that the characteristic of a slave as a chattel was not part of the domestic Ghana slavery experience, adding that: "In Ghana the slave was regarded as a human being and was entitled to certain right and privileges" (Alexander and Theophilus, 2011:251). But Armah's notion of slavery does not stop at these well-known types. Critics like Lazarus (1990) believe that his attack extends to cultural slavery which has persisted in the African psyche even long after the abolition of other forms of slavery, thus his mission of "reconstruction and recuperation of the African history to cleanse and liberate it from European ideology, dominance and distortions" aimed, as he asserted "towards restoring to Africans the right to construct

their own truths in accordance with their own needs” (Alexander and Theophilus, 255). Thus Armah’s fight against slavery is a fight for decolonization, which Lazarus maintains is a novelty in African literature, more so because to him slavery is an institution created by racism rather than economic desire. But this may not be true of domestic slavery.

Even then, Armah employs race as a tool for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of African history. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, (1979) Arabs and Europeans are branded as “destroyers “and “predators” and the Eurocentric stereotype of Africa and its past is his impetus for reconstruction. Yet some contradiction is evident in his fight for cultural rehabilitation when viewed against his strong antagonism and contempt for the chieftaincy institution which colonial intrusion had eroded. The institution itself, though not peculiar to Africa, is the form of tradition and governance most familiar with Africans themselves rather than the egalitarianism which he promoted and idealized in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979). Like in most societies chieftaincy (including royalty) as an institution is the manifestation of strong leadership. Kingdoms and empires are founded and maintained by strong leaders.

Armah’s pan-Africanism may be too utopian, as Ojwan’g (1997:106) observed, because in projecting this idyllic picture he “ignores the question of ethnicity and other forms of specifying that occur within the continent”. His position seriously questions the notion that an “essential Africa’ existed before colonial conquest. This, undoubtedly, makes Armah to fall into the same error as his antagonists-the colonialists and neo-colonialists-who see the African only as “the African”, which Fanon (1907) had earlier thus commented on: “... for the colonist, the Negro was neither an Angolan nor a Nigerian, for he simply spoke of the ‘Negro’ ...” (Ojwan’g:107). This realistic

observation seems to stand Alkebulan's "defence" of Armah on its head. He had argued that the point Armah was making in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) is that social inequality, the operation, and allowing certain people to rule over everyone else—all of these things constitute a break from African tradition" (Alkebulan 2005). This can mean that Africa of the past was classless or without order. The 'glorious' empires and civilizations of Africa (and indeed, elsewhere) could not have been built on the ideals so portrayed. It is only a poor student of African history who would invent nostalgia for a *laissez faire* pre-colonial society which never existed.

Another irony verging on contradiction is the observation that Armah wrote *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) as a refutation of the thesis of Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* (1971) which was a revisionist portrayal of the myth of a glorious African past. This refutation by Armah himself may not stand on firm ground for the good reason that the much reviled Saif dynasty has parallels in the "destroyers", as observed by Wright (1989) in this way:

In the wake of the growing isolation of Algeria and other Magrib nations from the African continent, it is perhaps significant that some West African writers notably Ouologuem in "*Bound to Violence*" and Armah himself in "*Two Thousand Seasons*" opted for a hostile separatist vision of the north and for an imperial tradition of the Arabs as pre-European colonizers and destroyers in preference to the cooperative of Moslem and Negro working together to build magnificent sub-Saharan states that Europe destroyed.

In both novels, Arabs preyed upon Africans but the Saifs lorded it over the Africans, and Armah's Arabs did so, aided by African collaborators, so there can be no grounds for refutation. Ouologuem's Saifs survived through the era colonialism by collaborating with the French colonialists who had taken over their empire. The only real departure from these parallels is the redemptionist slave revolt in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979)

which has historical parallels with the Amistad insurrection and other slave revolts. Armah's racist feelings are barely disguised in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and it is significant to note ambivalence is also evident here as seen from the collaboration between the Europeans and the Africans.

Armah's reconstruction of Africa's past verges on utopianism. "The way, our way" cannot truthfully be idiosyncratic of most pre-colonial African societies, even though some critics may see it as "a fight to not only rehabilitate her battered image to also liberate it from slavery, disintegration, distortion and dislocation of its own cultural identity" (Kakraba, 2011:42; Alexander and Theophilus, 2011:254). It would be a distortion of history and reality to argue this on the premise of African homogeneity. However, what may mitigate this overstretched presumption is Ogede's conciliatory view that Armah's unambiguous depiction of the history of Arab debauchery, exploitation, humiliation and degradation of Africa and its people are intended to elicit shame (Alexander and Theophilus, 254). This is no different from Kakraba's plea that the novel be seen for what it precisely is: an attack on and exposure of the racist institution of slavery which "will definitely leave any white reader of the novel with a sense of uncomfortable remorse" (Kakraba, 2011:54).

Amuta concurs with the reconstructionist view, describing Armah's works as "novels of historical reconstruction" which are meant to fight what he (Armah) considers to be the injustice, prejudice and atrocities perpetrated over the years by foreigners and also by Africans on Africans (Alexander and Theophilus:253). This effort to rehabilitate the West's image of Africa is complemented by the gloom that is obvious in his writings. The common people remain pawns in the continuous game of exploitation played first

brazenly by the colonialists and later, subtly, in collaboration with the neo-colonialists and hypocritical revolutionaries. Other critics like Fraser (1980) and Lazarus (1990) see the extreme condemnation of the Whites as racist and indeed the later even labels Armah's anti-West sentiments as "racial essentialism" which "is not clarifying but instead simplifying and distorting, and not a spur to radicalism but instead a soporific, whose ideological consequences are extremism, fatalism and compounded mystification" (Alexander and Theophilus, 2011:256; Kakraba, 2011:53).

Armah's detestation of slavery (including, colonialism and exploitation) is explicitly expressed in his works, and the emancipation of the African is the thrust (as Ogede noted in his observation on *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *The Healers*) (1979). But it is debatable if inhumanity and slavery with associated cruelties are borne out of the culture of servitude that the African society inherited from the "destroyers and predators" as Armah posits in his reconstruction writings. The history of pre-colonial African societies disproves this.

Those who see racial essentialism in some of his works would certainly be proved right by *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) where the main white characters-Aimee, Oppenhardt and Jefferson are portrayed as patronizing, self-serving and ultimately "lovers" of the black race. From the onset, he shows them up as condescending hypocrites, thus supporting his presumed arguments that the colonial mode of exploitation and servitude provides the defective pattern for and is the key to all black-white relationships which are destroyed by inherited cultural stereotypes. Even the "revolutionary" Jorge Manuel, in a self-inclusive statement points out that "an African in love with a European is pure slave... with the heart of a slave, with the spirit of a slave"

and indeed, Armah's white women are "femme fatales". Solo, Manuel, Ndugu Pankasa, and of course Modin-had bitter experiences with their white lovers (Wright: 35).

Osiris Rising (1995) shares a similar theme with some of his earlier works, notably *Fragments* (1969) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979). Here, he shows his commitment to Africanism through the relationship between Ast, an African American and Asar, an African, as well as what Adeoti sees as a response to critics who accuse Armah's previous works of pessimism and sentimentalism. For in this novel he sees in both content and narrative style a concession to "the possibility for Africa's development and liberation, while casting off the burden of 'otherness' imposed on it by colonialism" (Adeoti:2). This is reflected in Asar's aim which is the liberation of African intelligence from Eurocentric educational systems with a revised syllabus which represents a major paradigm shift, whereby colonial history and literature are to be replaced by their African counterparts. As Wright (1996) remarked:

The redesigning of the educational system is underlaid by the broad political aims of seeding a long-term social revolution in Africa, and re-unifying the dismembered continents neo-colonial nation states (Wright:182).

Consciously, Armah as the author and unconsciously, Asar as his creation are in the process of reconstruction which he (the author), sees as the fulcrum of decolonization and consequently, of development.

The dismantling of Western thought inevitably involves a deep understanding of such poetics as hybridity, "Same-and-Other" relationships which characterize the colonized-colonizer binary relationships. Armah's works display decolonization themes especially through severe criticism of Eurocentrism. *The Healers* (1979) and *Two Thousand Seasons*', (1979) for instance reconstruct a glorious African past-which

Kakraba (2011:53) sees as “premeditated instruments of resistance, transformation and liberation-as well as counter discourse to colonialism and Europeanism”. That “...there seems to be a measure of agreement about the negative impact of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trade, Euro-Arabian domination as well as neo-colonialism of African’s wellbeing” (Adeoti:2005) is a vindication of Armah’s strong advocacy for decolonization which is a major theme in his works. Hybridity and ambivalence also characterize works like “*Fragments*” (1974) and ‘*Why Are We So Blest?*’ (1972). Even “*The Healers*” and “*Ten Thousand Seasons*”, both of which are reconstructions of glorious African past fit into decolonization paradigm.

Armah’s pan-Africanist predilection stand out in all his works including those reviewed in this chapter. So also his isolationist bent whereby in trying to urge Africans to take their destinies in their own hands and be less dependent on the West, he goes to the extreme of advocating a philosophy that does not recognize that even the much desired development cannot be achieved by Africans going it alone.

Whatever may be the demerits of hybridity and ambivalence, the truth is that right from colonialism to now, the former colonizer and the erstwhile colonized still need each other at various levels. Many critics hail Armah for his fervent nationalism and race – consciousness but gloss over the reality of hybridity which has become entrenched as a result of racial interaction.

2.3 Okri Works

Okri differs in many ways from Armah. The latter's earlier works are set in Ghana but he later burst the boundaries to embrace pan-Africanism (in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *Black Revolution* (in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972)). On the other hand, Okri's settings and characters are mainly in Nigeria and only occasionally in England. However, like Armah, he does not glorify colonialism but unlike him, looks within Africa (Nigeria, precisely) itself for the cause of its problems and probably the solution. And, as Hawley (1995:32) noted, he turns the problems of Africa into self-examination. As far as postcolonial issues are concerned Okri is not an isolated case but when viewed beyond the thematic angle to literary form, it is then his uniqueness becomes obvious-as an amalgam of surrealistic detail, traditional story-telling style and Western literary techniques, particularly magical realism. Bennett (2002) notes that Okri's fiction represents one of the most significant explorations of literary form in the canon of postcolonial African literature. Putting this in an even broader perspective is Douglas McCabe (2005:21) who said this of one of his works...

New age spirituality-not postmodernism or postcolonialism-is the most important cultural vector shaping "*The Famished Road* . . . [and] that the features often noticed by critics as distinguishing Okri's abiku novel-the adoption and development of "African" narrative modes and ways of seeing the world exists side-by-side with Western modes and ways, etc. are all importantly determined by and subsumed within new age spiritual discourse and its attendant politics so much so that "*The Famished Road*" verges on being a new allegory.

Okri's works often focus on contemporary Nigeria-politically, socially, and economically. For instance in *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), we see the contrasting conditions of the rich and the poor in the city. In *The Landscapes Within* (1981), we find the struggling, often ignored, artist-Omovo, who persists in painting the events he

witnesses around him. The stories in *Incidents At The Shrine* (1991) focus on individuals struggling to survive or at least mentally escape from their hard daily lives. Central to the stories in *Stars of the New Curfew* (1991) are contemporary issues like economic exploitation, political violence, social inequality, etc. He criticizes fundamental issues of corruption and violence in Nigeria, creating a voice for the poorest and most powerless members of the society. But because cultural confrontation between foreign and indigenous traditions in post-colonial Africa have been explored by many postcolonial writers it cannot be said that Okri's works introduce new themes to African literature. However, his fiction is one very significant exploration of literary form in postcolonial literature.

One other uniqueness observed in Okri's works for instance. *The Famished Road* (1992) and *Songs Of Enchantment* (1993) whose hero is Azaro, the spirit child, is that the author has participated in the redirection of contemporary postcolonial literature by effectively shifting his narrative strategy. Thus rather than focus on colonialism's destruction of African societies and cultures, he draws attention to their survival. Unlike other authors, including his contemporaries, Okri refuses to allow defeatism in his characterization. Azaro and his father in particular, symbolize the resilience in the face of many colonial and neo-colonial confrontations. *Flowers and Shadows* (1980), for instance, shares similarities with some postcolonial writings such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Rushdie's *Midnight Children* (1980). The book could have been an urban version of *Things Fall Apart*. Discernible in *Stars of the New Curfew* (1991) is the rich imagination, complex mythical imaginary and episodic adventures that are also found in works like Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* (1952) Gabriel Okara's

The Voice (1964) or D.O. Fagunwa's novels. Okri, through *The Famished Road* (1992) has turned what Gerald Moore once declared a dead end for African literature (with regard to Tutuola's literary style) into the catalyst for exploring new aesthetic directions based on the understanding of African folklore and less dependent on the limitations of the European novel.

Hawley and Olatunbosun Ogunsanwo have both given *The Famished Road* (1992) the label of postmodern because it mixes genres, cross-cultural boundaries and intertextual parody of both African and European traditions. They conclude that this derives from Okri's sensibilities which are rooted in African myths and literature which, McCabe disputes. But Bennett (2002) agrees with them, pointing out that the greater critical analysis shows more clearly how Okri has developed a uniquely African sense of postmodernism that derives from a creative extension of African folklore rather than being a derivative limitation of foreign postcolonial techniques. What Ouma (2011) sees is that the 21st century seems to be marked by attempts to deal with the identity and (dis)placement through the idea of childhood. He notes that concerns with identity began to shift away from focus on the nation to those of the individual. The abiku, as presented by Okri is not the usual cultural icon or merely a subject of cultural icon or merely a subject of transition but an iconoclast. Azaro in *The Famished Road* (1991) defies both his spiritual companions and his earthly relations by remaining in the physical form (Ouma: 9). Nnolim's remark embraces not only Okri's style and technique, but also how he presents characters the creates. He states:

If the current tendency of contemporary Nigerian novelists is to write naturalistic novels...novels that catch the characters in realistic, even animalistic, endeavours to break out from the encircling prisons of hunger, poverty, and squalor, in a society in which they are condemned to

grovel for existence, Okri's method, his technique is to create main characters whose experience is vicarious and whose lives seen through their experience (not action) are incomplete and restless because they are characters of sensitivity (Nnolim, 1999:2).

However, his further statement that Okri's protagonists respond to experience mainly through artistic recreation of their experience may apply only to some of his works. There seems to be some generalization in the statement because Omovo (in *Landscapes Within* (1981) and *Flowers And Shadows* (1980) is certainly of a different mold from Azaro and some of the other recurrent characters in his other works. Also, as noted by A-Sekula (2007) majority of the characters in *Stars of the New Curfew* ((1991) resort to criminal activities for survival, while Omovo and others seek escape through artistic activity.

Most of, if not all, the characters share a common situation: they are victims of oppression and frustration, and as A-Sekula noted, they are individuals in conflict with the social forces which inhibit their need for self-actualization. But equally significant is the general characteristic of rootlessness as we see in some of those economically deprived characters like Ifenyinwa (in *The Landscapes Within*) (1981), Cynthia's father (in *Flowers And Shadows*) (1980) and even Omovo and Jeffia who, being city-born and bred, have no roots in their villages and are drifters in the city. Thus A-Sekula observes:

Ben Okri's short stories revolve around the notion that the colonial experience and its aftermath have led to a fragmentation of individual identity and the rupture of his sense of responsibility to himself, his society on the one hand and the hybridization of cultures on the other (A-Sekula:120).

In her opinion even Hope, which keeps the suffering people alive and is a constant aspect of many postcolonial writings is often lacking in Okri's short stories and novels. The question then is: is Okri's a pessimist? He should rather be seen as a realist.

His characters, mostly urban or sub-urban dwellers, are those who live on the fringes of life both metaphorically and physically. Their plight as captured in his works is real and their lives of uncertainty is seen by some critics as the direct result of economic and social deprivation brought about by bad governance and corruption, perpetrated by the political elite who head post-colonial Nigeria. Okri's adoption of magical realism in these circumstances may serve as a sort of escapism for his characters.

Okri, according Maier (2013) denounces the new black elite's complicity with white colonizers which eased the latter's domination over the African continent and crippled its chance for progress and development after independence in spite of the availability of resources. The poor are either victims of the rich or of their own passivity and ignorance-two drawbacks that turn the poor into easy preys. Maier describes the characters as liminal "like the space which they inhabit" and because of this their identity is a delicate issue: it either destroys them or helps them cope with a new location or social order.

On the characters also, Mahmutovic (2010) observes that they no longer have access to rootedness and meaningfulness. He remarked:

They feel thrown or fallen into a inhospitable world in whose making they have not participated and for which for the most part controls their development...this fundamental insecurity or existential angst signals to the characters that something is not quite right with their social system and that it may deprive them of freedom (Mahmutovic, 2012).

As A-Sekula noted, Okri uses Nigerian folktale and mythology to explain the profundity of the alienation, the dislocation from reality and the loss of identity that afflict postcolonial Nigeria (A-Sekula: 136). However, he adopts magical realism as a style. Jacques Stephen Alexis was the first to use magic realism, as it was first called, in

the wider postcolonial context, arguing that in many postcolonial societies, a peasant, pre-industrial population had its imaginative life rooted in a highly living tradition of the mythic, the legendary and the magical. He asserted that the mythic traditions were not alienated from the people nor were they mystifications but rather were the distinctive feature of their local and national cultures, and were the collective forms by which they gave expression of their identity and articulated their difference from the dominant colonial and racial oppressors.

Okri's adoption of it for his writings may be deliberate, which makes it conform to Alexis's thesis and also the most suitable technique for responding to this theme for the reason that according to Mrak (2013) "its specific narrative device makes (it) a viable form for rendering traumatic experience and memories. As he explained:

In reading an aboriginal literary text through the lens of the western literary tradition, one invariably runs the risk of appropriating it to the laws and convention that construct western literature. Yet magical realism re-evaluates hegemonic discourse in order to accommodate alternative/marginalized ex-centric perspectives which render it a powerful tool for post-colonial interrogation (Mrak: 1).

He states further that magical realist texts have the capacity to address the issues of marginalization and exclusion of the "other" from discourse and power relations and are thus notable for "their in-betweenness, their all-at-onceness (that) encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural features" (Mrak: 4).

Loss of identity also characterizes the urban lives of Okri's creations. Ifeyinwa (in *The Landscapes Within* 1981) and Cynthia's father (in *Flowers and Shadows* 1980) are economically deprived urban dwellers who have been uprooted from their homes of birth. In fact, even characters like Omovo and Jeffia, who are city born and bred are outsiders from their indigenous villages (A-Sekula, 2007:85). Okri employs Nigerian folktale and

mythology to explain “the profundity of the alienation, the dislocation from reality and the loss of identity that afflict postcolonial Nigeria” (A-Sekula:136). The identity crises is also evident in his characters as creatures of hybridity. The urban Nigerian is, and yet not really, part of his rural grassroots and the city elite, his exposure also makes him a creature of multiculturalism. In juxtaposing the dominant themes with the literary style.

Mrak’s explication summarizes Okri thus:

Magic realist texts have the capacity to address issues of marginalization and exclusion of the “other” from the discourse and power relations, and are thus notable for their in-betweenness, their all-at oneness that encourages resistance to monologic political and cultural structure (Mrak, 2013:4 quoting Zamora and Faris).

As he sees it, magical realism is an effective tool for postcolonial and/or Aboriginal authors to present their singular perspective on politics, culture, and history.

Leila Gandhi’s perception of magical realism is that:

“... despite its limitations, especially the danger of a utopian celebration of hybridity camouflaging severe socio-economic disparities, the risk of investing the postcolonial literary text with Romantic revolutionary powers, and the prescribing of hybridity for postcolonial culture, the post national promise of a genuine cosmopolitanism remains seriously appealing” (Faris: 117).

This agrees with Faris’s own view that magical realism possesses irreducible elements in the hybrid mode that ultimately destabilizes realism which has a long standing power of representation in the West, and that has made magical realism an enabling discourse for the postcolonial world (Faris:113).

Bennett’s observation is that by extending the scope of the novel to include mythical dimensions Okri participates in another redirection that is characteristic of contemporary postcolonial literature (in that) he effectively redirects his narrative

strategy to minimize the significance of the colonial master and maximize the experience of the postcolonial subject.

One common factor in the themes of the writings of Armah and Okri is the alienation and isolation of the key characters from the societies in which they live. This is more evident in the works of Okri selected for this study. Armah's pan-Africanism, nationalism and anti-racist racism are more pervading in most of his novels which are outside the purview of this research. But both authors portray the societal decay which Okri localizes within urban Nigeria, while Armah does not necessarily situate it in his home country particularly where racism is the major theme. The quest for identity is also a key point both authors explore, whether it be within urban slums or transcontinental.

The reviewed works shows Armah's fervor on issues pertaining to Africa and the Black race. This shift in focus became obvious almost immediately after the *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1978) although, along with *Fragments* (1969) the depravity of the political leadership which hinders development are intensively depicted. However, Okri is more subtle and indirect in his portrayal of the same leadership, except if the depth of his indictment is understood through the social deprivations which his writings highlight.

The key issues of this research, i.e. race, identity, hybridity, and rootlessness resulting from urbanization are missing or only perfunctionarily treated in the works reviewed, the exception being race in the case of Armah. An important gap is that of the downtrodden as an individual which goes down deeper when Okri's works are examined from the social focus.

CHAPTER THREE

The Ambiguities of Race and Identity Relationships in Armah's *Why Are We So Blest?* And *Two Thousand Seasons*

3.1 Introduction

In his writings Armah has consistently made Africa his focal point. In almost all his novels, he has shown commitment to fighting perceived injustice, exploitation and oppression not only by foreigners but also by leaders of African nations. Very often he expands his angst to include the Black race in general even though he often portrays them as victims of racism and colonization. With the exception of *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Fragments* (1969), Armah's novels are either Pan-African in approach or universally Negritudist even though he himself has been highly critical of the philosophy of Negritude in spite of his strong ideas on revival and reassertion of the Black race. His later novels, which includes *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) advocate a return to traditional African culture which has sustained its society in the precolonial era, as a solution to her present challenges and the path to a glorious future.

Armah's opposition to Negritude may also have been an unconscious repudiation of Bhabha's theory on hybridity. Senghor and his colleagues who advocated a return to and respect for Black values were black intellectuals who had been thoroughly westernized. This is a situation Bhabha maintained was the natural outcome of the contact between the black and white races, the colonizer and the colonized, "Us and Them" which is inevitable and is a critical factor in postcolonialism. Though assimilated into the colonizer's culture, the promoters of Negritude saw cultural gaps that needed to be filled, they saw that colonialism had alienated the Black man and thus championed a return to and retrieval of the past.

Their aim was nationalistic and made sense then for colonized peoples who were already victims of ambivalence and in some extreme cases, of mimicry especially among the intellectual class. It is thus ironical that Armah would be at odds with people whose ideas of cultural retrieval predated his own and were equally concerned about the predicament of the Black race.

The novels, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Ten Thousand Seasons* (1979) are about retrieval and re-assertion which Nkrumah's fiery revolutionary pan-Africanist speeches and writings expostulated. However, Armah moved sharply away from his former hero's nationalism, dismissing it as 'falsifications of African reality' and 'doctrines designed to rehabilitate Nkrumah's battered psyche, wondering why he did not rely on indigenous technology instead of imported Eastern and Western technology' (Armah, 1967:24). His commitment to the improvement of the black race and Africa is genuine and deep but his views on the process of achieving this is very extreme and ignores the reality of race relationships.

His works reveal his goals of engaging the past in the process of creating a new future; a united Africa where geographical, ethnic, national, boundaries and political legacies of colonialism are collapsed; emergence of a new African identity untainted by any contact with the West. The last factor is amply illustrated in his depiction of his white characters. In *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) they are collectively referred to as 'destroyers', and in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) where they stand out as individuals they come up as negative characters: exploiters of Blacks in various ways.

Armah's works have such versatile qualities that make them explorable from several perspectives and in this regard, it is possible to discuss his writings in relation to

his Black Nationalist inclinations. In *Osiris Rising* (1995), for instance, Wright (1996) observed that Armah leaves “options for change open to Africa’s inventive and radical thinkers and the forms that group initiatives might take, in a neo-colonial world where power abuses of dictatorial regimes have made more issues irrelevant to the lives of their people” (<http://www.stor.org/statable/161744>).

It is against the background of his Black nationalism that other issues are woven into the themes of Armah’s novels. For example, he is passionate about the legacy of cultural imperialism which inevitably gave rise to cultural clash between the black and white races, and the consequent cultural assertion celebrated in his works. It is on this level that his works capture the confrontation between European and African patterns of thought which went through various stages of metamorphosis. At the initial stage it was confusion and disillusionment, which led to fragmentation of the Africa societies. The overwhelming relentlessness of this interaction inevitably led to compromise which thus enabled the aggressors to consolidate. As should be expected, the compromise has been an uneasy one as those resultant tensions still exist. Characteristically, he predicts victory for the Black race at the end, as evident in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *Fragments* (1970).

However, the piquancy of such issues is at times blunted by the ambiguity discernible in the tension between the revolutionary openness of nationalism on the one hand and the wish to exclude others on the other. This tension and the oscillations it creates influence the characterization in Armah’s novels. To a large extent, this explains why in spite of his obvious tone of radicalism its not easy to pin him down to a clear-cut ideology. For instance, despite the widespread appeal and frenzied acceptance of

Marxism by the intelligentsia of his own era, Armah perceives it as “demonstrably, as colonial, imperialist, assimilationist, European and racist, evolutionist, as its capitalist counterpart” (Wright, 1989: 268). This stance is in opposition to the position of the ideologues, nationalists, and intellectuals of African nations who regarded Marxism, before perestroika, as the antithesis and counterpoise to capitalism and remained the credo of liberation movements and African nationalists. But Armah’s position is that it is the same side of the same coin!

It can also be argued that although Armah’s advocacy for opposition to white exploitation of black peoples has been his rallying cry, yet he tempers his black nationalism with some liberalism.

As Wright (1989) observed:

Armah does not waste time blaming Europeans for dumping third – rate goods, ideas and definitions upon Africa, for the real question to be answered is why Africans themselves are so receptive, indeed addicted, to these things and therefore deserving of the contempt implied by the intellectual lassitude of the West in its recourse to Third World identity tags (Wright: 224).

It is not usual for a nationalist to hold objective views about what and who he opposes, but Armah here thinks that the blame should be shared between the West and Africans. However, he is a non-conformist who is also unsparing of his fellow African writers as can be seen from his remarks that:

As long as major African writers are happy to depend on Western publishers or their local placemen we shall remain blocked at pre-professional levels and it makes no sense for such writers “to attack African politicians for their chronic dependence on foreign patrons” whilst remaining “heroically mute about their own dependence on publishers in those selfsame imperial centres” (Wright, 1989: 274)

Armah does not hesitate to express his opinion on African writers especially those who comment on his works unfavourably and it shows from the above statement that he has no place for camaraderie with the literati, his own constituency. It can also be seen here that he has failed to see that hybridity characterizes black-white relationships in many ways. In fact his severe criticism of the failure of his fellow African writers to do away with foreign publishers is characteristic of the ambiguity portrayed in his works considering that most of his earlier works were published in the U.S. and Britain before he got involved with EAPH, and *Per Ankh* with which he is closely associated.

Armah's rather caustic comments on fellow African writers might be a reaction to his own ambivalence which tends to set him apart from them and this appears to be deliberate self-isolation. Ogede (1992) sees this as stemming from his (i.e. Armah's) belief that communication between the artist and his readers should only be through the media of his works. Armah had boasted that

Many African writers discuss their work and themselves quite willingly, sometimes even eagerly with Western critics, newspapermen, magazine pundits . . . I have never granted any interview about my person or my work, no matter how prestigious the publication asking for it. That is my choice. (Ogede, 1992: 441).

This may explain why another African writer and critic, Dan Izevbaye saw Armah as “one of the African writers who create taste for (their) own type of literary compositions by prescribing literary criteria and standards which are often more valuable in the appreciation of (their) own works than for the criticism of other works” (Izevbaye, 1971: 27, quoted by Ogede, 2000).

Ogede (1992) also observed that Armah had an axe to grind with Achebe, a fellow African writer with whom Armah had much in common but he accused Achebe of

capitulating and becoming a purveyor of what he regarded as Western racist assumption. Achebe's "sin" was that he alleged Western influences on Armah's works just when he was joining issues with the critic, Charles Larson over the latter's unsavoury comments on his works to which he responded with a full essay entitled "*Larsony or Fiction as Criticism of Fiction*" (1976) (Ogede, 1992). Armah over-reacts to criticism of his works even by fellow African writers who certainly mean no harm, yet he seems to be contented with his seclusion which is itself ambivalent as a writer who wishes his message to be heard should not expect it to be a dialogue of the deaf. Critics and criticism may be irritating because irrational assumptions are inevitable, but they are certainly unavoidable. This is what makes Izevbaye's comment appropriate.

That ambiguity beclouds his ability to acknowledge the reality of hybridity in race relations is further illustrated in his statement that: "If we Africans were to rise from the abyss of exploitation and contempt, we should be obliged to do so against murderous opposition from the West, America in the lead, the same way the Chinese, the Vietnamese, and the Cubans had" (Lindfors, 1997: 81). But he continued in the same breath: "And yet, my personal truth was that the Americans were my hosts, excellent ones at that. From my first minute in America, I'd been treated courteously and kindly, and persons who were by reckoning part of that country's power elite had made me a welcome friend in their homes" (Lindfors, 81). It would appear as if by this statement, he is separating Armah the writer from Armah the person. It is the former that is seen through the portrayal of Modin in *Why Are We Blest?* (1972).

Armah's shifting and contradictory positions on key issues makes any attempt to ascribe to him an enduring label or tag difficult. It is not easy to determine when the

stated hatred for political America expressed in the first statement developed because the literary world is more familiar with the persona behind the anti-West, anti-white tone that unarguably characterizes his works. From these statements, it is difficult to distinguish between Armah the angry writer and Armah the appreciative guest of the kindly Americans. Also, his stance towards feminism can be surmised from the same equivocal posture. Although neither overtly feminist nor anti-feminist for that matter, the portraiture of his female characters is tinted with racism. While Anoa and Idawa (in *Two Thousand Seasons* 1979) are depicted as beauties with “no disappointment”, Prince Bentum’s white wife is described in the most unflattering terms; Aimee, Mrs. Jefferson and Maria, are depicted as sex-starved, heartless and psychopathic white women whose sole aim is to prey on African men. These are key issues around which the concepts of race, identity and relationships in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) are explicated in this study.

3.2 Black – White Binary Relationships

In *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) Armah shows the complexity of black-white relationship. Almost from the beginning of the contact between Africa and the West it has been characterized by such issues as racial tensions in both overt and covert forms: exploitation first through slavery and later through colonialism, mutual distrust, and neo-colonialism which is often disguised as inter-dependence. These have been the defining factors in the relationship. Exploiting its self-ascribed ‘master race’ philosophy, the West has been unable to adjust its psyche to putting others (i.e. blacks and other colonized non-whites) on a pedestal of equality which it so enthusiastically advocates for all mankind.

Racism is inexplicably linked with imperialism because, as Pieterse (1990: 223) observed, it is “part of the intestines of empire”, which re-emphasizes the importance of race as one of the key elements of postcolonial discourse in which post-colonialism itself is seen as contemporary as well as part of the long history of colonialism. Quoting Pagden (1995), Bush noted that from the Spanish conquest of the Americas ideologies of cultural and racial superiority legitimized conquest and enslavement and confirmed Europeans’ perceptions of themselves as “Lords of the World” (Bush, 28). This attitude has implicitly remained the ideological basis of the relationship between the West and the “others”.

Black nationalism is reflected in all of Armah’s works. In *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) Modin came face to face with racism in America, the bastion of overt discrimination against black people, and in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979), Armah captures a pristine pre-colonial Africa, a heterogenous community that has coalesced into

a single nation, later to be befouled by intrusions from Arabs (“the predators”) and Europeans (“the destroyers”). The interdependence or hybridity of the races as depicted in his characters is the inevitable sequel to racial contact amidst the undercurrent of tensions engendered by inequality as one of the races assumes superiority over the other. The novels show that interaction between the races is inevitable and any attempt at separateness is often a failure because they are bonded by a symbiotic, even if unequal and uneasy, relationship, as we have seen in the apartheid regime of South Africa.

A black person like Naita did not even accept that there can be anything good in black-white relationships as she reminded Modin that: “There’s nothing like friendship between them and us” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 123). She saw no wrong in a black exploiting a white if he got the chance, which Modin would later understand only after his encounter with Oppenhardt who along with his African Education Committee, he came to see as symbols of cultural imperialism whose ‘philanthropic’ projects were aimed at luring young Africans to America to acquire education that was designed to re-engineer their minds and inculcate American values into them. He came to the conclusion that his friendships in America were no more than “invitations to different kinds of death, calls for a spiritual disintegration far beyond the merely social disintegration Africa has suffered since many centuries” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 159). He saw his situation as symbolizing the plight of Africa since its first contact with the West.

Armah might as well be expressing his own experiences and observations through Modin. The stifling constricting feeling of being in a country where racial issues pervade almost every aspect of life in one way or another increased Modin’s disillusionment just

as it did to Armah himself who had to leave Harvard just a few weeks before his final examinations due to the controversy that arose over his involvement in the formation of a “blacks only” campus club (Lindfors, 1997). It might have also influenced his convictions that were verbalized through Modin that: “The educated Africans, the Westernized African success are worms... Happy to get the degree, then go home and relax on the shoulders of our sold people. The end of a Western education is not work but self-indulgence. An education for worms and slugs” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 161).

Ogede also sees Armah’s abrupt exit from Harvard, the same way as does Lindfors. He (Ogede) agrees with Robert Fraser’s observation that the mood Armah displayed in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) had very much to do with the race consciousness engendered by the administrations of Kennedy and Johnson as well as “the recent belligerency of the Reagan era” (Ogede: 52). Armah’s involvement in racial controversy in Harvard occurred at the time black riots were raging across the American South and for a youth who might have imbibed Nkrumah’s anti-imperialist ideology, the reaction should not be surprising. But the ambiguity in this is that he later returned to America not only to complete the abandoned degree course but also to obtain a master of fine art degree from Columbia University. It can be seen here that the author sometimes relives his experiences through his characters.

Racism was at that time, and even now is still, part of American life though the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King and others did much to stir white conscience which enabled the enactment of several civil rights laws that mitigated the worst aspects of it. But whether Armah’s volte face was due to this development or his growing out of youthful exuberance, it is undeniable that he failed to acknowledge the

inevitability of hybridity in black-white relationships. If he was that angry with the country he would not be keen to return there for further education. He would have acted like Modin, his fictional alter ego did by turning his back completely on the country.

Modin decided to abandon his studies when he saw Oppenhardt and his African Education Committee as a camouflage for cultural imperialism rather than its declared objective of lifting the poor peoples of the world out of the legacies of colonialism and other horrors of suppression and exploitation which Naita offhandedly dismissed as “propaganda” as the Committees’ magazines only showcased development projects where “black people were being helped by white people” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 108-9) Modin had likened Oppenhardt’s scholarships to Greek gifts, payment for obedience rather than appreciation for intelligence and the reward was that the beneficiary would imbibe American values along with its education and ultimately become the promoter of such values in his home country as foreign-acquired university education had placed him among the elite and opinion-moulders. Simply put, it is education designed as a tool for cultural imperialism.

Race is a prime factor in Modin’s relationships with American women and its manifestation became his nemesis. He barely escaped being murdered by Professor Jefferson over his wife and his rather stormy romance with Aimee would ultimately end with his death at the hands of white racist terrorists on the desert road in Laccreyville where she had inveigled him into attempting to join a revolutionary struggle along with her. When they showed up at the Bureau, the reception was tepid. Solo, the invalidated freedom fighter was quick to notice in Aimee “the hyperactive embodiment of that energy, that hatred that has impelled Europe against us all” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 229),

and wondered: “What is the root of this fatal attraction, this emotional fixity drawing us to these daughters of our white deaths?” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 230). The white deaths are the white race seen collectively as the cause of the dehumanization of the black race.

Although Armah’s male characters - Modin, Solo, Manuel-expressed or affected deep hatred for the white race, they were at some point involved in romances with white women. Manuel’s case was even the most contradictory among others. He was a product of black-white romance as his father was Portuguese and he had Maria, a white as a secret mistress but he would declare that any African in love with a white is a slave: “A pure slave with the heart of a slave, with the spirit of slave” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 255). This was enough for him to dismiss Modin’s and Aimee’s request to join the revolutionary movement.

The undeniable irony in the utterances and actions of Manuel and that ilk, smacks of denial of hybridity. The complexity of the romantic lives of the male characters reveals that black-white relationship is not easily discountenanced or dissoluble as it may appear on the surface. The progression of this interaction over the centuries is such that it has become quite intricate. The black race cannot count many plusses for its association with the white because it has been one of an unequal partnership even though at the same time symbiotic and inevitable. The inequality, though, suits the white race’s purpose because it strengthens its position as the exploiter and the black race has realized that it cannot be severed no matter how tension-riven it is.

This master – slave, relationship is exhibited even by those who are not pure whites. Although a half caste Manuel was an official of a black liberation movement who displayed a character trait not different from that of a typical colonial master. He had

under him at the Bureau, Esteban Ngulo, a committed black revolutionary who he treated in such a way as to attract Solo's observation thus: "But for how long would it have been possible not to see the lighter brother drank spirits upstairs with suave travelers, while down below the black one licked the tasteless backs of stamps?" (*Why Are We So Blest?* 151).

The complexity of racial relationship is brought out here by the fact that even among Blacks, there is some form of racism which determines the hierarchy. By racist categorization Manuel is also black but he feels superior to the truly black. It shows that the hybrid black in a predominantly black environment creates power around himself when the opportunity presents itself. Thus the power elite perpetuate inequality and domination. If and when Congheria won its war of liberation, the likes of Manuel would emerge at the top echelon of a socially stratified society. Even as the fight for freedom was still on it was obvious that the state which would emerge would not be one founded on equality which should have showcased a people with a common cause or destiny. Ngulo, sadly, typified the black who has come to accept the helplessness of his situation. Even leaders who were once freedom fighters may not become nation builders once in possession of power.

Racism has existed since the beginning of contact between blacks and whites but the American brand stands out because it has been so entrenched and it still exists in the psyche of the whites in spite of strides made in recent times in de-officializing it through civil rights laws. This reality is succinctly put by Graves (2002) who remarked that:

American systems of racial imbalance, segregation, and disenfranchisement, in other words, are every bit as "Post-colonial" (perhaps even as "Colonial") as the legacies of imperial rule in developing countries. What's more, because of its racial, religious, and cultural

homogeneity, the USA becomes a particularly volatile site of colonial contestation for political visibility and/or dominance. White racism against blacks for instance, is itself a form of colonial aggression (Graves <http://wwwpostcolonialweb...>)

In other words, racism in America, whether overt or covert has become a way of life. Hence, Modin's experiences in white American society should be seen within the context of Graves' equation of the blacks of not only America but elsewhere, who have gone through colonial experience. It must be noted that the presence of African-Americans in the Americas and in the New World is not a historical coincidence. The exportation of millions of Africans across the Atlantic occurred at the period the African continent itself was being penetrated and consequently colonized.

Hence racism is not only against colonized Blacks in Africa but also against the descendants of enslaved Blacks in America. Thus it is logical to see American racism and racism in general, rooted in colonialism and slavery as the beginning of hybridization and unequal association. Black labour contributed much to America's development yet its racism upholds a philosophy of exclusivity which hybridization has complicated, because of the resultant inter-dependence of the races..

However, the scenario Armah created in *Why Are We Blest?* (1979) provides a counterpoise to Graves' further observation that: "Portrayals of race in literature has throughout the Nineteenth century (and arguably through the present day) sought to "naturalize" and therefore legitimate the racially marked body as innately or irreducibly inferior". It is therefore a deliberate stratagem by Armah to characterize the Blacks in the novel as resolute persons. Modin, Naita, etc. are not portrayed as Uncle Toms. Armah's message here is that Blacks are not inferior to whites.

Very few analysts would fail to see explicit racism as the moving force behind *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) where Armah captures in fiction what J.P Clark had earlier exposed in non-fiction in *America Their America* (1964). But the reactions and reception are hardly the same, more so for critics on both sides of the racial divide. While black critics generally analyze it with obvious approval and righteousness, their white counterparts do so with muted indignation. Fraser, (1978) for instance remarked that “Armah is not humanly affected by his white characters since he is interested only to mark them out as agents of destruction” (Fraser, 43). Looking at Armah through Modin and Solo, he went further to explain the white readers’ feeling of being hard done by thus:

“It is evident that both Dofu and Solo subscribe to a certain historical and political case, which may be expressed in the form of a loose syllogism.

1. The influence of white civilization of African people has been and must be perforce ever be, entirely corrosive
2. We, the *evolves*, have been induced into a position of acute dependence on the white world
3. We therefore owe it, to ourselves and our people to destroy this dependence by force if necessary (Fraser, 45).

Fraser was simply expressing his discomfort with Armah’s bluntness in putting the blame of the woes of the Blackman at the doorsteps of the Whiteman. This tongue-in-cheek comment shows that Fraser could not accept the political and historical justification behind the expression of what Armah has tried to convey through the two characters. He interpreted Armah’s advocacy for racial separateness as a solution to black backwardness, which he was also quick to attribute to the events that took place in

America while Armah was there: “The notion that black salvation could only be sought in dogged separation was basic to much of the most challenging thinking of that time” (Fraser: 5). It would appear that if Armah had stayed longer he would have been drawn to the Black Panther ideology of separateness. But the truth is that Armah’s conception of race at this point, had no consideration for hybridity. He did not see the complication in each race going its separate way.

A similar and no less sarcastic evaluation of black-white relationships by another white critic is that:

. . . The black and white cried out for union. The African, full of vice, lost in the heathen darkness, needed light, civilization and Christianity. The Englishman, nigh choking with an excess of virtue and skill in government, brimming over with commercial prosperity and peace of God, was in need of virgin fields wherein to exercise his plentitude of arts. Thus was ordained the meeting of black demand and supply (Lindfors, 241).

This aptly captures the nature of black-white relationships and is the *raison d’être* for colonialism, but actually from the Whiteman’s own perspective. It is not certain if the Black per se desired a union but when it inevitably came to be, the white man was ready with a justification which, when closely looked at from Lindfors’ statement, was a union designed by the white man and for the white man’s benefit for it was he who determined the state of the Black man as well as his needs. If there are (white) people who see the issue in this way, then critics like Fraser need not grumble about how Modin and Solo (i.e. Armah) saw the whole race conundrum.

Armah’s attack on racism is similarly profound in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1970). Almost from the beginning of the novel, Armah’s Black Nationalism is evident as is his racial assertion. The anonymous narrator of the novel, acting as the collective voice of

the people, was unequivocal in stating with pride: “That we the black people are one people we know” (Ten Thousand Seasons 3). This affirmation is the centrum of the novel whereby Armah situates Black Nationalism as a transcontinental phenomenon, reinforced by the saga of the Anoa people’s migration from their original abode. In this novel, Armah is less restrained in his condemnation of even non-white races whose contact with Africa has been a sort of mixed blessing. One of the major reasons for the people’s transcontinental migration was to shake off the relentless menace of the Arabs (the ‘predators’) whose contact with them had been anything but mutually satisfactory. They started the odious African slave trade which came to be dominated later by the Europeans (the ‘destroyers’). Thus it is impossible to see both as friends to the Black race.

Armah’s Black Nationalism which critics like Ojwan’g, see as a variant of Pan-Africanism has come under severe scrutiny with conclusions that fall along racial lines. Although Fraser described *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) as a racist novel, some Africans have a different view. As Alexander and Theophilus remarked:

Armah’s fierce confrontation of the dehumanizing institution of slavery, an institution that was born out of racism more than an economic desire, is a novelty in African Literature. No African writer has attacked and exposed the racist institution of slavery thoroughly in a single novel as Ayi Kwei Armah has done” (Alexander and Theophilus, 2011: 256).

There is some justification in the white critics’ concern because Armah is unsparing of the Arabs and the Europeans whose roles in African slavery and slave trade is a historical fact that cannot simply be glossed over. And throughout the novel he consistently referred to them as “predators” and “destroyers” which he felt aptly described them.

As if in concurrence with other white critics, Wright felt that the caustic tone of the novel is a departure from the familiar “complex tensions of (Armah’s) realist fiction into the more categoric order of myth, the tendency to lay responsibility for all of Africa’s troubles at the door of the West (which) hardens in *Two Thousand Seasons*, into an obdurate racism” (Wright, 1990: 39). In other words, Wright faults Armah’s anti-racist racism. In truth, Armah’s generous use of such descriptive terms for the non-black races as well as their collaborators is enough to cause discomfort to any white or Arab reader, the attempt to objectively spread the blame notwithstanding. As should be expected, some of his African critics think those races deserve such epithets and that in some ways the descendants of those so described should have a taste of the lingering anger over the events of those centuries of infamy. But at least one African critic has also described the novel as a racial epic (Okpewho, 7).

In fact Ogede posits that Armah’s depiction of the history of Arabs in Africa as “one of debauchery, and the tales of exploitation, humiliation, and degradation caused by Arabs presence are intended to elicit Arab shame not merely indignation” (Alexander and Theophilus, 2011: 254). Hence, racism as seen in the novel by white critics differs significantly from how it is seen by blacks. The latter rightly or wrongly believe that those who had been responsible for the exploitation and despoliation of Africa deserve whatever names they are called.

Again, Armah’s Black Nationalism and his interpretation of it is illustrated in the novel by its unequivocal Afrocentricity. Ojwan’g viewed his conviction on Africanity (“essentializing of Africa”) as just another name for Armah’s ambiguous Pan –

Africanism. As he went further to compare *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1967), he observed that:

“In the earlier novel, Armah savages the nationalist bourgeoisie; it therefore comes as a surprise that in a later novel he adopts the monolithic precepts of their brand of nationalism ... the particular brand of nationalism in *Two Thousand Seasons* is indicative of a nativist backlash on Armah’s part. The sense of despair and unbelief that characterizes his earlier novels is falsely reserved by his mystical affirmation of Africanity in the later one” (Ojwan’g, 1995:115).

That is not the only ambiguity seen by Ojwan’g, as he went further: “In his projection of Africa as a unity, Armah ignores the question of ethnicity and other forms of specificity that occur within the continent” (Ojwan’g: 106).

It would seem as if Armah’s genuine desire and enthusiasm for Africa’s development has beclouded his sense of reality about the complexity of the continent and its peoples. He is over-simplistic in his convictions which tend to make him speak from both sides of the mouth. He invented the Anoa people as an ideal for African unity whereby people of diverse backgrounds become fused into one with a common purpose and identity. But such a creation is almost a repeat of the same mistake neo-colonialists have been making about Africa and Africans. They ignore the reality of the diversities of ethnicity, culture, folkways and Armah does the same with his “our way” creed of homogeneity. Even before the advent of colonialism, African societies had never had one single identity.

3.3 Black Nationalism and Perception of Negritude

Yet another contradiction in Armah's Black Nationalism is his attitude towards Negritude which had put him on the same side of the debate with Soyinka. When Senghor, Césaire and Damas originated this black ideology in the 1930s, it was meant to counteract white domination and to revive and re-assert the cultural values, identity and dignity of Africans and to glorify the achievements and beauty of Africa's past. But in *Battle for the Mind of Africa*, (1987), Armah declared Negritude irrelevant to the modern needs of Africans because it is "a blind summary of actual relations between Europeans and Africans from about the start of the slave trade to the latest adjustment programs designed in Washington, Paris, London, or Rome for adoption and implementation by an African elite that still refuses, out of sheer inertia and habit, to do its own thinking" (Armah, 62).

However, his works, like Soyinka's, are replete with the main features of the Negritude ideology. Soyinka's objection to Negritude may be for reasons not so much different from Armah's. According to Maduakor (1991) it is on the "the basis of its addiction to self-glorifying narcissism as well as its presentation of one – sided image of the African past" (Maduakor, 163) because by its "acceptance of the glory and indignities of the past, Negritude has ignored the bad side and for that reason Soyinka has subjected that ideology to a constant barrage of criticism" (184). This smacks of throwing the baby with the bathwater.

But also like Armah in one of his numerous lapses into ambiguity, Maduakor continues:

Soyinka is rather hard on Senghor and Negritude (although) his own writings are rather equally guilty of some of the charges he levels at Senghor. This novel *The Interpreters* is influenced by James Joyce and his poetry reflects the "toughness" of the neo-metaphysical poets such

as Eliot and Pound. But Soyinka is no less an African poet because of his response to these European influences (Maduakor, 288).

However, Soyinka put up a defence which is almost a mellowing down of his “tiger” and “tigritude” posture at the African Writers Conference in Kampala, Uganda in 1962. As Gakwandi (1982) recalled: “Talking about Negritude literature, Wole Soyinka has said:

I do not say nothing of this literature was valid or that there was not to be found in its genuine literary value. Only that the present philosophy, the present direction of modern Africa was created by politicians not writers and is this not a contradiction in a society whose great declaration to the outside world is that of a super – abundant humanism? (Gakwandi: 74)

This abatement in the severity of Soyinka’s perception indicates his concurrence with some aspects of Negritude even if he still holds on to the substance of his stand. But it cannot be said that he did a total volte-face. In any case, it is not Armah or Soyinka alone who voiced some misgivings about Negritude. Irele (1981) did also add his voice to the argument that:

The very idea of a unified African culture, on which theory of Negritude relies for much of its force has come under attack. The varied character of the different cultures and societies on the continent is stressed in this objection, so that the cultural concept that underlies Senghor’s theory is shown to be at variance with the sociological realities which the theory attempts to reflect (Irele, 84).

Irele’s comment can also be applied to the central theme of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) which is a unified African culture that he and Soyinka see as impracticable and farcical, and hence their reservations about Negritude. But Armah’s position is still uncompromizing, and his vehemence was such that he made it so personal as to refer to Senghor’s matrimonial preference by severely criticizing him for celebrating African fecundity and “swooningly extolling the beauty of black womanhood while being married to a white woman” (Ogede, 2000). This is either a show of ambivalence or

misplaced anger as in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) he effusively extolled African women: Anoa was “slender as a fale stack and suppler . . . her body was a deep even blackness that could cause the chance looker to wonder how it was that even the surface of a person’s skin could speak depths” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 15). Moreover, he has ignored the fact that in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) Aimée was eager to be part of the Black revolutionary struggle. Senghor’s white wife obviously shared her husband’s Negritude ideology otherwise Senghor would not have gone far as a flag – bearer of Black renaissance and remained married to her.

Achebe, on his own part, has not been that critical of Negritude. His tone was milder than Soyinka’s or Irele’s. As he remarked:

You have all heard of the African Personality, of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shan’t need any of them anymore. But for the moment it is the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better (Killam: 3-4).

Not for him the virulent criticism of Negritude. As far as he saw it, the ideology, like any other available one, could be a handy weapon for re-asserting the African identity after which it can be dispensed with it. This is not only much more sympathetic but it would help to efface any sense of betrayal Francophone Africans may have against Anglophone writers. French policy of assimilation certainly made a seemingly emancipatory ideology like Negritude acceptable to its formerly colonized peoples.

Black nationalists are wont to re-create or embellish Africa’s past. This is obvious in many of Armah’s writings, including *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) which is a re-creation of such a past albeit in fiction. However, it is in this novel that he came

down hard on Mansa Musa of Old Mali Empire whose reign and fame is celebrated by Pan-Africanists as the supreme symbol of African greatness. To Armah, however, it was sheer stupidity for the emperor to have acted the way he did (*Two Thousand Seasons*: 62). His famed pilgrimage to Mecca via Cairo in 1324-5 was “of such a magnificent scale as to excite considerable interest in Mali in the world of Islam” (Fage, 1969:22). The pilgrimage on which he was accompanied by 8000 slave retainers (according to Fage) and his extravagance in the gift of gold which caused value to fall in Cairo, was nothing but a show of vanity and profligacy and in Armah’s own conclusion, it only served to increase unholy interest in the African interior whereby the Arabs and, later the Europeans, as Isanusi reminded the people “would have us break up the mountains, take out what is good in them to give them” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 82).

Musa’s action, as Armah saw it, and by any rational thinking was inappropriate, and it might have helped to expose his Mali Empire and the rest of Africa for pillage. The “predators” and “destroyers” who descended on Africa from land and sea got their impetus from such thoughtless show of grandeur, opening the way for despoliation and degradation which today characterize the relationship between Africa and the West. If the novel, as a whole, is meant to re-create a great African past, Armah once again displayed his ambiguity by taking a negative view of an actual event that gave Africa some fame at that time. But it is a view that conforms with his and other African critics’ position on Negritude. Soyinka’s objection, for instance, is premised on his conviction that the ideology is based on “addiction to self-glorifying narcissism” (Maduakor, 286). Thus, Armah chose to see only the negative side of Mansa Musa.

Armah, among African novelists (Chinweizu would later follow), blames the Arabs as much as the Europeans for the humiliation of the race especially through slavery and slave trade. They (the Arabs) were “the predators who came as beggars” and were received in “our way” but they had treacherously exploited that hospitality after they made a discovery, to be further employed by the Europeans who followed on their heels, which was that “the capture of the mind and body is slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 33). The whites are branded with various unflattering names: pretenders, liars, traitors and ingrates and as Ojwan’g observed, “Armah regards the historical propensity of the European to colonize and the racism attendant upon this as some kind of psychopathology: the unappeasable violence of whiteness” Ojwan’g, 1997: 10). Armah may be advocating a harmonious co-existence, which would be out of character and out of tune with the aim of their intrusion in the first place.

If on the other hand, Armah is for what would now be seen as hybridization he may be closer to the point because the inequality in racial relationships can be said to have taken root since the first black-white contact. However, it may be what Ogede asserts, that “by presenting in his writing a sense of the horrors . . . degradation and humiliation of the experience of slavery, Armah participates in the process of racial engineering” (Ogede, 2001: 109). But what he can really be seen to have done is that he has re-enlivened the past into the present as a reminder to his and future generations of Africans that the development of their continent and themselves should no longer be entrusted to outsiders particularly those who in our yesterday had much hand in entrenching the conditions that today remain formidable obstacles to our progress. The

basic aim of the whites remains that of exploitation and in this they have collaborators among black leaders. This is what made Juma to make the remark: “Our chiefs, our leaders, they have bellies and they have tongues. Minds they do not have. This is the white destroyers’ happiness that is why the white destroyers will exhaust their long knowledge of murder to keep our rotten chiefs, our rotten leaders on top of us” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 146).

Armah sees black leaders not as pioneers or movers in quest of progress but active collaborators in the downward pull to retrogression. Their close association with the foreigners has made them malleable so they can be easy to manipulate for the purpose of misusing and abusing their people as it suits the whites. This situation can be juxtaposed on post-colonial Africa and a facsimile would emerge in the form of neocolonialism – the source of the oxygen for perpetuating the unequal relationship between Africa and the West after the political independence of colonized countries.

Ojwan’g however disagrees with Armah’s position on Pan-Africanism particularly as it is portrayed in *Two Thousand Seasons*: (1979) because “it assumes that all Africans related in one neat way in their contact with Europeans and Arabs as victims” adding:

Armah seems to be of the view that “real” Africans are those who have suffered and even more importantly those who have resisted foreign domination. To reduce the African universe to a mere focus of resistance to Europe is surely to divest Africans of a sense of agency . . . This “resistance culture” is an attempt to establish continuity with pre-colonial conditions (Ojwan’g 1997: 106).

What Ojwan’g is saying here is that Armah is being self-contradictory through revisionism, a denial of history. The writing of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) he posits, “is underlined by an archaeological impulse; an attempt to excavate the past and then

commit the retrieved past to the task of healing the present” (Ojwan’g: 114). He supports this with a reference to Fanon, 1962: 180-1) who had remarked thus: “The claim to a national culture in the past does not really rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture” (Ojwan’g, 1998: 114).

Armah has a genuine desire for Africa’s development and his position shows his disillusionment with the present which does not seem to point in the direction he thinks such development should take, thus, the resort to the past as a reminder that moving forward is not impossible, if only Africans know they had done it before.

This may be seen as a Janus-faced perception of the black race as Armah idealizes the past as if to present it as the model for the future. He hopes the heroic past would show the light to the future, even though that notion is contradictory. A return to the past is hardly a way to the future because of the anachronism inherent in it.

Not a few critics see *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) from this perspective. As Lindfors (2010) concluded:

The trouble with Armah’s cartoon history of Africa (i.e. in the novel) is that it ultimately is not a positive vision, even though it promises future happiness. All it really offers is negation of negation. The most creative set imaginable is destruction of the destroyers.(Lindfors 255).

What the critic is saying here is that Armah’s position is not so much about Africa as of race and indeed the novel is unabashedly racist. And from all indications, Armah is unapologetic about this. The closest he might have come to contrition is what the same Lindfors sees as Armah’s response to Achebe’s description of him after his first three books as an “alienated native” which is what made Armah retreat into history when he wrote *Two Thousand Seasons*: (1979) and *The Healers*(1978). Even with this Lindfors discerned ambiguity because the novels came out at the time when other African writers

were insisting that the creative artist come to terms with contemporary African realities adding that: “Armah seemed to be swimming against the tide by immersing himself in times gone by”, pointing out the ambiguity thus: “Yet his was a Janus - like view, for it looked forward at the same time that it fixed its gaze on the past” (Lindfors, 250).

But this is the point Armah is making here, which Opara (1991) defended thus: “By progressing from a decadent society to an idyllic one the author bares his dreams of a new Africa cleansed of the malaise of neo-colonialism” (Opara: 117). It can also be argued that his American experiences expressed in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) also shaped his convictions about Africa’s future. Thus, by painting the picture of a guileless, pristine Africa, wherein positive development can be made possible he might be indulging in Garveyism, an anti-racist racist idea which was most likely the reason for his involvement in the attempt to form that all-Black association whose rejection made him to leave Harvard at the time he did.

Race is a powerful motivator for asserting and re-asserting identity. In its very negative manifestation as racism, which is a principal factor in black-white relations, it has degraded the Black to the point of dehumanization. Race provided the oxygen for imperialism and all that it implies; it is the impetus for slavery and colonialism although both had been practised in the ancient and medieval world when the existence of other peoples of the world was not known. In any case, white slavery stopped when explorations and journeys of discovery and much later, the industrial revolution, gave the whites the impression that Blacks were the most suitable labour machines, which thus reinforced their notion that they (Blacks) are less than humans. This was the case in the centuries the slave trade and colonialism existed. Though both have been nominally put

to an end, their legacy of white-black superiority - inferiority stereotype remains, thus the recourse to re-assertion of identity as a means of rehabilitating the debased humanity and dignity of the black race.

Armah attempts to do this by endowing the people of Anoa with their symbol of identity – “the way, our way”. To show that this binding philosophy of the people’s uniqueness may be disputed by others, he declares through the voice of his collective narrator thus: “That we the black people are one people we know. Betrayers will travel long distances in their minds and out to deny you this truth” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 3). The assertion of oneness is a reaction to centuries of dehumanization which black people, irrespective of their disparateness, have suffered as a race. And the denial is the expected reaction of those who still hold on to the notion of black inferiority. When the narrator lamented thus: “The remembrances were separate but underneath them, all ran connected meaning: our common captivity now, our broken connectedness before the onslaught of the predators and destroyers, and for the times to come, our common destiny” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 195-6), it was a lament for lost identity which the intrusion into the lives of the black peoples has caused.

The main culprits, as Armah strongly posits in the novel, are the chief actors in the colonization of Africa, the Europeans (the “destroyers”) and the Arabs (the “predators”) who had even been ahead of the Europeans in the practice of African slavery and slave trade. Each had come with the sole purpose of enslaving the people and after appropriating their natural resources, proceeding to export both to their far away homelands. To ease the way, they cut through the principal symbol of unity and identity by luring the leaders away from the philosophy of “the way, our way” and turning them

into collaborators and inevitably betrayers of their own people. To obliterate the people's identity they both employed devious means to make them abandon their past by threatening: "Change or we will kill you... Believe in our road, abandon your way. Forget your ancestors, forget your posterity. Forget who your people are: forget your very selves and we will let you live" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 87).

It is hard to dispute Armah's position on this. Cultural imperialism followed on the heels of foreign intrusion into Africa and the foreign religions that came along with them was used to coerce the people to despise and consequently jettison the customs and practices on which their identity was anchored because "the capture of the mind and body is slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 33). The focal point of *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) is the assertion of identity by the people but just as is typical of Armah the line between reality and fantasy is somehow thin. The philosophy of "the way, our way" on which the Anoa people built their identity is rather utopian and indeed over-ambitiously Pan-Africanist especially in its transcontinental conception the same way as the concept of homogenous hospitality and reciprocity is also far – fetched.

In *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) Armah's disillusionment with the society is portrayed through Modin whose very first encounter with Oppenhardt, his benefactor, aroused in him the problem of identity. The interview with the white man clearly showed that his African Education Committee had an agenda that was not altruistic. It was an agency for cultural imperialism. As Modin lingered around after rejecting Oppenhardt's cheque, his few lecture attendances gave him a deeper insight into the American educational system which he saw as one designed by the white man for the black man to

create loneliness that is “an inevitable part of the assimilationist Africans within the imperial structure” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 33). The deep introspection convinced Modin that his friendships in America were no more than “invitations to different kinds of death, calls to a spiritual disintegration Africa has suffered since many centuries” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 159).

The end result of this soul-searching is the quest for identity. Armah here might have unconsciously created a mirror image of his person and his American experiences that made him drop out of Harvard University just weeks to his final degree examinations. Ogede’s opinion confirms this view with his remark that: “Armah’s handling of identity of the Black travellers in *Why Are We So Blest?* indicates some connection between his own life abroad and the experiences of the two main characters in the novel” (Ogede, 990:50). He added: “Armah’s fury is wedded to the quest for self-realization, which leads in every case to a crisis of identity within his protagonists” (52). But as is characteristic of his personality and principles, he would not only return to complete the degree but later go on acquire a master’s degree in the same America whose educational system he so castigated. Apparently, he is not one of those “educated Africans, the Westernized African success (who) are worms . . . happy to get the degree, then go home and relax on the shoulders of the people” (*Why Are We So Blest?* 161). The ambiguity is clear here but (both) Modin’s comment and Armah’s pursuit of education in America confirm that hybridity cannot be wished away.

It is the Blacks who are at the receiving end of racism and always have to re-assert their identity. Try as they would the Whites cannot generally develop equality with other races due to deep-rooted prejudices. Aimee’s enthusiasm for African revolution

gave impetus to Modin to find identity as an individual and as a black man. But the degree of ardour was not the same and could not be. It was Modin as a black man who wore the shoe and thus knew where it pinched. To Aimee the quest was mainly for the adventure whereas Modin's motivation was different and more personal. He had tasted the sour side of black-white interaction and had emerged from it with justifiable bitterness which Aimee did not and could never have experienced. However, Armah portrayed in Modin the picture of a rather reluctant would be revolutionary whose rejection was met with stoicism. The irony was that his quest was rejected by Manuel, a half caste whose identity was neither here nor there. While he operated as the head of the bureau, his interaction with blacks whose cause he claimed to stand for was ambiguous. He condemned black-white male female relations but kept a white lover; he treated Esteban Ngulo, a full black and a revolutionary war veteran who worked with him at the bureau as an inferior.

In the novel, Armah abbreviated centuries of search for identity by the entire black race after traumatization and dehumanization by the white race into the experience of one individual black man. Racism engenders identity crises and in Modin's travails Armah posits that interracial relationships only serve to replay stereotyped roles that have existed since Africa's historical encounter with the West. Modin as Adekoya (2002:151) observed, allowed his revolutionary idealism to mar his perception of the realism of white racism. But then when he discovered that the African Education Committee was an assimilationist and imperialist agency whose main objective was to psychologically disorient African students and colonize their minds, he decided that full involvement in

an anti-colonialist revolutionary movement would help to re-assert his personality and identity.

Racism remains racism regardless of where it is perpetrated. The difference is only in the degree. As Ogede (1990) observed:

A discussion of the theme of the Black's lack of identity in a land of whites – an isolation that is defined in this novel not only by his being in a numerical minority but more starkly by his presence in a world where he is constantly ignored or maligned – should begin with Armah's emphasis that Modin Dofu's estrangement differs from Solo's only in degree (Ogede: 52).

Ogede sees American racism as more overt and deeper but juxtaposing Modin's and Solo's experiences not only confirms his own assertion that the difference is only in degree but also exposes the historical actuality of the Black's experience. The American Blacks had been forcibly uprooted from their homes in Africa while the Black from Africa became victims of racial discrimination as a result of colonialism. The colonizers put the brand of inferiority on the colonized Blacks and created stereotypes around him to ensure that the label stuck, thus making subjugation easier and justifiable. The end result either way is that both the uprooted and the subjugated Black abroad and at home respectively are deprived of identity and feeling of self-worth.

As seen see in the novel, Manuel regarded Ngulo as inferior because the latter was a full-blooded African while he was a mulatto. By their very hybridity of race, mulattoes should really feel the acuteness of their neither being here nor there but as a general practice, they assert their identity or lack of it by creating a pecking order by which they see themselves as lords over the full black, a situation Idowu (1972) described as 'café au lait' with reference to Senegal where the early European merchants, administrators, and soldiers on arriving in the colony took African women as "wives"

even though they had their wives at home. The offsprings from these “marriages” gradually assumed positions of prestige and influence in politics and commerce which made them consider themselves superior to the indigenous pure Blacks until the emergence of Blaise Diagne in 1914 as Senegal’s deputy in France which set them on the way to eclipse (Idowu: 287).

Manuel’s deportment in the novel is axiomatic of the identity crisis of racial hybrids. But it is even worse for non-African Blacks who were in position of authority over African Blacks in which the French policy of assimilation created a more severe individual crisis for its Black colonial officials such as Felix Eboué who would become the Free French governor – general of French Equatorial Africa with headquarters in Brazzaville, and Rene Maran, also a high-ranking official in Ubangi-Chari (now Central African Republic) but best known as the author of *Batouala* (1921). Eboué was from French Guiana, Maran from Martinique both in the Caribbeans and their posting to the heart of Africa was partially influenced by racist considerations but Eboué’s adjustment to the environment was easier than Maran’s as the latter was from time to time assailed by doubts and feelings of ambivalence expressed thus: “Here, with a French heart, I sense that I am on the soil of my ancestors, ancestors that I reject because I do not share either their primitive mentality or their tastes, but who are nevertheless my ancestors” (quoted in Irele, 1981: 129). Here was a Black man whose psyche was suspended between two diametrically opposed realities. Although an official in a white colonial service, he was also a disturbed individual even among whites in France as he stated that: “And then I am a Negro. These five words carry with them all the maledictions because whatever I do, I remain secretly, infinitively sensitive” (quoted in Irele; 129).

Weinstein (1972) saw the importance of *Batouala* (1921) in “its being an early sympathetic view of the African experience in the colonial experience” (Weinstein: 69) a view that must have encouraged Eboué’s message to Maran to “devote his life to literature and show the white world what a black man could accomplish” (Weinstein: 103). But Maran and Eboué had seen disease and famine and the forced labour which they themselves had unavoidably been involved in enforcing because of their positions which behoved them to follow orders to recruit Africans and collect taxes. Eboué apparently had less identity crisis as he “had spoken to the Africans at the Brazzaville Conference (held in January 1944) and had called them my dear brothers”. And this brotherhood was not evangelical it was based on color. The Africans had adopted Eboué” (Weinstein: x).

The fact that non-African Blacks at this time could be educated enough to place them in authority over African Blacks says something about French racial policy and of course, colonialism. However, for the individuals involved things were not as smooth as they might appear. It was a situation that put them in serious dilemma but it was also a situation that became a key factor in forging an almost common resolve by African writers to reassert the identity of the Black man. When *Batouala* (1921) was published it raised a big storm in metropolitan France which was not used seeing a direct relationship between the lives of Africans and the colonial situation which Maran actually intended it to show, and for this it “obtained the Prix Goncourt in 1921” (Irele, 132) and because of the furor the novel raised, he was dismissed from the colonial service.

However, the re-assertion of identity as Achebe pointedly declared, should be the writer's duty by helping the people to regain their dignity and self-respect. When he stated that:

African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain. The worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect (Killam, 8).

The dignity and self-respect expressed here is deeply embedded in racial identity in order to reverse colonialism's erosion of the cultural integrity of Africans which are symbols of their identity. The people of Anoa as portrayed by Armah had been compelled to leave their original abode by the depredations of the Arab (the 'destroyers') and at the end of their odyssey they forged an identity for themselves, 'the way our way' as the binding philosophy of hitherto disparate peoples now united by a common bond.

In an ironical twist, the same colonial experience that robbed the Black people of their identity later became the energizer for re-asserting it. As Binebai (2013) observed of the Asian continent...“the colonial experience brought about a fresh logic of identity even during the colonial era” (Binebai, 213). Among the issues that crystallized into the nationalist struggles that led to independence in colonized countries was demand for recognition as distinct peoples in their own lands. Binebai also remarked that Bhabha's post-colonial theory is built around the concept of resistance that can carry ideas about human freedom, identity and individuality which may not have been held in the same way in the colonized culture's view of human kind. This is precisely what the struggle for

identity is aimed at especially when it is manifested as a conscious goal for colonized peoples.

The African writer in the decade of independence as observed by Okuneye (quoted by Binebai, 213) constituted the cultural wing of the nationalist movements, a function which they gave themselves and which enabled them to write based on the cultural and historical identities of their peoples. Thus, as he stated further, in Africa the fact is established that there is a flowering of the emergence of literature as part of cultural identity and revolutionary struggle against domination, marginalization and political cruelty in African states like Kenyan (sic), Nigeria, Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Guinea Bissau etc.

It is undeniable that in addition to other causes, lack of cultural identity is a major factor impeding the emergence of the nation state in Africa, but the intellectual class are not silent about it. As Binebai added: “in asserting their cultural identity, they condemn western interventions as disruptive of the growth and development of African culture through colonialism” (Binebai, 213). This concurs with Jean Pierre Derix’s view that:

The writer in the new literatures in English considers that one of his privileged missions is to rehabilitate the history of his people. He underlines his differences with his own version of the trauma that affected his country when a new set of values and system of Government were imposed by outsiders. (Binebai, 213)

These intrusions from outside which are as well part of contemporary African history from political independence as they have been from the beginning of colonialism have remained a major reason for the non-emergence of nation states because of the complicity of the indigenous leaders whose fictional counterparts have been so portrayed by Armah

in the novel; over who Juma lamented as chiefs and leaders “who have bellies and tongues, but minds they do not have” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 146).

Identity as a phenomenon is given prominence in African literature because it is seen to be basic to the peoples’ self-assertion and reclamation of what contact with the West had taken away. Binebai also saw it from another perspective as he observed that: “It is significant to note that literature and identity whether ethnic, regional, national, or social groups like workers’ rights with good intention for the people have also been identified as a major cause of bitterness between dramatists and national politicians” (Binebai, 217).

In reality, politicians and writers do not have much in common. As pre-independence nationalists, the political elite sought, and even fought for, freedom from colonialism but experience has shown that the fire of nationalism has burned out after those nationalists and their successors achieved their objective of political independence. As leaders of independent African states they are largely responsible for perpetuating the status quo ante as collaborators in neo-colonialism. Writers have shown more patriotism through their condemnation and criticism of the politicians’ failure to keep faith with their people and upholding those things that work against their interests. In most of his novels, Armah has made this a strong issue.

Hence when Washburn (n.d.) admonished that: “With the British Empire gone, African societies must look inward to find remnants of colonialism which continue to harm their nations . . .” he was also speaking the minds of African writers. They have exhibited more sensitivity about Africa’s multiple social, economic, and political

problems and for that reason, have pointedly rejected the ‘arts-for-arts sake’ notion as far as African literature is concerned.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter the researcher has analyzed two of Armah’s novels, *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) from the perspectives of race and identity relationships with particular emphasis on the ambiguities evinced by the author. The analysis is anchored on these specific issues against the background of how Armah and his works can be explicated within the context of postcolonial African literature, wherein elements of postcolonialism such as hybridity, nationalism, feminism, etc. are similarly identified.

Armah’s strong feelings on race are obvious in the two novels. There is a strong advocacy for Africa that is free from Western influences, an inward – looking Black race that can and should solve its own problems without being dependent on the White world. Through this, the Blackman’s identity would be firmly grounded. However this runs counter to realism and the idea itself verges on anachronism because the Third World in general and Africa in particular is still far behind in development. Any argument that favours advancement in isolation becomes self-contradictory. This is why Bhabha’s position on hybridity rests on firm ground here thus making Armah’s Black nationalism – designed panacea for development illusory.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Identity, Urbanization and Hybridization in Okri's *'The Famished Road'* and *'Stars of the New Curfew'*

4.1 Introduction

Okri's contribution to contemporary African Literature has been widely acclaimed, moreso the undeniable postcolonial bent of his novels and short story collections. Much has been said about his magical realism style considered a new phenomenon in the African literary arena. As observed by an analyst, Okri's fiction represents one of the most significant explorations of literary form in the canon of postcolonial African literature (Leadership: 52). Even though African Literature is informed by social affairs as well as culture, politics, economy and religious activities as opined by Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2000), Izevbaye also pointed out that early African Literature was largely sociological but has become less pre-occupied with social or national problems and more concerned with problems of men as individuals in an African society, (hence) the critical preference would be human beings rather than society (Izevbaye, 1971:30). This is precisely the direction of Okri's writings, as his concern for humanity is revealed in his focus on the individual in the society.

Nnolim (2009), agrees that Okri is on the right track as he recalls that Emmanuel Obiechina has been a long-time advocate for the Nigerian writer to have "a special allegiance to the downtrodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, the sick: all those who are not able to fight their own battle" (Nnolim, 223). It is significant that modern African writers cannot afford to be writing "literature just for the sake of art" as Ekwensi asserted (Nichols, 1981: 44). That would have rendered both them and their art irrelevant to their societies because as Ekwensi saw it "there are so many conscience

pricking problems which writing must expose". Therefore right from the onset, Achebe, who is regarded as a pioneer of modern African literature, purposefully and perhaps unconsciously set the pace which saw virtually all that came after him relating their writings the society in one form or another. When Apronti admonished that "the writer, like every artist, needs to be committed to a set of social, political, or ethical ideals" (Apronti, 78) he wasn't really saying something new as far as African literature is concerned.

But just like the novel as a genre has its roots in Europe so is social realism which Gakwandi (1982) reminded us is a major fictional technique in nineteenth century Europe and may be seen "to constitute the central inheritance of the African novel from its European ancestor" (Gakwandi: 127). He maintained that social realism should offer a clear and graspable conception of the relationship between individuals and their society. He summed up the social situation which is often portrayed in the African novel as one in which the relative insignificance of the individual is continually emphasized and remarked that: "All the angry young men that we meet in the novels-mostly expectant, naïve, and idealistic are made to grapple with the problems of a modern, complex social set up" (Gakwandi: 129).

The characters in Okri's writings as Mahmutovic (2010) explains, no longer have access to rootedness and meaningfulness: "They feel thrown or fallen into an inhospitable world in whose making they have not participated, and which for the most part, controls their development" (Mahmutovic: 1). Okri's experimentation with new techniques enabled him to express with depth his new feeling for humanity. Through the use of the folktale and mythology, for instance, he explains the profundity of the alienation, the

dislocation from reality and the loss of identity that afflict postcolonial Nigeria (A – Sekula, 2007: 136). It is in the city that people lose their identities, she stated further, and the city which is often the focus of Ekwensi “attracts all types” and there “the unwary must suffer from the ignorance of its ways” (Povey, 198: 80). However, those “unwary” ones are, clear – eyed enough to see that their social spheres are even more shaped by authoritative and diffuse powers which produce and maintain both physical and existential hunger (Mahmutovic, 2000: 1). In Mahmutovic’s view, Okri suggests that the history of colonialism and the postcolonial traumas actually drive individuals and communities to find peace and relief from suffering by adopting a stance of fatalism. However, his characters react to events around them and in almost all his novels and short stories, Okri portrays two social categories which are always in conflict: the rich and the poor. Whereas the rich consciously display solidarity, the poor are always divided. Their resentment is targeted at the rich who they rightly see as their oppressors but they often manifest their angst against one another as their oppressors are hardly within their reach. As explicated in this study Okri’s literary motif highlights principally the individual in the society, the small man who is the underprivileged.

4.2 Identity and Crises of Urbanization

In *The Famished Road* (1990) Okri created his characters as people living in the same sub-urban slums but living their separate lives, even within families. Their worlds are seen through the eyes of the *abiku*, Azaro the spirit child. They are the poorest among the poor. Apart from their depressing environment which they all share the other common denominator is the wretchedness of their lives. As seen through Dad they are all more or less dislocated people who have lost connection with their roots. Dad was to

have succeeded his father as the Chief Priest of the shrine of roads but instead found himself in the city without any thought of returning because he was already disconnected from his roots.

In the novel, Okri portrays the postcolonial Nigeria, whereby those who have acquired just a little education or even none of all drift to the city in search of better life carrying in their heads imaginations of streets paved with gold and ‘civilized’ living. but such dreams soon vanish in the face of reality. Indeed, the glittering city of bright lights, glistening flashy cars, and next-to-heaven mansions, and so on does exist but not for everyone. It is a world for just only a few who are determined to continue to live that way, and with increasing determination especially with the realization that around them are those whose lives are a complete contrast. Thus in that suburban slum while Azaro with Dad and Mum had to endure life among neighbours who readily make themselves available on the few occasions of the family hosting one celebration or another but would immediate turn hostile if Dad defaulted on paying back a loan that might have been used as part of the expenses for the celebrations. They saw no reason why they should not occasionally borrow some household items from Mum while they would not part with theirs should she request. “One day they are our friends and the next they are our enemies”, Mum said. (*The Famished Road* 228).

Amid all these, Dad maintained a high spirit and sustained his pride. That he had lost his regular paying work and had to resort to such menial jobs like carrying heavy bags of salt and cement, night soil, and such in order to sustain his family did not dampen his resolve to be himself. In Mum, too, Okri created a character that was the epitome of patience and endurance. She acted as a balance and counterpoise to Dad’s violent and

pugnacious nature which very often burst out as a reaction to his condition by misdirected anger against his own family. Hovering over them was the pitiless landlord who was so insensitive to the conditions of his tenants occupying houses that had all sorts of problems imaginable, from broken walls that freely admitted all kinds of reptiles to roofs that leaked like sieves when it rained.

Azaro's own nature as a spirit-child only exacerbated the seemingly unending problems of the family. As Dad and Mum struggled to overcome their condition of poverty and misery, so Azaro was in continuous struggle with himself, not quite sure whether to stay in this world or join his spirit friends who would not stop tormenting him to force him to join them. At such times his misery could be unbearable. It seems to be Okri's ingenious way of deepening the sense of despair and hopelessness among the key characters in this novel, as none of them really enjoyed respite from the situations they were always in. While Dad always gave vent to his own frustrations by taking it out on anyone who provoked him, including his family, Mum maintained a calm disposition with the dim hope that things would be better someday. She never lost that calm even in the face of Dad's unwarranted outbursts of violence against her.

To heighten the incongruity in the lives of sub-urban poor people, Okri provided Madam Koto who stood out as a complex character. While the conditions of the others continued to deteriorate or remained static, Madam Koto's moved upwards right among them there. Under their eyes, she began to move steadily towards affluence. Even as the proprietor of the palm wine and pepper soup bar she was already looked upon by her neighbours as rich and she acted it ignoring their perceptions of her. That she was the topic of gossip in such a neighbourhood did not disturb her. Instead she sought to exploit

her notoriety to her benefit. She was quick to see Azaro's dual personality and attempted to harness it to her advantage until she found that the boy was irrepressible.

Her upward mobility drew all kinds of reactions from her neighbours. They were naturally envious of her and detested her. They invented all kinds of rumours about her but like her fellow wealthy people inhabiting the glittering city; she saw them as a good contrast and counterpoise with which to showcase her own status. Staying among them heightened her sense of importance. By openly identifying herself with the Party of the Rich, she was making a loud statement that she was living among them but was not one of them. She was in a class apart and she showed that by transforming her bar into something more sophisticated with all the paraphernalia of a real urban hotel. Hers was the only electrified edifice in the neighbourhood and she was the proud owner of a car. Her profile rose when she held open feasts for her fellow politicians to enable her display her high status among her poor neighbours who eagerly invited themselves to partake in them.

As Obumsele (2011) observed, Madame Koto's virtues were many but she was so self-obsessed, greedy and exploitative that she perverted and poisoned every virtue. "In a harsh competitive world, she is determined to make her way by living off other people's vices" (Obumsele, 35). Her self-centredness and detachment are idiosyncratic of rootless urban dwellers who may share a neighbourhood but are as individualistic as they come. Companionship is a rare virtue among them as each person or family is only interested in his or its own survival. The German sociologist, F. Tonnies made a distinction between 'community' (*Gemeinschaft* in German) as an intimate, private and exclusive living together as opposed to 'association' (*Gesellschaft*), which is based on the rational pursuit

of individual self-interest (Obiechina, 202). The latter is idiosyncratic of ghetto urban dwellers of Okri's creation.

What Jatau (2005) stated about Ekwensi in *People of the City* (1954) appropriately captures the plight of the poor which is accentuated by unemployment resulting from rural-urban drift:

They fall victims of hunger, famine starvation, scrambling, discontent, greed, avarice, covetousness, dissatisfaction, crave, and insatiability. They form destructive habits of drunkenness, smoking, wastefulness, destruction, over-reactions, pettiness, irritation, sorrow, aggression, violence, impatience, sensual lusts, incontinence, religious fanaticism, and diabolism in order to cope with the psychological, social, economic and emotional demands of living in the city. (Jatau, 116).

The plethora of vices and negative individual traits and peculiarities is an endless list of what the urban poor encounters and it manifests in their continual struggle to keep life going. Their daily lives highlight the glaring contrasts to which they are exposed: splendor vs. squalor; riches vs. poverty, intelligence vs. ignorance, order vs. chaos (Jatau, 2005)

The individualism that the deprivations of urban ghetto life engenders can also been seen in the case of the protagonist in 'Worlds that Flourish' whose neighbour was something of a gadfly. The threat of war had caused people to flee the city and the neighbour, who himself was still around, mockingly asked the protagonist why he was acting as if he didn't have eyes" (*Stars of the New Curfew*" 15). In a show of crass malevolence, he admonished soldiers who had come to arrest the protagonist after he was framed up by the same robbers who had just taken away his properties, to deal with him. This was a "neighbour" with whom he had no previous quarrel and his relationships had been as impersonal as could be. The jeering would continue when they later met again in

the other world after a group of soldiers had inadvertently put paid to his meanness by shooting him to death.

The protagonist then set out “on a journey without destination” where again, individualism was played out when he ignored the warning of the old man in the petrol shack deep inside the bush: “Don’t go that way. I haven’t seen any vehicles coming back. Stay where you can be happy” (“*Stars of the New Curfew*” 23). Crashing his car into an anthill, he found himself in another world where everything worked in reverse. Here Okri takes him through another world where he came face to face with his rootless existence. In this Lewis Carrollian world, rivers flowed upstream; people walked with feet that faced backwards; people had wings but could not fly; houses and huts that were walled around with mirrors on the outside, in which he couldn’t see himself as he walked past them, although people walked in and disappeared into them.

The point Okri brought out here as the protagonist’s trance and nightmare is the reality of the lives of uprooted urban poor. What he encountered in that brief journey to the other world are realities that characterize urban life. People who have wings but cannot fly are those who have high aspirations, the wings being the means of propulsion to higher heights but the hopes remained unfulfilled. The feet that face backwards portray the frustrations in the lives of the urban poor whose every effort to move forward meets with failure. The mirrors that form the walls of the huts and houses are in real life the glittering homes of the rich which the poor can only see from outside but would never live in. Also, the houses of mirrors symbolize vanity which the urban rich are wont to display and flaunt to heighten their own feeling of superiority over the ones who are even denied the privilege of seeing their own reflections in them. The protagonist and the

young driver who came through the same road later were fleeing from the endangered city to no destination because they had been uprooted from their origins.

The nightmare revealed to the protagonist the reality of the rich-poor relationship which Jatau described thus:

(The 'haves') spare no effort in brutalizing the underprivileged, thereby maintaining the wide gap between the privileged and the underprivileged. The 'haves-not' (sic) on the other hand exhibits an ambiguous attitude towards the rich. The rich are portrayed as exemplifications of the success to which poor people aspire (Jatau, 116).

Okri has juxtaposed such unsavoury rich people with the urban poor: Madam Koto, the fathers of Odeh and Assi, and the proprietor of 'Cures Unlimited', and has thus put the rich-poor contrast in sharp relief. Their deliberate flaunting of opulence serves to further accentuate the wretchedness of the poor ones.

Emokhai and Marjomi in "In the City of Red Dust" were united in their misery and poverty. Marjomi saw no hope in city life. What kept Emokhai going was his optimistic spirit which had helped him to adjust to the poverty of the city ghetto. Neighbours are strangers to one another and are often contented with their alienated existence, which A-Sekula (81) noted of Azaro and his parents. But Okri for once put a touch of humanity on this individualism with Mama Joe, the jollof rice seller, also a struggling ghetto dweller herself who showed kindness to Marjomi by not only selling him food on credit but also occasionally lending them money which both of them knew may never be paid. Dede, a closet prostitute and the two friends' on-and-off girlfriend was similarly generous when she had money.

Amid the noisy celebration of the governor's birthday, the two friends made their way to the hospital to sell their blood. It had been one of their survival strategies and it

was a vicious cycle: they sold blood in order to make money to eat with and continuing to do this required that they ate well and regularly. Dazed after having some quantity drawn from his body, Marjomi mused: “The nurse said I must eat well . . . How I can eat well when I don’t have a job?” (“*Stars of the New Curfew*” 58-9). There would have been no need for him to go to that extreme of selling his blood if he had food to eat at all. Okri’s skillful showing of the parallels between the heart-wrenching struggle of the two friends against the extravagant display of wealth and power by the governor highlights the stark contrast in the lives of the privileged and the deprived. The climax of it all was the crashing of one the aerobatics performing planes into the crowded slum area to which the governor showed no emotion or concern.

In his writings, Okri portrays contemporary African urban scenes but leaves out or downplays the old rural-urban dilemmas of individuals in the city, however the comment by Obiechina (1975) certainly draws out some similarities, thus:

For most Africans, life begins in the village and wherever they go after that, they carry the village within them. There is certain ambivalence in their attitudes and behaviour when they enter modern urban culture. Most of the writers deal with these ambivalences of individual behaviour as well as conflicts in social relationships (Obiechina, 201).

Okri’s characters do not migrate to the city with vestiges of their village lives. He creates them as inseparable parts of their environment with very scant reference to their origins. And because of his own identification with only the deprived category, he has reversed the stereotypical city – dweller found in earlier Nigerian novels. Achebe and Ekwensi, for instance, portray characters like Obi in *No Longer at Ease* (1960), and Odili in *A Man of the People* (1966) and Amusa Sango in *People of the City* (1954) as well as Jagua Nana in *Jagua Nana* (1961) who had almost been totally assimilated into urban life and

were contented with it. They took pride in the status of having been separated from their rural backgrounds and only went there as ‘sophisticated’ visitors if and when they had to. The city was the only comfortable home because they were on the glamorous side of it. But Okri’s focus is on the other side. The “peculiar insecurities and rootlessness” of urban life has been a characteristic theme in South African literature (Nkosi, 80) and it is to Okri’s credit he has highlighted it in the Nigerian context.

To deepen his concern for the Nigerian working class, the unemployed, and the socially deprived, Okri contrasts the rich and the poor, the glitter and the gloom in a typical Nigerian city, that is, individuals trying to survive, often also trying to mentally escape the squalor and uncertainty that characterize their daily existence. Arthur, the protagonist in the title story “Stars of the New Curfew” was not unemployed like the other characters in the short story collection, *Stars of the New Curfew* (1991) but he was not happy with the job of selling locally made fake medicines, at various markets in Lagos. The owner of the factory making these drugs was a totally unscrupulous character who had no qualms about producing drugs that killed rather than healed. Arthur’s conscience was always gnawing at him for being the agent of defrauding and endangering the lives of poor, gullible people whose condition was even worse than his. His nightmares turned into reality when the ‘power-drug’ which he sold to a bus-driver so inebriated him that he drove his vehicle filled with passengers into the lagoon.

Okri shows that the poor sometimes hold feelings of empathy in spite of sharing a common hopelessness. While the proprietor of the fake drugs was unfazed by this tragedy, Arthur was deeply troubled and he agonized for days on end. Unable to bear it any longer, he fled to W. his city of birth only to be confronted with another set of

worries. Two incurably corrupt crooks, along with their sons, who had once been Arthur's schoolmates, had held the city by the jugular. Everyone in the city stood in dread of them. His misery was further compounded by the realization that all cities imbued their vulnerable poor with characters that cared only for themselves and were not only totally devoid of morality but also regarded the poor majority as their easy preys.

In W. the fathers of Odeh and Assi carried on as if they owned the place, recklessly displaying their wealth which was acquired through crooked means, awing the populace with their competitive display of fetish powers. The serene life Arthur had envisaged became an illusion. He had to flee back to the city he had run away from when life became too unbearable. As he settled in the taxi that was spiriting him out of W. he mused: "I felt that the meteors of the new curfews blaze for two or three generations. Then afterwards their legacies are scattered by the winds and among the pariah dogs" (*"Stars of the New Curfew"* 141). This was a lament for days gone, when the society had values and upheld them. It is in human nature that the strong always dominates the weak, the rich always oppresses the poor; that is why feudalism had existed at some point in the history of societies but after centuries of preaching and practising freedom and egalitarianism, modern society seems to have relapsed into the dark days.

Arthur had not really liked the job he was doing. Even before his flight to W. he had declared:

At first I did not like the job. The money was insecure. I did not believe in the medicines and most certainly did not use them myself. I felt it was wrong of me to persuade people to buy them. But when I got thrown out of the room I rented, and after I had spent six weeks sleeping under the infamous Iddo Bridge with goats and reticent goatherds, I began to change my mind. No one bothered that I suffered and starved. (*Star of the New Curfew* 84).

Like Dad in *The Famished Road* (1991), Arthur was forced to take whatever job that was available to him if he was not to go hungry and homeless. In the city, the poor thought only of self - survival and had no time for other people's problems and because he had no hope of getting any other job elsewhere, Arthur had to go back to the old one whose proprietor, caring nothing about the havoc he was wrecking around, was already scheming to produce more bogus drugs which made Arthur to wonder. "Where will it end? Like most of our leaders, he creates a problem, then creates another problem to deal with the first one – on and on, endlessly fertile, always creatively spiraling to greater chaos" (*Stars of the New Curfew* 143). As he had succinctly put it, it is characteristic of the political leaders to inveigle the very masses they are exploiting into believing that everything are doing is for their own good. Arthur's employer was planning to manufacture medicines that would cure the problems that 'Power-Drug' had created, just like modern African political leaders and the corrupt rich would create schemes that would distract the minds of the people from the problems they currently have on their hands, thus keeping them occupied while they continue to do what they are best at. Here, Okri appropriately captures the deceit and deviousness with which the oppressed and downtrodden are screened from seeing the privileged few for what they are.

In W. where Arthur had sought refuge, he discovered that cultural hybridization had taken over the city he thought he knew so well. He observed that: "It had become a centre of excitement only on account of its abundance of oil wells. At all night clubs the youths dressed in the latest importations of American fashion. Everyone spoke with a curious transatlantic accent" (*Stars of the New Curfew* 111). This is an inevitable fall-out of development, and it is unavoidable. However, it is also symptomatic of a generation

that had lost its roots, youth who are living in their own environment but already cut off from their origins. In this kind of urban environment, especially one in which the poor (of W) are, at least, a little better off than the poor in other cities (for instance, Lagos), it is almost impossible not to fall under the influence of two powerful contending cultures either voluntarily or by circumstances. In other words, the ghetto dwellers of Lagos, being from more disparate origins are more heterogeneous and more likely to evolve their own urban sub-cultures than a more homogenous W. which more easily imbibed American ways. The youth in W, unlike Arthur with his Lagos background, saw nothing wrong in adopting foreign cultures because their social environment had become hybridized by the foreigners among them who came to be there as workers in the oil industry, which is an economic development that created another type of life for the indigenes. Urbanization itself fertilizers cultural hybridization.

Every individual has a position in the social structure and the importance of this position is demonstrated by the characteristics of the individual who holds them and also the position has much influence upon whom the holder is likely to interact with. As Tajfel (1978) asserted, social identity is the individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership. This is aptly applicable to the two key characters in *The Famished Road* (1991), Madame Koto and Dad, who showed by their actions and activities strong desire for goal achievement which marks them out as unique persons in their distinctive ways. Each saw in the other a strong irrepressibility which dictated their attitude towards each other.

In this slum neighbourhood, Okri created two worlds in which all but Madame Koto lived in oppressive poverty. While Azaro was all the time struggling for identity between the spirit and real world and Dad, like the rest of the people was putting all his energies and resources into ensuring something was on the table for family, many times unsuccessfully, Madame Koto was similarly putting her energies and resources into replicating the life and surroundings of the nearby glittering city. This should be seen in the context of the observation by Bêteille (1977) that: "To a very large number of people in the modern world, social inequality means, above all, the division of society into classes and the unequal distribution of property, wealth, income and other 'economic' and 'material' factors" (Bêteille: 73). This is the reality of Madame Koto which is a contrast to Maslow's explication of the hierarchy of needs where he stated that: "All people in our society (with a few pathological exceptions) have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for esteem for of others" (Maslow, quoted by Flanders, 1976).

Dad and Madame Koto sought self-esteem in their different ways but esteem for others was a rarity in the entire neighbourhood. While Madame Koto somehow looked down on her neighbours and did her acts of goodness either condescendingly or with some hidden selfish motives, Dad's regard for the people around them was a combination of pugnacity and unpredictable outpouring of generosity. Because of this single-minded pursuit of self-esteem Madame Koto displayed all her negative traits of self-possession, greed, exploitativeness and a strong determination to live off other people's weaknesses and the general reaction of the neighbours was one of reciprocity as they bared their minds thus: "She became all the things we whispered she was and she became more. At

night, when she slept, she stole other people's energies" (*The Famished Road* 495). All these only strengthened Madame Koto's determination to live apart from the people even though she was physically among them.

Dad, on the other hand, maintained his self-esteem and identity even as he had to go through various mean jobs, succeeding at last in breaking the poverty jinx by exploiting the violent streak in him, beating a succession of bizarre opponents like Yellow Jaguar, Green Leopard, and The Fighting Ghost by boxing them for money. After this, he was no longer an anonymity and as Azaro stated: "We woke up to find the world staring at us with new respect. It had gone round the globe and even to the world of spirits that Dad had beaten seven men in a fight" (*The Famished Road* 385). His prowess had raised him in the esteem of the neighbourhood and beyond. He had become 'somebody' through his brawn, unlike Madame Koto who had equally arrived but by exploiting her brain and employing fetishism.

In the goal achievement and hence identity realization of these key characters, Okri has reiterated the human characteristic of 'dog eat dog' whereby individuals see themselves differently when they rise above others. This is what Hogg and Abrams (1988) observed with the remark that: "People derive their identity (their self-concept) in great part from the social categories to which they belong. The group is thus in the individual the categories to which they belong" (Hogg & Abrams: 19). Among the poverty-stricken slum dwellers, Dad had risen to high heights as a hero such that his son, Azaro described him as an impresario, and Dad himself boastfully declared that his newly – acquired fame required him to begin to train in secret because:

When people don't believe you can do something and you do it, they begin to respect you. That is the time to disappear. The longer they

respect you, the better. Then you keep your secret. Their interest grows. Time passes. They get tired of you. They get bored waiting for you. Then they don't believe in you anywhere. That's when you really begin to show them (*The Famished Road* 385).

He was only expressing a psychological truth. Even a hero's idolization by the people can lose its glitter if the object of the admiration becomes a common sight. To maintain his new found identity Dad needed to put a veil of secrecy around himself. He had become a symbol with the show of his boxing prowess, such that, Quayson (quoted by Obumsele) described as a representation of man's "titanic struggle with the elemental forces that would destroy man's soul" (Obumsele, 1977: 33-4). As Obumsele saw him, "Dad is life which in the midst of the material forms that constitute its real existence must struggle and writhe and stumble blindly and endlessly towards higher and higher realizations of its possibilities" (Obumsele, 34). Through sheer will-power Dad fought his way out of poverty and the humane side of him opened up.

He went on to show that in spite of his rising profile he was still with the people. His decision to form and lead a political party was an impulsive one which was borne out the realization that the beggars and destitutes now saw something of a redeemer in him. The two parties which had been angling for support in their slum were two sides of the same coin in spite of their names, Party of the Rich and Party of the Poor, the latter posing as fighters for the poor and the former promising future riches for the poor. But the corrupt politicians who populated both were the people's enemies. Madame Koto naturally aligned herself with them and quickly became richer. Dad, showing his independent spirit, revolted and distanced himself from both and decided to form his own.

Through the portrayal of these parties Okri, “critiques the ubiquity of corruption and violence in contemporary Nigeria, creates a voice for the poorest and most powerless members of African society” (Leadership: 52). In *The Famished Road* (1991) that voice is heard through Dad. Okri did not make direct or overt assault on the politicians but their corruption and deceitfulness were amply implied. The Party of the Rich came to the neighbourhood declaring themselves friends of the poor. But the people saw through the lies and told them so. However, that did not prevent them from rushing for the milk the party people had brought. Mum had also joined the scramble and brought some home. Dad declared it rotten and Azaro, with his spirit eyes, saw something very tall growing out of the milk. But what they each said and saw saved the family from milk poisoning, which exposed the extent to which “friends of the poor” could go in the quest for power.

Urbanization is a major cause of rootlessness and hybridization. As A-Sekula remarked: “The major characteristics of the city include impersonality, the ephemeral nature of interpersonal, relationships and relative freedom from kinship ties” (A-Sekula: 80). The last point was proved in the novel when Dad’s relatives living in another part of the city came to visit. Azaro observed:

They attacked Dad for not visiting them, for not attending the meetings of our towns people, for not contributing to wedding presents, funeral arrangements, and endless financial engagements. Dad responded badly to their criticisms. He blamed them for not helping him, for not being visible during his times of crisis . . . they all seemed more like implacable enemies than like members of an extended family (*The Famished Road* 128).

This scenario would have been unimaginable in the rural community setting where all those defaults Dad was accused of are taken for granted, and where his own counter – accusation would not have been necessary because relations would always look out for

one another. City life has made alienation inevitable as each person has his own problem of survival to cope with. Urbanization has killed bonds of kinship.

This is what A-Sekula describes as a special feature of Okri's texts whereby the individuality of the central characters sets them apart from their families and the neighbours. (A-Sekula: 81). But kinship ties may not be fetters from which individuals should seek freedom as she asserts. In most of our rural communities the well – do – look after their less privileged relatives and none would want to court communal indignation by abandoning a relative in need, hence mutual support and care among relations is taken as part of the culture.

However, Okri has shown that blood is thicker than water as Azaro narrated after the heated exchange of words, thus:

But Mum came in with a tray of food and drinks. Dad sent for some ogogoro and kola-nuts and made a libation, praying for harmony in the extended arms of the family. When the silence got too oppressive the wives of our relations went out into the passage with Mum and I heard them laughing while the men in the room, embarrassed by their differences (*The Famished Road* 129).

Even though Dad, after seeing them off, came back and worked himself into bad temper, cursing all relatives for their selfishness and coming to visit only because they wanted to show that they had more money than him, the earlier scene showed the truth in the Igbo proverb that anger against a kinsman is only skin-deep, and another common one that one can dispense with friends but not with relatives.

Mutiso (1974) made a point when he remarked that: “There is tension in African writing concerning the relative roles of the city and the village in determining the relationship of individuals to society” (Mutiso: 73). This is illustrated here by Okri in

Dad's reaction to his relatives. He certainly knew what village or communal tradition expected of him, being a migrant to the city, not city born-and-bred but his railing against them was due to the frustrations he was facing in the city, not the rationalizations he gave for his anger. What Obiechina (1975) described as ambivalence in the attitudes of persons when they move from the village and enter modern urban culture is illustrated here and as he further remarked most African writers deal with the inherent issues of individual behaviour versus conflicts and tensions in social relationships, Okri handles it here, by making the individual the focus. The individuals react to the situations around them and that determines their social relationships.

Similarly, the reactions of Marjomi and Emokhai are predictable. If they must survive as poor, jobless persons in the city they would have to be involved in bizarre acts like blood-selling and more common crimes like picking pockets and gambling, with drinking and hemp-smoking on the side. Thought of a different life somewhere else such as some rural village never crossed their minds because they were probably city-born and the city was the only "home" they knew even though they were practically homeless there. Since Okri gave no insight into their backgrounds, Obiechina's remark that: "For most Africans, life begins in the village, and wherever they go after that, they carry the village with them" (Obiechina: 201) – would hardly apply to the two friends. However, to some extent, it may apply to Dad, who had to grudgingly acknowledge kinship ties, much as his condition prevented his wholehearted acceptance of it.

4.3 Rootlessness as Epitome of Urbanization and Hybridization

In both *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Stars of the New Curfew* (1991), Okri carefully avoided direct attack of the government, even though Obumselu (2011) tried to

link Azaro's "spiritual anguish and disgust with a criticism of political and economic conditions" (Obumelu: 28). But it is difficult to separate the social condition of the people as portrayed by Okri, from misgovernance. If it were not so Dad would not aspire to form and lead his own political party; neither would the governor react with such callous nonchalance when one of the planes displaying in honour of his birthday crashed into the densely-populated slum area of the city ("In the City of Red Dust" in *Stars of the New Curfew*, 75).

But the governor's character is typical of the privileged class of Okri's creation: Madame Koto (in *The Famished Road* (1991) and others of that ilk in *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989), particularly in the short story 'Stars of the New Curfew'. Arthur tried to free himself from the roguish proprietor of 'Cures Unlimited' by fleeing to his hometown W, only to discover that two corrupt rich men and their sons had put the city under their thumbs. And like the people in "In the City of Red Dust" who went to the stadium in their thousands to cheer the governor on his birthday celebration while the signs of their deprivation and neglect were so glaring, the people of W had also become complaisant and cowed by these men's activities. Even in his nightmares, Arthur was seeing faces of the typical rich: an army general who offered a machine for making money – "a machine secretly approved by the nation's cabal of power"; a senator who when coming to canvass for votes in their slum neighbourhood came with three truckloads of free dried milk which would later poison the women who rushed for them, etc. (*Stars of the New Curfew*, 94) all because unemployment and hunger had driven him to work for a boss who "was as corpulent in body (but) thin on scruples" (*Stars of the New Curfew* 89).

And W exhibited all signs of a town under siege, a siege imposed by two unscrupulous rich men who caused the populace to live in perpetual fear because they needed to put themselves under the protection of the two powerful godfathers if they wanted to stay alive. No wonder then that all the former schoolmates Arthur ran into were “grounded in that strange town, their faces miserable, their eyes mean and rat-like, their features similar in the despair” (*Stars of the New Curfew* 135). Like the stadium crowd in “In the City of the Red Dust,” the wretched gathered in their thousands not only to witness the crazy “money-rain” contest by the two men but also to see what they could catch from it, as they were all hungry. They fought and climbed on one another, set upon one another in their attempts to collect enough money. They were fully aware that the two were the cause of their misery yet could not resist the urge to behave like a pack of dogs into whose midst someone had thrown some bones. But the cruel joke played on the multitude became clear when Arthur picked up some of the rain-soaked notes and found them running with ink as one side was authentic while the side was blank. It was not enough that the rich would ride the poor rough-shod at every turn but would also play pranks on them.

Okri’s vision of social squalor and human degradation has been compared to Wole Soyinka’s compassion for the down-trodden just as the clarity and precision of his style has similarity to Chinua Achebe (Riach, 1996). These pioneers of postcolonial African literature have been unrelenting in their exposure of the social ills of their country. Although from creation, there always have been rich and poor classes, it becomes a different issue when the gap between the two in same societies assumes wide

dimensions and reaches the point where the rich indulge in glaring displays to further emphasize the disparity.

That is the main thrust of Okri's portrayal of such characters like Madame Koto in *The Famished Road* (1991), and the governor ('In the City of Red Dust'), the fathers of Assi and Odeh and to some extent, the manufacturer of the fake drugs ('Stars of the New Curfew' – all in *Stars of the New Curfew* (1991)). The last, though not shown to be involved in vulgar display of dirty wealth, summarized the general feeling of that ilk with a statement like: "Are you going to mope around, pitying yourself, or are you going to be a man, an African?" (*Stars of the New Curfew* 142). For the rich, pity for the poor is a waste of emotion. The proprietor was determined to continue duping the people for as long as they did not realize that they were being exploited. And much as Arthur's conscience pricked him he found that he was entrapped. Because his photograph has been published in newspapers after the lagoon disaster, his chance of securing a decent job was none. He faced difficult choices, and he mused: "I had to choose if I wanted to be back on the block or a buyer, to be protected by power or to be naked, to laugh or to weep" (*Stars of the New Curfew* 143). He was practically between the devil and the deep blue sea.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter of the study, two works of Okri (*The Famished Road* (1991) and *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989)) have been analyzed against the background of rootlessness and identity engendered by urbanization. The key characters that are the focus of the analysis are urban dwellers that live on the fringes both literally and metaphorically. They are persons removed from their roots and thus have to struggle

daily to survive in the cities that they know as home. They are surrounded by people of affluence which even sharpens the contrast. The rich display their wealth as if to rub it in that their poor neighbours are doomed to wretchedness and lifelong poverty. The rich flaunt their status as a way of emphasizing the unique identity they have acquired. Yet such persons as portrayed by Okri are those who have acquired that status through dubious means. Alongside this is Okri's attempt to show that contemporary urbanization in the African society has helped to create hybridization which is a legacy of colonialism, because it has produced people with little or no feeling of belonging as they are marginalized by the elite who hold the political and economic power and who are determined to maintain the status quo.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary and Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and concludes the study, entitled “The postcolonial dimensions of selected works of Ayi K\wei Armah and Ben Okri”. The works selected are Armah’s *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) and *Two Thousand seasons* (1979) and; novel *The Famished Road* (1991) and \the short story collection *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989) by Okri which were analyzed within the context of postcolonialism in African literature which is the focus of this study. Both Armah and Okri are renowned writers whose works have attracted extensive critical analyses

5.1 Summary

The opening chapter of the study gives the background to the study, explaining some of the definitions and theories of postcolonial in general and its components which embrace a wide range of issues like cultural identity, race, gender, ethnicity, art, history, philosophy, linguistics, slavery, resistance and the reaction to it. It touches on almost everything that has to do with the erosive legacy of colonialism and its offspring; neocolonialism, all of which are pervasive themes in African literature. In stating the problem, the researcher argues that there is a major missing gap in African literature which more extensive postcolonial reading of Armah’s and Okri’s works should fill. This gap, as identified in the study, arises from the need to see characters created by Armah and Okri from the individual perspective rather than the stereotypes of the society’s rejects i.e. the archetypal ‘masses’. These characters are almost always located on the

urban fringes with the result that their plight is portrayed in sharp contrast; this is a recurrent theme in Okri's writings.

On a more universal level, the identity issue engendered by urbanization, widens beyond the individual; while the characters in *The Famished Road* (1991) and the selected stories in *Stars of The New Curfew* (1989) by Okri struggle for identity in their confined lives on the edge of the cities, Armah's own creations in *Why Are we so Blest?* (1974) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) do the same in a more spacious environment, the more universal space of race relationships, Modin in the former is an individual facing the complexities of universal racism; while in the latter the people of Anoa respond as a community to resist racism that has intruded on their otherwise idyllic cohesive existence. This study has provided further credence to the assertion that Armah and Okri are postcolonial African writers by examining identity, race, and hybridization which are key issues in postcolonialism.

The study has operated from the platforms of key propositions that: the novels of Armah and Okri are axiomatic of the postcolonial legacy of displacement and hybridization which thus places their works within the postcolonial discourse space; the legacy of postcolonialism has bestowed on the novel as a genre an African character that is suitable for exploring the Africans experience; and postcolonial theory is well suited for analyzing how the novel form signifies postcolonial experience. Urbanization as depicted in Okri's works has created displacement and the inevitability of hybridization is seen from the way Armah portrays the relationship between his characters, which is often characterized by tensions. Whether implied or explicit Armah and Okri have proved through their works that the African experiences are manifestations of the connection

between power, inequality and domination; and also, from the analysis in this study, that identity, race and tradition are responsible for the failure of African countries to become modern nation-states. This last point is portrayed in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) where the people of Anoa find themselves betrayed to the Arabs and whites by their own leaders, and to some extent in *Why Are We So Blest?* (1974) where Jorge Manuel, a half-black, turns down Modin's request to join the liberation movement because he came in company of his white girlfriend, and denounces white-black late relationship.

In Okri's novel, *The Famished Road* (1991), and the selected stories from *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989), the key characters-Dad, Emokhai, Marjomi and Dede (in 'In city City of Red Dust') Arthur) in 'Stars of the New Curfew'), and the un-named narrator (in 'Worlds That Flourish') – are displaced persons uprooted from their origins and roughing it out in the cities. Dad is often in conflict with Madam Koto whose display of affluence amidst the poverty and hopelessness in the squalid neighbourhood brings into focus the quest for individual identities.

The contrast is sharpened by her refusal to move into the city proper where her type resides. She derives her sense of importance living among the struggling poor. Dad asserts his identity after he discovers that his prowess as a boxer can raise him from a hopeless struggler doing menial jobs to survive to a famous individual. Against the background of heartless display of power and corruptly-acquired wealth by the governor, Emokhai and Marjomi trudge about the city looking for means of survival, including selling their blood in the hospital and accepting the occasional money made through prostitution by their common girlfriend, Dede. Arthur's horrible experience from hawking killer drugs manufactured by his unscrupulous employer drives him out of

Lagos to his hometown, where he witnesses not only the vilest display of ill-gotten wealth, but also a city that has lost all decency as a result of urbanization. The un-named narrator's attempt (in 'Worlds that Flourish') to flee from the war in the city lands him in a reverse world in a story in which Okri displays his mastery of magical realism. Both in real-life in the city and in the reverse world of his corna, the narrator goes through the experience of displacement whereby for the rootless ones, urban life offers no refuge or comfort. As Okri has shown, urbanization considerably contributes to identity crisis, particularly in our Third World.

5.2 Conclusion

This research is an in-depth study of postcolonialism in African literature employing the selected works of Armah and Okri. In the process of asserting the postcolonial inclination of the two authors, the research has proved that the novel as a genre can be used effectively to depict and portray the postcolonial experience. Furthermore, the research has contributed to knowledge on African literature by widening and deepening the postcolonial dimension in African literary criticism in the process of which new themes are created and old ones are expanded; and proving that even familiar contemporary issues can still be examined by applying any of the various strands of postcolonialism, just as this research has done by employing race, hybridity and identity.

The study has established that postcolonial issues such as race and identity are major colonial legacies that constitute obstacles to whatever dreams African countries nurse of developing into nation – states. It has also proved the inevitability of hybridization in the relationship between the black and white races. Also the effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism as well as misplaced nationalism within African

countries help to further widen internal cleavages which are still divisive factors in Africa's political development. It is these realities that help to render Pan-Africanism one of whose most passionate advocates of which Armah is, a mere pipe dream.

The examination of race in particular in this study has proved that the complexities of the tension inherent in it continue to have negative impact on relationships and this is further compounded by the inevitability of hybridization that characterize the relationships thus creating a vicious cycle.

One reason for the difficulty in pigeon-holing postcolonialism into one universally accepted definition is because of its multifaceted characteristic. This has created a wide latitude for critical analysis. Thus, the background against which this research is situated is Homi Bhabha's overlapping and interrelated postulation of hybridity, ambivalence and mimicry in colonizer-colonized relationships. In the analyzed novels of Armah, the tensions and complexities that characterize black-white relationships were brought out. In *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972) it is an individual, Modin, who was caught up in the labyrinth of racism and identity crises. Modin was confused by his realization that the presumed generosity, hospitality, and philanthropy exhibited by white Americans was a façade behind which paternalism and condescension were concealed.

While hybridity espouses the interdependence and mutual construction of colonizer and the colonized, ambivalence refers to the mutual relationship between the colonizer and the colonized on one hand and complicity and resistance in the other. Much as Armah is highly critical of Western values and would rather see each race go its separate way, both novels show the complexities inherent in this philosophy. Bhabha's

argument is that centuries of interaction has made racial separateness impossible. Ambivalence also characterizes the situation in Anoa in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1979) in that the community is torn between complicity and resistance involving the rulers and the people respectively.

Identity is the key factor in the explication of Okri's selected works, with hybridization engendered by urbanization coming in to exacerbate the plight of the individual characters. Dad and Madam Koto in *The Famished Road* (1991) each fought to establish their identity. Characters in *Stars of the New Curfew* (1989) were trapped in the glittering cities that brought them no joy and promised them no hopeful future. It was then inevitable for them to accommodate themselves into the misery that their environment has forced them into.

In portraying them, Okri did not bunch them together as stereotypes generally called "the masses" but shows them as individuals struggling for survival. Dad symbolized the struggling man who had had humiliating and soul searing experiences but who accidentally discovered his potential and utilized it to establish an identity. Madame Koto, who was Dad's rival of sorts was obsessed with ensuring that she shone above everybody in that slum neighbourhood, not minding that the wealth she was flaunting among her wretchedly poor neighbours was of questionable sources. Around her and sharing the same type of decrepit houses were tenants whose very lives stood in sharp contrast with hers and yet stayed put as they had completely lost touch with their rural roots. So were the other characters in the selected short stories.

While race relationships and the identity dilemma it engenders are the focal points in the analysis of Armah's novels, other equally important postcolonial issues such as

urbanization also characterize the examination of Okri's works in this research. The inter-related and interwoven nature of the multiple strands of postcolonialism itself gives it wide latitude when it comes to literary analysis, the disparate and sometimes contradictory postulations of theorists notwithstanding.

This study has particularly situated its arguments against the background of Bhabha's theories on hybridity and ambivalence on the premise that such issues as identity and race relationships as well as urbanization are grounded in his position on the nature of postcolonialism.

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