

Psychopathology and Healing in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*

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Scholars of African belief systems, such as John Mbiti, Laurenti Magesa and Kofi Appiah-Kubi, assert that in some African cultures illnesses symbolize a disjuncture among individual, social and divine purposes. Thus, an understanding of illness and healing requires an understanding of the relationship between the gods, the ancestors and human beings. Situating Ayi Kwei Armah within the traditions of the Akan, a West African-based cultural group, this paper argues that Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* present an alternative perspective on godhead, gods, ancestors and the human person. It further argues that Armah's interpretation of these formative elements of being and becoming provides a different understanding of illness and healing. In these two novels Armah diagnoses the pathologies that afflict Africa as violence, greed, envy and jealousy. Early in his writing career, Armah set the goal for his writings as contributing to the healing of these maladies. For the purpose of illustration, this paper will borrow examples from different African cultures. I begin by discussing the concepts of godhead and gods.

The Godhead and the Gods

Taking into account contextual differences, this paper will borrow conceptual tools from various sources in order to articulate the concepts of godhead, an embodiment of unconditioned possibilities, and gods, the agencies that actualize these possibilities. For example, the Dogon worldview postulates the existence of primordial signs that are basic forms of all entities (Griaule & Dieterlen 83-86). This belief system holds that each entity or being is constituted by a different combination of these signs whose totality makes up Amma, the Dogon godhead. Similar to the Dogon worldview, Alfred North Whitehead argues in *Science and the Modern World* that an entity presupposes the existence of unconditioned possibilities, which he calls forms of definiteness (227). Whitehead contends that forms of definiteness constitute an infinite set of possibilities that he names a realm of possibilities (228). While the Dogon call the godhead Amma, and Whitehead calls the godhead a realm of possibilities, in "The Image of Man in Africa," Dzobo points out that the Ewe of Ghana and the Mende of Sierra Leone use the concept of the High God when referring to the godhead.

Some belief systems advance the idea that the godhead is divisible into the instrumental or destructive principle and the creative or synthetic principle. Dzobo argues that the High God of the Ewes of

West Africa is divisible into the twin siblings, Mawu and Lisa (“The Image of Man in Africa” 128). I have observed elsewhere (Mtshali 2009) that the first chapter of Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* presents the realm of the godhead as divisible into the time of men and the time of women. Several African belief systems use water to symbolize the godhead as a site of primordial origin. In *Gods and Myths of Ancient Egypt* Robert Armour asserts that the ancient Egyptians believed that life originated out of primordial waters called Nun (7). Similarly, Mazisi Kunene asserts that the pre-colonial amaZulu of Southern African believed that human life originated from the banks of a reeded river (*Anthem of the Decades* 3). The water symbol pervades Armah’s writings from his early short stories, such as “An African Fable,” to his latest novel *KMT in the House of Life*. In “Flood and Famine” Armah argues that famines, floods, droughts and glut percolate African history to such an extent that “a substantial corpus of the continent’s oral traditions” is based on these events (2011). *Two Thousand Seasons* appropriates symbols that span several African cultures in order to advance a pan-African vision. The first chapter of this novel presents the realm of the godhead with water as a symbol around which its social life ebbs and flows. The Esuano community, the birth place of Densu, *The Healers’* protagonist, is located in an arc whose arms are Nsu Ber, a calm, female river and a symbol of the creative principle; and Nsu Nyin, a turbulent, male river and a symbol of the destructive principle. In an interview with Emmanuel Ngara, Armah indicates that, in his novels, the river symbolizes the particular while the sea symbolizes the universal (qtd. in Nwahunanya 555-556).

Some belief systems hold that the gods, goddesses or divinities are agencies that mediate between the godhead and actuality. John Mbiti uses the concept of spirits to refer to all agencies that mediate between possibilities and actuality. He advises us that the “spirits in general belong to the ontological mode of existence between [the Supreme] God and man” (*African Religions and Philosophy* 75).

In Mbiti’s conceptual scheme, the spirits are unchanging substances “which were created as such” (75). In contrast, Armah holds that these agencies are not separate from experiencing agents. In “Seed Time,” invoking the ancient Egyptian belief systems, Armah argues that gods are not creatures above human beings but are human beings as self-creating beings (926). In some African belief systems, the gods and goddesses are divided into destructive or instrumental deities and creative or synthetic deities. For example, the pantheon of ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses are divided into Seth and Nephthys, and Isis and Osiris. Armah distinguishes between two concepts of gods: Gods as projections of violence, fears and insecurities, and gods as a symbol of human reciprocal relation or “our best selves” (*The Eloquence of the Scribes* 257). The former concept is illustrated by the gods of the invading Arab and European forces whose adherents use force to convert others to their belief system. The narrators of *Two Thousand Seasons* label these gods as the slave master-gods (36). Armah alludes to the concept of god as our best

selves in *Two Thousand Seasons* when he asserts that god is a spiritual force “which is an energy in us, strongest in our working, breathing, thinking together as one people” (96). I have argued elsewhere (Mtshali 2009) that this spiritual force is characterized by our open, holistic and mutual relations. However, some African belief systems point out that the viable and ideal solution is the balance of the instrumental and creative deities. Thus, the ancient Egyptian belief systems suggest that the ideal situation is the balance of these two camps which is represented by Maat. Similarly, one-sided instrumental and one-sided synthetic spiritual forces are, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, represented by the bearers of the road while the balance of the two is represented by the bearers of the *way*. This paper will discuss these manners of relating to the world in the following paragraphs.

The road is a non-reciprocal relation to others and to the world. *Two Thousand Seasons* places the development of these social relations in the context of internal and external violence. Under these inimical conditions agents respond to the demands of the dominant participants by conforming and thus listening “only to today’s brazen cacophony, [taking] direction from that alone and [staying] deaf to the whispers of those gone before [and] deaf to the soft voices of those yet unborn” (8).

The road can also take the form of unreciprocated giving. A violent environment which precedes the time of women promotes this manner of relating to the world. After the carnage of the time of men, women producers feel guilt and responsibility for this blood bath. Compensating for this guilt, women allow men to idle and consume without production. While the economy prospers during the time of women, the imbalance between production and consumption makes it vulnerable to internal and external interruption.

Armah shows that neither of the two dimensions of the road is viable on its own. As a result, the narrators of *Two Thousand Seasons* champion the *way* which is the balance between the time of men and the time of women. Armah maintains that when people relate to each other in this *way* they participate in the spiritual force as an authentic shared site.

While *Two Thousand Seasons* shows the road and the *way* as two manners of relating to the world, *The Healers* foregrounds manipulation and inspiration. Damfo, the healer, describes manipulation as a disease which is constituted by spiritual blindness. A manipulative person uses force in order to make other people do something for her/him. He further explains that manipulation “steals a person’s body from [that person’s] spirit, cuts the body off from its own spirit’s direction” (81). In contrast to manipulation, inspiration is an authentic manner of relating to the world. A person who relates to others in this way sees the other person’s spirit and invites their spirit to participate in a shared project. In *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* Armah appropriates and re-interprets some African beliefs’ myths and symbols. In Armah’s writings the godhead is not a mystical realm but a realm of possibilities. For Armah, the gods are not all-

powerful and external beings that control human destinies but are human beings as self-creating being.

The Ancestors

In addition to the godhead and the gods are the ancestors, who form one of the formative elements of the Akan social universe. In “Death and the Afterlife in African Culture,” Kwasi Wiredu suggests that most African belief systems hold that once a human being dies s/he goes to the ancestral land. In “Values in a Changing Society” Dzobo advises that the Akan word for ancestor is *nananom* which is a title conferred upon those “who earn [it] by the excellent way they conduct their lives. *Nananom* is then, first and foremost, a moral title and is earned living virtuously *in this life*” (231). Dzobo further asserts that ancestors are “a way of conceptualizing the ideal life” (232). Ancestors are thus bearers of possible worlds for the living.

Thus, for Dzobo, the ancestral land is constituted by accumulated human experiences. In *The Eloquence of the Scribes* Armah calls it “the vast storehouse of information constituted by the accumulated knowledge and values” (274). However, Mbiti points out that this land is divided into regions. One of the regions, Sasa, is the abode of the experiences which are remembered by the living, while the other, Zamani, is the residence of experiences which are forgotten by the living. Past experiences will be invited into Sasa if they advance the goals of a society which are largely influenced by the dominant groups of that society. Africa’s colonial legacy has meant that the experiences of the colonizer are upheld as a paradigm. While some past experiences are invited to Sasa, other experiences are relegated to Zamani. The experiences that occupy the latter region are partly those experiences that are deemed irrelevant. The outcome of the violent colonial and post colonial environments is that some of the experiences which are relevant for the colonized are repressed and thus relegated to Zamani.

Armah’s novels also display this division of the ancestral land. Thus, *Two Thousand Seasons* has two competing traditions. The first is the tradition of conformity or the road which originated in the deviations of the time of men when men “indulge[d] themselves at the expense of their own people” (9). This tradition is continued during and after the Arab invasion, and is re-enacted in Koranche’s time when Koranche pleads with the public to accept the offer from European colonizers to trade their land and culture for material things. Voices of an alternative tradition, such as the voices of Akole, a woman of the duiker clan, and Isanusi, a griot, are marginalized. Similarly, *The Healers* has a tradition of connectedness which reminds the people that “no matter how painful a journey, [the] people would finish it and thrive again at the end of it as long as [the] people moved together” (4). However, this tradition is marginalized and the dominant tradition is that of fragmentation and conformity to the interests of the colonial forces. The opening pages of *The Healers* chronicle Densu’s frustration with marginalization of the bearers of the tradition of inspiration. By re-interpreting ancestors as a storehouse of knowledge

and values, Armah reclaims this concept from some of its interpreters who reduced it to the worship of the dead.

The Person

The last element of the Akan social universe is the human person. There seems to be an agreement among Akan scholars that a human being consists of three components: the body (*honam*), the spirit (*sunsum*), and the soul (*ōkra*). While there is a debate among Akan scholars about the composition of the human body, all seem to agree that the body is the physical dimension of a human being. There also appears to be an agreement on the origin of the *ōkra*. Kwame Gyekye holds that

ōkra is the individual's life, for which reason it is usually referred to as *ōkrateasefo*, that is, the living soul . . . [In addition] *ōkra* is [understood as] the embodiment of the individual's destiny (fate: *nkrabea*). It is explained as a spark of Supreme Being (*Onyame*) in man. It is thus described as divine and having an antemundane existence with the Supreme Being. (85)

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor holds that the “*okra* is the very essence of God in human beings and all living things and maintains its immaculate purity throughout existence of the person or thing” (71).

Kwasi Wiredu disagrees with the conceptualization of the *ōkra* as the soul. Wiredu argues that the concept of the soul has connotations of disembodiment, while in many African worldviews to be is to be at some place. Citing the belief that traditional healers are “capable of seeing and communicating with the *ōkra*,” Wiredu argues that *ōkra* must therefore be “quasi-physical . . . with some parapsychical properties” (qtd. in Gyekye 86) Gyekye points out that “the fact that the *ōkra* can be seen by such people does not make it physical or quasi-physical . . . since this act or mode of seeing is not at the physical or spatial level” (86).

Armah's concept of a person is explicitly articulated in *The Eloquence of the Scribes* where he describes the body as the “physical aspect of human individual [which] is particularly sensitive to the demands of the physical world, of the here and now . . . [and] is attuned to the short-term interest of the self” (273). Armah understands the soul as “an aspect of the individual personality that connects and communicates with the huge, boundary-less universe of ancestral values . . . [It] is the person's connection with all that is not immediately here” (272-273).

Gyekye provides statements that illustrate an Akan understanding of *ōkra*. When an individual is sad, worried or good, the members of this community say: “His 'kra is sad”; “His 'kra is worried or disturbed”; or “His 'kra is good”. When an individual had died they say “His 'kra has withdrawn from his body” (95). There is a similar understanding of the soul in Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. Characterizing the askaris, the narrators say: “In sleep, in death, the body and soul are apart” (28). The soul of Abdallah, a Muslim ideologue, is characterized as being in an abject state. Those who side with Arab invaders against the indigenous people of Anoa are

characterized as defeated in their soul. Those who care about the sufferings of the people of Anoa are characterised as sensitive souls. The askaris are typified by the disconnectedness of their bodies from their souls. The abject state of Abdullah's soul is due to his disconnectedness from the tradition of the people of Anoa.

The account of the soul in *The Healers* can be illustrated by the life story of Araba Jesiwa who was born in the colonial Fantse royal family. According to the patriarchal-colonial tradition, she is destined to be the mother of the next king. While in her youth she loved Kofi Entsua, her family forces her to marry Bedu Addo, who has a royal background. The result of this marriage is depression, anxiety, and miscarriages. Reflecting on her experience of depression, Araba says that the marriage violated her soul and caused it to sink "into a deep horrifying hole" (62). There is also a suggestion that the soul is embedded with an individual purpose; Araba Jesiwa says that the birth of Appiah fulfilled her soul.

Akan scholars trace the origins of the *ōkra* in gods. As already indicated, for Armah, gods are symbols of human social activities. Armah distinguishes between the instrumental, creative and balanced spiritual forces. While all individuals are born with a soul, as in the case of askaris, the mind can be attacked and conquered and the body can be cut off from the soul. "In this state of souldeath the body blindly, sleepily obeys the conqueror" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 28). *The Healers* provides two contrasting ways of nurturing the soul. On the one hand is Densu, a sensitive soul and an aspiring healer who is nurtured by the healers and their friends. On the other hand is Buntui, a violent young man, who is mentored by Ababio.

The last component of a person is *sunsum* or spirit. While Akan scholars seem to agree that the spirit is a force or power contained by all entities, there seems to be disagreement on the source of *sunsum*. Some scholars such as Anthony Ephirim-Donkor and Kofi Appiah-Kubi hold that *sunsum* derives from the father. Gykye suggests that the attribution of *sunsum* to a father is logically incoherent since it is not only human beings who have a *sunsum* but also natural objects and deities. Gykye further asserts that "*sunsum* derives from Onyame, the Supreme Being" (73). Despite these differences, Akan scholars seem to agree that *sunsum* "manifests itself in outward traits of individual temperament" (Ephirim-Donkor 50).

Armah holds a similar understanding of the spirit as energy. Thus, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the European and Arab colonizers are described as a people with deadly energy; "a people whose spirit is itself a seed of death" (6). The young Koranche is portrayed as a person lacking energy and purpose: "There was no spirit in his being whose flowing could direct his hand and then the adze to bring out any beauty, any truth trapped in the wood to answer whatever there was in his soul" (68). As Gykye points out the spirit is not only imbued in human beings, but also in the ancestors. The narrators of *Two Thousand Seasons* speak of Anoa's spirit (39) and the spirit of rebellion (39, 45). There is a similar understanding of the spirit in *The Healers*. The energy that characterized Araba Jesiwa's marriage

ceremony was enhanced by “an overflow of drinks to heighten the spirits” (74). Her marriage to Bedu Addo drained her energy, she “did not feel her spirit take a single step in growth” (75).

There is a disagreement among Akan scholars on the relationship of these different components of a human person. Holding that *sunsum* is an aspect of *ōkra*, Gyekye argues for a dualistic conception of a person. Other scholars such as Ephirim-Donkor and Appiah-Kubi advocate a tripartite conception of a human person. However, Gyekye points out that neither a tripartite nor a bipartite notion of personhood subverts the unity of a human person (98). This notion of a human person as a socially embedded being that straddles the three dimensions of time is the key to understanding illness and healing in Armah’s writings.

Spiritual Diseases: Violence, Greed, Envy and Jealousy

Two Thousand Seasons characterizes Africa as a diseased continent with the *road*, or an inauthentic connectedness to the world and others as an underlying cause of its maladies. This novel is thus partly concerned with diagnosing a plethora of diseases that afflict Africa. The time of women, with its abundant material wealth, habituates the people of Anoa to giving without receiving. This habit is fully exploited by Arab invaders who came as guests but later turned into parasites. These social arrangements do not last since women producers wage successful guerrilla warfare against the invaders. However, this foreign rule has already created an elite stratum that wants to perpetuate gender and class hierarchies.

During the reign of the Arab invaders some of the elders develop an acquisitive character. In response to the violence of the invaders, they decide to conform and play different administrative roles within the invading regime. Consequently, they internalize the values of the invaders. The novel describes them as “crippled souls,” beings who are separated from their ancestral resources. They find themselves between the contempt of the people of Anoa, who despise them for collaborating with the invaders, and the hatred of the Arab invaders who hold that they are inferior by nature. To compensate for their crippled souls they turn to material things. Thus, the “world of tinsel, the superficial, comes as perfect clothing to cover the cripple’s deformity from recoiling sight. In the fullness of the ostentatious cripples’ dreams the spirit of the community is raped by the worshippers of impressive trash” (63).

Fuelled by this acquisitive spirit, the elders of the leopard clan unsuccessfully try to sabotage the public forum by replacing rotating leadership with hereditary leadership. Angered by the failure of this attempt to introduce hereditary leadership, Edusei, the would-be beneficiary of these changes contemplates emigrating. He “[sits] daily brooding by himself, and [spends] the energy of his mind contemplating a spiteful emigration with his clan” (36). Convinced by Abdallah, a Moslem missionary, about both the cultural inferiority of the indigenous peoples and his entitlement to political privileges, Edusei abandons his plans to emigrate. Having lost an opportunity to

distinguish himself in the political arena, Edusei plans to use material wealth to set himself apart from the community. Thus, he channels his energy into economic activities. He becomes “hyperactive, a man possessed by that explosive spirit, vengeance. He [drives] his family to prodigious work, [hunts] like a famished lion . . . and [brings] together a group of men to work with him . . . along the road as far from our way, the way, as it is possible . . . Edusei’s group [works] together but [does] not benefit together” (37).

The novel labels Edusei and his followers as “crippled souls,” a phrase that partly refers to their separation from ancestral resources. Edusei is constantly urged by his mentor, Abdallah, to put himself “completely at the service of him whose road is the one sure road away from [his] people . . . [who] walk in darkness” (36). “Crippled souls” also suggests a limited horizon for Edusei and his group, since the choice of heredity as a criterion for leadership restricts the candidacy for political leadership to birth and blood. Furthermore, the methods that Edusei uses to amass wealth align him with the destructive deity, the “slave-owning god” (37).

In *The Healers*, the concept of greed is exemplified by Ababio, a grandson of a slave who wins the favours of the royal elite through masochistic behaviour and becomes a power broker between the Cape Coast colonial administration and the Fantse royal elite. His conformist behaviour is partly inherited from his family and is reinforced by the threat of colonial violence. He does not see any alternative to supporting the British colonial forces. Attempting to convince Densu to participate in a palace coup that would install Densu as a British puppet, he says:

Now they want to control everything that goes on. From the coast to the forests, to the grasslands, even to the desert. And they will. If we help the whites get this control, we stand to profit from the changes. Those foolish enough to go against them will of course be wiped out. I’m among those who’d rather profit than be wiped out. Densu, have you ever seen those guns the white men have? (31)

Thus Ababio’s greed cannot be reduced to his will, but is partly an outcome of his ancestral inheritance and also a result of his current environment.

In “Character and Anal Erotism,” Sigmund Freud grounds the concept of greed on individual traits and the nuclear familial environment. In “A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States,” British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein postulates the existence of innate sadistic impulses that in a familial environment account for greed. In contrast to Freud and Klein, Armah imbeds the acquisitive mentality on a superficial relation to society and to ancestral knowledge, and on a limited perspective of the realm of possibilities. Edusei and his supporters limit themselves to knowledge, experiences and possibilities which were prevalent during the era of Arab invaders. When his political aspirations are frustrated Edusei re-channels his energy, objectifies members of his community and drives them to “prodigious work” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 37). Ababio’s

greed is both an inherited character trait and a response to the violent environment that surrounds him.

Armah uses the metaphor of eating to articulate the relationship of the individual to the world. As already indicated, for Armah the body is a physical dimension of a human being that is sensitive to the demands of “the here and now.” Thus, one of the symptoms of a deformed soul is an inability to control one’s physical desires. The narrators of *Two Thousand Seasons* advise that the life of the big-bodied askaris consist of “some sport, eating, drinking, copulating, smoking, or defecating” (29). The narrator of *The Healers* introduces Ababio as the man who “looked like someone who had spent more than sufficient time consuming an abundance of food and drink, and who, now more than sated, was groping unsteadily on his undeveloped legs looking for a place where he could rest for years and years peacefully digesting all he had consumed” (13).

In *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon links greed with political and economic corruption. Finding themselves in a position where they are not able to compete with multi-national corporations, African elites see corruption as the only avenue to accumulating wealth. While corruption has become an excuse for sweeping and condemnatory judgement of African elites, it is often treated as an individual abnormality without providing a wider historical background. In contrast to this trend, in some of his novels like *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments*, and *Osiris Rising*, Armah specifically connects greed and corruption to their historical background.

However, the protagonists of Armah’s novels are not only afflicted with greed; they also suffer from envy. In both *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon situates this attitude in a violent social and historical context. Colonial forces destroyed indigenous cultural structures and imposed Western European ones. The black person of *Black Skin* finds himself/herself lusting for white objects. The colonized of *The Wretched of the Earth* looks at the settler’s town with envy, expressing “his dreams of possession – all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible” (39).

Using a protagonist like Koranche, Armah examines this psychological attitude in *Two Thousand Seasons*. Koranche, a progeny of a line of kings who betrayed the people of Anoa, is an infamous king who invited Atlantic slave traders to Anoa. Among his great grand fathers are Ziblim, a misogynist who treated women as things, Bentum, who introduced private ownership of land in Anoa, and Krobo who introduced slavery. In an attempt to limit access to the office of kingship to his blood offspring, Topre, Koranche’s father, copulated with his only sister. This incestuous relation, whose outcome was the birth of Koranche, symbolizes the reproduction and the transmission of prevailing conditions.

Koranche shows developmental defects at an early age. His motor skills develop slowly, he can not cry, and he always has “a constant, dull, flat” expression. Koranche is not satisfied with the breast milk

from his mother and feels entitled to the breast milk of all the women from his neighbourhood. He “could not accept weaning from the suckling breast” until his tenth season. His weaning is ultimately a communal event; to discourage him from breast-feeding, bitter herbs are smeared on the nipples of all women who could possibly breast-feed him. Initially, Koranche resists attempts to wean him. However, recognizing his powerlessness, he magically turns women’s breasts into embodiments of dirt. Consequently, he “vomit[s] at the mere sight of a woman’s naked breasts” (66). In his twentieth season, Koranche enrolls for the initiation rite but he is unable to keep up with other initiates. He demonstrates a lack of talent in his art project which shows that there is “no spirit in his being whose flowing [can] direct his hand and then the adze to bring out any beauty, any truth trapped in the wood to answer whatever there [is] in his soul” (68). However, Koranche has “one formidable gift: a genius for obliterating the proofs of other people’s superiority to him” (67). Thus, he burns the hut in which the initiates have collected all their art products.

We therefore witness two forms of envy in *Two Thousand Seasons*. As Richards argues “the envious subject does not possess the desired object [and the] discontent at this lack is the core of the feeling” (66). Richards further claims that envy is characterized by the unavailability of the desired object. In “The Concept of Envy,” Simon Clarke discusses psychological mechanisms for resolving this discrepancy. In the first case, the subject spoils the desired object by projecting badness onto it and consequently equalises itself with its rival. In the second occasion, equalization is achieved by destroying the desired object (111). While Melanie Klein traces envy to an innate death instinct, Frantz Fanon situates it in the slave and colonial modes of production that created a dichotomized world of white/black and good/bad (Segal, *Melanie Klein* 113-120; Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth* 39). Armah, like Fanon, grounds envy on historical and social bases. As a descendant of kings, Koranche feels entitled to both human and non-human beings. By unquestioningly appropriating the dominant ancestral knowledges, Koranche deprives himself of the rich traditions of Anoa and limits his exposure to the realm of possibilities.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon traces the evolution of envy from the colonial to the postcolonial moment. In postcolonial Africa, envy that was previously harboured against white colonizers and their material possessions mutates itself into an envy of material objects possessed by other Africans. Exuding envy and xenophobia, the primary protagonist of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, known simply as the man, partly blames Africans from neighbouring countries, such as Zacharia Lagos, for his predicament. Therefore, Armah’s writings offer critics an opportunity to link envy and xenophobia to idioms of some African belief systems.

In addition to greed and envy, Armah’s writings also deal with jealousy. In jealousy a subject feels that her or his possessions are threatened. Therefore, “the jealousy is actually felt towards a *rival*, real or imagined. The jealous subject is fearful of losing the good object, and jealous of those who threaten to take it away” (Richards 65).

Koranche, like his great grand-father Ziblim, believes that all women belong to him. Thus, he considers his interest in Idawa as a formal claim to what actually belongs to him. However, Idawa pre-empts his interest by marrying her lover, Ngubane. Since Koranche attributes Idawa's agency to Ngubane, he arranges for his murder. While psychoanalysts such as Melanie Klein restrict their accounts of jealousy to its individual dimension, Armah provides an historical and social context. In Armah, a jealous subject restricts itself to the dominant interpretation of the ancestral text and consequently forfeits its opportunity to explore the realm of possibilities.

Koranche hopes that the death of Ngubane will resolve the psychological predicament presented by jealousy. However, contrary to Koranche's expectation, Ngubane's murder does not force Idawa to capitulate. Rejection by Idawa "pushe[s] his spirit into a comfortless hole in which, alone with himself, he searche[s] in vain for ways to run from his inner emptiness" (*Two Thousand Seasons* 71). As indicated above, individuals who are in this spiritual desert and have no social support may substitute material things for the missing social relations. To assuage his greed, Koranche invites European slave traders who were already in the neighbouring regions. He tells "great boasting tales of immense wealth contained in Anoa, and taunt[s] white destroyers . . . with their continuing impotence before the barrier made by the river with the sea" (78). The outcome of this lobbying is the arrival of European slave traders with ship loads of material goods which they intend to exchange for land and slave labour. It is in the context of these maladies of the soul that the healing projects of *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers* should be understood.

Healing

In a conversation with Densu, an aspiring healer, Damfo, the healer, states that healing is "restoring a lost unity to [an] individual's body and spirit": here, Damfo also suggests that social healing is the highest form of healing which mends rifts within the society (*The Healers* 82). In this section, this paper uses the healing of Araba Jesiwa to provide an illustration of individual healing. We have already indicated that she suffered from depression and miscarriages partly as a result of being forced to marry somebody she did not love. Initially, she seeks "help from a veritable procession of doctors" who offer her different, ineffective prescriptions for infertility (70). Isolated and overwhelmed by the dominant ancestral knowledges, she has no vision of alternative possibilities. Disappointed by those around her, she becomes suspicious of anybody trying to help her. However, Araba's fortunes change when she meets Damfo, whose healing practice is centered on a dialogical approach. Unlike other individuals who have tried to heal her, Damfo is patient and spends time with her. The speed of her progress is "what she, herself need[s] and [can] sustain" (72). While other individuals had preyed on Araba's weaknesses, Damfo advises her that the forces that were constricting her fertility were not external but were internal. The healer also advises Araba to suspend her biased view of ancestral knowledge, explore all the available past experiences

and choose those experiences that will facilitate her current project. The outcome of this process is the development of mutuality between Damfo and Araba. Eventually she realizes that in marrying Bedu Addo “she had violated her best self” (76). Mending her violated soul, she breaks away from her husband and marries Kofi Entsua. The outcome of the latter relation is the conception and birth of prince Appiah who, as a young man, develops a critical perspective of local and regional development. He opposes the British plan to incorporate all indigenous social formations into a British colony. The healing of Jesiwa is emblematic of the authentic relation that develops between Jesiwa and the healer. In this healing process both Jesiwa and Damfo experience the creative spiritual force.

The limits of individual healing are also illustrated by the case of Araba Jesiwa. Appiah, her son, rejects Ababio’s invitation to participate in the formal incorporation of the Fantse social formation into the British Empire. Consequently, Ababio successfully plans his murder and the critical maiming of Araba Jesiwa. Since a soul is an individual’s connectedness to her/his world, the healing of an individual ultimately depends on the healing of her/his world. The healers get a chance to participate in social healing through Asamoa Nkwanta, a commander of the Asante Army during the reign of Nana Kwaku Dua I. Nkwanta’s nephew is ritually killed by the members of the royal family. This event causes his depression and he vows never to “touch arms again in defence of Asante” (98). The healers accept the request to heal Asamoa believing that if Asamoa Nkwanta is “able to survive this catastrophe he’ll come out better than just strong. He’ll be wise, in addition to being strong. He will see the world around him differently. He’ll also see the way he wants to fit into the world differently” (100). The healers believe that a healed Asamoa will return to the Asante army with a changed perspective and may thus contribute to social transformation.

After his healing, Asamoa accepts an invitation from the Asante royals to lead the army against the British forces. Asamoa’s return to the Asante army causes divisions in the healing movement. The healers had initially reached a consensus to heal Asamoa with the hope that his return to the army would facilitate social transformation. Presumably, the healers believed that the army might play a positive role in social transformation. However, social development leads some healers such as Damfo to change their position. Damfo believes that it is impossible for Asamoa to facilitate change within the Asante political structures because the Asante military is organised around Asamoa. Implicit in Damfo’s critique is the claim that social change can be effected within existing social and political institutions provided that a counter-hegemonic movement is built. Asamoa Nkwanta is eventually betrayed by members of the Asante royal family who preferred to “yield a bit to the whites . . . than to lose all power to an upstart general” (291).

Asamoa’s mandate was not to heal the soul of the Asante people but to defend the Asante state against British invasion. The failure of his mission shows the need for an authentic and viable counter-hegemonic organization. *Two Thousand Seasons* deals with the birth

and the growth of such a group which is led by twenty initiates who find themselves in a politically passive environment. They find their interests straddled between two voices. The first voice urges them to fit into the existing social structures while the second voice calls them to a healing vocation, to be the soul guide of the people of Anoa. With their soul thus divided, the initiates have to heal themselves first in order to succeed in their calling.

To pursue their calling, the initiates enroll for the initiation rite. However, this process fails to meet their educational needs. They subsequently journey to the forest in search of the exiled healer-educator, Isanusi who advises them about the complexity of the world and warns them “to beware the surface of things [and] to stay clear of the hypocrites of power” (*Two Thousand Seasons* 89). The meetings with Isanusi display divisions within the initiates’ soul. Viewing Isanusi as “he whose greatest desire . . . [is] to keep the knowledge of our way from destruction; to bring it back to an oblivious people,” the initiates approach the healing call as a process akin to what Paulo Freire called banking education, an educational process in which the role of students is reduced to receiving, filing and storing the deposit (*Two Thousand Seasons* 89; Freire 57). The initiates are also still harbouring a belief that they can be productively and successfully integrated into the Anoa society. However, this illusion is fractured when Koranche conspires to send them to North American slave plantations.

On their trip to the nearby colonial outpost, the initiates’ response vacillates between conformity and individual heroism. With their hands and feet tied, their spirits feel heavier than their bodies and their minds, “blanked out with the overwhelming reality of capture” (112). This trip is also marked by heroic individual efforts to fight slavery. Taiwa, one of the initiates, launches an individual resistance which ends with her death. There are also local resistance groups that unsuccessfully try to stop the slave ship. This phase of the initiates’ lives show signs of a divided soul, an “unconnected consciousness [. . . which] is destruction’s keenest tool against the soul” (128).

When the initiates realize that neither conformity nor individual heroism are viable alternatives they begin to organize. Their first step in this process is the development of communication networks. They make sure that there are translators for all language groups so as “to reach every spirit” among the captured (125). The opportunity for further development of the organization presents itself after the death of John, the slave-driver. While it is enticing for the initiates to boycott all associations with slavery, they realize that they can use that position to further their understanding of the operations of the slave ship. Sobo, one of the initiates, volunteers himself for this role. He works hard to endear himself to the slave drivers and to conceal his double role. Soon he is given access to all parts of the ship, thus enabling him to play a pivotal role in the sabotage of the slave ship. After killing the slave drivers, the initiates drive the boats to safety where they built a recuperative home. This phase is anchored on a balance between conformity and freedom. The initiates are able to intelligently utilize

ancestral knowledge which was symbolized by the various languages of the enslaved. Communication is thus used to mend the divided soul. Their ability to utilize the connectedness of these languages allows them to explore new possibilities which result in their self-liberation and the continuation of the collective social healing.

In “One Writer’s Education,” Armah sets himself a modest goal of contributing to Africa’s self-liberation through his writings. Using Akan-influenced concepts of personhood, illness and wellness, Armah diagnoses the diseases that are plaguing Africa. Africa’s illnesses do not affect only the physical body but also Africa’s soul. Africa’s predicaments are therefore not to be resolved only by providing for the physical body, be it through economic growth or charity. Given the eurocentric grounding of the social sciences and humanities, Armah’s rendition of African myths of creation, and his re-interpretation of the concepts of godhead, gods and ancestors contribute to the decolonization of an African soul. Armah’s notion of personhood, with its tentacles on the three dimensions of time, challenges both the adherents to atomized individualism and the advocates of the romantic and nostalgic African personality. While projects with the goal of individual healing are important, Armah holds that Africa’s liberation is an African-centred and a collective endeavour.

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