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The Ambiguities of African Representations of the Colonial Encounter: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound To Violence*

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présenté par:

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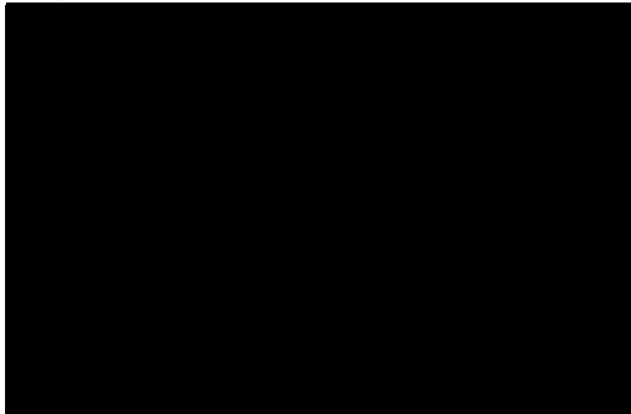

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Résumé de synthèse

Dans cette thèse, j'analyse les ambiguïtés crées par la rencontre coloniale dans trois textes spécifiques: *Things Fall Apart* (1958) de Chinua Achebe, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) de Ayi Kwei Armah et *Bound to Violence* (1968) de Yambo Ouologuem. Je considère que dans les trois romans la conclusion en est une de désillusionnement, et que le portrait de la société africaine, avant, pendant et après la rencontre coloniale, indique des contradictions et des irrégularités qui ne sont pas nécessairement conformes à la position anticoloniale des auteurs et à leur désir d'affirmer l'identité africaine.

Dans les textes, la rencontre coloniale en tant qu'événement tragique est mise à l'épreuve lorsque les artistes, non seulement "prônent" l'Africain et sa société, mais aussi soulignent divers traits négatifs au sein des communautés africaines. Ils dépeignent l'indigène à la fois comme victime d'agression mentale et physique et comme agresseur de son propre peuple. Malgré le fait que les trois auteurs dénoncent la présence étrangère dans leur romans, ils concluent avec une image du colonialisme intact.

J'argumente que ces diverses contradictions résultent d'une réaction des auteurs face aux représentations et aux perceptions négatives et colonialistes faites de l'Africain; ces contradictions sont aussi issues de leur compréhension des complexités de l'allégorie manichéenne, et de leurs convictions sociales et politiques.

Mon introduction explique que ces auteurs véhiculent des messages similaires malgré leurs différentes représentations de la société africaine: la société africaine est vulnérable dans le roman d'Achebe, utopique dans celui de Armah et violente dans celui de Ouologuem. De plus, je remets en question le refus d'Achebe d'être regroupé avec les deux autres auteurs. Je traite aussi de l'allégorie manichéenne en discutant brièvement les oeuvres d'Abdul JanMohamed et de Frantz Fanon.

En examinant l'utilisation de la langue faite par l'auteur dans la représentation des personnages, de l'intrigue et des concepts, et en me concentrant sur les discours fictifs et non-fictifs de l'auteur, j'étudie les ambiguïtés à l'intérieur des textes. Dans mon premier chapitre, je souligne la description de la vulnérable société Igbo dans Achebe. J'analyse la façon dont l'indigène est subjugué et victimisé, comment il laisse victimiser et la manière dont il "s'ajuste" à la présence de l'étranger en me concentrant sur les personnages principaux, Okonkwo, Obierika et Nwoye. Le second chapitre examine la société utopique d'Armah et sa condamnation de la présence des forces coloniales—les Arabes et les Britanniques—et ainsi que sa repésentation des actions de plusieurs Africains. Dans cette section, je porte une attention particulière au principe moral idyllique de survie, "la voie." Dans le troisième chapitre j'examine la société violente décrite par Ouologuem et sa notion de l'agression en tant que force libératrice et unificatrice pour l'autochtone en présence d'Africains locaux féodalistes, d'esclavagistes arabes et de colonialistes français.

Je conclus en fournissant un comparaison entre les structures et idées similaires discernées dans les trois textes. Et je termine en affirmant qu'Achebe, Armah et Ouologuem, dans leur tentative de créer un/e "contre-discours/idéologie," s'entremêlent dans les complexités des relations raciales, et conçoivent des images lugubres de la rencontre coloniale malgré leur désir d'insuffler de la dignité chez les lecteurs Africains.

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the ambiguities of the colonial encounter in three texts: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence* (1968). I find that in the three novels the conclusion is one of disillusionment, and that the portrayals of African society, before, during and after the colonial encounter, depict contradictions and inconsistencies that do not necessarily comply with the writers' anticolonial position and desire to affirm an African identity.

The colonial encounter as a tragic event is undermined in the texts as the artists not only present the African and his society in a positive way but also highlight various negative qualities within African communities. The novelists also portray the indigene as the innocent victim of mental and physical colonial aggression while including descriptions of the African as a victimizer of his own people. And although the three authors denounce local and foreign oppression throughout their novels, at the end of their texts they conclude with the idea that colonialism remains intact.

I argue that these various contradictions arise out of the writers' response to Western and African depictions and perceptions of the native, and their

understanding of the complexities of the Manichean allegory, as well as their social and political convictions.

My introduction lays the foundation for my proposition that these writers convey fairly similar messages, despite their various portrayals of African society, which are vulnerable in Achebe's novel, ideal in Armah's and violent in Ouologuem's. Furthermore, I challenge Achebe's refusal to be grouped with the other two authors. I also expound on the Manichean allegory by briefly discussing the works of Abdul JanMohamed and Frantz Fanon.

By examining the author's use of language in the representation of characters, plot and concepts, as well as focusing on the writers' fictional and nonfictional discourse, I study the ambiguities in the texts. In my first chapter I highlight Achebe's portrayal of vulnerable Igbo society. I analyze the indigene's subjugation and how he is victimized, as well as how he "allows" himself to be victimized, and the manner in which he "adjusts" to the presence of the foreigner. I do so by concentrating on the principal characters, Okonkwo, Obierika and Nwoye. The second chapter studies Armah's utopian society and his condemnation of the presence of the colonial forces: the Arabs and the British, as well as his praise and condemnation of the actions of many of the Africans. In this section I pay close attention to the novel's idyllic moral

principle of survival, "the way." In the third chapter I examine Ouologuem's portrayal of violent society and his notion of aggression as both a liberating and binding force for the native in the presence of local African feudalists, the Arab slave-dealers and the French colonialists.

I conclude by providing a short but concise summary of the patterns and ideas seen in the three texts, and close by affirming that Achebe, Armah and Ouologuem, in their attempt to create a "counter-discourse/ideology," get caught in the complexities of race relations, and formulate dismal images of the colonial encounter, despite their desire to instill dignity into African readers.

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For my parents , Tribeni and Kamla
. . . with all my love

Introduction

> What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the fagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe.
>
> (*Waiting for the Barbarians* 133)

> . . . it looks like the saying of our ancestors that when brothers fight to death a stranger inherits their father's estate.
>
> (*Arrow of God* 275)

> . . . .
> The Tall black King steps forward
> He towers over the thin bearded White
> man
> then grabbing his lean white hand
> Manages to whisper.
> 'Mtu Mwese Karibu'
> White man you are welcome . . .
>
> ("Stanley Meets Mutesa" David Rubadari)

In his article "Narrative, History and the African Imagination" Abiola Irele maintains that "the fundamental theme of modern African literature written in the European languages is that of the cleavage of consciousness provoked by the historic encounter with Europe" (161). Most certainly the traumatic experience of the colonial encounter has been the catalyst for the emergence and development of an African literary tradition. But equally important is the realization that African writers, responding to negative colonialist depictions and perceptions of the African, concentrated their literary efforts to provide more "just" images of the continent. In

other words, pitted against what Edward Said has termed the colonial "unitary web of vision," the native began to produce narrative that recreated the African experience with "an opposing point of view, perspective [and] consciousness . . . " (240). It is among the many themes explored by African writers that one also finds representations of the colonial encounter.

The portrayals of the course and legacy of the foreign encounter vary in African fiction. The characteristic that underlies most efforts, however, is the exposure of stark dichotomies that differentiate the indigene from the destroyer. Contrasts such as White and Black, good and evil, civilization and savagery, superiority and inferiority, self and Other, and so on, are constant. In fact, it would not be wrong to conclude that the African continent is painted in such a manner that it evokes the image of a "Robben Island," a prison where all are discriminated, oppressed and punished to quench the colonizer's economic thirst.

Novels such as Ferdinand Oyono's *La Vie de boy* and Ngugi wa thiong'o's *The River Between*, for instance, reveal the horror of a foreign invasion, the literal disintegration of local environments, and the denigration of the African by cultural, political and religious means. But there are also novels that recount how Africans take violent action against their colonizer. In J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for example, the locals randomly raid the "Empire," while in Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Season's End*, Beukes and his companions use guerilla tactics

against White rule. Yet among these novels one also finds fiction that not only portrays colonial oppression but draws attention to internal conflicts by questioning the motives, actions, as well as the social and political institutions of the Africans. Exposure of internal political strife in a novel such as Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Healers*, or the abuse of power by the Mandingo king, Djigui, and his court in Ahamdou Kourouma's *Monnè, outrages et défis*, or, for that matter, the lack of religious unity in Jamal Mahjoub's *In the Hour of the Signs*, hint that the disintegration of African societies may not necessarily have resulted solely from a foreign invasion, but rather, from weakness and/or the abuse of power from within.

My interest lies in novels that try to encompass all the above characteristics in their representations of the colonial encounter; that is, novels that examine the subjugation of the African by foreign abuse, and draw attention to the in/ability of the African to take action against oppression, as well as novels that portray certain aspects of African economic, social and political systems in a positive manner while simultaneously depicting other aspects in a negative light, thereby undermining the colonial encounter as a uniformly tragic event. Basically, I am drawn towards fiction that represents the encounter in an ambiguous manner. Questions such as whether the African should be seen as an innocent victim, or a victimizer, or quite simply a compliant victim is what is of real concern to me. I thus chose three novels that depict the encounter in complex ways: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ayi Kwei

Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*. Apart from the fact that they represent the encounter of the indigene and the aggressor (African, European and/or Arab), they emphasize the use of violence and abuse which is necessary for the "Manichean world" (Fanon 41) to set in and take effect in the form of imperialist relations. At the same time, and more importantly, although the conclusion in all three instances is one of uncertainty, and even at times despair, the portrayals of African society, before, during and after the colonial contact, depict contradictions and inconsistencies that do not necessarily comply with the normative prerequisite of an anticolonial position.

A closer look at the three selected novels shows that the writers follow a more or less similar pattern in their recreation of the colonial encounter. They present African society in a "positive" and sympathetic light, focus on the destruction of African society by invading forces, and highlight how internal conflict and corruption also leads to the community's downfall.

Achebe begins with the "glorification" of pre-colonial Igbo society. His meticulous details of the tribe's cultural practices create an image of a unified society. He continues with the description of the arrival of the British forces and the subsequent exploitation and oppression that follows. In this way, he emphasizes the loss of an "utopian" past in the hands of imperialist powers. But as he explores the consequences of nineteenth-century colonization on the native, he also hints that

contradictions within Igbo society contributed to the community's disintegration. Armah, on the other hand, begins with an invocation that laments the loss of an egalitarian African past. His narrator, a seer, recounts the thousand years of enslavement and alien exploitation by forces from the desert (the Arabs) and the sea (the Europeans). Armah also creates an "Eden-like" past; he formulates an African philosophy of life, termed simply "the way," that is composed of principles of equality. But he too exposes African society as problematic. Not only are there "rifts" within the egalitarian society but many Africans willingly abandon their way of life, "the way," and betray their own people to join the invaders. Ouologuem, unlike Achebe and Armah, who take pains to explore pre-colonial society, does not depict the time before the emergence of the exploiters (who are not only the African Semitic/Islamic aristocracy but also the Arabs and the French colonialists). Instead, he describes seven hundred and fifty years of exploitation of the servants/peasants in the hands of African rulers and foreign forces. This, I find, draws sympathy towards the native, more so when the masses, deprived of the role of governing themselves, and caught between the struggle for power amongst the African rulers, the Arab slave dealers and the French colonialists, are portrayed as the "eternal salves." But Ouologuem is also exceptionally critical of local society. He depicts the so-called oppressed members of the community in a rather "hostile" manner, calling them the "niggertrash" of Africa, and describing them as equally violent and exploitive as the invaders. He illustrates

that the native also had a role to play in the oppression of the African people.

From the above summaries it is clear that in their representation of the colonial encounter these novelists introduce issues that contradict each other. The presence of such contradictions can be understood if one examines the different elements in isolation, bearing in mind the writers' ideological positions. The role of the author in all instances cannot in any way be overlooked, especially in African literature where the writer is at all times "committed" to his art and society in some form or the other. He is, as Michel Foucault puts it, a historical figure who experiences and records the changes in history (149). The imperatives in the novels I have chosen, these "national allegories," as Frederic Jameson (69) calls them, must then be read by delving into the authors' nonfictional discourse and into their various convictions, especially since the portrayal of African society complies with the authors' belief that the past must be re-created for ideological purposes, or in Wole Soyinka's words, for "social direction" (117). Hence, without getting into too many details, it will suffice to simply mention these writers' attitudes as regards to the role of the artist in African literature.

Briefly then, for Achebe, the writer's role is to instil "dignity" and "respect" into a people, so that the African may know that he too had a "culture" before the coming of alien forces (Killam 7–13). A similar position is taken by Armah, who speaks of the writer's recreation of the past as a "social necessity," for not only does literature provide a better understanding of the past and the present but it can guide the African

people towards a more promising future ("Teaching" 994). The attempt to recreate African society for social purposes is also, in a way, present in Ouologuem's novel. The author may not extol African society but he too maintains that he is interested in trying to recreate a "truer" African past for locals who have been demoralized by colonization and misguided by past Western and African historical and ethnographical discourses (Plexus 135–6).

But although Achebe, Armah and Ouologuem explicitly state that they are committed to redefining the past in order to assert an African identity, they are unable to bring this across. They portray African society as being riddled with problems: the local systems are described as inefficient and the African is depicted in negative terms. The authors, at times, even go as far as to state that the African was responsible for his own subjugation because of his corrupt nature, and because he did not see the seed of disintegration within his community, thereby leaving room for strangers to take over. Achebe, for instance, depicts many of the cultural practices in an ambiguous and even negative manner. The inexplicable nature of certain horrible acts, such as the throwing of twins into the bush, or the sacrifice of children to avert war, drive many of the locals to the missionaries. This allows the British to penetrate Igbo society and establish themselves. In Armah's novel the Africans abandon "utopian" principles and engage in communal warfare because of their greed and ambition. The invaders take advantage of this and lure those with grand desires for

power and wealth to their side. As "accomplices" of the Other, many of the Africans further disrupt local tribes by taking advantage of the natives and selling them into slavery. The carnage that follows continues for a thousand years. Ouologuem does not hold back in describing the presence of violence amongst the Black Africans. According to the author, the indigene's sadistic and erotic nature drives him to commit abominable atrocities on his own people. And it is the desire for power and status that leaves the African at the mercy of indigenous and foreign forces.

One could argue that these writers scrutinize and "condemn" African society, and expose the "rise and fall of empires [and tribes]" (Ngugi, *Homecoming* 45) in reaction to African portrayals of the native. They question the Negritudist position taken up by artists such as Leopold Sedar Senghor (who candidly romanticize the past) by affirming that "the idea of pre-colonial traditional society as a haven of peace, a state of egalitarian self-satisfaction, idyllic bliss and sweet reasonableness is an utopian myth. . ." (qtd. in Nwahunanya, "Social" 2). This is why in all the three novels the exploration of the colonial encounter shows how the Africans also had a large role to play in the destruction of their community by highlighting that African society was riddled with cultural contradictions, conflicts and inter-feudal wars, all of which led to its downfall.

But although the exposure of the internal flaws in the communities provides a more "balanced" view of African society, and similarly helps to counteract the

African romantic portrayals of local communities, it contradicts the writers' need to recreate the past for social purposes, since it shows that the African is not the victim of foreign oppression but a collaborator in the victimization of his people. Hence, the indigene not only yields to aggression but he also joins the colonizer in oppressing his people.

And yet the novels end with a sense of disenchantment, eliciting sympathy from the reader for the African and his "tragic" fate. Okonkwo, the protagonist of Achebe's novel, who appears as the perfect representative of Igbo society kills himself when he realizes that he is fighting a lone battle against the colonial powers. He commits suicide, the worst of all abominations, while the British, triumphant, continue to rule over a "subdued" population. In *Two Thousand Seasons* the local "revolutionaries," who have roamed the desert and witnessed slavery, overthrow the native despots and the White slave-drivers. They rejoice at the prospect of returning to their homeland, thinking that they can (re)establish the old way of life that was once disrupted and destroyed by the encroachment of Arabs and Europeans. However, the British gain such a strong foothold in the African continent that the locals cannot escape European imperialism that now exists in the form of the slave-trade. And in the final episode of Ouologuem's novel Saif ben Isaac al-Heit, ruler of the African Republic of Nakem, and the French Bishop, Henry, a missionary, momentarily "resolve" their power struggle over a game of chess. But the game has

symbolic innuendoes, so that even when the game ends in a checkmate the reader realizes that the struggle for power between these forces will resume. And since the masses are not represented in the particular scene (emphasizing their general absence from the politics of their own land) one can assume that they will be subjected to continued violence and oppression.

It is in response to Western and African portrayals of the indigene that the authors provide ambiguous portrayals of the colonial encounter. Despite their desire to instill a sense of "Black identity" in their African readers, these writers represent the colonial encounter in contradictory ways. They not only praise but also condemn the African and his society; they portray the native as the innocent victim of colonial conquests, as well as one of the collaborators in the victimization of the people; and they denounce local and foreign oppression while ending their novels with the idea that colonialism remains intact. Although such contradictions can be examined by looking at the authors' political and social convictions, they can also be explained partly by studying the various implications of the colonial encounter itself. In fact, discourse on the colonial encounter cannot be fully understood unless the politics of domination is examined. It is thus important to provide the historical context of the events portrayed in the novel. I will therefore briefly discuss the stages of colonial domination in African society and the effects it had on the native. I will also mention how the writers, responding to Western discourse, may be representing the African

past in codes defined by the West.

According to JanMohamed, colonial domination exists in two stages: "dominant" and "hegemonic" ("Economy" 61). The "dominant" stage includes the period between the first contact of foreign forces with the indigene and the time when the locals gain independence. This stage is marked with colonial "material practices"; that is, a period in which the outsider achieves economic domination by exploiting the colony's natural resources by force. "Carried on by the dint of a great array of bayonets and cannons" (Fanon 36), the colonizer enforces labour and production, instigates population migration and suppresses local systems, religions and languages. The second imperialist stage is the "hegemonic" one (also know as neo-colonialism) which, as Said explains, occurs with the institutionalization of foreign practices through civil and political means (7). I concentrate on the former period, the "dominant" stage, as it is the focus of the three novels that I have chosen, even though the aspects of the second stage are introduced in all the three texts.

The "dominant" period is a disruptive phase; it manipulates local systems with the use of technology and wealth, thereby creating a new power relation within the society: the Manichean opposition of White superiority verses Black inferiority. In fact, similar to the explanation George Balandier provides in his *Sociology of Black Africa*, the three texts that I examine establish how the

> [a]ctive minority [the colonizer] owes its dominant position to its

> indisputable material superiority, to a system introduced to maintain its own interest, and to a system of justification of more or less racial character. . . (33)

As a result, the native not only experiences physical inferiority but mental anguish as well. He is caught in the chains of oppression from which he desperately tries to break free. But he is unable to do so as he is attracted to the colonizer's material wealth and technology. He desires to destroy his aggressor, but believing that he is inferior he simultaneously strives hard to please the colonizer, so as to be recognized and accepted. He basically becomes a victim of "a kind of social pathology" (qtd. in JanMohamed, *Manichean* 3), a state in which he is unable to take up arms against his enemy. But since the native has to vent his anger and aggression through some means, he does so by attacking his own people (Fanon 52) before he is able to strike the foreigner and break free.

The above model, the Manichean opposition between the dominated and the dominator, exists in the three texts. But because the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is one of interdependence the motives behind the actions of the natives can at times be unclear. For instance, when the native joins the colonizer is it simply because he is caught in a psychological "bind" from which he desperately tries to break free in order to seek acknowledgment from the outsider? Or is it for purely selfish reasons because he wants to benefit from colonial wealth and

power? The inability to understand whether such actions arise out of the African's ambivalence towards the colonial presence, or quite simply his supposed corrupt nature, only serves to make the portrayals of the natives more ambiguous .

But it is interesting to note that the study of race relations arises out of the writers' response to colonial "hegemonic" fiction. While being conscious of African portrayals of the native, these authors are trying to subvert former Western preconceived images of Africa by affirming "Africanness": "whiteness indeed they have known; of our blackness they have yet to learn" (Armah, *Two* xvi). But by trying to recreate the past in response to African romantic portrayals of African communities, and simultaneously trying to counteract the Western erroneous images of the African, these authors are caught in a dilemma. For by abiding with one they unconsciously negate the other.

But by forming counter-discourses in response to Western images of the African, these writers, in their attempt to denounce the colonizer and invert past negative images of the African, are pulled into the complexities of race relations. But this does not mean that the authors are ambivalent towards the colonizer and thereby formulate both an anti- and pro-colonial discourse, so as to give the impression that the encounter, however negative, was, in fact, *beneficial* to the African—an example

seen distinctly in a novel like *Dougicimi.*[1] For none of the texts overtly *praise* the colonial presence. However, seeing that

> the power relations underlying this [the Manichean allegory] model set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex (JanMohamed, "Economy" 63)

one cannot rule out the fact that ambivalence can exist without the advocation of the positiveness of foreign contact. This is illustrated in the writers "failed" attempt to invert the Western image of the native and his society. For despite the authors' desire to forge a view of the past for social direction, they portray the African in the same light in which Western discourse perceives him: as savage, violent, erotic and corrupt (Hammond and Jablow). One could then consider JanMohamed's point that in the attempt to provide counter-discourses these artists become trapped in the codes and contexts defined by the West. As they include the colonizer's attitudes to which they are responding in their own works.

And yet the authors argue that the problems that existed in African society were actually *exacerbated* by "the colonizer's ability to exploit preexisting power relations of hierarchy, subordination, and subjugation within native societies" (JanMohamed, "Economy" 62). They imply that although internal problems were

[1] Paul Hazoumé's 1938 novel both condemns and *champions* the social, political and cultural structure of the Dohomeyan Kingdom, as well as French colonialism.

present, the turmoil that followed the colonial encounter may not have occurred, or reached the heights that it did, had the colonizer not infiltrated African society and taken advantage of internal problems by introducing manichean distinctions such as the dominator verses the dominated. In other words, the authors blame the colonizer for the destruction that followed the colonial confrontation. They nevertheless conclude their novels with the colonizer still present. It is then perplexing that despite their condemnation of the colonizer, Achebe, Armah, and Ouologuem end their novels in disillusionment.

While I am hesitant to state that these artists are ambivalent about the colonial encounter, I do accept that ambiguity in the texts may stem from their (un)conscious desire to accept the kind of changes that colonization has brought; after all, they have all experienced the cultural conflicts inherent in hybrid societies. But even though one could easily argue that ambiguity in the novel arises out of the (un)conscious contradictions in the ways in which the authors see their society, I first read these novels with the understanding that the ambiguity in the texts may be largely a case of the artists' lack of awareness of certain implications of their representations. I, therefore, study the writers' work by looking at their *aesthetic representation* of the colonial encounter. I do so by taking into consideration Irele's point that modern African literature must be approached with "an effective and intense participation in the creative art," as a lasting interest in an artist's work can only be achieved if a critic

"partakes in the imaginative process, in which the senses are alive to the verbal signposts which the writer has planted. . ." (*African* 32). But though I posit language as a crucial instrument to the understanding of the texts, I must point out that I am not restricting myself to simply examining verbal signs; rather, I am looking at language as it is used in the different portrayals by focusing on characters, concepts, events and so on.

At the same time, I look into the writers' critical essays, other fiction, and when possible, interviews, to reach a better understanding of their novels. I find that the writers' artistic and political convictions are not only contradictory but that they do not necessarily manifest themselves in their works. And the fact that some of their non-fictional discourse appears after the publication of the novels discussed does not, in my opinion, make these latter works irrelevant to my study.

My selection of three representations of the colonial encounter is necessarily limited. It does, however, provide different interpretations of the same event which are amenable to comparison. Firstly, in all three novels there is the exposure of every possible form of abuse inflicted upon the African: sexual, economical, political, cultural, social and psychological. Secondly, within the ambiguous depictions of the colonial encounter lie different portrayals of African society; it is vulnerable in Achebe's case, ideal in Armah's and violent in Ouologuem's. And thirdly, different colonizing forces are presented by the author: the African, European and Arab.

Also, the texts I have chosen have not been examined together. My decision to place them in a study is a direct result of Achebe's words at a symposium in 1976 where he objected to being categorized with writers like Armah and Ouologuem on the matter of commitment, justifying his argument with the statement that they "are committed to different things, completely" (Achebe, "Panel" 36). These "different things" according to Achebe lie in their unveiling of cruelty and "wickedness," their refusal to see African reality, and their "alienation" from their own society. In response to this I deliberately choose Armah's text, *Two Thousand Seasons*, and Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*, especially since the former has been considered as a direct response to the latter.[2] But I do not believe, as Derek Wright does, that Armah's text is an entirely "corrective and constructive" response to Ouologuem's "negative and destructive" novel ("Orality" 91). Rather, I find that both novels, regardless of their varying portrayals of the African society, manifest similar attitudes: both condemn and sympathize with the colonized but end their novels in uncertainty and despair. But I feel that Achebe is not entirely justified in his interpretation of the writers' positions, since he too, in my opinion, portrays the encounter in a disillusioned manner, and is unable to (re)create the kind of communal integrity he

[2]It may interest the reader to know that the prerequisite to Armah and Ouologuem's work is André Schwartz-Bart's *Le Dernier des Justes*. I do not concern myself with the similarities of these African texts with the French one, but I do think it is important for readers to be aware of the similarities (and differences) of the two African texts.

advocates.

Finally, the colonial encounter has been widely fictionalized, and much critical work exists in this area. Dorothy Hammond and Waita Jalbow's *The Myth in Africa*, and Christopher Miller's *Blank Darkness*, for instance, study the representation of Africans and the continent in British and French fiction and nonfiction. As for the examination of African writing, studies range from literary and linguistic analysis to discussions of the accuracy of literary representations of colonialism. Close readings of historical and autobiographical influences also exist. There are also studies that ground literary fiction of the colonial encounter as manifestations of sociological, psychological, economic, political or cultural factors. Among these, Abdul JanMohamed's *Manichean Aesthetics*, V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* and M. M. Mahood's *The Colonial Encounter*, stand out for combining many of these issues in different ways.

I will now proceed to examine each book individually. I not only play close attention to the aesthetic representation in each text but I analyse the ambiguities by highlighting the authors' own contradictory ideologies and convictions.

Chapter One
"Whenever Something Stands, Something Else Will Stand Beside It": Ambiguity in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

In a 1989 interview with Bill Moyers, Achebe interpreted the Igbo proverb: "whenever something stands, something else will stand beside it," to mean that "there is no one way to anything"(333). He added, and this is extemely important, that this Igbo proverb had played a great role in both his life and art. Readers will most certainly agree with this admission, for the duality that the proverb refers to is definitely present in Achebe's work. From his early conviction "that most of the problems we see in our politics derive from the moment when we lost our initiative to other people, to colonizers" (Appiah 209); to the belief that culture in local societies was not "destroyed" by foreigners but "disturbed" (Ogbaa 3); to the proposition that the African may have "gained" something from the colonial encounter (Nwoga 15); to the strong artistic urge to "alter things" (Achebe, *Morning* 14) in order to instill dignity in a people who had a culture worthy of praise before the coming of the White man (Killam 8); Achebe's attitudes differ. This has led critics like M. M. Mahood to conclude that it would probably be better for readers to put their trust in his fiction, as the opinions he expresses elsewhere somewhat undermine his position as a writer (38). But Achebe's conflicting points of view are, in fact, reiterated in his fiction. They are not presented in simple contrasting terms but ambiguously, which reflects his own unresolved notions about the colonial encounter.

Ambiguity in *Things Fall Apart* arises out of the way Achebe "juggles" with

aesthetic and ethical notions, out of the way he tries to strike a balance between his artistic and educational roles. In fact, believing that art and education are not "mutually exclusive" (Killam 4), Achebe in a 1965 essay actually coined the phrase "novelist as teacher" to describe the African writer's commitment in representing the fateful consequences of the colonial experience. This definition, despite his interjection that a writer is not bound by his society but free to go against it and do as he pleases (Killam 2), has been taken quite literally. This is why in an interview with Jane Wilkinson he clarified that by equating the novelist to a teacher he was not necessarily alluding to an artist who "prescribes" but to one who "explores" (47).

Things Fall Apart is thus an "exploration" of the past. But this is in itself problematic because Achebe does not interpret and recreate the colonial encounter with the use of historical sources; he does so on his own terms, with his own preconceived ideas and biase.

The author portrays the destructive power of foreign intervention by discussing the religious, social, political, and mercantile changes that take place within Igbo community. The process of gradual destruction of the African environment is emphasized by transforming the society into a "myth," an "archetype" with elements of "pathos" and "celebration" (Kar 151). But while describing the richness of the community, Achebe draws attention to the clan's internal flaws, to hint that the society's destruction may have come from within, and not necessarily from without.

The result is then a juxtaposition of two opposing notions: the colonial encounter as *catastrophic*, and the destablization of the society as *catalytic*. The former alludes to the belief that the colonizer is solely to blame for the destruction of African society, while the latter considers the role played by society in its own disintegration. But I find it strange that despite Achebe's belief that the past must be explored to instill dignity into a people (Killam 8), he still portrays local society negatively, thereby undermining the "tragic" effect of the colonial encounter.

And yet ambiguousness in the novel arises not only from the exploration of race confrontation, and the simultaneous study of internal disintegration, but also when Achebe implies that the changes that take place in the society, as a result of colonial intervention, are perhaps inevitable and beneficial to the Igbo. In fact, the text's lack of clarity is accentuated when, on the one hand, Achebe ends his novel "imbued with a melancholic sense of the falling apart of things" (Jeyifo, "Chinua" 51) (Okonkwo, the protagonist, kills himself when he realizes that his tribesmen will not join him to confront the English colonizers); while on the other, he hints that society simply "changes in order to move on" (Wright, "Things" 81) (the other members of the clan continue to survive under colonial rule without revolting as Okonkwo does; they learn to "adapt" to the foreign presence).

I want to examine these different attitudes, to show how ambiguity is created in the novel, and to discuss how Achebe, in his representation of the encounter,

vacillates between lamenting the loss of a communal and agrarian past, and championing change for "things" to move on. I will analyse the indigene's subjugation and how he is victimized, as well as how he "allows" himself to be victimized, and how he "adjusts" to the presence of the foreigner.

But before I go any further I wish to cite Achebe's own view on the colonial encounter, for I find that not only does it summarize Achebe's attitude, but it also exposes the roots of the contradictions seen in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*:

> Without subscribing to the view that Africa gained nothing at all in her long encounter with Europe, one could still say, in all fairness, that she suffered many terrible and lasting misfortunes. About human dignity and human relations, the encounter was almost a complete disaster for the black races. It has warped the mental attitudes of both black and white. (qtd. in Nwoga 15)

Clearly, this quotation uncovers not only Achebe's understanding of race relations, or the structure of the Manichean allegory, but also draws attention to his possible ambivalence towards colonialism. He responds to colonial confrontation with the attitude that it was physically and mentally destructive to the native. And yet despite his view that the repercussions of colonialism were nothing less than devastating, he does not dismiss the possibility that the African may have "benefitted" from such an event. For while expressing the traumatic experience of colonization, he adds that society "gained" something from European contact. But it is important to take note that Achebe is not necessarily *praising* the presence of the Other. To him the notion

that Africa "gained" something, regardless of the consequences (good and bad) of colonization, implies that Africans did, and can learn from the past. Hence, I am wary of the possibility that Achebe may be "stretched on the rack of [his] ambivalence" (*Morning* 68). However, the characters in his book may not be as lucky. So while Achebe himself may not be caught in a Manichean "web," he portrays the colonial encounter with the "economy of the Manichean allegory," in mind.

Things Fall Apart depicts the colonial encounter as a confrontation between two antagonistic groups, the Africans and the Europeans. The dissolution of Igbo society is attributed to colonial domination, the consequences of which are that not only did "things fall apart," morally and culturally, but that the process of change initiated by foreign imposition left the native somewhat "no longer at ease." Achebe, therefore, not only describes the various strategic stages of colonial intervention, but he also focuses on the "mental" attitudes of the locals towards British intervention, which vary from hatred (seen in Okonkwo, the protagonist), to awe (manifested by Nwoye, Okonkwo's son), to ambivalence (expressed by Obierika, an "*Ozo*," a highly ranked member of society). These different attitudes explain why the Igbo do not revolt, or why they learn to "adapt" to the presence of the colonizer.

Things Fall Apart is partly a response to colonial literature. The author tries not only to subvert the colonial image of the native but he also tries to re-create the image of the African. And since the author's attitude is to "teach" and "explore" the past

for ideological purposes, he chooses an artistic approach that he believes may serve well to instill "dignity" and "confidence" into his African readers (Killam 8). He describes his artistic method in terms of light passing through a glass. Like the way light, when hitting a glass, can provide either a "faithful if somewhat unexciting image" or a distorted "glorious spectrum" (Killam 9), the African artist must accordingly choose between two similar approaches when recreating the past. He must avoid the accurate and mundane and, instead, formulate an image in "glorious technicolour" (Killam 9).

It is no wonder then that while studying the predicament of the encounter, the author highlights details of the society's structures, values, philosophy, beauty and poetry, marriage and harvest ceremonies, the veneration of elders and local deities, the glorification of oral literature, and so on, in the novel. I have avoided elaborating on the ethnographical details of the book because I feel that the novel is in itself an ethnographic source of information, and discussing the details would be redundant. Still, what is important to acknowledge are the effects created by these details. For apart from being a source of cultural information, the descriptions of the society's features help create a sense of solidarity and "wholeness" among the Igbo, the loss of which is greatly felt when these qualities are destroyed with the coming of the White man.

But to draw attention to the subjugation of Igbo society Achebe does more

than "extol" local culture; he also presents the colonizer as the oppressor. It is Obierika, one of the clan's important men, who very accurately sums this up:

> The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart. (176)

But added to the colonizer's religious imposition, the author, in order to formulate the basis of the novel's representation of race relations, also provides descriptions of various other "steps" taken by the Europeans to fulfill their colonial mission. For example, the White man establishes a form of government and introduces an economic system that gives rise to both fear and greed. The English also take the law into their own hands and judge cases in ignorance of the laws of the people (174). It is also mentioned that the European institutionalizes slavery, and that he produces "powerful guns" (141). In all these instances power acquisition is figured as the colonizer's main objective, and he will go to any length to guard it. Even Mr. Brown's (an English missionary) policy of "compromise and accommodation" (185) is not void of the thirst of power; for as Achebe reminds us, "understanding and control go hand in hand—understanding being a precondition for control and control constituting adequate proof of understanding" (*Morning* 5). As for the apparent absence of violence in Mr. Brown's policy, it is eventually fulfilled by Mr.Smith (Mr. Brown's successor). It is under Mr. Smith's command that the leading men of Umuofia are

taken hostage, beaten and humiliated. He represents the White man's "real" ignorance as he sees things in "black and white terms" (185).

Interestingly enough, despite the evidence that the outsiders disrupt local society, and introduce the Manichean opposition of the colonizer verses the colonized, the author's distinct anticolonial stance is contradicted by the idea that the colonizers are not solely to blame for the break-up of Igbo society, and that African society may have had a role to play in its own disintegration. But unlike Armah and Ouologuem, who focus on the possibility that the African may be ("generically") corrupt and violent, Achebe undermines the portrayal of the great cohesive structural workings of the community by highlighting the prevalence of negative features within the society.

Artistically, the study of the flaws of the society contradicts the author's former decision to negate colonial thinking and instill dignity into a people. However, Achebe justifies this by explaining that the African artist must avoid being overcome by passion when revealing the past, and can only do so by providing an "objective" picture. According to him, one cannot simply vilify the European; after all, the past "had its good as well as its bad sides" (Killam 9).

I personally feel that the depiction of Igbo culture cannot escape scrutiny. The portrayal shows that the very fabric of society is in need of change. Indeed, within the so-called well-knit society are questionable and ambiguous laws that drive the

unsatisfied to a new religion and culture. There are, for example, no logical reasons to ostracize, marginalize or discriminate against people like the "*osu*," "*efulefu*," or the "*agbala*," nor is anything achieved by abandoning the diseased in the "Evil Forest," or, for that matter, sacrificing people and mutilating and throwing babies into the bush. These "unattractive" acts are carried out because they are part of a cultural set-up that must, at all times, be obeyed. But because the law is decreed as absolute those who cannot understand it find themselves faced with moral dilemmas, and more so, when the law is openly contradicted by the presence of the English forces (the missionaries' ability to survive the prophesied curse of the "Evil Forest," as they settle there, serves to enhance their power in the eyes of the locals while undermining that of the Igbo).

Society's flaws must be examined, not because their "distasteful" and ambiguous nature are partly responsible for driving many villagers to the colonizers, but because they are actually portrayed by Achebe in an equally ambiguous manner, the implication being that to change the ways in which the community functions means jeopardizing its unity and existence. Keeping this in mind, I examine the flaws as they are brought to the forefront by the author with the portrayal of three characters: Nwoye, Obierika and the main protagonist, Okonkwo.

Nwoye represents the unsatisfied and confused members of his society. In his case the two principal customs that affect him are the cries of an infant in the bush and Ikemefuna's death (61). They create in him what the author describes as a

"snapping." This is indeed symbolic of the community's inability to account for certain customs and traditions that eventually drive many to look elsewhere for answers. But it is worth noting that the new religion Nwoye joins does not have answers for him; in fact, we are told quite plainly that "he did not understand it" (147). I find this extremely ambiguous because by informing us that Nwoye had no understanding of the White man's teachings Achebe implies that Nwoye may have other reasons for joining the Christians. I argue then that Christianity may not be the root cause of the rift between Okonkwo and his son. The author elaborates on this by describing Nwoye's domestic life as being one that is "plagued" by his father's constant bickering and thrashing, which leaves him sad and bitter (14). But to consider this as the only reason for Nwoye abandoning his own religion to embrace another is misleading. For when the narrator emphasizes that "it was not the mad logic of the trinity that captivated him," but merely, "something felt in the marrow" (147), he is implying that the mere presence of a foreign religion, as an *alternative* to turn to, led many like Nwoye to "defect." Furthermore, by using the word "captivated" Achebe implicitly hints that Nwoye's unexplainable feelings may have something to do with the colonial African fascination with "Whiteness" and "White superiority."

Nwoye's defection echoes the slow destruction of society. Although the community's norms are seen as "criminal," they are norms ordained by the oracle, and

have, thus far, held the community together. This is not to say that Igbo society should be founded on unjust laws. But culture is always based on a certain amount of mysticism, and it is only faith in the unknown that allows many communities to survive. I thus believe that through Nwoye Achebe is hinting that the Igbo do not necessarily come under colonial power because of internal problems but simply because of the foreign presence. In other words, the downfall of the society is *initiated* by the encroachment of the foreign forces. The disintegration of society begins with the arrival of the colonial powers.

But not everyone with unanswerable questions goes over to the other side. Some learn to "adapt." Obierika is the perfect example of this. Like Nwoye he is burdened with questions but, unlike Nwoye, he learns to deal with them.

On Okonkwo's unintentional killing of Ezeudu's son, Obierika ponders long and hard:

> Why should a man suffer so grievously for an offense he had committed inadvertently? But although he thought for a long time he found no answer. He was merely led into greater complexities. He remembered his wife's twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed? (125)

I look at this passage as superbly exemplifying Obierika's perceptiveness in spotting the inadequacies inherent in his culture. However, my contention is that Obierika, an eminent man of the society, an *Ozo*, who has the power to implement change, does

not take necessary action. Even when he has answers for the inadequacies, like in the case of the contradictory law of the tapping of trees (69), he is unable to do anything, or chooses not to, for he fears the unexplainable law, reminding us that the clan must always follow what has been ordained by the oracle (125). In this instance, he is perhaps no better then the people of Umuofia who, quick to condemn the customs of others (32), continue to accept and live with their own. Yet no matter how much one criticizes Obierika, the fact remains that he does not fall prey to the community's flaws, or to the changes the society undergoes with the advent of the colonizer.

Consider the manner in which Obierika handles the ritual killing of Ikemefuna (Ikemefuna is the young boy who is sent by a neighbouring clan, Mbaino, to compensate for the accidental death of an Umofian woman. He is taken into Okonkwo's household). His reasoning that Okonkwo should not have taken part in the killing (67), similar to Ogbuefi Ezeudu's (one of the clan's elders) advice to Okonkwo (57), is a rational analysis of an absolute law; it separates the emotional burden of killing the child from the necessary fulfillment of the ritual. This clearly displays Obierika's ability to be "more subtle and more in tune with the danger, the impending betrayal by the culture" (Jeyifo, "Literature" 13) that, in turn, enables him to survive.

However, one can also see Obierika's "reasoning" in another light, as an "evasion" (Jeyifo 13) of the "sordidness" involved in the fulfillment of customary

norms, for he lets others take the brunt of society's disparities. Nevertheless, it is his ability to "hold something in reserve" (Jeyifo 13), to be ambivalent, that keeps him psychologically intact and ready to face challenges. This, I feel, is similar to the way his entire society functions. Despite its deep-seated inconsistencies it too has survived, so far, by "sieving" what it deems appropriate. Hence, obscurity from within does not compel everyone to "cross over" to the other side; instead, like Obierika, some live in ambivalence, giving them the ability to guard their customs, despite the flaws, while readily accepting and allowing new ways, introduced by the English, to prevail.

Okonkwo, it appears, is then destroyed because he interprets the law literally. He is driven to his death because of his incapacity to read into the ambiguousness of the cultural laws.

Many of the Igbo laws are not only inappropriate (as seen with Nwoye) but ambiguous. Take for example the gender values of the community. Igbo society is founded on matriarchal values but is a predominately male oriented society. This is well exhibited with the description of Ani, the earth goddess, who protects the land and the people. Her role symbolizes the esteemed presence of women, ("mother is supreme," says Okonkwo's uncle [134]), and yet, masculinity is upheld and awarded at all times (Okonkwo climbs the social ladder based on his achievements, such as the beheading of men in war, marrying several wives and winning wrestling matches, all

of which are typically masculine actions in his society). But despite the reverence of women, they are considered secondary and insignificant. Simon Gikandi has discussed this at length by focusing on a particular wrestling match portrayed in the novel (*Reading* 34). He cites the narrator's description of the scene, "[i]t was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders" (Achebe, *Things* 87), as a clear display of the discrepancy between the role of women and men. To Gikandi, the men in the centre signify "phallocentrism," so that "meanings are defined and controlled by men and cultural identity is only achieved through the exclusion of women" (34). I find that Okonkwo's life, goals and achievements are based on a similar idea.

Okonkwo is unable to strike a balance with the gender values of the society. He is haunted by the unworthiness and indolence of his father who, because of his laziness, was considered "womanly." This unpleasant memory instills the fear of failure and weakness in Okonkwo (13) so that his whole life is founded on the desire never to be anything like his father. This leads him to transgress laws that he normally tries to adhere to closely. During the "Week of Peace," for instance, he commits an abomination by beating his wife, Ojiugo. Even though she is at fault for having missed cooking the midday meal, I believe this episode suggests that Okonkwo is trying to defy anyone who cows his manliness. He beats his wife not because he has no faith

in the "Week of Peace" custom but because he feels he has the right, a right accepted by his people, to take control as a man.

Okonkwo's "inadequacy" in relating to the gender roles of his society reflects the imperfections of Umofia's cultural values. One could, however, argue that the ambiguous nature of societal norms may just be due to the author's contradictory attitude. But the author wishes to show that the inconsistencies within the local set-up are responsible for society's downfall. This is why he constantly introduces contradictory values of the Igbo. Consider another example: the proverb explaining the role of a person's "*chi*" (personal god). It is said that when a person says yes to his god his "*chi*" accordingly complies (27). But this is contradicted when Okonkwo commits murder and is sent into exile, for the author sympathizes with Okonkwo by explaining that "a man could not rise beyond the destiny of his chi" (131). It is quite clear here that unlike the former explanation where a person and his "*chi*" are said to work together, the latter confirms that the *chi* and the self can actually go separate ways.

But Achebe's indecisiveness in condemning society's workings, as seen in Nwoye and Obierika's case, also continues with Okonkwo. For it is unclear whether Okonkwo comes to a sorry end because he is unable to read into the ambiguous laws or because he is singled out to take the brunt of the decay of traditionalism already in process (125). Furthermore, one needs to acknowledge the fact that Okonkwo comes

to his death also because of the influx of foreign ideas (208). These various possibilities must be sorted out because they have a bearing on the author's understanding of the colonial encounter, and define whether the encounter was "tragic" for the individual and/or for the society. It is then vital to ask whether Okonkwo, who reflects the impractical and unaccountable side of his society from within, and the problems that come from without, should be considered as a representation of his people.

Jeffery Meyers and Baltej Brar most certainly feel that Okonkwo embodies the society's general attitude towards European colonialism. While Jeffery Meyers has affirmed that "the frustration and violence of the hero Okonkwo are a mute expression of what has been stated by the most eloquent African leaders and intellectuals" (27), Brar has insisted that with the responsibility to recreate a "true" past, "African heroes and characters are representatives of their land, people, culture and tradition" (41). But to take Okonkwo's fate as one that echoes that of the society may be rather presumptuous (although the narrator tells us at one point that Okonkwo's grief was not just personal but that of the clan [183]), for his defiance against the missionaries has ambitious motives for self-advancement. I do not wish to discredit Okonkwo's loyalty to his clan but his obsession to achieve great things is reiterated throughout the novel.

However, one cannot ignore how, in a moment of contemplation, Okonkwo

senses his complete isolation from his community, and concludes that he is destined for failure. He draws an interesting image by uttering that "living fire begets cold, impotent ash" (153), alluding not only to his own life (his son resembling his father) but to his "*chi*," his personal god. He strongly believes that he is destined to be destroyed by his personal deity (152).

But when one considers Obierika's explanation of how things have fallen apart with the intervention of European powers (176), and how the colonizer is to blame for driving people like Okonkwo to their death (208), it becomes apparent, despite the evidence that culture does not betray the people but that the people betray themselves by misreading it, that Okonkwo is a victim not only of local values but of the foreign invasion as well. And since society is responsible for its kinsmen (the clan, for instance, holds the whole village of Mbaino responsible for the murder of Udo's wife, and also sends Okonkwo off to his motherland when he accidentally kills a young boy, to cleanse the rest of the clan), it is automatic that Okonkwo's fate is linked to his society.

But why is it then that Okonkwo is destroyed? Is Achebe hinting that society cannot accommodate such a "roaring flame" (153) and his ever ready will to take up arms? I suggest this because despite Achebe's description of how the community is "stifled" by outsiders, he avoids portraying a "collective resistance." Indeed, like Okonkwo, the reader too questions why a "warlike" clan should so easily lose the will

to fight (175).

It has correctly been observed that Achebe's works "have only been minimally concerned, at least at the thematic level, to depict or explore resistance to colonialism" (Jeyifo, "Chinua" 51). Although this may lead one to make a rash assumption about Achebe having some hidden desire to "accommodate" the colonial presence, I must insist that it does not; for Achebe justifies such a choice by presenting and developing reasons for why resistence could not be fruitful in Igbo society. Firstly, Achebe shows how the colonizer's power and strength, and his capacity to use force when necessary, instills fear into the people: the Europeans are said to have wiped out a whole village (Abame) (139); they also imprison and punish those who offend the White man's laws (174–5), going as far as to hang a local (Aneto) over a land dispute that takes place amongst the Umuofians (177). Secondly, there are the suggested cultural injustices and ambiguous customs within the tribe, which I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, that allow the colonizer to "infiltrate" the clan, leaving the people at the mercy of the missionaries. Thirdly, Achebe shows how the locals are caught in a dilemma from which they cannot escape: since it is an abomination to kill one's kin, the locals have no choice but to "accept" the colonials, as many of their own brothers live amongst the missionaries. Fourthly, Achebe is quick to show how the locals are "duped" into trusting the foreigners' strategic policy of "compromise and accommodation," whereas it is only an alternative policy to a

"frontal attack" (181). Believing then that the White man is harmless, that the "water is only ankle-deep"(204), the spirits and elders of Umuofia "allow" the missionaries to continue to reside amongst them, even after the unmasking of the *egwugwu*, the men who impersonate ancestral spirits (190) (which incidentally is the only time when the locals take action and hit back at the missionaries—they burn their compound). But the main reason that Achebe does not elaborate on local resistance is because of his own attitude towards violence:

> The writer has to keep reminding himself all the time that even where you think violence is inevitable, you still should realize what it is; you do not pretend that violence is good. It may be inevitable but it's not good. (Ogbaa 8)

It is no wonder then that Okika's speech near the end of the novel does not lead to action; instead, it is overshadowed by Okonkwo's death.

The lack of resistance, however, compels the reader to contemplate Achebe's alternative to confrontation, which appears to be the "acceptance" or "adaptation" to the changes that arise out of the colonial encounter. To discuss this one must consider Obierika's attitude, for he too, like Okonkwo, has been portrayed as a paradigm of his society. Furthermore, Obierika's ambivalence towards his society and the colonizer has a lot to do with Achebe's own beliefs: the author has admitted that Obierika contains something of himself (Jeyifo, "Literature" 13).

While speaking to Biodun Jeyifo Achebe explained how culture to him is not

only "devious" and "flexible" but also "ambivalent," adding that it has to be if it needs to survive (12). He also postulates that only a "healthy" culture can make allowances. I do not believe that Achebe projects Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* as "healthy," although if "healthy" means being able to live in ambivalence, then Igbo society is sound. But society cannot, as Achebe informs us, continue in the very same manner it had before the coming of the Europeans. It will change however appropriately it needs to, but not, he insists, at the expense of its own beliefs. This is why Achebe himself affirms that,

> if we are ready to take challenges, to make concessions that are necessary without accepting anything that undermines our fundamental belief in the dignity of man, I think we would be doing what is expected of us. (Ogbaa 4)

In other words, Achebe is suggesting that cultures can exist side by side without confrontation. This is why he talks of "alternatives" in religion, stating that if they can fulfill a person's need then they have every right to exist together (Ogbaa 6).

Things Fall Apart thus encompasses the ideas of change and adaptation. From the title and the epigraph, which are taken from Yeats' poem "The Second Coming," the idea of change as imminent with the birth of a new civilization, is openly expressed. This is why Achebe introduces Eneke, the bird, a figure that stands for adaptation, that confronts the past so as to survive in the present, in both his fiction and discourse. One finds this imagery in *Things Fall Apart* where it is uttered by

Nwakibie and Okika, the former while referring to the lending of yams (22), the latter, in the context of the local retaliation against the Europeans (203). Although they appear in different contexts, they both allude to the notion of change. It is, in fact, only in *Arrow of God* that the proverb is used within the colonial context: Ezeulu, Umuaro's priest, describes himself as "Eneke-nti-oba" because of his decision to send his son to the missionaries. He explains that "men of today have learnt to shoot without missing so I have learnt to fly without perching" (55) to describe how he has come to cope with the changing times. Unfortunately, Ezeulu is engaged in a power struggle with his community, god and the colonizer that eventually drives him insane. But the notion of accepting change and living in ambivalence is still upheld, similar to that seen in *Things Fall Apart*.

It thus follows that while Nwoye finds an alternative religion, Obierika finds a way to "weather" the changes. As for the community at large, the cruel and unthinkable norms are halted: the marginalized and the ostracized are, for instance, made to feel as equals, and the throwing of twins into the bush is forbidden. At the same time, money is allowed to flow into the community as the new trading store allows palm-oil and kernels to become commodities of trade (178). A school and a little hospital to educate and heal the people are also built (181). But one cannot interpret all these changes as the author's acceptance of the colonial power because he most certainly disapproves of the colonial policy of the "*crystallization of civilization*"

[sic] (Achebe, *Arrow* 134), as he portrays (alongside those who "adapt" to colonialism) Okonkwo, a man of great stature, annihilated not only by his own shortcomings, but also, and more importantly, by the presence of the European.

Okonkwo's death is of great importance to the novel. But it too does not escape ambiguity, for by giving the final word to the District Commissioner Achebe somehow undermines the impact of Okonkwo's suicide, as well as the subjugation of the clan. It is a strategy that, once again, leaves the reader confused.

Faced with Okonkwo's body dangling from a tree, the District commissioner, "inspired," silently contemplates writing a book about his experiences in the interior. He decides that he will title his book "*The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*" (209) and include the episode of this "crude" man's suicide by devoting a paragraph to him. Whether this takes shape or not is unknown. However, the book, in its published form, appears in Achebe's third novel, *Arrow of God* (38). But what this scene exhibits is the negation of local society, as it refuses to acknowledge the African experience. Ngugi Wa thiong'o compares the scene with Robinson Crusoe's patronizing and pacification of Friday; to Crusoe's inability to see Friday as a complex being with a complex culture; to Christian bigotry (*Homecoming* 51). Although Ngugi is to an extent correct in making such a statement, this argument is only valid if we consider that society, like Okonkwo, has lost its ideals to colonial imposition. For if we consider that the people have learnt to "adapt" to change, or "accept" it, then

there is no "pacification." Instead, the colonizer is made to believe that he has pacified the indigene, whereas the locals have succeeded by accepting what they believe is worthy to their community. In this instance the people have not only profited from being at a "crossroads of culture" (Achebe, *Morning* 67), but they also have become a "hybrid" society, since their ambivalence towards the changes that take place not only reverses the effects of colonial disavowal but threatens the foreigner's authority (Bhabha 114). But this, as JanMohamed claims, is not possible unless one ignores the whole historical period of the "material conflict between the natives and the Europeans" ("Economy" 60). I agree with him, especially since the novel ends with the horrible sight of Okonkwo dangling from a tree, suggesting that there can really be no "positive" adaptation to colonialism.

The uneasiness felt at the end of the novel arises because Achebe structures his story as a tragedy. He does not, however, do this in the conventional sense; instead, he gives us a "real tragedy," the definition of which we find in his second novel, *No Longer at Ease*: "[r]eal tragedy is never resolved. It goes on hopelessly forever. Conventional tragedy is too easy. The hero dies and we feel a purging of emotions" (39). Okonkwo's passing away is thus a "real tragedy" because it echoes a lingering hopelessness. As much as the society may have learnt to "adapt" it still has had to face the destabilizing impact of colonialism. The community has lost the very culture that kept it together: "their ancestors and their gods are weeping and suffering

because of the shameful sacrilege and abominations that have taken place" (203). This idea of despair is better understood when one considers how *Things Fall Apart* is the first part of a trilogy where the consequences of the first book have bearings on the second and third novels, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God*, respectively. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that the consequences of the colonial encounter that are introduced in *Things Fall Apart* continue in all Achebe's novels, right up to, and including, *Anthills of the Savannah*.

In the final analysis, *Things Fall Apart* tells us how no amount of material progress can, in fact, compensate for the subjugation and loss of dignity of a colonized people, with the accompanying idea that society must "change" and "adapt" in order to move on. The author presents both sides without explicitly defining his position. This ambivalence, I feel, mirrors his own "hybrid" background, but is not in any way bound by the need to praise colonial existence. It prevails because the author is trying to grapple with the "complexity of the world" (Ogbaa 2) that cannot be defined in simple "black and white" terms. "[I]n keeping a kind of even keel so that society does not lose its head in enjoyment or is not crushed in despair" (Jeyifo, "Literature" 11), Achebe extols and condemns African society. Hence, there is a constant struggle with aesthetic and moral values, in order to "grasp the meaning of the people's tragedy" (Achebe, *Morning* xiii), as well as to explore the "complexity of the African reality" (Jeyifo, "Literature" 12).

Ambiguity is thus the author's artistic technique for coming to terms with reality. This explains the phrase "whenever something stands, something else will stand beside it." But though Achebe presents both sides of the colonial situation in a "balanced" fashion, he does guarantee a continued tension (Turner 33) that creates a "tragic effect." Like Yeats' "The Second Coming" which expresses sadness with the understanding that change, in all its inevitability, brings destruction, the novel argues that the community's will to "adapt" to the colonial encounter involves a major change of the cultural norms. It would then not be wrong to conclude that in spite of the many instances where ambivalence and adaptation are advocated, Achebe ends *Things Fall Apart* with the message of a foreboding future, as colonialism remains intact. And by doing so the author undermines his desire to instill "dignity" into the African people.

Chapter Two
A Thousand Years of Questionable Existence: Ayi Kwei Armah's Ambiguous Portrayal of the Colonial Encounter in *Two Thousand Seasons*

Most African writers/critics who read *Two Thousand Seasons* are overwhelmed by the portrayal of Armah's vision of an African past. Among these critics is Emmanuel Ngara, who not only finds Armah's novel "persuasive" ("Armah" 141) but goes as far as to state that "[t]he amount of material covered and the vision given to the African people are fantastic and admirable," adding that "there is nothing so far written in African fiction to surpass its excellence" (142)! But while some applaud Armah's fiction others condemn it. Achebe, for instance, plainly states that the novel is beyond any reality. In his own words:

> *Two Thousand Seasons* is a complete failure; I'm not convinced by it. It is a fantasy, but there is a certain logic to fantasy and I don't accept this one . . . but also it is hideously boring. (Appiah 209)

The stark contrast of these opinions do cause surprise. While individual taste and personal ideologies have a bearing on such different ideas, I strongly feel that these diverse points of view are reactions to the many different ambiguous issues (artistic and ideological) that Armah himself introduces in his fictional recreation.

Unlike the previous chapter where I was able to elaborate on Achebe's contradictions with the help of his numerous interviews and essays, with Armah I have discovered that his essays on colonization are few, and interviews, nonexistent. Nevertheless, to help one understand Armah's artistic and political stands his short

articles that appear in the magazine *West Africa* are helpful, as are some of his fictional and non-fictional works.

In his essay entitled "Teaching of Creative Writing," Armah claims that it is "socially necessary" for a writer to make people aware of the past and the present. An artist's vision should, he insists, help readers to become active participants in the shaping of their future (994). This is why his own focus has been on exposing African "social realities." But he is also concerned with the manner in which these "realities" are presented. He therefore pays closer attention to language: "words, images and symbols," in order to best express the African situation ("One Writer's" 1725). Hence, Armah is not only intrigued by social and political ideas, but as an artist he is interested in conveying issues that concern the African and his continent in the best possible way, not only for aesthetic reasons, but for social change, and for the betterment of the African people.

Armah's study of the colonial encounter in *Two Thousand Seasons* focuses on the roles played by both the colonizers and the Africans in the damaging and lasting effects of the African continent. Although he narrates how both sides are at fault, he maintains that the colonizer is to blame. In his essay "Mystification: African Independence Revalued" Armah explains that although Africans did play a role in the disintegration of their communities, it was the colonizer who, in order to fulfill imperialistic and economic goals, disrupted African society and created a "subordinate

subsystem" of "agents" (local collaborators) to help them amass slaves (Armah 149). Armah feels so strongly about the Europeans being at fault that in his third novel, *Why Are We So Blest,* he actually states that there is no art outside the destruction of the destroyers, the colonizers (231). In fact, he is convinced that African artists should only concern themselves with "how to end the oppression of the African, to kill the European beasts of prey, to remake. . . [the Africans]. . ." (231). This rather ethnocentric and hostile attitude appears to be the theme of *Two Thousand Seasons.* I use the word "appear" because although Armah tries to "remake the African," by showing how the "revolutionaries" find their way back to their home by destroying the aggressors, the native does not necessarily triumph at the end of the novel; the Europeans, who are so severely condemned by Armah, prevail.

In *Two Thousand Seasons* Armah examines the social, political and economic unity of African society, as well as the fragmentation of the society by invading Arab and European forces. Similar to Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, the author is concerned with exploring the consequences of colonization: the way African society functions, during and after the arrival of the colonizer. To emphasize the disintegration of the African and his society Armah's principal focus is the way of life of the locals, which he terms simply as "the way." Founded on the notion that all Africans belonged to one community in the beginning, the author describes it as a philosophy made up of principles of egalitarianism and reciprocity that are not only corrupted but uprooted

and destroyed by the violent colonizing methods of the Arabs and the Europeans. In fact, the author goes as far as to term the colonial encounter a "fearful holocaust" of "fantastic destruction" (Armah, *Two* 12–13).

Because the novel is also concerned with trying to reestablish the very totality destroyed by the Other, in order to "return to total Africanity" (Lo Liyong 174), which in the novel is "the way," it is said to contradict and counteract the author's cynicism and social hopelessness that is found in his former novels; principally, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest*. But whether the "revolutionary zeal" (Amuta, "Portraits" 474) proposed in *Two Thousand Seasons* succeeds in (re)establishing the old way of life that is destroyed by incoming forces is debatable. For although *Two Thousand Seasons* lacks the grim pessimism found in some of Armah's earlier work, it most certainly does not have the optimism that critics such as Albert Ashaolu have commented on as being Armah's possible search for a "brighter future" for the African continent (138), as Armah constantly exposes the debilitating and destructive effects of local corruption and violence throughout his text. And even if one were to argue that there is a "ray of hope" at the end of the novel, when the locals return to their home, Anoa, and overthrow the indigenous king Koranche as well as the European "destroyers" to (re)establish "the way," one can still not agree with Ashaolu who exclaims that Armah's work concludes on a "high note" (138); for with the "joyous" return of the few, who are lucky enough to escape from

the clutches of the mercenary locals and the exploitive Westerners, is the irony that the Europeans have established slavery, which implies that the struggle will continue.

Armah's fictional portrayal is based on the Manichean opposition of the colonizer and the colonized that emphasizes the dichotomy of White and Black, superiority and inferiority. This reflects the author's own attitude towards the relationship of Africa with the West, which is as follows: "as far as prejudices go, Western assumptions about Africa are well known . . . Africa is inferior; the West is superior" (qtd. in Amuta, "Ayi Kei Armah" 45). This distinct Manichean opposition of race is conveyed and, more importantly, challenged in the novel. Descriptions of atrocities committed by invading forces on the "innocent" Africans reverse the stereotyped role of the Whites as "civilized." In fact, the author refers to the foreign way of life as "the white road", adding that it is characterized by "death" (7), "unconnected sight" (8) and "broken reason" (42). Moreover, the "inferior" African is shown to uphold beauty, harmony, innocence and creativity, while the "superior" Arab and European become synonymous with ugliness, chaos, darkness and destruction. These parallels refer to the battle between "them" and "us," the "rulers and the ruled" (Armah, *Two* 34), and draw sympathy towards the African. This point is highlighted at the end of the novel where the indigenous people, in spite of their defiance against Arab and European oppression, are still locked in the chains of unjust suffering.

But Armah's "clear-cut Manichean pattern" (Feuser 61) is marked with contradictions. The stark dichotomies do not, as Robert Fraser states, address readers "unambiguously" (72). Rather, the author's adopted "Negritudist posture" (Palmer 4) in his creation of the encounter is contradicted with the introduction and exploration of several concurrent issues. Firstly, it is hinted that the locals learn to conspire and acquire violent characteristics when in contact with the foreigners. In other words, it is the colonizer's oppressive scheming methods and religious teachings that brainwash the locals into becoming "tools" (33) in the hands of the outsiders. Secondly, Armah suggests that many of the Africans are "generically" violent and corrupt. The tribes, for instance, go to war with one other for power and status. Their inhumanity and greed, are accentuated when, after joining forces with the invaders, many of the locals perform atrocities on their own people and conspire against their kinsmen. Thirdly, Armah also suggests that the coming of the foreign forces actually exacerbates a rivalry already brewing amongst the natives. He shows that the people's moral code of survival, "the way," is flawed, so that those who join the Other do so simply because of the contradictions within the society's social set-up. But apart from these three different views that Armah puts forward in his recreation of the colonial encounter I also feel that at times the work tends to be vague and puzzling.

Unlike Achebe, who skillfully depicts ambiguity in the encounter of different races, I find that Armah's fictional recreation is filled with creative inconsistencies.

This occurs because of the author's use of a rather verbose style that surprisingly distorts his work: his extended descriptions and innumerable details lack precision as he not only contradicts himself but is excessively repetitive.

The lack of clarity in Armah's text has not gone unobserved by other critics. Soyinka comments that at times Armah's work tends to "creak," adding (with which I agree) that this results from the use of "the long seer-run overture," (114) (the use of a griot/teacher narrator who narrates in a traditional manner). But Soyinka does not realize that at times the author tends to be obscure. There are, in fact, inconsistencies that hint that the novelist is not necessarily presenting the colonial encounter with "artistic subtlety" but is actually contradicting himself. One then has to be careful, and accordingly question the validity of the work. I am not trying to imply that Armah's novel should be judged on the basis of historical relevancy, of how and when the colonial encounter took place, or whether a philosophical concept such as "the way" actually existed. Rather, I am concerned with the manner in which the work is narrated, or as Edward Said states, with its narrative "effects" (Said 21). Hence, I think it is necessary to consider that although the contradictions in the novels can be accepted as Armah's "tactful" way of putting forward his views on the colonial encounter, they can also be seen as simple mistakes that the author himself overlooks in his creative process.

Armah attempts to recreate the meeting of different races as a tragic event for

the African by depicting stark differences between pre-colonial society and society after the arrival of the aggressor. This is why his narrator (a seer) constantly reminds the "listeners" (readers) of the various "ideal" characteristics of the African philosophical way of life, "the way," and how this African way of living is threatened by alien tyranny. As a result of this the "net effect" of Armah's work appears to be, as Eustace Palmer declares, "the total condemnation of the Arab and European destroyers of the pristine values of a once pure Africa" (4).

Although the novel is scattered with numerous meanings of "the way," I think it will suffice to list the system's salient characteristics that give it an "Eden-like" quality: it is a form of "reciprocity" (10), a mode of "mutual giving and receiving" (17); a form of "knowledge and coherent understanding" (39); a call for "creation" (203); "the road to connectedness"(133), of community spirits and collective will (39); and a means of rejecting individualism and oppression (39). These attributes are subsequently weakened and destroyed by colonialist divisive and selfish practices. As a result, the "positive" African traits are eventually replaced by foreign "vices," mainly kingship, caste, class, individualism, slavery and foreign religions. But this creates widespread destruction and disunity amongst African communities. Hence, the encounter of different races is a "turbulent" one. It is best symbolized by the author's image of the "calm" river running into the overpowering sea (75). The result: "unreasoning violence" (42) and "utter desolation" (204), from which there is no

escape. In fact, the acts of violence performed by the "bringers of death" (80) are so explicitly and evocatively described that the author is able to establish yet another absolute difference between the African and the colonizer: that of the "innocent" victim (African) versus the "devilish" victimizer (Arab and European).

An illustrative example of such difference can be seen with the description of the Arabs who are the first invaders to conquer African lands. Not only are they are said to "know but one harvest: rape" (40) but their appetites for food, drink and drugs are also equally excessive and crude. In chapter two the author provides detailed accounts of the sordidness of the Muslim overlords' nightly orgies. I cite a passage from this chapter that I feel best captures the ugliness of their indulgences in carnal ecstasies with the local (oppressed) Black women. (Incidentally, the Arabs also perform sexual acts with their African male servants):

> Great was the pleasure of these lucky Arab predators as with extended tongue they vied to see who could with the greatest ease scoop out buttered dates stuck cunningly out the genitals of our women lined up for just this their pleasant competition. From the same fragrant vessels they preferred the eating of other delicious food: meatballs still warm off the fire, their heat making our women squirm with a sensuousness all that more inflammatory to the predators' desire. The dava drug itself the predators licked lovingly from the young virgin genitals—licked with furious appetite. (21)

The ugliness of such behaviour is only heightened when one considers that the episode takes place during the so-called solemn month of Rhamadan. But the Arabs'

reign of terror is also exercised in other forms. To sustain power they find new ways of subjugating the native. In their second onslaught, for example, they realize that "the capture of the mind and the body both is a slavery far more lasting, far more secure than the conquest of bodies alone" (32). They therefore combine human enslavement (a system implemented in their first attack) with religion: Islam (termed by the narrator as one of the "shrieking theologies" [3]), to keep the indigenous communities under their control. They continue to do so until many of the locals eventually revolt and escape. But their wrath comes to no end, they burn and murder those who are unfortunate enough to be left behind (45).

Similar villainy is also seen amongst the "destroyers" (Europeans), whose violent behaviour is dictated by their desire for profit ("monstrous is the greed of the white destroyers, infinite their avarice" [137]) rather than for sexual gratification. They fulfill their voracious appetites by instituting slavery and mercilessly exploiting human and local resources. An example of the kind of atrocities the native is subjected to by the "destroyers" is best described in an incident that takes place during the slave trade in which a slave-driver marks a slave with a metal rod:

> The tall slave-driver pushed the burning iron from against the captive's chest where the oil had been smeared and held it there a full moment. The tortured man yelled with pain, once. Smoke rose sharply from the oily flesh, then the iron rod was snatched back. Where its end had touched the captive's skin there was now raw, exposed flesh. The skin had come off in two pieces each as long as a middle finger and half as broad. (118)

Such descriptions of atrocities committed by the Arabs and the Europeans, as the ones cited above, give a clear picture of whom Armah identifies as the victim. Yet the author contradicts this with the idea that violent and exploitative actions—no different from those committed by the foreigners—are also committed by many of the locals. Armah thus questions the tragic nature of the colonial intervention by focusing on the "enemy" from within (This idea is well explored in *Bound to Violence* where the African rulers and the masses are portrayed as beastly and violent.) But this approach tends to undermine the possible conception of an "innocent" native.

Armah shows that the invaders achieve their imperialistic goals because of the "support" they get from many of the local opportunists. Indeed, as Armah confirms in his discourse on African independence, it was the presence of an "effective network of agents" that allowed the "decimation of the continent's human resources" ("Mystification" 149). This is echoed in the novel when the narrator willingly blames the African for the continents frustrating plight by pointing out that it is the native's "bloated chiefs" who sell them off to the "other side" (146). In fact, throughout his account the narrator presents a number of collaborators who work with the aggressors to exploit the people for material gains and power. There are, for example, during the reign of the Arabs, the "askaris" (soldiers), the African "zombies," who have equally grand sexual appetites as their Muslim overlords. And they are equally violent too.

"[F]illed in anticipation with the blood of victims" (22), they kill anyone who attempts to defy the Other's oppression: they saw tongues, drive arrows through flesh, hang people on stakes, and cut off lips (30). Among these violent members of society are the "caretakers" or the "ostentatious cripples," who appear after the second Arab invasion. Having been elected by their own kin to protect the tribe and solve local disputes over succession, they instead kill the original "pathfinders" and exploit the people: they not only pillage, rape, castrate and have incestuous relationships, but also divide the land, and implement forced labour and slavery (64). And with the coming of the Europeans the narrator also focuses on other despots such as local kings, chiefs and various natives ("parasites" and "flatterers") whose thirst for power and desire for self-aggrandizement compel them to betray their tribesmen and sell them into bondage. Two such examples of local despots are king Koranche, and Kamuzu, a dealer of slaves. The former's greed for power and wealth drives him to commit murder and procure slaves for the Europeans, while the latter, hating his exclusion from the profits of the slave trade (160), helps the "revolutionaries" overthrow Koranche, only to ape the White man in order to be called "governor"(169).

The "real enemy" is then, no doubt, the "eternal middleman" (Soyinka 113) who betrays his own people for power, status, wealth and recognition from the colonizer. But what is interesting is that the African "collaborators" only "appear" on the scene with the presence of the Other. At the same time, slavery is not practiced

before the first invasion, nor is local violence so brutal, or widespread, as seen during the time of the colonial intervention. Hence, it can be deduced that the locals only lose their sense of community and alienate themselves to exploit their people when in contact with the Arabs and the Europeans. Ime Ikiddeh, therefore, insists that it was the colonial encounter that *led* to the "birth of local traitors and consequent departure from 'the way'. . ." (38).

But although Ikiddeh's argument has weight, it is simultaneously undermined by the narrator, who explains that the first invaders were able to gain a foothold in African communities by simply having "*grafted on the division already in existence* among the people" (emphasis added) (34). What Ikiddeh overlooks are the events that take place *before* the advent of the Other, which show that the local population was experiencing internal strife, and departing from "the way." More precisely, then, the people become "agents" to the colonizer not because they are innocent, as Ikiddeh implies, but because the outsider is able to take advantage of the "seeds of disintegration" (61) within the African community.

But this does not mean that one can dismiss the argument that the African who, as the narrator implies, was "lured" into following the "White road," cannot be "generically" corrupt; for the number of local traitors "coalescing" around the colonizers—a "phenomenon" that even surprises the locals (26)—is far too large to simply dismiss as a consequence of foreign domination. I digress then, briefly, to

account for this, for I think that although Armah condemns some of the locals, or the "enemy" from within, he is also able to justify their acts.

The author very subtly hints that those who follow foreign systems do so because they are caught in a "double bind" by which they are both "attracted" and "repelled" by the invader (JanMohamed, *Manichean* 4–5): the native, who despises the colonizer's oppression, is also unfortunately fascinated by his power and wealth. Such "ambivalence" (on the part of the native) is established from the very beginning of the book with an image of a wandering slave in the desert. This man, having been deprived of his tongue by the invaders, rejoices with the pieces of brass that the foreigner replaces it with. He points to his empty cavity, at the shining brass that keeps his mouth ajar, not to seek sympathy from his people but to create envy. The brass, as the narrator continues, is a "gift" to him; "its *presence* made sweet to him the *absence* of his tongue" (emphasis added) (7). In other words, the slave believes that the colonizers' act of "presenting" him with foreign material is their way of acknowledging his presence. Furthermore, he believes that his loss is well compensated for with new "glorious" objects, whereas the brass is worthless in comparison with his loss of speech. It is this "fascination with things" that is seen amongst the natives that becomes the people's "potent tool of death" (201–2). Robert Fraser gives credence to this point by stating that "it is the lust for wealth, specifically seen as a kind of material dependence on the capitalist west. . . [that] undermines the

solidarity of the people. . ."(10). Of course, the existence of the "revolutionaries," who follow "the way," lessens the value of such an explanation, since it means that there are some natives who are not influenced by foreign ways. However, the emergence of those who reject colonization, occurs only *after* the inter-clan feuds have taken place, when the native, having turned his anger against his people, is able to "take up arms against the oppressor" (Fanon 54). Nevertheless, one still wonders why some of the Africans are able to withstand the presence of the White man (both the Arab and the European) while others are "assimilated." This of course implies that there may have been problems within the community, as a result of which the people became divided. I wish to explore this, for by knowing the community's set-up *before* colonization one may be able to come to some conclusion about whether African destruction from the colonial encounter was instigated or accelerated, according to the novel.

The narrator declares that foreign invasion succeeds because of the "divisions already in existence among" the people (34). Unfortunately, he only *mentions* the first instance of discord within the clan without *discussing* it. It is Anoa, the prophetess who foresees the enslavement of the people for two thousand seasons, who identifies the problem. To her, the conflict arises out the people's inability to abide by "the way." It is her belief that the native's oppressive state under colonial rule originates from his veering from the African principles of existence. This is, however, only

partially correct, as Anoa does not take into consideration the *initial* rift that the narrator mentions. Also, she overlooks the possibility that "the way" itself may be flawed.

Like Igbo society in *Things Fall Apart* there are ambiguous characteristics in the foundations of Armah's society that hint that African destruction was perhaps accelerated due partly to the outgrowth of existing norms. Thus, similar to Achebe, Armah also puts to test the notion that the result of the colonial encounter in Africa was tragic, and furthermore, was *initiated* by outsiders. He explores the various flaws within the community and shows that African society was ridden with problems and heading towards its own destruction before the advent of the Other. Chinyere Nwahunanya, in his article "A Vision of the Ideal," has looked into this and explored the "divisions," or "fissures" (553) as he calls them, at great length, by further elaborating on the work done by Abena Busia. I find his essay insightful but brief. Moreover, Nwahunanya, like Anoa, the prophetess, in *Two Thousand* Seasons, only explores the rift that takes place *after* the first onslaught of the Arabs. Although this is very interesting, it still does not establish the root of the conflict amongst the Africans. To find the source of the division I deem it necessary to retrace the events recited by the narrator that take one back to the time when the native was "untouched" by foreign ways and ideas.

Early in the novel the narrator speaks of a time in history when the growth of

the tribe resulted in the breaching of "the way." For no apparent reason "greed" began to haunt the elders (5). The narrator draws attention to a particular hunter named Brafo, whose father's thirst for grandeur leads to the clan's downfall. The speaker does not explore why this "greed" occurs, but it appears, at first glance, that this discord perhaps emanates from a very ordinary situation: the tension between parents and grown children. This "greed" can thus be translated as having arisen out of the elders' need to guard power and authority. Brafo's father is thus threatened by his son's accomplishments and love for a young woman. And it is his desire to withhold power and status that initiates a family rift that, in turn, accelerates into numerous inter-clan feuds.

But the fact that the author gives no explanation of why "greed overwhelms the knowledge of 'the way'" (5) is both puzzling and acceptable: puzzling, because the sudden eruption of self-empowerment seems unseemly and uncalled for, and acceptable, since Armah's aim is to depict the indigene in a sympathetic light; he appropriately avoids incriminating the African. Nonetheless, Armah is able to sustain ambiguity both ways by not explicitly stating the roots of initial conflict. Anoa's suggestion of the people veering from "the way" may be of some help here.

Although the prophetess unfortunately only accounts for the second rift that takes place *after* the initial battle amongst the clans, her account that the people come under the power of the "predator" (Arab) because they do not abide by the principles

of survival is noteworthy, as it may just be the possible root of discord.

To elaborate on Anoa's argument I continue with the events that follow the inter-clan feuds. It is explained by the narrator that mere exhaustion brought the tribal wars to a halt (10), soon after which the women take over. As "maintainers, protecteresses, finders and growers," they rebuild everything. And it is in this very period, defined by Anoa as a time of "fertility" (10), that the people "stray" from the teachings of "the way." Because the women produce grain at a greater rate than its consumption, they tend to have a surplus. They consequently are able to provide more to the other members of their community. As a result of this they "breach" the principle of reciprocity, the act of *mutual* giving and receiving, as they give more than they receive. This "openness" (2) on the part of the women creates a certain amount of inequality within the tribe. Not only do the men grow insolent, lazy, and drunk, but they become eager for ownership and begin to despise the women, as well as fight against female succession (9). The people then basically "fall victim to their own abundant generosity" (12). This becomes clearer when Anoa points out that it is in the act of surplus giving that the locals also entertain the "hollow-eyed beggars" (Arabs) (18) who, fleeing from other hostile tribes in the desert, are in dire need of food and shelter. The nourishing of these Arabs is a fatal mistake, for the Arabs eventually empower themselves. They then lure locals who are "tempted to be takers" (18) and turn around and "prey" on their very "hosts" (19).

Still, I find it difficult to accept the community's "generosity" as a "vice" (12), especially since "the way" advocates generosity. A closer reading of the novel shows that the people's "misconduct," their breaching of "the way," may have arisen not necessarily out of their "generic" desire for power and status, but because of the various contradictions within their moral code of survival, "the way."

Within the teachings of "the way," juxtaposed with the moral code of reciprocity, is also the teaching that "the way" not only "produces *before* it consumes" (emphasis added), but "produces *far more* than it consumes" (emphasis added) (39). Keeping in mind that "the way" also advocates that the people should give and be hospitable to guests (39), it does not seem surprising that after the inter-clan battles when the women produce more—far more than they can consume—that they automatically have more with which to entertain. Hence, when they nourish the incoming Arabs who are in need of provisions, they may be breaching the code of reciprocity as they give without receiving, but they nevertheless are following what the "the way" elsewhere teaches them to do; that is, to produce more, and to be generous. However, the notions of "consumption" and "production" are not always related to goods, it also identifies the indigene from the Other, to capture the symbolic image of the colonizer as the destroyer and the colonized as the creator. In this sense the people misinterpret the teachings of "the way" and are consequently caught off-guard when the Arabs take over. Nevertheless, I do feel that it highlights how "the way" is

itself unclear.

It thus appears that the people's ambiguous code of survival, "the way," may be the cause for African disintegration. And it would not be wrong to state that this is perhaps the cause for the very first discord as well. "Greed," the root of all conflicts, probably arises out of the contradictions in the philosophy of "the way." Hence, "greed" does not, as the narrator proclaims, "overwhelm the knowledge of 'the way'," but rather, it is "the way" that overwhelms the people and introduces internal strife, that, in turn, leaves the African society vulnerable to foreign invasion.

There is, however, the possibility that "the way" may actually be incorrectly explained by the narrator (or the author). Armah's stylistic approach is to "filter" information through a narrator of limited omniscience, who participates and reflects on the actions that take place around him. But since the novel begins in "medias res" the narrator accounts for a time that takes place before his existence. In fact, in order to (re)establish the knowledge of "the way", and to describe the colonial encounter of the Arab and the African, as well as to recite two thousand seasons of the history of the people, the narrator speaks from memory. He does not belong to the past he recites but to an age when European colonization is at its height and the local despotic King Koranche is reigning ("it was in Koranche's time as king that the children of *our* age grew up (emphasis added) [74]). His narration is then suspect to flaws.

The narrator recites the litany of "the way," assuming that its various principles

must have been practiced at a time before his own existence. But this is unrealistic, since the narrator himself is unaware of the actual origin. Not only does he explain that "the way" is as old as the existence of the people but he actually draws analogies between the origin of the African and his history to uncountable stars, innumerable grains of sand, and infinite numbers of drops of rain in the ocean, to capture the unaccountable past of the native. "How many seasons have flowed by since. . . [the] people were *unborn* (emphasis added)," he cries, to hint that the origin of the people cannot be discovered. And this is where the contradiction lies. Not knowing where and how the people originate the narrator still proceeds to recite the principles of survival, the people's "ultimate origin," "the way" (3). In fact, after insisting that he will not give the "listener" (reader) "truncated tales" of how the very first people lived, as none of the "fables" that exist are "sure knowledge," (3) he proceeds to do so and accounts for the people's unknown beginning. Can one thus accept his word as "truth"? In this instance, what better words capture the need for wariness than those spoken by a Fundi (teacher) in chapter six, as he warns a group of curious adolescents who are to be initiated:

> [y]ou will hear words from people. . . they are sounds not coming from any real events. They come from the teller's particular imagination, no more knowing than your own. (87)

I feel that this "unintentional cautionary remark" best describes how one must

approach the narrator's tale; after all, he is narrating a thousand years of history based on sheer memory!

Very few authors have actually dissected Armah's work and looked deeper into this issue. I have only come across Ato Sekyi-Otu's reading of the contradictions of "the way" as worth mentioning. His interesting analysis examines the "grammar" of the novel's focus on the people's "revolutionary homecoming" by deconstucting the work. He explains that the narrator's search for "the way," a call that not only demands "destruction's destruction" (Armah, *Two* 149), but "the search for paths to that necessary beginning" of "the way," is misleading; for the "chosen" path does not lead them "back to Anoa" (149), to *re-establish* "the way," but "towards" Anoa (149), to *establish* a new way of life. In other words, the narrators's historical background to "the way," before the conquest of African lands, is a fabrication, albeit a deliberate one. For by creating an etiology of the "the way" he is "inventing" a tale for the formation of a new way of life for the future: "[t]he ending of our remembrance should give greater force to the continuation of the beginning flow in search of our way" (204). It is a strategy to rally locals to overthrow the outsiders and pave the way for "independence". Hence Sekyi-Oto is quite correct in contending that "'the remembrance of the way' [Armah, *Two* xiv] is constituted by chiasmas as 'the way of remembrance' [Armah, *Two* xv]"(197).

The narrator's inconsistencies can easily be considered as authorial flaws;

however, because they appear consistently I strongly feel that they have been deliberately incorporated by the author. For by not being clear Armah is able to strengthen his ambiguousness towards the colonial encounter. He avoids stating whether discord emanates from within or without. But since the inconsistencies are deliberate, it can also mean that the narrator's *creation* of "the way" is an essential part of Armah's *recreation* of the colonial encounter. So that he too, like his narrator, is involved in trying to create an "ideal" to educate the African reader. And yet, this still does not help one reveal the author's opinion about the past. For although the two essential parts of the struggle against colonialism—the affirmation of "Africanness" and the destruction of the destroyers (Armah, *Why* 231)—are reiterated in *Two Thousand Seasons* (with the creation of "the way," and the existence of the revolutionaries, who prepare to battle against their oppressors), it is doubtful whether the people will be able to really (re)establish their way of life devoid of the kind of violence and corruption that they have seen and experienced for two thousand seasons.

The novel ends in the final stage of the prophesy, hinting that the people will now be able to (re)build the way for a brighter future. But although the tiny group of Africans, the "pathfinders" (202), "may have cured themselves of colonial neurosis by thrusting out the settler through force of arms" (Fanon 21), I think it will be unlikely that the natives will be able to "ensure the permanence of 'the way' long after the

chroniclers of it have passed it" (Okpewho 7). For the Europeans have already established the slave-trade, and the Arabs, who have become "willing instruments" to "other predators," still continue to occupy the desert (205). Furthermore, Armah's description of the people's deviation from "the way" and their subsequent violent and corrupt actions that continue for a thousand years only hints at the uncertainty of the survival of "the way" in the second millennium.

One can assume that the uncertainty of change in Armah's representation is his reflection on the African situation. After all, he is writing this novel in the early seventies during the years of widespread political *ennui* in African states where socialist ideals have failed. Hence, even though *Two Thousand Seasons*, like *The Healers*, seems to advocate for a "classless and communist" society (Ngara, *Art* 113), Armah himself states in his novel that "the way" cannot be interpreted as a "groping backwards along . . . [a] nostalgic road" (Armah, Two 149). In fact, he condemns African "utopian" socialism, defining it as a "mytho-poetic system" (8), a "gimmick" and a "set of magical prop slogans" (Armah, "African" 27). Is his unclearness for change then a comment on the African neo-colonialist situation, to the still prevailing relations of the First World with the Third, in which the First World is able to perpetuate its power status by economical means with the help of the Third World? (Armah, "Third" 1781–82). Or is it a direct result of the writer's ambivalence that arises from his own exposure to the West, where he studied for several years, and his

own hybrid and elitist upbringing (Fraser 4–5) ?

It may be difficult to identify the foundations of the ambiguousness in the novel. Nevertheless, I find it contradictory that despite Armah's anti-colonial stand and his desire to create literature for the betterment of the African, he ends his novel with the kind of uncertainty seen in Achebe's representation.

Chapter Three
"*The Wages of Violence*" [3] . . . Liberation or Doom ?: The Ambiguity of the African Predicament in Yambo Ouologuem's *Bound to Violence*.

The colonial encounter in Ouologuem's novel does not, as Soyinka rightly points out, begin with the "authentic genius of the African world before the destructive alien intrusion" (105). Unlike Achebe, who presents Igbo society before the arrival of the British, and Armah, who portrays African society prior to the Arab and British invasions, Ouologuem commences his novel with Africa already under exploitive rule. It is the author's desire to show that Africa has been under oppression since "pre-colonial" times. For To Ouologuem colonial confrontation is not just a battle for power between the Whites and the Blacks but includes the struggle for survival between African classes:

> I did not want to reduce African history arbitrarily to a dimension which is only a small part of it, namely White colonialism. White colonialism has been preceded by other colonialisms: first the colonialism of the black notables. . . . . Later, Arab colonialism. (Plexus 135)

He therefore recreates a period of African history from the thirteenth-century to the early twentieth-century to describe how the aristocracy of the Nakem empire (what is sixteenth-century Western Chad) ruled over the Black slaves. The kind of

[3] This is apparently the original English translated title of *Le Devoir de violence*, published by Secker and Warburg in 1968. The translated version presently in circulation and the one that I have referred to throughout this thesis is *Bound to Violence*.

subjugation and oppression the locals face in this feudal society, under the ruling classes, even after their (the Black's) "emancipation" (after the kingdom becomes a republic the slaves become "peasants"), continues with the Arab slave-traders and the French colonialists.

I will discuss the colonial encounter in Ouologuem's novel by studying the role played by the French, the Arabs, and the aristocracy (I include the Saif and his nobles in the latter group) in the colonization of the African masses, as I feel, like Tunde Fatunde, that the latter group, the "niggertrash," are the "exploited" (115) and oppressed members of African society. They are not only the slaves to the feudalists, but they remain the subjugated masses under the Arabs and the French.

Ouologuem himself stresses the distance between the African rulers and the Black slaves by drawing attention to the uncertainty of the Saifs' foreign birth right. The legend of the first Saif Isaac al-Heit states that he was born of a Black Jew, Abraham al-Heit, and an Oriental Jewess from Kenana (6). The folkloric ancestry of his privileged birth and the blend of Eastern and Western theologies, the Bible and Islam, reflect the imperial and religious forms of justification used by succeeding Saifs and their nobles to exploit the "*négraille*." At the same time, Ouologuem also introduces the Manichean division of the colonial world between Black and White, in order to describe the subjugation of the African by the European colonialists. Though the chiefs and the nobles are also under the French rule they tend to benefit

from the colonizers presence; it is the servant/peasant class that bears the brunt of French tyranny.

Ouologuem's recreation of the colonial encounter is related to his desire to correct African inferiority. He affirms that "the blacks have lived in the attitude of slaves" as a result of colonization. In the novel he admits that however "constructive" colonization may have been, "even the greatest of its benefits, education for instance, brought grave evils in their train, so-called assimilation, contempt for native culture, etc." (21). It is in this respect that Ouologuem, in an interview, spoke of the need to recreate a history of "documentary character" that would provide a "truer" image of Africa in order to decolonize the African mind (Plexus 135–6). Yet the author portrays the colonized world in contradictory terms, thus undermining his desire to valorize African identity.

Ouologuem explores the colonial encounter by focusing on the mental and physical subjugation of the slaves in the hands of local and foreign colonizers. He, however, also portrays the lower classes of society as equally violent, thereby contradicting the image of the native as the victim. Nevertheless, he justifies their violence by suggesting that it arises out of the contact with ruling forces. In this sense, the author sympathizes with the oppressed. The use of violence amongst the people then becomes a redeeming force, a way out of colonial rule and oppression by native leaders. However, not one event in which the native revolts against the exploiters

is described; instead, violence amongst the Africans becomes a "cultural vice" that allows the nobles and the French to further manipulate the lower classes. Furthermore, the author believes that violence is not only indigenous to Africans but part of the human condition (Hale 158), by which everyone is bound together in suffering. In this sense the exploited masses are caught in an eternal web of power by which they are destined to remain "pawns" of the colonizer and the native aristocracy. The novel ends in disillusionment with the locals still "bound" by local and foreign violence.

It is contradictory that despite Ouologuem's desire to recreate African history, so that the Africans may no longer live "in the attitude of slaves" (Plexus 135), he ends his novel in despair. This occurs because Ouologuem falls victim to the very Manichean distinctions he hopes to invert. His exploration of African history's various "dimensions" of colonization in the sense of domination, including the portrait of Blacks versus Blacks, is based on his simultaneous desire to contradict the Senghorian "lyrical view of the past" (Aizenberg 1238), by which the African continent has been portrayed "as peaceful, pastoral and devoid of class struggle" (Fatunde 113). His *Lettre à la France nègre*, which was published in the following year after *Bound to Violence*, affirms this. Insisting that "[I]l est impossible de fermer les yeux devant l'image d'une Afrique par trop déforméé par ses chantres et ses littératures. . ." (*Lettre* 190), he takes the French-speaking world, Black and White,

to task, for forming distorted idealized images of African society. It would not, I think, be presumptuous to assume, as Robert Fraser does, that the author had a similar audience in mind when he was writing *Bound to Violence* (67).

Ouologuem proposes to replace the stereotyped image of Africa as "the sanctioned museum" with the reality of underdevelopment, which stems from, among many things, slavery and violence (*Lettre* 191). This is why he chooses to represent African society as primarily violent . However, Ouologuem does not just respond to Western discourse by simply describing the sordid realities of the colonial encounter, he also "invokes Africa's history and traditions to *mock* [my emphasis] them" (Mensah 1). He recreates the past by depicting the native with such virulent irony that it becomes unclear where his loyalties lie. An illustrative example is the opening paragraph of the novel:

> Our eyes drink the brightness of the sun and, overcome, marvel at their tears. *Mashallah! wa bismillah!* . . . To recount the bloody adventure of the niggertrash—shame to the worthless paupers!—there would be no need to go back beyond the present century . . . . (3)

It is not clear who is speaking in this passage. The juxtaposition of the Islamic praise to God and the insult to the native makes if difficult to comprehend if the narrator/author is attacking the African to "support" the Western image of the native as "savage," or is simply being ironical in order to attack Western discourse that portrays the continent as "ideal".

Kenneth Harrow has argued that the three lines perform "three ironizing gestures." The meaning of each one is threatened by the presence of the other. The first one, for example, is directed to African readers, and is "ambivalent" about the state of the African in the hands of the oppressors. But it nevertheless carries a hint of sadness. This is immediately threatened by the second gesture, the "ironic imitation" of the Muslim incantation of praise, for it is spoken by the members of society who side with the French. The third gesture that follows is the "French judgement" on the African, which is evidently condescending since the indigene is referred to as the "niggertrash" (76). The use of these three different "voices" creates ambiguity and makes it difficult to understand whom the narrator/author wishes to condemn (or support): the colonized or the colonizer. This becomes even more complex when the narrator interjects his descriptions with exclamatory phrases such as "[a] tear for the niggertrash" (33), to taunt the people's oppressed state. He also uses a number of hostile epithets, such as "dogs" (22) and "baboons" (66), "idiot" (50) to describe the locals.

Such use of language and narrative technique, as Harrow rightly informs, "makes the position of the narrator less explicit—the irony seems to turn inward in ways that undermine the narrator's point of attack . . ." (173). The use of irony may reinforce the attacks on Western ethnologists such as the German, Leo Frobenius, (who is incidently parodied in the novel as Fritz Shrobenius), and African

anthropologists/historians such as Chiekh Anta Diop (whose work becomes a pastiche of "Shrobeniusology" (95)), who glorify African culture, but it does not help to portray the African masses as the victims. In fact, it is evident that to satirize the "erroneous" images of Africa's cultural heritage is to automatically undermine the valorization of African identity itself (Miller, "Reading" 21).

To highlight the ambiguousness of Ouologuem's portrayal, which stems from his contradictory goals; that is, his desire to recreate a "truer" past and his need to attack Western images of an "ideal" Africa, I focus on several aspects of the novel. First, I discuss the colonizers subjugation of the natives. Secondly, I discuss how the image of the African as the victim is contradicted with descriptions of their own brutality, no less horrific than those exercised by the so-called aggressors. Thirdly, I show how brutality amongst the masses is justified through Fanonist terms, as "animalistic" behaviour amongst the colonized is considered as a prerequisite to the eventual attack on the colonizer (Fanon 54) and the subsequent liberation of the native. Fourthly, I explain how the author suggests that violence is also a "cultural vice" that leaves the native vulnerable to foreign control. And finally, I comment on how the author also hints that colonization and violence are inescapable.

In order to establish the stark dichotomy of the dominator and the dominated the author focuses on the aggressor's dehumanizing rule. He describes scenes of local and foreign forces repeatedly committing atrocities of all sorts (murder, rape, incest

and sodomy). These images are accompanied by scenes of the nobles trading in slaves, and are complemented by episodes of the Arabs and the Europeans also involved in the slave-trade.

The period of rule by the African nobles after the death of the first good legendary Saif Isaac al-Heit in 1498 is characterized by "general bastardization, vice and corruption" (18). The goal of the native elite is to manipulate and exploit the masses for material gains. They do so by terrorizing local society through torture and other forms of abuse (sexual and physical). They also "stir up 'as much trouble as possible'" between the tribes to obtain "cattle, land, and other capital goods" (13). And "club, haggle, flog, bind and deliver" many of the natives to other European forces as slaves (12).

The masses are also subjected to abuse from the Arabs who, as the narrator informs, settle a few centuries earlier in the kingdom to live amongst the nobles (18). They are essentially slave-traders who, pretending to spread the word of God, mark their stay with atrocities no less notable than those of the feudalists. They trick the African masses into taking pilgrimages to Mecca and instead herd them off to the Middle East, the Americas and other African countries (18).

The French colonialists, the "flencessi" (29), who arrive in the late eighteen hundreds take advantage of tribal confusion, internal violence, and corruption amongst the Arabs, the nobles, and the masses. Under the pretense of suppressing the

slave-trade that is devouring all of Africa, they consolidate their power. Not only do they conquer African lands with their soldiers ("*tirailleurs*") but they also carry off "caravans" of slaves, and brutalize and rape the natives (27).

With constant tyranny being imposed by the feudal aristocracy of the Saifs, the Arab Moslem slave-dealers and the French colonizers, one cannot help but sympathize with the slaves/peasants. But while denouncing the colonizers, Ouologuem also presents "Africa's subaltern class" (Strobbe 466) as "cruel," "fierce," "beastly" and "savage" (13) by describing how it too is immersed in relentless violence. There are episodes in the novel that show how many of the locals help to raze villages and gather slaves for the colonial rulers. At the same time, the masses are also shown to exercise unnecessary brutality and barbarism on their own people.

By creating the image of the African as equally violent as the colonizers the author is able to negate the Western image of the "good" native. But unfortunately this also means affirming the common stereotyped image of the African that dwells on barbarism and bestiality (Jablow and Hammond), "sexuality" and "primitivism" (Schikora 75). This reverses the common depiction of the native as the oppressed. It also undermines the representation of the colonial encounter as tragic and contradicts the author's desire to valorize the African through a representation of his past.

But violence amongst the natives is not uncalled for. There is evidence in the

novel to show that its exists amongst the indigene as a result of Manichean contrasts such as White and Black, superiority and inferiority, self and Other, etc., that are introduced by the colonialists and the African feudalists.

Like any colonial force trying to establish its hold on the people the nobles and the French not only impose a "totalitarian" leadership but, more importantly, paint "the native as a sort of quintessence of evil" (Fanon 41). The feudalists justify their right to "civilize" (50) the lower classes with their strong conviction of superior ancestry. They encourage the denunciation of the native as the "infidel" (10) in order to render him "quiescent and malleable" (Erickson 237). Once subjugated, the locals easily play into the hands of the ruling forces and become targets of further exploitation.

With constant physical and mental oppression it is not surprising that many of the locals, like the "southern chiefs," or individuals like Doumbouya, the Sudanese native (67), help Saif (and the Arabs)in the slave-trade (11). They are caught in the Manichean power struggle in which they will do anything to achieve power, status and recognition. This is why those who give false praise to obtain titles of nobility, money and women (18) do so because they aspire to be like the "superior" feudalists. And even when there is no material attraction the locals join the aggressors out of fear. Hence, when Saif's "errand boys" (111) Wagouli, Kratonga and Sankolo kill anyone who may be any threat to Saif Isaac ben al-Heit (local, feudal, or French), they do so

because they fear for their own lives.

Saif subjugates the African masses in order to use them as a weapon against other invading forces. Unlike his legendary counterpart he is both evil (hence compared to "Judas" [172]) and manipulative (also called "Machiavelli" [172]). He not only uses brute violence like his predecessors, but in order to sustain power, fight off the French colonizers and missionaries, and appease the Arabs, he uses religion, Islam, as a "political weapon" to "exploit" and "hold" the people together" (22–23).

Saif is able to throw the dismayed people into "a bath of pseudo-spirituality" (23) so that he can mobilize the energies of the "fanatical" people against the French invaders and, in turn, reign supreme. The masses, already humiliated by the nobles' rule that has rendered them insecure, unfortunately fall victim to this kind of manipulation and willingly attack the French, even though it means falling into the hands of French destruction. But Saif continues to use the locals to sustain his power. When the French missionaries impose education and religion he sends the sons of the servant class in place of those of the nobles. In this way he pacifies the French and the locals and is able to sustain the aristocracy so that it is not assimilated.

The French, like the nobles, also exploit the native. They build upon the class distinctions that are imposed by the feudalists. Surprisingly, they too meet no resistance. "[S]ick of continual massacres," the masses practically throw themselves under the protection of the French (29). The Europeans are then easily able to install

the Manichean division of the colonial world between White and Black, under the guise of "liberating" and "civilizing" the native (111), whom they consider, along with the nobles, as inferior and "savage." They do so with the use of European technology (weapons) and with education and religion.

The Africans who are already locked in the complexities of class struggle are easily attracted to White technology and the possibility of consolidating power with the French. They therefore devote themselves to the "White cause" (28). As a result, many local chiefs and local soldiers ("black *tirailleurs*"), known as the "shock troops" (27) rape, plunder and pillage to capture slaves with the French. Unfortunately, they fall victim to the White "mask of progressivism" (21) because many of the local French supporters are also sold off as slaves. Also, the French education system demoralizes the masses. A perfect example is Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi (one of the sons of the slaves Kassoumi and Tambira) who is sent by Saif to be educated by French missionaries. The narrator explains how this young native, "smitten by Europe" (137) aspires to become a "White man." But no matter how hard he tries to be like the colonizer, he remains an "alienated nigger" in the eyes of the nobles (155), and "a French subject" (163) to the colonizers: a slave to both Saif and the Europeans (167).

The frustration that Raymond experiences is similar to that of the African masses. This is an inevitable consequence of colonization, by which the indigene,

caught in a "double bind," is unable to vent his anger on the oppressor because he both admires his adversaries' superiority and loathes their power over him. In dire need to "sublimate" anger and frustration the native then indulges in "bloodthirsty explosions—in tribal warfare, in feuds between septs, and in quarrels between individuals" (Fanon 54). Hence, Raymond "asserts" himself by sexually assaulting his own wife (163), Sankolo kills his fiancé, Awa, out of anger and sexual frustration (92–93), Wagouli and Kratonga "repay" Kassoumi for having witnessed Sankolo's murder of Awa, by raping his wife, Tambira (129), and the locals delight in barbaric acts upon captives of the rebel tribes, as well as indulging in cannibalism (14–16).

By exposing the many brutal acts of the indigene Ouologuem is able to suggest that colonialism not only brutalized Africa but tempered the horrors of traditional life too. And yet the native's "destructive" nature can be considered a positive characteristic. Fanon explains that "collective autodestruction" (54) takes place *before* the native is able to attack the colonizer. In this way, the use of violence amongst the locals can be seen as the first step towards the mobilization of forces against the invaders or, more specifically, as a means of liberating the masses. In fact, in the French title, *Le Devoir de violence*, there is an advocacy for the *moral duty* to continue a life of violence, to achieve freedom at any cost (Panter-Brick 81). It is this sense that the portrayal of violence amongst the people is justified.

I wish to digress briefly here to discuss Ouologuem's advocation of violence,

since it is one of the issues that have dissuaded Achebe from wanting to be grouped with him. Achebe strongly believes that violence is avoidable and that it need not be used or advocated as a solution (Ogbaa 8). This is why in *Things Fall Apart* the author provides "alternatives" to war. Okonkwo, for instance, is sent into exile, while children and virgins are exchanged to avoid war between tribes. Of course his reluctance to describe violence as a way out of colonial rule may have something to do with his ambivalence; nevertheless, he is able to justify how without the use of aggression some form of "co-existence" may be found amongst different races. But I do not think that the use and presence of violence amongst the natives in Ouologuem's text is entirely unjustified. Similar to Armah's novel, where the armed struggle of the "pathfinders" becomes a viable method of destroying the White destroyers and the local despots who subject them to all sorts of brutality, one could say that violence amongst the servants/peasants in Ouologuem's novel shows that aggression may be used as a possible form of liberating the masses from the exploiters. However, unlike Armah's text where violence is seen amongst a small portion of society, in Ouologuem's portrayal, everyone is violent (with the exception of Koussumi, Tambira and Bishop Henry). This counteracts the writers need to create a "truer" past for African readers who he believes have been misguided by Western images, for it presents the African in the same light in which Western discourse perceives him: as savage, violent, erotic and corrupt. Here, I agree with Emmanuel

Obiechina who comments that the vision of an "idyllic" African past is as "falsifying as the opposite view which sees it as a state of chronic anarchy, a bloody battlefield in which the weak and the helpless were trodden down by the strong" (qtd. in Nwahunanya 205). Nevertheless, I do not think that Achebe is justified to dismiss Ouologuem's portrayal on the basis that the writer does not convey "dignity" (*Morning* 11), for I find that his own portrayal of the colonial encounter is ambiguous. It is ironical that although Achebe does not advocate violence, and instead offers "alternatives," (principally "adaptation"), the fate of his society is quite similar to that of Ouologuem's. His novel may not end in the kind of heightened tension seen in Ouologuem's novel but it nevertheless creates a sense of continued tension (Turner 33) that makes it uncertain how he hopes to instill "dignity" into his readers.

But the idea that violence can be used as a redeeming force is "short-lived," as Ouologuem does not explore the possibility of revolt. The natives do not use aggression to overthrow the colonizer; they continue to be "passive" to colonial rule. But if, as Fanon dictates, the presence of violence should at some point in time become a unifying force (40), like that of the "revolutionaries" in Armah's novel who defy the local and foreign oppressors in the attempt to take their fate in their own hands, then in Ouologuem's text the masses should be able to work together to overthrow their adversaries. And yet the "Manichean of the settler" does not produce a "Manicheism of the Native" (Fanon 93). There is not one occasion where the

people protest against their aristocratic rulers and the colonizers. But this, the author hints, occurs for two reasons. Firstly, because of Saif's tyrannical power, and secondly, because the people's violent behaviour creates such discord and disunity amongst them that they are unable to formulate an opposition against their adversaries.

The people are enslaved by the terror of the Saifs for several centuries. Once into the twentieth century the rule of the feudalists is no longer as severe as it was during the reign of the earlier Saifs, but is nevertheless, equally effective. For example, the main strategic device used by Isaac ben al-Heit to murder men is his famous poisonous asp that tracks the enemy and kills without leaving a trace (incidentally, this even instills fear in the French). The use of such tactics strengthens his reign in the kingdom/republic (the empire attains "independence" from the French). The people thus have to learn to "adapt" to tyrannical rule. However, unlike Igbo society where the people learn to live in "ambivalence," the manner in which the locals "adapt" is simply by submitting. This is why they take no action against the rulers.

Secondly, there can be no denying that Ouologuem also hints that the people are unable to unite against their oppressors because they are too involved in destroying one other. While violence can be seen as an element essential to understanding the colonial world, Ouologuem appears to regards "collective autodestruction" as a negative cultural characteristic.

Bernard Mouralis argues that violence amongst the locals is part of a cultural

dimension in which force, brutality, eroticism etc. are social characteristics that have existed since primordial times, a notion that he insists Fanon overlooks (74). Historical sources show that in the history of the Nakem empire "murders, immurings, poisonings, and torture" were commonplace among the locals (Hale 143). And Ouologuem himself is aware of this, having done extensive research before he began his novel (qtd. in Kohn 216). But Ouologuem does not tell the reader of a time *before* the presence of the Saifs; he dismisses African history before the establishment of the Nakem dynasty by stating that the real history of the African begins with the Saifs in 1202 (3). By doing this he introduces the continent already immersed in bloodshed and fulfills his need to react to already existing literature that glorifies the past. But it no doubt helps to strengthen the ambiguity of the writer's position. For by refusing to expose African society before the institution of class hierarchy he avoids exposing his views of whether the people were "generically" violent prior to the establishment of a feudalist society. And yet the lack of information about the past is compensated by the fact that the author generalizes his portrayal of brutality amongst the servants/peasants in the empire to include the whole continent. He mentions warriors in the empire who hail from other parts of Africa: the Zulu from Southern Africa, the Masai from East Africa and the Jaga from Central Africa (13), to put across the idea that violence is part of the African people. In other words, to him violence has always existed. To recount the history of the "niggertrash" before 1202 would probably

expose the same kind of cruelty exhibited throughout the novel after this particular period in time. This is why he begins his novel with the remark that one need not even go beyond this century to speak of the African's past (3).

Hence, violence amongst the locals is not necessarily a liberating force but a disrupting and degenerating element of society that weakens the solidarity of the people and leaves them vulnerable to colonial rule, thus explaining why the French are able to infiltrate the empire (21).

By suggesting that the African's brutality stems from his cultural background Ouologuem no doubt condemns not only violence as a cultural characteristic but also the native. And because he mocks the masses throughout his novel, and even refers to them as worthless "niggers," it becomes difficult to understand how Ouologuem's recreation of the colonial encounter attempts to give the African reader a "truer" image of the African.

And yet at the end of the novel Raymond-Spartacus Kassoumi is to be elected to the French National Assembly: a voice of the "damned" (12) is to be appointed to represent the masses. Although Raymond is portrayed as being ambivalent towards French rule, he is also described by the author as having strong desires to take action for his people, that it is his "duty to be a revolutionary"(168). And despite Saif's belief that "the task of subjecting the educated was completed" (167) on Raymond's return from France, Raymond still bears hatred for Nakem's leader who destroyed his

family. Hence, Raymond's pending election suggests that he may be able to overcome the subjugation of Saif and help his people regain their lost dignity. But once again, Ouologuem is ambiguous about the prospects of change. He does not describe Raymond's election but simply ends the novel with it pending. Should one assume that because the novel concludes with the chapter entitled "Dawn" that there may be some "ray of hope" for the natives? Yet the episode that does take place in the last section of the novel between Bishop Henry and Saif ben Isaac al-Heit makes it quite clear that the word "Dawn" is ironical. It is not symbolic of a new beginning where the masses will no longer be subjects to their local and foreign rulers; rather, it alludes to the idea that the African native is doomed to perpetual violence and rule of other powers.

In the last section of the novel Henry and Saif resort to a game of chess. This game is accompanied by rhetorical dialogue that echoes the events that have taken place in the novel and summarizes the kind of manipulative "games" the French and the nobles have been playing with the natives, and with each other. It is odd that the author should end the novel's "sanguinary" episodes with a board game played with pawns, bishops and kings. But this cannot be mistaken as a peaceful resolution, for the verbal struggle is accompanied with an asp in a bamboo cylinder rolling back and forth from Saif to Henry.

Saif, however, decides not to kill the Bishop. He understands that they

"complement each other" as powerful forces (177). But although the narrator remarks that "the two men exchanged smiles and for the first time agreed to speak the same language" this "reconciliation" is "short-lived". For moments later there is a "show down" in their game of chess when Saif, in his last move, plays his queen and ecstatically calls out: "'[m]*ashallah! wa Bismillah*! Play! Saif ben Isaac al-Heit. Queen'" (181). He cries out his name to signify that he reigns supreme.

But Henry is aware of this. It is he who explains to Raymond Kassoumi by means of a Chinese parable that they (the French, the aristocracy and the slaves/peasants) are players of a much larger struggle:

> The Chinese have a game: the connecting link, they call it. They capture two birds and tie them together . . . when the birds are released, they take flight, they think they are free and rejoice in the wideness of the sky. But suddenly: crack! The cord is stretched taut. They flutter and whirl in all directions, blood drips from their bruised wings, feathers and fluff fall on the onlookers. (169)

This is the logic of the world at large. Everyone is separate but bound in suffering. Hence, the French and the native are bound to each other, in the similar way that the French and the nobles are, as are the nobles and the masses. But although the various African classes are also caught in this "web of power," it is the masses who are destined to be the eternal "pawns."

The author thus contradicts his own desire to construct an African identity amongst his African readers and ends his novel in despair by stating that the native

will always be subjected to tyranny as Saif is "forever reborn to history" (182). In this sense the English-translated version of the French title, *Bound to Violence*, captures the "inescapable bondage" to destruction (Panter-Brink 81). It hints that there is no positive element of African (cultural) violence, and that its mere presence echoes only doom, as the native is not only "bound" to it, but by it.

But it may not be fair, even with such an ambiguous portrayal of the African, to suggest that Ouologuem may be "pandering to the West's racist and colonialist attitudes" (Achebe *Morning* 11). For not only does he lampoon the West's falsification of African realities in his novel, but he goes as far as to call the French "white apes" (30). Moreover, Dorothy Blair has given interesting "inside" information about Ouologuem's insolent behaviour to his publisher at a luncheon which was hosted to honor him with the Renaudot award (308), to justify that by writing such a novel he simply wanted to "thumb his nose at European liberal enthusiasm for the African. . ." (308). Nevertheless, the author's quibbling throughout the novel leaves his position open to debate.

The ambiguities in the novel thus stem from the author's unclearness about his own ideological goals. His wish to recreate the past in order to comment on the continent's "miserable reality," the truths and horrors of underdevelopment (Ouologuem *Lettre* 190) and his desire to reestablish dignity amongst African readers who have been demoralized by local and foreign oppression, is contradicted by his

simultaneous desire to denounce "the cult of the good native" in Western discourse (Ouologuem, *Devoir* 165). The very violence he uses to defy the Western image of the "ideal" native plays against his desire to rectify the demoralization of the African that has resulted from the colonial encounter. As a consequence, he advocates that the requital of violence is both liberation and death. And yet, he ends his novel in disillusionment: violence that appears as a "prophetic illumination" (173) now becomes "a false window offering a vista of happiness" (174), where there is no escape from oppression and exploitation.

Conclusion

In a 1976 conference on African Literature, Achebe, speaking on a panel for "Literature and Commitment in South-Africa," questioned the loyalties of both Armah and Ouologuem to their society in their fiction. He condemned the two writers for preaching "alienation" and "wickedness," and added that they should instead create fiction that instills dignity into the African people. But as I have shown in this study, not only do Armah and Ouologuem also speak of their commitment to African readers, but like Achebe, they are unable to convey this clearly in their work.

Achebe, Armah and Ouologuem believe that the colonizer is not only responsible for the subjugation of the native but that he is also to blame for the destruction of the continent: Achebe claims that "the problems we see in our politics derive from the moment when we lost our initiative to other people, to colonizers"(Appiah 209); Armah asserts that the fragmentation of the African continent, in every possible way, "was ordained by Africa's enemies in Berlin" (Armah "Our language" 831); and Ouologuem insists that it is because of colonialism that "the blacks have lived in the attitudes of slaves" (Plexus 135). But despite these similar anti-colonial positions, these writers represent the colonial encounter ambiguously.

Although I have studied how Achebe, Armah and Ouologuem incorporate similar issues, and convey similar messages, which make their portrayals appear ambiguous, I do not mean to imply that the three texts are aesthetically the same. I find that Achebe portrays the colonial encounter in better terms than Armah and

Ouologuem. His ability to provide a more "balanced" image of the colonial encounter (nevertheless an ambiguous one) gives his work a more realistic quality than that of his counterparts who focus on the past as devoid of any humanity. While Achebe's work may be a "real tragedy," in that it hints at lingering hopelessness, his portrayal allows for the possibility of an attempt to establish a "positive" representation of the African in comparison to the other two authors. Armah, for instance, may highlight certain cultural elements amongst the Africans, but he still dwells on corruption and violence as a major reason for the failure of African unity. Ouologuem, it appears, is totally incapable of providing any positive image. His focus on the native as savage and erotic does not leave any room for the possibility of change.

I find that in the attempt to "write-back" to Western and African discourses on the African past these artists are unable to "strike a balance" between trying to re-define Western and African portrayals of the African society, while at the same time, trying to re-create a past to instill a sense of African identity. It is a struggle between their aesthetic and moral values in which these writers grapple with their need to convey an African reality in the most authentic manner possible to correct Western and African images, and to grasp the meaning of the African's tragedy with the desire to instill dignity into those who have lost it as the result of colonization.

Also, the writers' African cultural bias cannot be isolated from their hybrid experiences. Nothing they write can be spontaneously African because they are, no

doubt, locked in the cultural conflicts of hybrid societies. Hence, one cannot rule out the possibility that their various ambiguities may then stem from certain (un)conscious desires to acknowledge the positiveness of colonial contact.

Finally, though I examined these novels as reactions to Western and African discourse, I did not discuss any particular texts that may have "inspired" these writers to provide such counter discourses. It would be interesting to consider these texts as works that have emerged from a post-colonial situation as "by-products" of the cultural conflicts seen in hybrid literatures.

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