

The Cynque Syndrome: Tracing the Germs of a Hereditary Disease in Armah's *Osiris Rising*

Ameth Diallo

ABSTRACT

The following article discusses the attitude of one of Armah's major characters in *Osiris Rising*: Ras Jomo Cynque. It seeks to uncover how an appeal to a glorious African past can divert present generations in Africa from understanding their history, facing their present and building their future. Using the concepts of romantic Gloriana and romantic primitivism from Ali Mazrui and Fanon's analysis of mental alienation, it investigates the rationale behind Cynque's conduct and his determination to lead a life reminiscent of African kingdoms into a modern Africa after he decides to leave America, where his life was strained by racism and disappointment, and to establish himself in Africa, in the fictitious state of Hapa. Cynque's attitude, as that of Seth Spencer, another character working for the repressive machine of the Hapa regime, is at odds from the dedication and commitment of characters such as Ast, an American from African descent, who returns to the continent in order to help into its rebuilding under the efforts of the Manda group led by the revolutionary Asar.

Keywords: African past, Ankh, Ast, Cynque, disease.

Published Online: January 26, 2023

ISSN: 2796-0064

DOI: 10.24018/ejlang.2023.2.1.47

Ameth Diallo*

Université Gaston Berger, Saint-Louis,
Senegal

(e-mail: diallo.ameth2@ugb.edu.sn)

**Corresponding Author*

I. INTRODUCTION

Armah's seventh published novel, *Osiris Rising*, offers an inspiring story in which the past is valued as a crucial asset for the understanding of the present and the devising of the future. The writer's wit and genius stems from his ability to use ancient African myths to better convey his message. The novel's main characters and protagonists obey a Manichean scheme: progressists working for social change and confronting villains determined to maintain the status quo (the repressive state and its allies). To this effect, the champions of a dictatorship ruled by the Utombo regime like Seth Spenser, and to a lesser extent, Rass Jomo Cynque and Prince Wossen, seek to crush mercilessly the revolutionist group in Manda led by Asar and Ast. While the latter embody the good morals required to uplift the continent, Seth and Cynque are presented as retrogrades whose aims are mainly centered around quenching their own ego and that of the neocolonial state of Hapa. Gbemisola Adeoti underlines this dichotomy on the characters' moral conduct in the following terms:

The characterization in Osiris Rising clearly establishes Armah's choice between good and evil, light and darkness. While those who represent good and light are presented as admirable people, the forces of evil and darkness are shaded in contemptible colors. For instance, Ast, Asar, Netta, Bai Kamara, Iva Mensha, Manaan Djan and other members of the Manda College collective are portrayed positively, and they represent the author's notions about change. On the other side of the divide are Seth, Cinque, Wossen and the conservative trio of Woolley, Padmasana and Nguruwe. They are agents of the repressive state and by extension, imperialism. In essence, the creators are pitched against destroyers, and innovators against conservatives (Adeoti, 2005, p. 12).

Although Cynque can be considered as an agent who sides the repressive state as Adeoti argues in the passage above, his action is not underpinned by the crude violence which Seth uses. This reality is what explains why most critics have emphasized on Seth in their analysis novel. They often tend to relegate his role in the actions of the repressive state to a lesser extent while his attitude has a highly negative impact on the mindsets of Africans struggling for a better future. Cynque's attitude, which consists more into collaborating with the state, plunges Africans into a sort of mysticism which ultimately diverts them from their true concerns and leads them to live into a nostalgic lifestyle centered on ancient African glory. In a modern African state, where issues of governance and survival are far more important than such a nostalgic emulation of the past, it becomes important to question the rationale behind Cynque's conduct.

This paper, using the analysis from Ali Mazrui's concepts of "romantic Gloriana" and "romantic primitivism" (2002, p. 1) and Fanon's theories on mental alienation in *Black Skin, White Masks*, attempts to explain Cynque's attitude. It aims at showing how his inconsistency can impact the work on the rebuilding of Africa. More precisely, it strives to show how this character suffers from a disease which can be traced to his forbears as an intention of disfigurement from the narrator, in an attempt to uplift his opponents working for progress on the continent.

The paper first lays out the context of the painful experience of Africans in America who travel back to the continent in a reverse crossing scheme as Cynque's life epitomizes. It then delves into the nostalgic life these disillusioned people attempt to lead in Africa upon their return. At last, it reveals the gap which exists between such nostalgic persons and the progressive elite which struggles to free Africans from dictatorship and bad governance.

II. REVERSE CROSSING CHARACTERS

Like Ast, Cynque is among these characters that made the "re-crossing journey" over the Atlantic. Both are individuals of African descendants born in America. Their forbearers coming from Africa were forced into the Middle Passage and landed in America where they served their masters as slaves. Upon the abolition of slavery, their descendants settled in this continent. Like all migrants, their alienation impacted their life. Besides, they were subjected to the racism and segregation which followed the abolition of slavery. Their American experience is shaped by bitterness and suffering. As they look for ways and means to escape their pain, they turn back into the African past for elements that can help them restore their "manhood" or "personhood".

According to Ali Mazrui (2022, p. 1), the perspective from which African recall their past "to emphasize the glorious moments in Africa's history and the grand civilizations" is termed "romantic Gloriana". Mazrui carries out in his analysis to explain there is another perspective called "romantic primitivism" which does not seek "to emphasize past grandeur, but to validate simplicity and give respectability to non-technical traditions. This historical perspective takes pride in precisely those traditions that European arrogance would seem to despise". These two perspectives impact on the mindsets of Africans trying to grasp their past and struggling to find a better future. This study reveals at a later stage how Cynque's attitude relates to these two perspectives. In addition, as Cynque appears as an individual suffering from mental alienation, it becomes relevant to study his conduct comparing him to Fanon's Capécia (1986), in her dream to become a white person, as Cynque earnestly longing to tie himself to some African past royalty.

Unlike Cynque, Ast, for instance, is fortunate to grow up in a family, which, until then, retained its African bonds. Upon her birth, her grandmother, Nwt, insists her granddaughter is given an African name to mark this intrinsic bond with Africa and Ancient Egypt. Her upbringing, filled with the narratives of her African ancestors from her grandmother, prompts Ast to undertake a journey back to Africa. She thus engages herself in the project of remembering an ailing continent along with a former acquaintance and future partner, Asar, a revolutionary established in Manda, with his group.

Cynque, as it appears, is described as the exact opposite of Ast, her antithesis and an anti-model whose only concern is to fulfill his desires. He shares these traits with Seth Spenser. Seth is a former classmate of Asar, and Netta, another character who works at the Hapi hotel. The readers learn, through Netta's voice, that there has always been a kind of competition between Asar and Seth at school, even though this feeling was more present in Seth. "After a Doctorate in Criminology, quick post-doctoral titles in espionage, something heavy in counterinsurgency and rows of credentials in intelligence work" (Armah, 1995, p. 76), Seth comes back home to work for the neocolonial government which rules Hapa under repression and fear. Seth represents the machine of President Ahmed Utombo's dictatorship in that fictitious African country. As the myth recalls, he is committed by all means, to stop his rival Asar from fulfilling his actions and organizing the revolution. He is a threat to both Asar and Ast and all those who stand against the authoritarian regime.

III. A THIRST FOR PRIMITIVISM

Although Seth seems to be the main opponent to Asar, the character of Cynque is of paramount importance in the framing of the plot in *Osiris Rising*. His origins are blurred in the beginning of the novel. Armah uses a brilliant technique which enables Ast to utter the term "Cynque" for the time first when she talks to Netta about the running of the country after Seth's visit at the Hapi hotel. Ast referred to the "Cynque Syndrome" (Armah, 1995, p.80), to describe the appetite of those people who dream of material success while appealing to African roots only to end up siding with the government to participate in the looting and the sharing of the national cake.

It is only during the visit of Prince Wossen at the Hapi for supplies such as ketchup, hot dogs, hamburger

and mayonnaise for his boss, Cynque (Armah, 1995, p. 80), when the veil about that character is lifted. Then, Ast has to ask whether there “is a real live person called Cynque here”, for she knows about a Cynque in America whose ancestors’ story is controversial. Realizing that it was only a mere coincidence that made Ast utter the name of Cynque, Netta informs her:

Four years, nearly five. I saw him the first day he arrived. Loose ends. He didn’t seem certain of what he was going to do. He used to eat here, looking lost and serious. The second year the security guys picked him up. They do that with strays going broke. I don’t know what assignment he was given, but he got a car, regular money, and a place over there in the beach (Armah, 1995, p.81).

The real motive which leads to his comeback is not given to the reader at this stage of the story. It can be assumed that he is part of those who return to Africa with “burning ideas”, but who are prevented from receiving any source of income until they become broke, as Netta said. Whatever the reason for his conduct, Cynque plays an active part in the government. He is entrusted by the state with running an “orientation Center for Americans seeking African roots”.

While it remains difficult to locate his liability in the option he takes, Cynque really enjoys the ugly task assigned to him by the Utombo government. His ideas are supported by theories of sheer primitivism about Africa. Netta informs the reader that he believes “to be an African, one has to turn irrational” (Armah, 1995, p. 81). Her critique of such an attitude parallels Senghor’s famous idea on the rationality of the West and the emotionality of the African as Ast completes the remark. There is a strong sense of anger in her words when she asserts that “this fool (Cynque) swallowed the racist propaganda about the rational West and an intelligent Africa” (Armah, 1995, p. 81, emphasis is mine). Here is indeed a stern criticism of the limits of Negritude. Though Eustace Palmer (1981) defends the thesis of a rebirth of Negritude in the fiction of Armah, it should be mentioned that Armah does not endorse the full thrust of this movement as he later draws inspiration from the ideas of Cheikh Anta in *Osiris* criticizing vehemently Senghor’s views (Armah, 2006, p.129; Armah, 2010, p.47). His bend with Diop’s points is the main driver which pushes him to recreate ancient myths from Egypt, challenging the celebratory tone of the Negritudists. What Armah seems to reject, at most, is the naivety of this theory and its single orientation which aims at restoring former African culture regardless of any critical processing.

Later, Netta confirms indeed Ast’s doubt on the identity of that individual when she informs her that she heard Cynque was “a civil right activist in the [Martin Luther] King days” (Armah, 1995, p. 82). Then, on their first encounter, Ast recognizes Cynque and calls him by his former name Sheldon Tubman. Here the reader is struck by Cynque’s response. He is adamant to bury forever that name in the following response: “My sister, why keep up calling the dead?” (Armah, 1995, p. 85). These words underscore Cynque’s strong desire not only to forever erase that name, but also to bury his previous life. He insists that his new name is Ras Jomo Cynque Equiano, “the ferryman to the new age” (Armah, 1995, p. 86). The narrator then describes a scene so similar to the episode where Abdullah calls Kimeira, who has become a business tycoon and a new “rich”, by his real name in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s *Petals of Blood*. Both Sheldon and Kimeira react in the same manner when acquaintances try to remind them of their real names. The disease of Cynque is the same as that of Kimeira or Nderi Wa Riera, and all other characters who take African culture just as a commodity for sale. In Ngugi’s *Petal of Blood* (1977, p. 211–212), Nderi resorts to maintaining this African authenticity as a pretext enabling only to sell exotic African culture.

There is no doubt that the new Cynque is trying to embody the mantle of a prophet and a king. His seclusion as a hermit in the castle, “the Mansion of Truth”, as he calls it, the setting up of a court and an environment full of luxury and pleasure are indeed reminiscent of the life of ancient kings whose deeds are often recounted. Cynque suffers from what Ali Mazrui terms as “romantic primitivism” which is preeminent in Africa’s initial quest for self-affirmation through movements such as the Negritude. This is all the more important to the extent that Mazrui asserts that “Negritude is associated with romantic primitivism”. Cynque is in fact nostalgic of an African age that is entirely backward and useless to the present situation. His traditional lifestyle and his name illustrate his longing and desire. His horde of wives is a testimony to his bestiality. Armah’s text seems to recall, at this level, the practices which identified cripple kings as depicted in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*.

A close examination of his name explains how Cynque gathers, as a character, various historical celebrities, or ideals under one name. “Ras” is derived from the famous Rastafarian movement while “Jomo” can be traced back to the controversial leader, Kenya’s first Prime Minister, Jomo Kenyatta. The name “Cynque” seems to suit him only because he identifies himself to the historic Cynque, a hero who organized a slave rebellion which led to the escape of many slaves who returned to Africa. “Equiano” recalls the famous Olaudah Equiano, the first African slave who freed himself from the bond of slavery in America, and whose book, *Equiano’s Travels*, is vehemently criticized by Armah in *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* (Armah, 2010, p 53). To that light, Omar Sougou, in studying this controversial

character of Cynque, offer the following insights:

Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano, whose name is historically suggestive, is antithetic to the genuine returnee. He appears as a demythologizing artifact, pictured in a world of self-mystification and delusion. As an archetypal creation, he illustrates a common mistaken identity search and confusion loudly suggested in the name he is given, and which is purposefully designed to sustain the concept of the zombi-askari in modern times. The conglomerate appellations and titles ridicule the histrionic and megalomaniac type he represents. Each of the names conveys referential codes concealed in its own history. Ras refers to the part of Rastafarian philosophy that deifies an oppressor. Jomo alludes to the betrayal of Kenyan national hope. Oludah Equiano, or Gustavo Vassa the African, is described in a shaft of sarcasm as 'the blind victim of European stereotypes' (Sougou, 2001, p. 128-129).

As Sougou explains, Cynque attempts, no doubt, to link himself to some African authenticity and grandeur which, he hopes, will enable him to lead the life of a model, a prophet, or a king ruling over his subjects. It will be interesting therefore to question the motivations which sustain Cynque's conduct to better grasp his personality. As the plot unfolds, the readers learn that Cynque, whose real name is Sheldon Tubman, was a fierce advocate of the black cause in America during the Civil Rights Movement (Armah, 1995, p. 89). He was once admired and held in high esteem by his community, whose rights he stood for. He was even Ast's subject for her undergraduate history thesis before she lost sight of him.

IV. A FRAGMENTED SOUL: THE FALL FROM GRACE

Ast thereafter investigates on Sheldon Tubman, the man who is now baptized Cynque in Hapa (Africa). She manages to trace his origins from his birth in Charleston. Some motions carried him to other places like Olanta, Lynchburg, Salem, Richmond, and Baltimore (Armah, 1995, p. 89). In this last city, Ast finds out that Cynque's father worked as an usher in a club for white people. Ast follows Sheldon in his bid to join the African and African American Association and the Yorker Club (Armah, 1995, p. 90). This is a major event which helps to shed light on the character of Sheldon in an incident that opposed him to a club he wanted to join, the Yorker Club, an all-male and all-white organization. The reason why this incident is relevant is that it was the first time Sheldon agreed to make a compromise in order to satisfy his own interest in joining the Club. Although he lamented "the taint of racism blackening an otherwise splendid American institution" (Armah, 1995, p. 90), he made "private approaches" to earn an entrance, resorting to different maneuvers. His appetite for material success and a high social status are the main motives accounting for the move he makes.

The ensuing story illustrates to which extent Sheldon Tubman betrays his community. It occurs that the African and Afro-American Association (AAAA) is rejected by the Dean of the Students, who labels it as a racist organization. When Tubman secures an entrance into the Yorker Club, he immediately starts scorning the African American Association. Acting as a mercenary, he writes an article entitled "The Menace of Racism" (Armah, 1995, p. 91) that is going to be the main headline of the campus journal for a full week. To give it full backing, its first part is promoted into the journal's editorial slot. There he states the following:

...he had received an invitation to join a clandestine society; that no white was eligible for membership; that he had attended one meeting; and that on mature reflection he had rejected the offer of membership. He said he had reacted as an individual constitutionally unsympathetic to racism of any kind, a real American. He had been repelled by the hate and paranoia implied by an association with no room for the white. He had felt an instinctive revulsion against the stress on the evils of slavery, and the discounting of the enormous distance traveled since those sad days by black Americans and by the great society in general. Finally, the outright pathological atmosphere of the AAAA had repelled him (Armah, 1995, p. 91-92).

Cynque's betrayal of the AAAA is so visible and terrifying. It is only after he pays his fee for the Yorker Club that he decides to direct his critique against his community's voice, the AAAA. Armah's craft in underlining the scale of betrayal remains in the precision with which he describes the Yorker Club, which is only made of white people, something worser in terms of racial discrimination than the AAAA. Besides, the Dean's reply in his rejection of the black people's association is groundless compared to the existence of clubs such as the Yorker. Cynque is therefore driven by his personal ambitions and materialistic desire as he sells out his community, expecting the juicy favors of his newly chosen ally, the all-white Yorker

Club. Cynque's so-called wit, from the white supremacists' vantage point, is celebrated by one letter to the Editor of the *Register* which "called him an oasis of good sense in a wild jungle of irrational turbulence" (Armah, 1995, p. 92). Sheldon Tubman becomes then the first non-white member of the Yorker Club.

As Ast is to find later in her research, Sheldon Tubman's dreams of the "Real America", continued after he leaves college. He envisions a brilliant career in befriending later two white companions, David Weiss and Adela Morgan. He even entertains a romance with the latter. Sheldon later discovers that Adela and her friend Dave, a doctoral candidate in Philosophy, aimed only at using him as a sample for research they intend to carry out. Adela even has some trouble to formulate the topic going through phrasings such as "The Negro Mentality" to the "Black Man's mind" (Armah, 1995, p. 94) before choosing secretly Tubman himself as their case study. Sheldon suffers afterwards from a painful crisis as he learns the racist thrust of his companionship with his friends and their game. This event is crucial to his future moves as the narration recounts: "

The misadventure destroyed Sheldon Tubman's universe. He lost energy. Company brought him pain. What he felt he needed most was a hiding place-remote, inaccessible, peaceful. Rescued from a suicide, he journeys throughout Canada in a Trappist monastery, joins a Baha'i seminar in Bhutan, and becomes a Muslim for some time before he goes to an "Authentic Yoruba village founded on the principles of Negritude (Armah, 1995: p. 95).

As the passage indicates, Sheldon becomes a wandering individual looking endlessly to soothe his troubled spirit. He is psychologically affected and needs some healing to reclaim his manhood and his courage which made of him the celebrity he was. His traces are lost afterwards.

Though it is not expressed clearly, it was at that moment he made up his mind for a return to Africa. Through such a trek, it becomes easy for the reader to grasp Cynque's thirst for power and his dreams to enliven old customs and practices in order to relieve his pain, loss and disappointment. Cynque heavily bears the burden of his past. As a young African American, he dreamt of a beautiful and successful life. That dream falls to pieces. He takes Africa as a second chance to restore this loss, to rebuild his dignity, and to fulfill his natural desire to be entrusted with some power. Being deprived of his desires is what makes him so adamant to establish a kingdom in a modern state. In order to sooth his mind, he sets up this kingdom carrying out some rituals as Don Bailey, the man in charge of the portrait of President Christian Ahmed Utombo and who runs Cynque's errands remarks:

Ras Jomo Cynque has transposed his American Africult here. His line is he's offering the uprooted their lost roots. Turning Americans into Africans. Only his process has nothing to do with Africa. It is a funky mix of Christian, Islam and Negritude (Armah, 1995, p. 125).

It should be underlined that Cynque's identity is very confused, as that of many other African Americans who make the journey back to their homeland, Africa. Bailey, the artist, has other secret paintings which underscore such a confusion. He maintains that most of these African Americans aim to perpetuate the master-slave patterns once in Africa. Their lust for power as the throne Cynque designs or the changing in names – the readers learns that Prince Wossen or the fake Ethiopian's name is Earl Jonson whom Bailey recognizes, associating them to some authenticity – illustrates the backwardness of their moves. Besides, their nostalgia appeals to a way of life totally useless to a continent to rebuild. Their state fits the description Mazrui offers in dealing with romantic primitivism since, according to Bailey "no one told him Africans dug social change, all he hears about is just that old traditional jive" (Armah, 1995, p. 130, emphasis mine). They have no real social alternative to offer to the continent. They do not foster change as the other group around Ast and Asar attempts to do. On the contrary they stand against progress as Jude Agho notes:

Enveloped in a make-believe and fantasized world, Ras Jomo Cinque Equiano is fake and claims a royalty that is not his due. He believes that his ancestors were kings and princes in Africa before they were carted off to the New World during the era of the slave trade (Agho, 2002, p. 69).

Instead, Cynque believes that redemption and the healing of lost souls come only from the return to this mixture of customs and faiths. The failure of his way stems from its own ambiguity and paradoxes. For instance, his call to a worship of authenticity makes reference to the Messenger of God, Allah. However, African rituals, in their origin, do not include rituals or allegiance to foreign religion such as Islam and Christianity. Cynque's rituals are his own. For instance, during Ast's visit to his temple, he makes his servants utter some hymns.

Claiming to be a true African, Cynque aspires to run his own kingdom. He attempts to foreground his royal heritage with the broken ankh he brought back from America, as he says in such boosting tones to be

the “last repository of that secret knowledge” and that he is “the Keeper of the Sign” (Armah, 1995, p. 144). It should be noted in fact that Cynque’s attitude is only understandable if we consider his past experience in the United States. His endless search for celebrity and success, and his failures are what explain his re-crossing to the continent. Consequently, he longs to attribute himself all the merit that he was denied in America. Anger resulting from racism, unemployment, mistreatment, a living in the periphery account for the fact that Cynque is adamant to obtain the power he is dreaming of. Drawing on the famous saying which states that ‘the one-eyed men are the masters in the kingdom of the blind people’, it becomes easier for the likes of Cynque to wield their fake power in in Africa. He embodies the attitude of those who have “the twisted desire of the slave not to abolish the stupidity of royal power, but to taste it” (Armah, 1995, p. 88).

Furthermore, living in a neocolonial state where personal success is nearly impossible while sticking to good morals, siding with the government becomes the only way to lead a stable life unless the individual is committed to go against the tide. Africa becomes the place where they can transplant their old dreams. Most of the time, Africans re-crossing the Atlantic consider themselves always smarter than those who remained home. Present day Liberia for instance, witnesses the harsh impact of this belief on the superiority of the returnees. These individuals most of the time meddle themselves in governments politics and become resourceful cronies of dictators as Sougou warns:

The collaborative attitude of Cinque towards the oppressive state is presented as a manifestation of his sycophancy and need for valorization that caused him to turn away from the Black cause while at university. The novel carries further its indictment on this kind of behavior in his journey to the motherland that does not purge him of his complexes. He instead lives in a fanciful world filled with false values and irrelevant stereotypical assumptions of grandeur and kingliness (Sougou, 2002, p. 130).

Interestingly, Cynque’s narration of the origins of his broken ankh is used to show how people can easily manipulate signs and symbols or objects only to serve their own interests. It highlights the opposition of two narratives. He could not believe that there was a real and complete piece of Ankh detained by Ama Tete. As such, he claims the legitimacy of his version of the Ankh. Cynque explains that he is the descendant of an “interminable line of kings and emperors on both sides” (Armah, 1995, p. 144). He actually describes how one of his ancestors, a young prince had been betrayed into slavery bringing half of the symbol with him. Cynque believes now that the other part of the Ankh piece is buried in Africa just to underscore his solid bonds with the African soil where he claims his roots. His commitment to establish the link is a matter of legitimacy and psychology. His determination to establish that bond finds sufficient explanation in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1986, p. 42) where Mayotte Capécia had to use all means available to relate his kin and kith to the white people. Capécia’s dreams of becoming white and living the life of white people are conveyed in her constant habit to tie herself the white race. To make it sound, to sooth her mind, she ultimately forces herself to discover that her grandmother was a white person.

V. THE TRUTH REVEALED

Cynque’s enigma is put into trial by Ast’s research and the troubling finding she stumbles in. Cynque fails in his bid to claim his bonds from African royalty. Such a failure rests on two main points: Firstly, his dispute with Ast resulted in helping Jacqueline Brown, an African American woman falling into Cynque’s trap escape his cynicism and brutality and return to the United States (Armah, 1995, p. 149-150). Secondly, the discovery from Ast that his Ankh, the broken piece, was once the possession of a sell-out king, seems to be the most damaging blow that ruins the royal lifestyle he so far enjoyed in Hapa since his return. Ast first reminds him that the claim to a silly authenticity cannot be applied to all the continent as its advocates only represent ten percent in comparison to the ninety other percent. Ast’s outburst echoes her violent terms: “But all you’re doing is indulging your starved ego. That is your disease” (Armah, 1995, p. 154). While Cynque claims to restore the lost glory, Ast cries out: “I am telling you the need to be royal is a sickness of the slave soul” (Armah, 1995, p. 154).

Ast then searches for Cynque’s origins in the library. What she discovers is disappointing. Cynque’s ancestor, an African notable, whose name is Ah-Poo, was involved into blood vengeance and begged to be carried away to America in a slave boat. He was a slave working at the royal court, probably the son of an aristocrat who bedded with his mother as a servant (out of wedlock person). She learns further how the white captain used Ah-Poo in the boat to sail smoothly across the ocean, the other captives granting him respect and reverence. Ah-Poo is actually a betrayer. As the member of a secret society, he was secretly involved in selling slaves, which was what the organization stood against. Upon the discovery, he was to be sentenced to death by the council. That is why he wanted to be taken on the boat at all costs. The fact that he had this symbol, the Ankh, cut in half, was due to a summons which obliged him to attend the next meeting of the society, where its members would have probably dealt with him. Fearing the death sentence

where he would be forced to commit suicide, he chose willingly to join the slave boat.

The reason why Ast is so adamant to know the truth is also that she has brought back her own ankh. But unlike the broken one, hers was a full, complete piece. As Cynque is writing to Ama Tete to get confirmation on his ankh and not information, that wise historian decides to summon them together. The rest is clear. It confirms Ast's research. Cynque's ancestral bonds go back to Ah-Poo, the sell-out, who profited from slavery, betrayed his community, and escaped to save his life. Such was the conduct of Ah-Poo who was actually bought back from slavery to become a free man by a sister and a brother from the royal family at his adulthood. It was at that time that Ah-Poo joined the secret society to show his commitment and gratitude. But he later betrayed the community.

Indeed, as Cynque and Ast are committed to two different sides, the narrator uses history to disfigure the former and empower the latter. This technique is so eloquent and is at its best when Cynque wrongly pronounces the name of his ancestor. While he thinks it was Apple, Ama Tete corrects him and states it was Ah-Poo, thus confirming Ast's research. Here is a man pretending to live the real life of an authentic Africa, even though he did not know his origins.

The interesting question we are tempted to ask here is who deserves the legitimacy to ask for followers: the one who is the descendant of a betrayer, son of a servant born out of wedlock or the one who carries loyalty and dedication? Armah thus disfigures Cynque and reveals the origins of the transmission of a disease of disloyalty and betrayal to the whole line of his family starting from Ah-Poo and to which indeed Cynque belongs to. Therefore, he cannot be of any relevance in the progressist struggles of the continent. Ah-Poo was victim of an illness as Ama Tete points out:

What Apo understood with devastating clarity was that the utterly efficient force that had first enslaved, then freed him, was money. For Apo, the determination to get rich became blood and air. The old slave decided to follow his old master's trade himself (Armah, 1995, p. 266).

Such an illness, unfortunately, seems to have been transmitted to Ah-Poo's own descendants like Sheldon Tubman, who became Cynque, determined as he was to become rich and famous at all costs in America. Money is power and power was what America denied to Cynque. Africa is the ideal place to find it again. This remark finds similar echoes in the following statement from Ast:

He came to Africa to fulfill a dream of power. You tell him of a group devoted to criticizing power, tearing it apart. That's a threat to his dreams. Don't you know out there in America we're power-hungry (Armah, 1995, p. 270).

Cynque is undoubtedly a wandering ghost looking for mental stability. His move is understandable as Moses Oke asserts:

...it is to be remarked that cultural nostalgia is a universal phenomenon. What differentiates the Africans from other peoples' cultural nostalgia, notably Western and Asian, is the attitude towards the past. Unlike those other peoples, Africans are largely uncritical about our traditional ways of life. Rather than being uncompromisingly critical of the past, advocates of appeals to the past are urging an unreflectively patronizing retention of a phase that should be transcended (Oke, 2006, p. 340-341)

If looking for solace in times of turmoil appears as a normal reaction, Oke warns clearly about the inherent risks Africans might face. He recommends the use of a critical look in the search for directions from the exploration of the African past. Afterwards, Tete does not insist on Ast's full piece of ankh, but there is no doubt that it comes from loyal forbearers, those who defended the community from predators and destroyers. Their heritage is the groundwork of the Manda group of which Asar and Ast are of critical importance.

VI. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, Armah's *Osiris* presents two models of characters who both draw from the past to account for their present actions and attitudes. While the progressive revolutionary group led by Asar, Ast, Ama Tete and the Manda group take inspiration from ancient Africa to lay the foundation of social change, the other block defined by Seth, Cynque stands for the perpetuation of malevolent forces which block any reform and prevent the advent of progress. Armah, in establishing a link between former betrayers such as Ah-Poo and Cynque, shows only the motives which feed the conduct of returnees who seek to restore their lost dreams and desires in America. It also enables the readers to grasp how the African past should be used

in the remaking of the continent. Such a past is not to be envisioned in the way Cynque attempts to do when he invokes an idealized and backward kingdom as Ast puts the remark in anger:

Cynque, none of this makes sense. There's no such a thing as a land of kings and queens. For one king you have millions of subjects and slave. Africans moved beyond that nonsense about king and queens ages ago (Armah, 1995, p. 153-154).

As Ast posits, a careful use of African past should only help the continent to confront its present challenges. It should not contribute to helping someone nurture his own ego as Cynque attempts to do. Drawing on the positive role played by Ast and Asar who invoke ancient Egypt philosophies, the novel offers an assessment of the exploration of such a past. Armah's point therefore is not the celebration of a beautiful past because as such it could mislead into useless nostalgia as Jude Agho observes:

In this novel, Armah does not seem to support an exhibitionist program of black repatriation to Africa in the sense of Marcus Garvey's back-to-Africa program during the post-slavery era in America. Although a greater bulk of the text is about Ast's homecoming to Africa in search of her roots, Armah repudiates the adventurism of "Africa hungry" returnees who take their discoveries about Africa back as commodities to be embellished and sold in America (Agho, 2002, p. 66).

The defeat of the malevolent forces, whose advocates are the likes of Cynque and Seth, sets the tone for an utter rejection of the backward attitudes which wreak much havoc on the spirit of community, justice and freedom that define the people's way of life. The message of this text warns Africans on how they should address their past.

REFERENCES

- Adeoti, G. (2005). The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Alter)-native Route to Development". *Africa Media Review*, 13(2), 1–15.
- Agho, J. A. (2002). Ayi Kwei Armah's *Osiris* rising new wine in an old wine skin. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*, 33 (2), 57–70.
- Armah, A. K. (1978). *The Healers*. London: Heinemann.
- Armah, A.K. (1979). *Two Thousand Seasons*. London: Heinemann.
- Armah, A.K. (1995). *Osiris Rising*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.
- Armah, A.K. (2006). *The eloquence of the scribes, a memoir on the sources and resources of African literature*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.
- Armah, A.K. (2010). *Remembering the dismembered continent*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.
- Fanon, F. (1986). *Black skin, white mask*. London: Pluto Press.
- Mazrui, A. Amin (2002). The African experience in politics and culture: from Monroe's doctrine to Nkrumah's consciencism. (http://www.cccb.org/rcs_gene/ali_mazrui.pdf accessed on October 19th 2022).
- Ngugi, W. T. (1977). *Petals of blood*. London: Heinemann.
- Oke, M. (2006). Cultural nostalgia: a philosophical critique of appeals to the past in theories of re- making Africa. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 15 (3), 332–343.
- Palmer, E. (1981). Negritude rediscovered: a reading of the recent novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka. *The International Fiction Review*, 8 (1), 1–11.
- Sougou, O. (2001). Armah's politics in *Osiris rising*: the African diaspora reversing the crossing. *Identity, Culture and Politics*, 2 (1), 115–143.



Ameth Diallo was born in Kaolack in the center of Senegal. He graduated from the English Department at Gaston Berger University in Saint-Louis. In 2022, he defended his Ph.D. in African Literature at the same university.

He is currently serving as an assistant lecturer at the English Department while working on development projects implemented in the Saint-Louis area, in Senegal. Mr. Diallo's areas of research include African resistance to the global order, the exploration of relevant alternatives for progress in the continent using African literature and African thought produced by writers such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Ayi Kwei Armah. In his research, built around the postcolonial theory, he uses sociology, psychology, and political science to deepen his analyses. He has published articles in the *International Journal of Art Humanities and Social Sciences Studies* (IJAHSSS) and *SAFARA* (Review of the English Department at Gaston Berger).

Berger).

Dr. Diallo is a member of the African Studies Association and the African Literature Association. He is also a Fellow of the US State Department Young African Leaders Initiative of the Mandela Washington Fellowship.