

Negritude Rediscovered: A Reading of the Recent Novels of Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka

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It is relevant to my purpose in this article to restate briefly what many might consider to be accepted commonplaces—the causes and characteristics of the phenomenon we all now refer to as “Negritude.” Negritude was a direct and forceful response to the consequences of the white imperialists’ attempt to destroy not only African culture, but also the African personality itself. It was essential to the colonizing mission of the European powers to represent the indigenous cultures of the people they encountered as barbarous and primitive, but in practice, the British administrators left the cultures of the Africans in the areas under their domination virtually intact, whereas the French actively tried to suppress them. More specifically, the French, through their policy of assimilation, reared a special breed of Africans who, having been thoroughly educated in French values and perfectly attuned to French culture, were for all practical purposes black Frenchmen. These *assimilés*, conscious of their alienation from their roots and the debasement of their traditional culture and of the need to rehabilitate that culture and reassert the black man’s cultural identity, were the leading spirits behind Negritude.

Negritude was not an entirely African phenomenon; the collaborators with whom Senghor launched the movement in Paris in the late thirties were from French Guiana and the French Caribbean—Leon Damas and Aimé Césaire. Indeed, the ideology had its roots in movements going much further back than the activities of Senghor, Damas, and Césaire—in the Cuban literary movement “Negritismo,” in similar activities in French-speaking Haiti and Martinique, in the Negro Renaissance in the United States that followed the First World War, in Marcus Garvey’s much maligned “back to Africa movement,” and in Du Bois’s pan-Africanism. Negritude was the culmination of all these attempts at asserting the cultural authenticity not only of the African, but also of the black man.

Consequently, Negritude extolled the virtues of traditional African society and declared the beauty and validity of indigenous African culture. In particular, it laid stress on the physical beauty of the black man, the excellence of the black man’s physique, and the exquisite beauty of African womanhood. It was not merely defensive, but also aggressive, highlighting the evils of white European society. The apostles of Negritude felt the need not only to display the virtues of negro culture, but also to demonstrate the black man’s cultural superiority over the white man by devaluing various aspects of white life. Negritude, therefore, attacked the white man’s materialism, his detachment from the soil and from the seasonal rhythms, his coldness in human relationships, and the dehumanizing effects of Western technology.

A number of Marxist intellectuals were attracted to the concept of Negritude, understandably so, since Negritude opposed Western capitalism and emphasized the communal nature of traditional African society, as opposed to the individualistic basis of Western society. Negritude therefore had a Marxist component.

However, the concept was vulnerable from several angles. It was often accused of the very racism that it sought to expose in Western society, and the charge was difficult to refute since many Negritudists adopted a decidedly and, at times, abusively anti-white stance. Furthermore, in their bid to demonstrate the warmth of the black man and the strength of his relationships, they unwittingly buttressed the spurious racist views of some anthropologists who declare that the cerebral white man is distinguished by his capacity to think, the black by his capacity to feel. In accepting this facile distinction between the purely intellectual white man who keeps his feelings tightly under control and the emotional black who is incapable of deductive reasoning, some Negritudists were at least guilty of inverted racialism.

Although most Francophone writers in Africa were apostles of Negritude, a few, like Sembene Ousmane, were strongly antagonistic to the concept. Ousmane, who often seems to have greater affinities with the Anglophones than the Francophones, thought he was also under an obligation to expose the uglier aspects of African life, traditional as well as modern, while the Negritudists sought to glorify and idealize traditional life. An avowed communist himself, Ousmane saw the apostles of Negritude, to quote Obiechina, as leaning "to a cultural past that favoured the caste system, feudalism and the spiritual oppression of the masses, the aim being to justify the rising bourgeoisie's own acquired rights and privileges after its take-over on independence."¹ But the most ardent opponents of Negritude were from the Anglophone countries. Not having been as thoroughly alienated from their roots as the Francophones, they did not perhaps feel as great a need to declare their blackness or to assert the beauty and validity of traditional African culture. Having been brought up in the more pragmatic English educational tradition, they were less given to idealization, and although they also celebrated the beauty of traditional African life in their writings, they also objectively displayed its shortcomings.

Obiechina has quite rightly pointed out that the Anglophone dismissal of Negritude as summed up in Soyinka's scathing remark that a tiger does not need to proclaim its tigritude, is too facile. It underestimates the tremendous importance of an ideology which, though largely regarded as irrelevant today, served a very useful function at the time as a rallying force for all those who justifiably wished to assert the dignity of the black man and the authenticity of African culture. Indeed, when seriously considered, the differences between the Anglophones and the Francophones on the question of Negritude were not really fundamental. Many of the Anglophones accepted the need to demonstrate the beauty of African life and values; they too wished to prove, as Achebe declared, that Africa did not learn about culture from the white man; and although they may have adopted antagonistic postures in their public pronouncements and essays, writers like Soyinka and Achebe did demonstrate in their plays, poems, and novels, the beauty and dignity of black African life and values. The difference, really, was mainly one of emphasis.

Negritude was of course a preindependence phenomenon, part of the cultural manifestation of that nationalism which was sweeping the African continent and a part, therefore, of the strategy for resisting the white man's domination. During the postcolonial period, with independence an established fact and the authenticity and beauty of African life and culture generally accepted, Negritude lost its momentum. Most of the Francophones lost their inspiration and wrote less and less, while in the Anglophone world the view

¹E. N. Obiechina, "Cultural Nationalism in Modern African Creative Literature," *African Literature Today*, No. 1 (1968), p. 27.

increasingly gained currency that the task of the writer in postindependence Africa was to expose the ways in which the new black rulers were exploiting their people and debasing their society. The African writer was expected to alert his society to the presence of corruption, incompetence, nepotism, inhumanity, and a whole range of social, political, and economic evils; and for this task, Negritude was largely considered irrelevant.

Faced with the imminent collapse of African society in this postcolonial phase, various African writers, particularly Anglophones, have been exploring the means of creating alternative societies. And it is the submission of this article that in this exercise Negritude has been resurrected once more, though possibly in a slightly altered garb, and has unexpectedly acquired a tremendous significance. Writers like Ngugi, Armah, and Soyinka are now saying, in effect, that the corruption, incompetence, inhumanity, and materialism that now characterize most African societies, are the consequence of the destruction of traditional African values by the imperialists, in particular, by that most savage and most effective weapon—the slave trade. And in order to recreate a fair and just society, we Africans cannot do better than return to origins, try to discover through patient research and through the adoption of the right attitudes of mind, how exactly genuine traditional African society was organized, and then model our modern societies and values on it. Soyinka's *Myth, Literature and the African World* is geared precisely towards a retrieval of a genuine African world view. In the words of the author, the work is engaged in the "act of eliciting from history, mythology and literature, for the benefit of both genuine aliens and alienated Africans, a continuing process of self-apprehension whose temporary dislocation appears to have persuaded many of its non-existence or its irrelevance in contemporary world reality."² It is a work in which the phrase "return to origins" occurs with an almost embarrassing insistence and in which, significantly, many of the authors Soyinka presents as advocating this return to origins are "those who have responded with boredom and indifference to the romanticized rhetoric of negritude."³ But this concept of a return to origins is also central to Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*, and Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*. Armah's concept of "The Way," Soyinka's Aiyero, and Ngugi's traditional Ilmorog present for our contemplation idealized traditional societies infiltrated with the pristine African traditional values; they also indicate possible ways of creating alternative societies to the inhumane ones which presently predominate.

In varying degrees, each of these works manifests some characteristic or other of Negritude. Thus each presents a near perfect traditional society whose social and political organization is clearly Communistic if not avowedly Marxist. Increasingly Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka seem to be leaning towards Marxism as the only viable solution to the continent's ills. This is not perhaps surprising, since their search for alternative societies has been partly necessitated by their revulsion against what they see as the essentially capitalist and elitist orientation of much of postindependence Africa. In any case, their study of the values and patterns of the traditional African society they are recommending for our acceptance suggests communalism and the common ownership and supervision of the means of production and distribution. The glorification of African womanhood, the veneration for the soil and the seasonal rhythms, and the stress on the African's alienation from his cultural traditions are further characteristics of Negritude which appear in these works. In at least one case—that of

²Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.xi.

³Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, p.xi.

Armah—there is a racist streak. For want of a better term, one must use the word racialism to refer to the almost total hostility to anything remotely white which appears in *Two Thousand Seasons*.

In one majestic sweep of Africa's history, Armah seeks to demonstrate in *Two Thousand Seasons* how those pure African values and traditions which used to exist in an almost prehistoric past were largely annihilated through the exploits of Arab predators and European destroyers. Unlike the anti-Negritudist Malian author Ouologuem, who declares that black notables no less than Arab and European conquerors and imperialists were responsible for the historical degradation of the continent,⁴ Armah adopts an essentially Negritudist posture, the net effect of his presentation being the total condemnation of the Arabs and Europeans as the destroyers of the pristine values of a once pure Africa. He seems imperialism as a destructive force obscuring the essential truths of "the way," interrupting its reign and inducing people to forget their origins. Armah sees a number of features of modern society as deviations from "the way" introduced by the forces of imperialism. Monarchical systems of government and the tyranny in which they resulted, the individual ownership of land, and the subordinate role accorded to women in many African societies, were all imported by the Moslem predators and European destroyers. So, for that matter, were trade and materialism: "We are not a trading people . . . We have seen traders and their work . . . The traders are creators of unreasonable desires."⁵

The most significant fact about *Two Thousand Seasons* is Armah's positing of a far distant past when all black peoples belonged to one vast African nation with its own genuine, pure system of values or way of life that the author consistently refers to as "the way"—"our way." And he posits this in spirited defiance of the Europeans who distort the essentials of African history: "That we the black people are one people we know. Destroyers will travel long distances in their minds and out to deny you this truth. We do not argue with them, the fools. Let them presume to instruct us about ourselves. That too is in their nature" (p. 4). According to Armah, the distinguishing characteristic of this African "way" is the principle of reciprocity—mutual giving and receiving. These two components of reciprocity are intertwined and together constitute an essential principle of life; death, both spiritual and physical, ensues when the two are separated. "The way" is, therefore, a creative life-affirming principle as opposed to the destroyers' way of death; "the way" had its own clearly defined political and religious systems. In political organization it emerges as Communistic and egalitarian with "each participant an equal working together with all others for the welfare of the whole" (pp. 57-58). Land was owned in common, the principle of the individual ownership being a later innovation by the imperialists. Throughout the work there is a marked insistence on communalism and a sense of community, and a strong aversion to anything that smacks of individualism: "The single agent's freedom is useless liberty. Such individual action can find no sense until there is again that higher connectedness that links each agent to the group. Then the single person is no cut off thing but an extension of the living group" (p. 210). The people of "the way" could not be regarded as materialistic, since materialism implied the individual hoarding of possessions. Though they loved possessions, they used them for the enrichment of the whole: "The disease is not in the abundance of things but in relationships

⁴See Yambo Ouologuem, *Bound to Violence* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971).

⁵Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973), p. 154. Further references are to this edition and will appear in the text.

growing between users. The people using all things to create participation, using things to create community, that people have no need of the healer's art, for that people is already whole" (p. 315).

Committed as this society was to communal activity, it was still not antipathetic to leaders, or what Armah refers to as "experts" or "caretakers." However, these did not involve positions of selfish consumption at the expense of the sweat of others, as they subsequently became in colonial and postcolonial times, but "productive agencies requiring care and the patient use of skills exactly learnt" (p. 54).

Armah also posits a religion of "the way" quite distinct from Islam or Christianity which he sees as alien religions associated with the death-dealing Arab predators and European destroyers. In this, Armah goes much further than avowedly Negritudist writers such as Laye and Kane who present Islam as a traditional African religion accepted by the people. He groups Islam with Christianity as "shrieking theologies" with which the Arab predators and white destroyers assail the black people, and he refers to the myths of both religions as "fables." The religion of "the way" is indeed closely linked with Armah's principle of communalism. For if there is a supreme force in the world at all, it is not a supernatural being, but the collective will and determination of the people. It "is an energy in us, strongest in our working, breathing, thinking together as one people; weakest when we are scattered, confused, broken into individual, unconnected fragments" (p. 151).

Indeed the system of "the way" laid great emphasis on "connectedness," that is meaningful communication or awareness of relationships. The much stressed concept of "connectedness" often appears to be equivalent to community spirit, or the collective will; there are frequent references to "connected consciousness," "general consciousness," "our common mind," and "our common soul." The system of "the way" involved "connected sight," "connected hearing," and "connected thinking"—a vision, a system of thought and action that focuses on the entire pattern, sees the interrelationship between past, present, and future, concerns itself not just with the expediences of the present, but with the prophesies of the past and the lessons of history, and takes thought for the welfare of posterity. The reverse is "unconnectedness"—fractured vision, fractured hearing, and fractured thinking—which is associated with the white predators and destroyers and therefore with destruction and death. There is a sense in which Armah is almost impatient with the present which he refers to on one occasion as "the senseless present" whose sounds are merely a "brazen cacophony." Instead, he emphasizes the need for going back to origins and determining purposes: "A people losing sight of origins are dead. A people deaf to purposes are lost" (p. xiii).

It is unfortunate that Armah does not give a really extended presentation of this ancient African traditional society which he is recommending as a model for the restructuring of our modern societies. Indeed, of the three writers under discussion, only Ngugi gives a very detailed presentation of his idealized traditional society. There is much talk in *Two Thousand Seasons* about the ideals and values of "the way"; a lot of our information about it comes through the mouths of prophetesses and seers, but there is little actual demonstration of "the way" in action, most of the book being taken up, in fact, by the attempts of the virtuous to rediscover "the way" after the disasters of colonialism and postcolonialism. Furthermore, one is not quite certain that Armah has succeeded in his intention of convincing us that the destruction of the values associated with "the way" was entirely the responsibility of the white destroyers. The

disintegration had started before the advent of the imperialists due to the people's deviation from the path of reciprocity to that of unbridled generosity. But even before this period of prosperity when generosity became a vice, there had been the savage period of the rule of the fathers—a harsh time characterized by warring gangs and clans and leaders determined to cling to power. This harshness and tyranny, this deviation from “the way” was surely not caused by the destroyers; the uncharitable might suggest that “the way” must itself have possessed the seeds of its own destruction.

Armah's strong racial consciousness appears almost negative when he equates whiteness with death and destruction, not just because in the African imagination it is the color of death and disease, but because it is also the color of the destructive imperialists. Significantly, he regards both Arab predators and European destroyers as being white. On the other hand, black is the color associated with racial triumph and eventual fulfillment. It is also possible to argue that the relish with which Armah describes the assassination of the Arab predators and white destroyers smacks of racialism:

Thirty victim eyes searched for each destroyer and found him. Seven hands caught each ashen limb. One white destroyer was thrown into the water with not one of his limbs: these followed after. Another had his left thigh stretched away from the right till the bones between them cracked. He was hurled off the ship in the wake of the first. The third was strangled by so many pulling hands his neck turned longer than a chicken's, ungraceful in its slender death. The fourth and the last white destroyers, they went down together, bound tight with rope from the flapping sailcloth overhead. (pp. 222-23)

This, as it were, is the moment of Africa's revenge. Armah could also scarcely conceal his scorn for the Arab conquerors and their religion Islam. He describes Ramadan as the predators' season of hypocritical self-denial, and sees their god Allah as a slave-owner benefactor God. the Moslem rulers are presented as bestial beings indulging in the most repulsive orgies involving drugs, food, and sex, and they have no qualms in calling on their slave-owner God at the height of their indulgence in unspeakable rites:

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 in 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 the women squirm with a sensuousness all the more inflammatory to the predators' desire. The dawa drug itself the predators licked lovingly from the youngest virgin genitals—licked with a furious appetite. (p. 33)

And yet in spite of the venom directed at the white predators and destroyers and the author's obvious relish at their destruction, one can argue, with Wole Soyinka, that the work is rescued from a negative racism by the positive nature of its message.⁶ It seeks to recreate a genuine traditional African past and calls rousingly to all Africans to liberate themselves from all those alien forces—economic, political, and spiritual—which, in his view, initially led to the destruction of African traditional values and which are the real cause of the present decadence on the continent. It is to this end that he fully demonstrates

⁶Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, pp. 111-12.

the horrors of the slave trade and the permanent damage done to the personalities of those Africans who have been transformed into zombies by the imperialists. Armah includes under the umbrella term of "zombi" all those Africans who either by force or through their own volition have become collaborators with the imperialists, have lost their original indigenous personalities and now help to consolidate imperialist power and culture in preference to indigenous traditions and institutions. But even the zombi is not beyond reclamation as the heroic Sobo demonstrates.

The attempts to rediscover "the way" are always linked in the novel with resistance to slavery and imperialist domination. After the Arab predators' second conquest some idealists among the people decide that rather than submit to slavery and the Moslem religion they would leave in search of new lands where they would reestablish "the way." It soon becomes clear that this journey is both physical, spiritual, and psychological; it represents a journey into the African racial psyche to rediscover authentic values and standards—"the way." The group of twenty idealistic initiates also prepare themselves precisely for this task of racial retrieval both before and after their enslavement by Koranche and his white-destroyer allies. The initiation procedures to which they are exposed comprise a system of traditional education perfectly suitable for equipping the initiates to cope successfully with their environment. They are exposed to all the various trades and arts and then made to specialize in the particular art for which the initiate shows most aptitude. They are taught the tenets of "the way" and they are warned that it would be fatal to their art to misuse the skills they had learnt; they must never turn these skills to the service of things separate from "the way." It is this task of racial retrieval that Armah has also set himself in the novel. And he believes that every self-respecting African should embark on this exercise: "This should be the lifework of spirits still open to the remembrance of the way, capable already of visions of its rediscovery, willing, determined to make it a living way again" (pp. 246-47). The search for "the way" is in fact a continuing exercise: "Endless our struggle must seem to those whose vision reaches only to the end of today. But those with ears connected to our soul will hear a message calling us to a better life, to a life closer to our ancient way, to a preparation for the best, the only living way" (p. 306).

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o also projects "a vision of the future rooted in a critical awareness of the past," to quote his idealistic young character, Karega, who seems to be the embodiment of his moral and social positives in the novel *Petals of Blood*.⁷ For Karega and his creator, like Armah, are disgusted with the present. No other African novelist has given a more thorough demonstration of the political, social, and economic evils that currently blight the African continent than the Ngugi of *Petals of Blood*. The main evil is capitalism inherited from the white imperialists who began the process of the destruction of African traditional society. Like Armah, therefore, Ngugi attributes the initial blame for the erosion of pristine African values and the introduction of decadence to the white imperialists. But most of the novel is taken up with a demonstration of the wickedness of the black imperialists who, having stepped into the shoes of the white rulers, behave with even greater inhumanity. Worse still, they have introduced greed, corruption, nepotism, and immorality on a scale unheard of hitherto. Ngugi forcefully demonstrates the prevailing poverty, unequal distribution of wealth, inadequacy of economic and educational opportunity and the indifference of the authorities to the bleak landscape around them. Like Armah he is convinced of the need to create an alternative society and his views

⁷Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Petals of Blood*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1977), p. 198. Further references are to this edition and will appear in the text.

are embodied in the idealistic young Karega. Appalled by the capitalism and materialism Karega sees around him in a world "built on a structure of inequality and injustice, in a world where some can eat while others can only toil, some can send their children to school and others cannot, in a world where a prince, a monarch a business man can sit on billions while people starve or hit their heads against church walls for divine deliverance from hunger, yes in a world where a man who has never set foot on this land can sit in a New York or London office and determine what I shall eat, read, think, do, only because he sits on a heap of billions taken from the world's poor" (p. 199), he comes to the conclusion that for a proper and equitable reorganization of our society we must go back to our African origins to learn lessons from the way in which African peoples produced and organized their wealth before colonialism.

It is for this reason that the village of Ilmorog to which Karega repairs after his disasters in the city assumes such tremendous importance. It is a paradigm of genuine African traditional life before the depredations of the imperialists. Ngugi nostalgically evokes Ilmorog's glorious past and the pride the community takes in the heroic exploits of its traditional heroes. He also stresses the society's reverence for the soil and its attachment to its ancestral lands. The Theng'eta plant itself, the plant with the "petals of blood," becomes one of the symbols of traditionalism:

Theng'eta is the plant that only the old will talk about. Why? It is simple. It is only they who will have heard of it or know about it. It grows wild, in the plains, the herdsmen know it and where it grows, but they will not tell you. Nyakinyua says that they used to brew it before Europeans came. And they would drink it only when work was finished, and especially after the ceremony of circumcision or marriage or itwika, and after a harvest. It was when they were drinking Theng'eta that poets and singers composed their words for a season of Gichandi, and the seer voiced his prophecy. (p. 204)

The Theng'eta plant is therefore associated with the traditional rituals and the people's traditional art. It also represents purity, since it was used to purify the drink named after it, and truth, since it forced those who drank it to confront the truth about themselves.

The Theng'eta brewing is a set piece in the novel because it represents a return to the dignity of origins, and the spirit that results is much superior to the debased brand brewed by the modern capitalists after their takeover of Ilmorog. Significantly, it is Theng'eta which brings about the regeneration of Ilmorog; it is the old which revitalizes. The Theng'eta brewing also brings out the traditional sense of community which Ngugi is at pains to stress in the novel. And significantly, the leading role in the brewing process is played by old Nyakinyua, that staunch upholder of traditional values, and herself the most obvious symbol of traditionalism. She is the repository of traditional lore, and when she sings the admittedly bawdy initiation songs during the season of circumcision she invests them with a dignity and beauty which is absolutely lacking in the modern capitalists' debased rendering of them.

But this idealized traditional society and all its values are of course subsequently destroyed by the activities of the greedy modern capitalists. The destruction of the mysterious spirit Mwathi's shrine is the most concrete symbol that could have been contrived of the annihilation of a glorious traditional society by the debased forces of modernism.

Ngugi, Armah, and Soyinka idealize African womanhood. Abena and Idawa are possibly the two strongest personalities in *Two Thousand Seasons*; they are

certainly the most idealistic and the greatest moral forces. They are more than a match for the men. The same can be said for Wanja and Nyakinyua in *Petals of Blood*. Though a prostitute who is forced to play society's game in the end, Wanja exudes tremendous moral force and strength of personality. Iriyise also, in *Season of Anomy*, is certainly a force to reckon with.

Karega, Ngugi's spokesman in the novel, is obviously a Negritudist. He rejoices in the glories of the past, and though somewhat alienated by his education, he plunges wholeheartedly into the traditional rituals. He takes tremendous pride in blackness, black values, and black history, and teaches his pupils to do the same. But Karega's Negritude has a Marxist hue. It is his presentation which confirms one's suspicion that Ngugi is increasingly leaning towards Marxism as the only viable solution to Africa's many problems. Karega feels that a thorough study of the African past would reveal systems which were fair and equitable, in which wealth was owned by those who produced it and where there was virtually no unemployment. In other words, the political and social organization of traditional African society bears a strong resemblance to that described and recommended by Karl Marx. The study of the traditional past reveals, therefore, that the most suitable ideology for remodelling the African present is Marxism. The only hope for the future, in Karega's view, lies in the solidarity of the workers and the traditional peasants. In a bid to bring about this socialist society in modern Kenya, Karega becomes a trade union agitator, tirelessly mobilizing the workers and the masses.

Soyinka's Aiyero in *Season of Anomy* is perhaps rather less traditional than Ngugi's Ilmorog or Armah's society of "the way," but it still shares quite a few of their characteristics and is regarded by its author as the ideal. Its social and political organization, like that of Armah's "the way" is quasi-Communitic, and although it is therefore regarded by the rest of the country as an eccentric anomaly, its system ensures material prosperity, justice, and equity, and demonstrates concern for the welfare of every individual. Its values are regarded as perfect; this is why its descendants, having experienced other values throughout the world, still return to Aiyero, while the descendants of other communities never do. In Aiyero there is profound veneration for the soil and for the seasonal rhythms. It is significant that the head of the society is called the "Custodian of the Grain" and Aiyero's major rituals are enacted in terms of regeneration, rebirth, and fertility. There is a total commitment to the ancient rituals and traditions. Indeed, Aiyero broke away from its parent community Aiyetomo because it felt it could no longer base its life on the teachings of a white god whose followers 'kill, burn, maim, loot and enslave our people'.⁸ It was time, the people felt, to return to the religion of their fathers. Aiyero is also vibrantly life affirming, while other communities seem defeated by life. Soyinka also sees it as possessing moral, spiritual, social, and economic health, a model for the rest of the country. Aiyero symbolizes the good life—a life involving moral, physical, and spiritual well-being—which every Nigerian citizen is entitled to. This is why Ofeyi, the hero of the novel, recognizes that Aiyero soil is cocoa soil, for the cocoa plant also represents the possibility of the good life. Accordingly, Ofeyi links the cocoa promotions campaign with Aiyero. It is an attempt to disseminate the Aiyero ideal of decent living throughout the land with the powerful propaganda machine now at his disposal.

If Soyinka's Aiyero seems less traditional than the society of Armah's "the way" or Ngugi's Ilmorog, it is because he tries to show the practical ways in

⁸Wole Soyinka, *Season of Anomy*, (London: Rex Collings, 1973), p. 10. Further references are to this edition and will appear in the text.

which these pure traditional African values could be applied to modern society in a bid to transform the latter. Even before Ofeyi's evangelizing activities we can see that Aiyero represents the marriage of the physical and the ideal. And of course, the spreading of the Aiyero ideal into other regions through Ofeyi's initiative represents even more obviously the attempt to blend the traditional and the modern. This is the importance of Shage, the outpost for the new idea in Cross-River. We are told that "Shage was central to the less obvious penetration of Aiyero through the land. Old villages had been uprooted, inundated and replanted making the concrete achievement visible, the marriage of the physical and the ideal. Even as the dam grew and the hydroelectric promise moved towards fulfilment, the men of Aiyero sowed their seeds in the soil of the new communal entity" (pp. 87-88). This implies that Aiyero, while holding on to traditional values, is not antagonistic to technological advancement. It points to the possibilities of modern institutions making use of traditional principles of integrity and purity.

This brings us to the differences between Soyinka, Armah, and Ngugi—whom one would like to call the new Negritudists—and the older apostles of Negritude. For when all is said and done, it has to be admitted that their recent works manifest a good number of the characteristics of the old Negritude. We have isolated their glorification of traditional society, their insistence on the African's reverence for the soil, and the excellence of black womanhood, their emphasis on the Communistic organization of traditional African society, and the dignity of blackness, and, in the case of Armah at least, a total hostility to anything associated with the whites. What is the difference then between this and the old Negritude to which the Anglophone writers had been so consistently antagonistic? Soyinka himself realizes that he is open to the charge of inconsistency and anticipates the question in *Myth, Literature and the African World*.⁹ He acknowledges that the vision of Negritude should never be underestimated or belittled. But what was wrong with Negritude, in his view, was that its reference points took far too much coloring from European ideas. In particular, it accepted one of the most commonplace blasphemies of racism, that the black man was incapable of deductive reasoning, depending instead on intuition and emotion, whereas the white man was capable of reasoning. Of course, not all the Negritudists accepted this simple dichotomy. Nevertheless, no one can accuse Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka of failing to demonstrate the black man's inventiveness and power of ratiocination. Herein lies the first major difference.

The second major difference is that for Armah, Ngugi, and Soyinka this exercise in racial retrieval, this return to origins, is part of the strategy for the transformation of modern society. It is much more therefore than a complacent, self-regarding idealization of blackness and black culture. The values thus retrieved must be actively used as the leaven for humanizing contemporary society. The ultimate target, therefore, is not so much the white man, as was the case with Negritude, as black men and contemporary black society. The retrieval of these pristine African values is not the end, merely the means. All three novels, therefore, involve a call to action, even a call to revolution. All three novelists show their leading characters beginning the attempt to effect the transformation in a practical way. Thus in *Two Thousand Seasons* the young idealistic initiates, having liberated themselves from slavery, spend a considerable amount of time learning more about the tenets of "the way" under the guidance of Isanusi, and then embark on the laborious but continuing task of wrenching their country from the grasp of the inhuman Koranche. In *Petals of Blood* Karega

⁹*Myth, Literature and the African World*, p. 126.

not only researches into traditional African values, but becomes a trade union official, attempting thereby to realize his dream of a pure and just society based on the solidarity of workers and peasants. And in *Season of Anomy* Ofeyi is able to persuade the people of Aiyero to give up their introspection and to evangelize. Under his leadership, the Aiyero ideals are taken into other areas and concrete examples of the marriage of the physical and the ideal are held up for the reader's examination. When peaceful methods became inadequate, Ofeyi is even prepared, under the guidance of the Dentist, to meet violence with violence. The new Negritude, therefore, while sharing many of the characteristics of the old, is more positive, more confident, less introspective, more aggressive. It derives its inspiration not so much from a contemplation of what Africa was, as from a determination to bring about what it ought to be.