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ARTICLE



Unmasking communism: Ayi Kwei Armah, black Marxism, and the cultural turn, 1967-1984

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ABSTRACT

Can the repudiation of Eurocentric Marxism and embrace of Afrocentrism in Ayi Kwei Armah's essays explain his shift from writing realist to historical novels? Contextualizing Armah's work in relation to the global cultural turn in the second half of the twentieth century, this article understands his critique of racial capitalism and program of re-Africanization as a black Marxism. It then explains Armah's embrace of the form of the historical novel in *Two Thousand Seasons* via a reading of *Fragments*, which allegorizes a key political and aesthetic contradiction: the changes in culture and consciousness requisite for decolonization cannot occur within the established structures of representation. Reading Armah's historical novels through the black Marxism of his essays indicates the horizons of his work for Marxist approaches to African literature today and remains important for understanding the legacy of revolutionary Fanonism.

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The most spectacularly successful counter to Western capitalist thought is the system comprising all the international variants of Scientific Socialism' declares Ayi Kwei Armah in 'African Socialism: Utopian or Scientific?' ('African Socialism,' 1967, p. 15). The claim contrasts with his polemic in 'Masks and Marx: The Marxist Ethos vis-a-vis African Revolutionary Thought and Practice' that 'Marxism, in its approach to non-Western societies and values, is decidedly colonialist, Western, Eurocentric, and hegemonist' ('Masks,' 1984, p. 41). These essays, published eighteen years apart, highlight Armah's changing views on Marxism's radical potential and its Eurocentrism. They also mark an immensely productive period of his career, during which he wrote five novels that are similarly difficult to reconcile with each other. Armah's early realist novels – *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968/1972a), *Fragments* (1969/1974), and *Why Are We So Blest* (*Blest*, 1972b) – differ sharply from his later historical novels – *Two Thousand Seasons* (*Seasons*, 1973/1979b) and *The Healers* (1978/1979a). The realist novels express disappointment with political independence while the historical novels are optimistic pan-Africanist allegories of social renewal. Does Armah's repudiation of Marxism and embrace of Afrocentrism explain the shifting affects and genres of his fiction?

Disappointed with African political independence, Armah imagines a lineage of black cultural radicalism as an alternative to Eurocentric Marxism. Viewed from our current

moment, however, his seeming rejection of Marxism and invention of a revolutionary pan-Africanism may be understood as a generative engagement with Marxism. Like other proponents of the 'cultural turn' and 'black Marxists,' Armah innovates out of the failure of a political movement – which he calls African socialism – and the incoherencies of Marxism – as Marx, Engels, and their followers would define it – in his approach to race, class and revolution.¹ More than the mere by-product of disillusionment, his work from the period of 1967–1984 stages an encounter between classical Marxist analyses of the capitalist world system and approaches that foreground modalities of culture and race. These changing ideas about racial capitalism are evident in Armah's early essays, which develop a language to analyze how contemporary culture upholds racialized divisions of labor in Africa and globally. His realist novels, written at the same time, give literary form to this language and allegorize a key political and aesthetic contradiction: the dissolution of an ingrained racialized culture requires moving beyond the established structures of representation. This impasse leads Armah to the form of the historical novel. By narrating the emergence of an Afrocentric style of theory and praxis, his historical novels anticipate the black Marxism of 'Masks': a late essay that theorizes an appositional relationship between Marxism and black cultural radicalism, with race forming an important link.²

Reading Armah's late fiction through the black Marxism of his essays indicates the horizons of his work and thought today. The prevailing approaches to Armah's work offer productive ways to attend to the political economy of African fiction and understand the structure of feeling of the independence era, but their perspectives are overdetermined by debates about the pitfalls of ethno-racial particularism and the formation of post-colonial studies. Consequently, Armah's critique of Eurocentrism does not fit the categories proffered by the most recognizable programmatic statements of Marxist approaches to African literature. Chidi Amuta's *The Theory of African Literature* upbraids Armah for 'flogging a dead horse' and frames dialectical materialism as a 'universal tool' that 'recognizes the specificity and relativity of the historical conditions of divergent societies' (1989, p. 59–60). Georg M. Gugelberger's *Marxism and African Literature* presents the 'question of race versus class as a still on-going debate' and asserts that only class – and not identity – can be a universal category of analysis (1986, p. viii). By constituting Marxism around these polarities, these critics mistake renunciations of a European Marxism riven with racial and social particularism for a repudiation of Marxism *tout court*.³ In what remains the most influential criticism on his novels, (1990) wrestles similarly with Armah's attempts to find new frameworks for revolution.⁴ He assimilates Armah's ideas to those of Frantz Fanon, and reads his novels symptomatically for their Fanonian 'messianism': an outlook that conflated independence with revolution by misconstruing the African masses as already revolutionary (1990, ix).⁵ Claiming that Armah never abandons this conception of decolonization (p. 39), Lazarus relays how Armah's Fanonism becomes regressive (p. 43), his critique of Marx 'truculent' (p. 44), and his fiction increasingly indulgent in 'racial essentialism' (p. 223).⁶ Retelling the story of Armah's turn to culture reveals a critical praxis attentive to both race and class, which can defamiliarize our history of African Marxism and reinvigorate Marxist approaches to African literature.

My account of Armah's cultural turn stresses how he built on and moved beyond Fanon's thinking in an effort to develop a new philosophy for decolonization, adequate to his critique of the capitalist world system, Marxism, and African socialism. This effort requires us to work through the essays before we read the fiction. The first section of this

article recounts how Armah's improvisation with Marxism detours through Fanon's thinking in three essays from the late 1960s. Amongst the first to recognize Fanon's significance, Armah's engagement with his work differs from more recent varieties of 'critical Fanonism' (Gates, 1991).⁷ Armah practices what Reiland Rabaka terms 'revolutionary Fanonism': a habit of critical thought that borrows from Fanon's texts anything that 'might be useful in the ongoing dialectical process(es) of revolutionary decolonization and re-Africanization' (Rabaka, 2011, p. 127). Stressing the 'dialectical rapport' between Fanonism and Marxism, revolutionary Fanonism critiques mainstream Marxism's inattention to race and colonialism to advance a more thorough critique of capitalism (p. 132).⁸ Armah's early essays reframe Fanon's insights and develop new conceptions of culture to analyze the *longue durée* of racial capitalism, which prompts his search for new strategies of decolonization. In 'Masks,' Armah begins to elaborate an alternative language in the idea of re-Africanization, a black Marxist strategy explored in the second section of the article. The possibilities of re-Africanization are explored in Armah's novels, *Fragments* and *Seasons*, whose formal differences reveal his ongoing efforts to narrate the changes in culture and consciousness requisite for decolonization. As the final section demonstrates, Armah utilizes the historical novel to create a new type of subject, whose mind is decolonized, and a new telos of anti-capitalist, anti-colonialist revolution. Understanding this narrative of re-Africanization thus allows us to appreciate a different legacy of Fanonism, distinct from the third-worldist and postcolonial Fanon that we know.⁹

Conceptions of culture and revolutionary Fanonism

Although George Padmore famously predicted in 1956 that 'in the coming struggle for Africa, the issue ... will be between Pan-Africanism and Communism,' these movements were in fact intertwined during the era of independence, and the failure of Nkrumahism proved a double blow to impressions of Ghana as both 'a pan-African base and refuge' and a harbinger of 'African socialism' (Adi, p. 143).¹⁰ Armah's response to these disappointments thus addresses both projects, the pan-Africanist and the socialist, and uses their connection as a platform to rethink the relationship between race, class, and community.

Fanon is central to this endeavor. Armah cites him in each of his essays, and dedicates 'Fanon: The Awakener' ('Fanon,' 1969b) to explaining his biography and ideas. There, Armah asserts that the recent frustrations with independence are part of a larger pattern: the 'past,' he writes, 'has been an endless disaster; our present is sheer impotence; and ahead of us even fools have begun to see destruction.' Armah suggests that an accurate analysis of this trajectory could prompt strategies for future: 'the catastrophic drift could be stopped, if we could think clearly about where we are, decide where we want to be, then act to move ourselves from here to there' (Armah, 1969b, p. 4). Armah builds his analysis around Fanon's understanding of 'the central fact of our lives ...: we're slaves' (p. 5). What is a structure for Fanon, however, is for Armah a descriptive metaphor that offers different types of analytical leverage, which changes over the course of his essays in conjunction with how he objectifies culture.

Two of Armah's early essays transform his understanding of the political economy of African national independence into an analysis of culture and the capitalist world system.

In the first of these essays, 'African Socialism,' published before any of his novels, Armah blasts African Socialism for being a 'feeble' and 'unbalanced' antithesis to 'European colonialist penetration' (1967, p. 14). He speculates that a thinker like Fanon 'would have resented calling himself an African socialist,' for he recognized 'all the slogans' as 'mystification' (p. 29). Borrowing Fanon's term for the second of these essays, 'A Mystification: African Independence Revalued' ('A Mystification,' 1969a), Armah observes that the 'verbal veil of Revolution' – the notion that 'the imperial system had grown hollow and was being overturned' – has 'grown *passe*' (p. 141). He analyzes the political economy of the 'independence myth,' which underwrote grand expectations of economic and social change.¹¹ Armah blames African elites and metropolitan social scientists for creating the sense of a historical break. They mistook independence for 'fundamental change in the large reality of imperial life,' and perpetuated the 'empire-to-nation thesis' (p. 144). He admonishes world-systems theorist Immanuel Wallerstein in particular for implying that independence had allowed some African states to gain 'economic autonomy' and 'some kind of self-direction' as part of a separate provincial system (p. 147).¹² Armah contends that independence does not signal a restructuring of the world system into dual systems, and offers an alternative account of the present moment.

Armah's history of the capitalist world system in the *longue durée* reevaluates the significance of national independence. This moment is just another of the 'accidental forms of the European-African metropolitan-provincial realities of empire,' which started with 'various types of barter, going through trading factories, slave fortresses, private commerce and speculative enterprise, to the misnamed colonial system, the self-governing territories, and now the so-called independent nations' (p. 144). Armah likens slavery and national independence to assert that, although the ideologies of imperialism shifted, the underlying reality perdured. Distinguishing essence from form, his history generates continuity between the past five-hundred years and the present. In this history, Africa and Europe become parts of a 'larger imperial whole,' characterized by an 'established, essential' relation: 'that African resources, inert as well as living, should be organized in a structure inferior to, and available as the need arises for absorption into and use in the exploitative European structure which is the command center of the whole imperial system' (p. 144). This imperial relation characterizes Africa's place within the capitalist world system in the *longue durée*, and the structure it generates extends beyond economic phenomena. Armah's early essays thus turn to culture to understand the 'accidental forms' of the imperial relation.

In 'A Mystification,' culture provides a way of conceptualizing the social relationship between elite and non-elite classes of Africans, which helps Armah to write a history of the world system. Particularizing Fanon's contention that the nationalist bourgeoisie was consumptive rather than productive (and thus not Marx's bourgeoisie), Armah explains how the 'worship' of metropolitan culture secures an intermediary position for the African elite (p. 146), and situates them within a historical set of 'triangular connections' that have existed since the colonial encounter (p. 150). Armah analogizes the elites' demand that their 'liberated countrymen' perform unpaid labor 'in honor of' the new nation to the behavior of 'African chiefs ... who produced the necessary disintegration, hence slaves, in their eagerness to acquire ... incentives [manufactured in the European metropole] and thus aggrandize themselves' (p. 149). Armah uses the history of slavery to mark continuities within the capitalist world system. Where Fanon claims that the nationalist

bourgeoisie emerged from the struggle for political independence, Armah identifies a history of 'activities of the intermediary type' that dates back to the colonial encounter (Fanon, 1963/2002, p. 120). In both past and present, metropolitan schemes of cultural value connect the subsumption of 'African resources' in the world system to the process of class formation in the province. Concluding that 'good new unpaid labor is the same good old unpaid colonial labor' (1969a, p. 149), Armah uses slavery to account for how European culture reproduces the imperial relation in the *longue durée*.

'African Socialism' (1967) analyzes culture in a different way: as a totality that conditions the limits of imagined political horizons. Armah illustrates how a cultural matrix, specific to the industrial revolution, precipitated Marx's scientific socialism. While Armah approves of Marx and Engels' 'forward looking' vision in contrast to the 'backward' 'temporal wish' of utopian socialism (1967, p. 11, 9), he questions whether they understood the historical specificity of their 'mytho-poetic' imagining (p. 5, 19). Their utopia accepts the 'gains of the Industrial revolution' and looks forward to the 'triumph' of the European industrial worker. That they proffered 'the philosophy of the European working class in its maturity' signals that the limits of the scientific socialist's imagination lies at the edges of the 'social structure that accompanied [the European industrial] revolution' (p. 11). Far from its universal pretensions, the so-called science behind socialism was historically particular.

The essay connects Senghor, Nkrumah and Nyerere's African socialisms to the cultural matrix of the industrial revolution as imagined by Marx. Armah contends that European notions of science and modernity were the product of a racial discourse of development, which shapes African socialism as well as European Marxism. While accelerating European expansionist ambitions, the culture of the industrial revolution contrived the figure of the noble savage, which underpinned the '<<white man's burden>>' and the '<<civilizing mission>>.' These ideologies encouraged 'triumphantly militant white men ... to destroy' African 'violence,' 'sexual license,' 'strangeness,' and 'blackness.' Conversely, they also determined European anthropologists to study 'this tribe or that way of life' before it 'becomes <<extinct>>,' by which they mean, not the death of human beings, but their modernization' (p. 13). Armah reveals the interdependency of figurations of European industrial workers and 'exotic' Africans in historical race-making projects, which produced modern European subjects by presumptively attaching pejorative attributes to their 'traditional' African counterparts (p. 14). This racialized trajectory of modernization structures the education of African elites and informs their socialism, which Armah characterizes as 'ingenuous reactions to the ideological accompaniments of colonialism and a crude attempt to amalgamate selected elements of the socialist tradition and the African experience' (p. 8). For Armah, therefore, both European Marxism and African socialism are conditioned by a common culture, embedded in imperialist registers of racial development. African socialism thus proves not particularly African.

Building on his critique in 'A Mystification' (1969a), Armah psychoanalyzes this elite class to illuminate further their political philosophy. According to Armah, the 'African leader' responds to the civilizing mission and climbs 'the ladder of assimilation set up for his benefit by the white man' (1967, p. 16). Distinguishing himself from other Africans, he unconsciously desires 'what is white' (pp. 16–17). Yet, his 'heroic adventure' culminates in 'the traumatic shock of identity': reaching the threshold of acceptance, the assimilated subject is 'inexorably pushed back into ... the black African mass from which he has spent so much energy

distinguishing himself' (p. 16). Consumed with disappointment and suddenly aware of racism as an ideology – the psycho-social manifestation of European superiority – the potential leader contemplates 'the annihilation of the self,' which he may displace 'into a desire for a return to one's roots, to the sentimental Africanist's black Mother Africa' (p. 17). Skewering Senghor and Nkrumah for accepting and apologizing for European racism, Armah determines that neither figure transcended the limits of utopian socialism (pp. 18–26). The 'backward retrenchment' of African socialism merely excuses Senghor's colonial authoritarianism and allows him to pretend that 'African socio-political reality is one undifferentiated mass free from class conflicts' (p. 29; 19; 20). Where Fanon's 'The Fact of Blackness' appreciatively cites Senghor the poet (1952/2008, pp. 97–98), Armah critiques Senghor the independence leader as a figure of the 'transitional class,' whose African socialism preserves the culture of colonialism. Armah predicts that, lacking 'social roots,' African socialism will disappear with the first generation of independence leaders and leave the problem of the imperial relation intact (1967, p. 29).

As an alternative, Armah pushes for a 'revolutionary restructuring of lines of authority' (p. 29). This cannot occur, he warns, without 'wide-spread consciousness of connections between socio-economic inequalities and the structures of the social order,' which needs to 'grow out of the visible, audible and sensible facts of life' (p. 29). Armah thus contradicts charges of messianism in positing that the revolutionary consciousness must be developed rather than presumed. Nonetheless, revolution remains the condition for an authentically African philosophy of social organization, distinct from those derived from the culture of the industrial revolution. Armah, however, does not explain how to engender mass consciousness, and leaves the task to 'Fanon' published the same year. 'African Socialism' also does not disclose how a new society would relate to a system comprising the 'international variants of Scientific Socialism,' which it recommends without any detail (15).

In 'Fanon' (1969b), culture becomes an object that mediates and reproduces the contradictions of social relations and is thus crucial to the masses' struggle. Armah's definition of 'culture' in this essay as 'the environment we function in' describes an autonomous sphere of activity that is implicated in varieties of dominance (Armah, 1969b, p. 36). When 'we' have made it 'for own our needs, then it's our culture' he reasons; but when it has been 'imposed on us' for another's ends, 'what we have is a slave culture,' and 'for slaves no culture can exist outside the struggle to take over our environment and shape it ourselves' (p. 36). Africans cannot dictate their purposes when the cultural superstructure conditions their actions, reproducing the economic relations of the base. Slavery connotes how these relations are experienced through culture, the demystification of which allows subjects to identify structures of dominance. This cultural environment is not new, and in keeping with his history of the world system, Armah accentuates the continuities between historical slavery and present iterations of the 'special violence meant to kill the mind' (p. 8): like the 'bold lies about our freedom,' it prevents Africans 'from having to look into the nausea . . . of our lives' (p. 5). At the center of this environment is a 'manichaeon world' of racial difference 'built to crack our dreams and wishes' (p. 6; 7). Armah turns to the superstructures as the site in which contingent forms of the imperial relation articulate capitalism and racialization. He recognizes that overturning racial capitalism requires struggle through culture for the possibility of mass historical consciousness.

The racial binary at the heart of culture is best understood via citations of Fanon interspersed throughout Armah's text. These paratexts, drawn from Fanon's four published books, appear in italics and block capitals, placing Fanon's writing in counterpoint. Many citations come from *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1952/2008), a book that 'should provide painful, indispensable reading' for 'any black person who has at any time had delusions about integrating into a dominant white society' (Armah, 1969b, p. 29). The central insight of that work – that the neurosis of colonial subjects is a product of their environment – is the basis of Armah's explication of how racial capitalism creates the presumptive logics of blackness and whiteness. Armah asserts that 'there is no such creature as a normal black person' (p. 29), against which he juxtaposes Fanon's aphorism that 'what is often called the black soul is a white man's artifact' (p. 31). Through Fanon's words, Armah understands culture as an index of forms of racial identification that are rooted in essentialist imperial paradigms, inadequate to addressing the causes of neurosis and disillusion. At the end of his essay, Armah decisively rejects talk 'of our black power,/of our black culture,/ ... /our identity,/and our bullshit revolution' (p. 43), because these are identifications born of the colonial environment. Where the discursivity of Fanon's texts enables many different ways of addressing the intersecting problems of subject formation and colonialism, the 'we' of Armah's essay conscripts the reader into a community of refusal, composed of black Africans who realize that the 'problem is not how to get into imperial power,' but 'how to withdraw from the imperial system and construct a viable system of our own' (p. 36).¹³

Armah does not pretend that Fanon offers a utopian vision. After enumerating questions that Fanon poses for the present, the second to last paragraph of 'Fanon: The Awakener' comprises a single-line sentence: 'But Fanon is dead.' The paratext that immediately follows insists: 'each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it' (p. 43). The juxtaposition mimics the form of the paratext itself, which disarticulates a section of text from its context and situates it anew, allowing it to generate fresh significance in relation to its new surroundings. Armah encourages readers to engage with Fanon strategically as a 'series of demystifying guidelines ... to help us clear our minds of the imprisoning ideas we have bound ourselves in in our slavery' (p. 39). 'Fanon' outlines how a 'revolutionary restructuring of lines of authority' could begin with revolutionary Fanonism. Armah endorses Fanon's insight that 'the enslaved male ... became a man only in the active process of destroying the system enslaving him' (p. 38). By rejecting the dominant culture and disabusing themselves of its Manichean divisions, Africans can undermine the imperial relation at the heart of the capitalist world system. Armah, like Fanon, thinks of revolution in voluntarist cultural terms, but turns his Marxist humanism into a case for the complete rejection of colonial culture.

'Fanon' represents a key stage in the development of Armah's ideas. It marks his turn to culture as object of analysis and struggle, and sets the stage for 'Masks' (1984) to describe the society to come. Through references to historical and metaphorical slavery, his first three essays revise the history of the world system and conceptualize culture as an object that expresses social contradictions and is crucial to their reproduction. Culture becomes the terrain of revolutionary class struggle precisely because of the specific historical formation of the African elite, which derived social power from imperial-cultural practices. This form of class analysis is apposite to historical materialism, which has been overlooked

by Marxists like Gugelberger who claim that 'African specificity (race/Africaneity) cannot any longer be privileged concepts once progressive internationalist positions are taken' (1986, p. viii). Tracking this development of 'Africaneity' over time reveals Armah's efforts to invent an Africanist language irreducible to ethno-racial particularism and a cultural domain distinct from the Africa of Senghor's Negritude and the Fanonian nation.

Black Marxism

Fifteen years passed between the publication of 'Fanon' (1969b) and 'Masks' (1984). After the coup against Nkrumah, Ghana alternated between civilian and military government, eventually adopting a structural adjustment plan in the early 1980s. Armah had left the country in 1967 to work in Paris and then study in America. By 1970, he was living in Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, which, at that time, was at the heart of efforts to synthesize socialism and pan-Africanism via cultural practice. Armah had already written *Fragments* (1969/1974) and *Blest* (1972b) prior to his arrival in Tanzania, but wrote *Seasons* during his stay. He was also drawn to the philosophy of Amilcar Cabral, who had led guerrilla forces in Guinea-Bissau to victory against the Portuguese. Armah left Tanzania for Lesotho in 1976, before travelling until 1981, when he spent a year at Cornell University and adopted a capacious conception of the Africana world and Afrocentric thought.¹⁴ All the while he continued to write for, amongst other magazines, *Présence Africaine*, where anti-colonial thinkers discussed decolonization and debated whether Marxism was appropriate to Africa.¹⁵ Disenchanted with projects of national liberation and influenced by a variety of new intellectual movements, Armah imagines new subjects and polities in 'Masks' that, via a renewed African culture, could engender African varieties of communism.

'Masks' reinvigorates Armah's earlier critiques to prepare the ground for his alternative vision – the process of 're-Africanization,' as inspired by Fanon and Cabral (1984, p. 60).¹⁶ The essay inters Marxism to make way for new philosophies: 'the face of Marx' serves as 'an ancestral mask,' Armah claims, and, like other 'hagiographic masks' that 'have served their purpose,' should be 'ceremonially buried' (p. 58). The Marx that Armah buries is that derived from the colonial culture of the industrial revolution: 'Marxism' refers 'precisely the ideas of Marx and Engels.' While he celebrates other third-worldist Marxists like 'Lenin, Mao, Giap, Ho, Fanon and Cabral' as examples of 'revolutionaries,' he refuses collocations such as 'Marxism-Leninism-Maoism' that imply there is something derivative to communism's 'different styles of revolutionary theory and praxis' (p. 36; 58). Yet, as he bids farewell to Marx, Armah venerates and Africanizes him. By burying a mask of his face, Armah grants Marx the status of an ancestor and gives his ideas a material form to signal their place in an enduring lineage. This gesture of particularization positions Marx as both a necessary precursor and a hindrance to the process of re-Africanization: Marx belongs in the ranks of ancestors but the instrumentalization of his ideas by elites distracts intellectuals from their own radical traditions (p. 63; 58). 'Masks' critiques Marxism to identify the specificities of an African style of theory and praxis, and wrestles with the relation of different styles of communism that have previously been connected via an 'eponym' (p. 58).

Armah's denunciation of Marxism is part of his familiar broadside against 'Western hegemonism' (pp. 40–41). What is new in 'Masks' is the charge that Marx and Engels knowingly adopted 'rationalized forms of Western self-esteem' and 'imposed a racist schema on data,' obscuring that communism existed beyond Europe (p. 42; 52). Marx was unwilling to

comprehend that ‘peasants as a class, and peasant-based civilizations in their generality, have worldviews distinctly different from those of industrially-based civilizations,’ and therefore did not countenance that these worldviews could be communistic (p. 44). His argument both explains how Marxism disregards alternative communisms and suggests that they perish out of sight. The cultural environment in ‘Masks’ is thus less deterministic than in ‘Fanon.’ These alternatives, however, remain under threat, as the Marxist trajectory of the proletarian revolution still endorses a modernizing ideology coterminous with colonialism: ‘there is nothing scientific, nothing revolutionary, nothing communist,’ Armah declares, in schemes that consider ‘the destruction of non-Western civilizations’ a ‘precondition for the Europeanization of the world’ (p. 50). Marxism cannot be a universal revolutionary philosophy because, by neglecting communist worldviews held by peasants, whose ways of life cannot be described by stagist European vocabularies, it reproduces the hegemony of the West.

Rejecting the false universalism of Marxism, Armah examines the specificity of revolutionary subjects. He argues that Marx ‘misread the psychology of Western industrial proletariat’ itself. History has disproven Marx’s argument that the ‘nature of proletarian work process’ would cause workers ‘to recognize their occupational identities as primary and powerful enough to override secondary and tertiary identities’ (p. 43). Armah rebuffs the idea that a certain type of class-making activity makes modern subjects who ignore their identities – be they racial, national or cultural. Marx’s error was giving ‘excessive weight to the material factors in the process of history’ (p. 42), designating ‘cultural factors ... as ephemeral’ (p. 54), and assuming that ‘technological development of itself has a logic translatable into purposive social change – teleological change’ (p. 36). Marx missed how different forms of ‘know-how’ (‘technology’) can generate different kinds of ‘know-why’ (‘teleology’) (p. 36). The similarities between Armah’s critique of Marx’s subordination of ‘culture’ and his neglect of peasant ‘know-how’ suggests the congruence of the two categories, and inversely implies that cultural knowledge can engender alternative communist teleologies. These cultures, like the communist visions they produce, are specific; they are not reducible to identity claims but do not necessarily supersede them.

Armah searches for a philosophy of history that can accommodate these connections between culture and communism. He expects that models will emerge from the historiography of the world that remains unwritten, but for the moment he offers a definition of ‘cyclical philosophies’ (p. 46; 37). Crucially, cyclical philosophies arrange multiple factors in ‘a circular or even a spherical continuum’ where ‘all points are significant, for the same reason that any point on a seamless ball may be seen as the center of that ball’s surface.’ The metaphor accentuates how ‘it is the observer’s purpose which determines which points in a cyclical scheme are of practical significance at any given time’ (p. 37). The significance of a particular point is contingent but the antipodes on the surface remain connected, which represents a notion of history that connects particulars to each other in their relative significance. Read in light of Armah’s ideas about technology and teleology, the particular positions on the ball mark cultures as well as communisms that exist in relation to others.

Having cleared ground, Armah develops ideas toward ‘a rational, universal [sic] theory of revolution and communism’ (p. 40). This theory addresses the relationship between the particular and universal: Armah needs to reconcile his views that Marxism is a ‘variant of communist theory’ (and thus a particular) and that ‘revolution and communism are phenomena and concepts of universal occurrence’ (p. 41; 37). Yet, lacking an actually

existing example of a system that could mediate this friction, Armah resolves it aesthetically. He contrives a 'water image,' which figures the relationship between multiple traditions and the universal. 'Give communism the image of a central sea of ideas,' he writes, and 'into this common sea run tributary rivers from all the world's continents' – Africa, Asia and Europe – that is their 'contribution to communism.' Variants of communism derive from different sources and tributaries, but flow toward the same end. The sea conjoins these iterations to each other and holds their collective contents. The universal is not opposed to pluralist traditions nor is it established prior to iterations of communism: it is the final resting shape of the amassed particulars and contingent upon their flow downstream. By symbolizing the connection between different combinations of theory, practice, and the universal, the water image implies the transubstantiation of the final 'know-why' in the 'common sea of human values' (p. 40). The figure resolves the tension between Marxism and apposite forms of black cultural radicalism, drawing a parallel between them. It promises that a particular, like Marxism, could be subsumed into a broader revolutionary and communist humanism. It also treats as equal movements that emerge in the periphery and metropole.

Armah does not elucidate the contents of the communist reservoir. Instead, the final pages of 'Masks' focus on its African inlet. He looks forward to a 'communist future in which the innovative builders are non-Westerners.' Borrowing the term 're-Africanization' from Cabral to name the 'the rediscovery, development, clarification of our meliorative values,' Armah points to an 'indispensable part of the decolonization process,' which is 'centered on Africa' and entails the 'search or research for positive African ideas, perspectives, techniques, values' (pp. 64–65). Re-Africanization, then, can be grasped through culture, as a type of Afrocentric know-how that leads to the 'democratic self-government' of peasant societies (p. 61). The peasantry, however, needs help from the 'creative minority of the *élite*,' who, cognizant of Marxism's flaws, have 'been pointing, in Cabral's phrase, to <<the source>>' (p. 65). For the first time, Armah identifies himself as a member of an elite class that functions as a vanguard. Members of this group are activist-intellectuals: the revolutionary, he writes, 'inserts himself quietly among his people,' making 'common cause' to 'discover (in praxis) abandoned or even unsuspected values and social practices of a highly positive nature' (p. 60). That these practices may be 'unsuspected' implies that some Afrocentric culture is invented anew, but is nevertheless derived from past 'abandoned' peasant worldviews. Regardless, cultural processes – rather than labor or Fanonian national struggles – transform both peasants and elites into revolutionary subjects and orient them toward Afrocentric communist futures.

Thus in 'Masks,' re-Africanization is a revolutionary process, apposite to Marxism in challenging the capitalist world system. The post-independence African elite remains Armah's object of critique, but he sheds metaphors of slavery to foreground the particular position of peasants: the majority of these elites sit between the peasantry, on whom sacrifices are imposed, and the 'capitalist West,' who appropriate the benefits of those relationships (p. 62). 'Masks' displaces the struggle over these social relations into cultural practice. Re-Africanization is a 'cleansing process' that 'winnows out merely tribalistic values, leaving positive, inclusive values as a basis for future development' (p. 60). The majority of the African elite opposes the 'inherently revolutionary dynamic' of re-Africanization because it would destroy their class 'together with its Eurocentric philosophies' (p. 61). The struggle against the manichean 'primitive civilized mind-trap' of

racialized culture is also one against the comprador class that maintains the capitalist world system (p. 62). Armah continues to think with *Wretched of the Earth* (1963/2002), but where Fanon proposes revolutionary violence of the lumpen-proletariat to engender total decolonization, 'Masks' asserts that peasant cultural practices can undo the colonial system.

Armah's Afrocentrism addresses the shortcomings of Marxism, emphasizes culture's material impact, and maintains the thrust of historical materialism, contributing to the tradition of black Marxism (Robinson, 2000).¹⁷ His thinking is not naïve particularism; it reveals a struggle to produce a relational and more encompassing theory of communism. His ideas about the particular and universal shift the problem of Eurocentrism onto new ground, uninhabited by the normative subjects and communities of both orthodox Marxism and African socialism. 'Masks' is philosophically unencumbered by the manichean culture critiqued in previous essays, even as it struggles against that culture. The telos of this struggle is not merely the elimination of a class, its culture, or capitalism in Africa, but a new type of African communism, brought about by a 'meliorative secret society' (p. 63). This communism generates a political community that is neither the Fanonian nation or the Marxist International, but is defined by the intersection of race, class and geography: through cultural praxis, black peasants in Africa develop a collective consciousness that has the potential to alter what it means to be African and communist.

Fanonian signs and 'the Way' of history

'Masks' delineates Afrocentric communism philosophically but does not portray the process of re-Africanization. As the discovery of 'the source' occurs through praxis – a series of actions that require ordering to generate teleological coherency – the depiction of re-Africanization suits narrative genres more than the essayistic. The relative affordances of fiction explain why Armah wrote *Seasons* (1973/1979b) before 'Masks' (1984): the novel anticipates the description of Afrocentric communism in the essay. By narrating the clash between the forces of re-Africanization and imperialism, *Seasons* illustrates the meanings of Afrocentric communism. Armah ultimately chose the form of historical novel to narrate re-Africanization because his previous novels had exhausted realism's capability to represent the changes in culture and consciousness requisite for decolonization. These contradictions are evident in *Fragments* (1969/1974), where Armah uses signs of Fanonian psychosis – narrative cognates of the imperial relation's racialized culture – to explore the disjuncture between a stultifying postcolonial culture and the utopian possibilities of fictional representation. This Fanonian trope organizes the earlier novels, but *Seasons* offers an alternative way to plot Armah's turn to culture as a problem of narrative form.

Fragments faces the challenges of representation that confront other anti-colonial realist novels. As Armah suggests in his essays, the 'manichean' thinking of colonial regimes locks African subjects into economic and cultural dependency, analogous to slavery. Drawing on Fanon, Stephanie Newell elucidates the implications of this for the politics of realist fiction: Fanon's *damnés*, she reasons, cannot express coherent narratives of self-determination because they 'lack any representational structure, let alone a mimetic one' (2018, p. 248). Newell understands Fanon's philosophical questions in *Black Skin, White Masks* as examples of how to disrupt colonial narratives to curtail their

psychological effects, and locates parallel tactics in the fiction of Amos Tutuola and Bessie Head (p. 248). Armah's strategy, however, differed to that of the young Fanon, who he reprimands for prescribing psychological treatment for the 'disease built into the construction of our external world.' Armah's case for the complete rejection of colonial culture follows his conviction that 'everything we do in this white world pushes us deeper into our slavery' (Armah, 1969b, p. 31). *Fragments*, like *Blest* (1972b) after it, allegorizes Armah's claim that culture could not be dissolved from within its own structure of representation, as the novel's protagonist becomes increasingly alienated and struggles to imagine alternative futures within the mimetic framework of realism.

Despair sits on the horizon in *Fragments*, where 'the white form ... of the slave castle ... had now become the proud seat of the new rulers' (1969/1974, p. 30).¹⁸ The protagonist, Baako, a 'been-to,' returns to Ghana after studying abroad, expected to take his seat amongst the elite by virtue of his foreign education. Over the course of the novel, he develops a critique of the social function of the been-to, who serves as 'a miracle worker,' turning 'poverty into sudden wealth.' 'The voyage abroad, everything that follows' is 'very much a colonial thing': a narrative in which the hero is 'supposed to get rich, mainly at the expense of the community,' and serve the demands of the family (p. 103). *Fragments* narrates how the elite class socially reproduces itself via the family, which Baako describes as a 'more intimate reflection of society itself, a concave mirror' (p. 102). His struggles with his family's expectations drives the plot, as he tries both to get a job that befits a been-to and to make art that subverts social order. These aims prove irreconcilable. The novel foregrounds the result of his conflict when, toward the beginning of the text, Baako suggests that he would 'explode from something within' if he participated in the 'happy world' of the been-to (p. 62). By the end, Baako detaches himself from his surroundings, and, able to see through the syndromes of daily life, becomes ill from his thoughts. His family, interpreting his symptoms as psychosis, commit him to a mental health institution against his will (pp. 156–174). The novel, however, does not equate social defiance with psychological deviance. Rather, Baako 'explodes' in the Fanonian sense, and his psychosis indicates that the colonial logic of the elite structures relationships even at a micro-social scale (cf. Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 107). *Fragments* uses signs of Fanonian neurosis to narrate the effects of living within the cultural environment described in Armah's early essays, as the characters live at an impossible remove from a community resembling that envisioned by 'Masks.'

The narrative of *Fragments* casts doubt on possibility of societal change. In the middle of the novel, Baako joins the state television company to make silent and abstract political dramas unencumbered by problems of literacy, but soon quits and burns his unused work. The scene offers an ekphrastic portrayal of his three screenplays, as Baako clashes with Asante Smith, the been-to in charge of programming, over how culture embodies history. Baako's first script portrays colonial violence as a battle between abstract white and black shapes that resolve into the image of a slave castle. As Smith implies that the work does not represent 'a free independent people' with 'a glorious culture,' Baako responds that 'slavery is a central part of that culture' (p. 147). Smith objects to the other two scripts, which render the mystifications of the elite. The interaction illuminates the institutional constraints on radical art. Baako's failed efforts to break the contradictions of comprador life in the plot also casts doubt on the elucidatory potential of the plot. The ekphrasis juxtaposes the potential of the realist narrative medium and the abstract

dramatic film it depicts, and implies that the abstract film is more suited to defamiliarizing the present. This abstract form departs from the concrete, familiar time and place of realist fiction but remains grounded in Armah's history of the world system: the image of the slave castle yokes the scene's visual representation of racialized conflict to Armah's history of the imperial relation. The abstract representation of history presages the aesthetic strategies of the later novels, the romantic emplotments of which are historical without being realist.

Fragments also questions whether realism can challenge the patterns of interpretation that constitute colonial culture. As Baako displays the signs of psychosis, he writes that the 'most impressive thing in the system is the wall-like acceptance' of the 'division of labor, power, worlds, everything,' which is 'not inherent in the scheme' but is 'in the interpretation people give the system' (p. 156). Baako's commentary undermines the notion that the world system exists as an economic structure, waiting to be revealed through narrative. Instead, he suggests that readers' interpretative frameworks rebuild the colonial system. These insights suggest that realist representation cannot depict society whilst transforming the culture and consciousness of its members. Indeed, Baako's remarks suggest it is impossible to know if he suffers from psychosis as a result of colonial society or if his family is so embedded in colonial scripts that they attribute the cause of his alienation to psychosis.

In *Fragments*, neither the colonial subject nor the realist structure of representation can escape the bounds of colonial hermeneutics, and thus neither character nor novel can offer a vision of decolonization or re-Africanization. The protagonist of Armah's final realist novel, *Blest* (1972b), suffers a related yet exacerbated fate, as his alienation and psychosis climaxes in death. *Fragments* and *Blest* signal the conjoined need to replace colonial culture and embrace alternative fictional forms. Working back from the trajectory of the essays, this alternative form would need to narrate the formation of a peasant collective rather than represent the alienation of the comprador class in relation to the history of the capitalist world system.

Seasons (1973/1979b) does not mobilize the Fanonian signs of neurosis to drive the narrative. The novel, told in epic time, opens with a depiction of an idealized African community prior to the colonial encounter and concludes during the early period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Colonial incursion and resistance determines the plot, which allows Armah to foreground the contingency of the imperial relation. *Seasons* spans five hundred years and catalogues the fulfilment of a prophecy made in the distant past: that the Africans of the narrative will be subject to 'lifelong slavery' and a 'terrifying catalogue of death' (Armah, 1973/1979b, p. 12, p. 15), before the 'the rediscovery and the following again of our way' (p. 16), a philosophy that promises to regenerate the cultural environment. The allegorical prologue foreshadows the effects of colonial contact in the plot. It abstractly describes the magnetic effect of colonial culture, as nameless people, blinded by 'destruction's furious whiteness,' journey to the desiccated desert despite the voices from 'the source' that call them back (p. xi). The chorus whispers 'news of "the way"' to those 'returning scalded from the white taste of death' (p. xi; xv), trying to impart 'knowledge of future purpose' (p. xv). Of those who return, the narrator proclaims: 'whiteness indeed they have known; of our own blackness they are yet to learn' (pp. xv-xvi).

The revised historical schema of *Seasons* resignifies the registers of whiteness, blackness and slavery created within colonial culture. The novel explores how a recognizable

set of historical conditions could engender an anticolonial collective that is distinct from the nation and the Marxist international and is not reducible to a particular tribe or ethno-racial grouping. Whiteness in *Seasons* is a political signifier of colonial incursion rather than a cognate for European: 'the black people,' who are the subjects of the collective narrative voice, observe how 'white destroyers' came 'from the desert first, then from the sea' (p. 3). The first colonial contact with an external society is with white 'Arab predators,' who come from across the desert to enslave the community and push it further from 'the way' (p. 21). Some members escape to found a new settlement, appalled that their collective work only benefits individuals (p. 37). After a long, multigenerational journey, they realize that they have 'carried' the 'deepest causes' of their 'ruin' with them when members of their party want to establish a king, private property, and a gendered division of labor (pp. 59–64). The novel thus implies that 'the way' is not an ideology inherent to the group. Their internal struggle is interrupted by the arrival of 'white destroyers . . . from the sea,' who wish to buy slaves and enclose the land in exchange for gifts for the monarch (p. 77). Hoping to mine gold and create plantations, these Europeans urge the community to abandon 'the way' and 'believe in our road,' (pp. 87; 100). The development of racial capitalism solidifies the epistemic loss of 'the way.' An elder foresees that the 'open trade in human beings' will be replaced by a 'cleverer kind of oppression, harder to see as slavery, slavery designed as freedom itself,' and thus chattel slavery will be just one phase of this 'lasting oppression' (p. 104). While this account of racial capitalism explains how blackness became the inverse sign of whiteness, the novel does not figure blackness in relation to abjection.

There are two narrative temporalities within *Seasons'* epic frame: the first locates chattel slavery within the long arc of colonial contact, and the second relates a particular group's struggles against enslavement. The arrival of the Europeans thus causes a shift in the temporality of the novel: having related the journey of a largely nameless community over a long period (pp. 1–64), the narrators change focus to a group of characters with particular names and attributes (pp. 64–206). The rest of the novel chronicles their enslavement, escape from the slave vessel, attack on enslavers, and attempt to build a new community. Their counternarrative branches off from the history that we recognize: the development of racial capitalism, which conjoins the first half of *Seasons* to the historical present of Armah's realist novels. The narrative structure of *Seasons*, then, nests a contingent plot of resistance within an epic rendition of the development of the world system. The group's desire to evade the broad motion of history precipitates another way of living, apposite to that envisaged by Eurocentric Marxism. Their refusal to participate in the capitalist world system, however, only opens the possibility of living apart and is not a universalizable project of freedom; 'Masks' retrospectively processes these contradictions.

Although the novel emphasizes the pre-colonial origins of 'the way,' its meanings emerge through the group's praxis. The narrators describe 'the way' as a mode of 'reciprocity,' a 'wholeness' that 'produces before it consumes'; like the process of re-Africanization delineated in 'Masks,' it works against the epistemologies of the bourgeoisie. It is also a philosophy of community that 'aims at preserving knowledge of who we are, knowledge of the best way we have found to relate each to each, each to all, ourselves to other people' (p. 39). Those who choose the practice are part of that community, the bonds of which are not ethno-racial or rooted in an essential

consciousness. Indeed, those Africans with ‘lumpen’ consumerist desires leave, while reformed Askaris re-join the collective (p. 182; 141). Similarly, those with other group affiliations also join, implying that ‘the way’ is ethno-racially diverse (p. 145). ‘The way’ is a form of epistemological identification, delinked from nativism and nation, that challenges ‘descent’ as the basis for solidarity: the relationship between generations is not just of the ‘body’ but of the ‘mind,’ as a ‘mental line through teachers’ who pass on knowledge of how to live (p. 88). Thus defined, it is a form of communism that rethinks what it means to be a black political subject and community.

At the end of *Seasons*, the collective voice of narration – with knowledge generated by the events of the plot itself – appears to address readers in Armah’s present. The initiates conclude that they are merely making ‘preparation[s]’ for those who come after (p. 155), acknowledging that they will ‘not outlive the white blight’ (p. 155). The form of the historical novel allows Armah to narrate this praxis of re-Africanization and sketch the contours of an alternative communism. By giving figure to a new revolutionary agenda, apposite to Marxism, he generates a teleology for an anti-colonialist and anti-capitalist society that can flow into communism’s ‘central sea of ideas.’

The possibilities of black Marxism

Armah’s revolutionary Fanonism generates an Afrocentric language that rethinks the relationship between the capitalist world system and culture, and can help us to negotiate an impasse in Marxist approaches to African literature. His essays proffer a set of analytical terms apposite to historical materialism that amplify Fanon’s critique of Eurocentrism. Demurring the links between cultural nationalism and socialism, Armah provides a cosmopolitan philosophy that complements rather than betrays peasant epistemologies, Fanonian notions of third world revolution, and international class solidarity. Embedded within this logic is a register of specifically African theory and praxis, which allows Armah’s novels to narrate the formation of anticolonial and anticapitalist collectives, composed of black peasants who live in defiance of the capitalist world system. Armah’s writings are not the final word in the debate about class and race in Marxist theory, but illustrate how a mode of analysis sensitive to their articulation can illuminate radical emplotments that would otherwise be neglected. In Armah’s case, these emplotments challenge our understanding of his period, the legacy of Marxism in Africa, and the global cultural turn.

Armah’s black Marxism resists the narrative of liberation characteristic of the Bandung era, the horizons of which were national self-determination and third-worldist experiments with Marxism. His early essays and realist novels mark the attenuation of this narrative and its postcolonial futures. They begin to shift the object of anticolonial critique from indirect colonial rule to racial capitalism, and demand new political and aesthetic strategies for decolonization. *Seasons* and ‘Masks’ indicate this transformation in the cognitive and political grounds of anticolonial critique. Reworking Fanon’s Marxist humanism and recasting the revolutionary impulse of third worldism in the terms of his black cultural radicalism, Armah abandons secular modernity’s technologies – a reformist state and national citizen-subject – and teleologies – a society absent the social markers of class and race – which were crucial to the politics of the Bandung conference and Communist International. Sandwiched between the demise of the Bandung era and the

rise of postcolonial studies, the critical questions and strategies that Armah innovates belong to a distinct critical 'problem space.'¹⁹ Armah is neither a disconsolate figure, unable to let go of national independence, nor an ethnocentrist who did not appreciate internationalism, but a political and aesthetic thinker who tried to retain the possibility of revolution when it appeared most fraught.

Armah's black Marxism is thus not the African Marxism that scholars dismiss as a contemporary African critical theory. Achille Mbembe, a theorist of Afropolitanism, repudiates twentieth-century Afro-radicalist thinking because it transformed Marxist and nationalist categories into restrictive criteria that privilege 'autonomy, resistance, and emancipation' in 'determining the legitimacy of authentic African discourse' (2002, pp. 240–241).²⁰ Yet, Armah's black cultural radicalism envisions characteristically African and cosmopolitan forms of communism, and thus generates a heterodox Marxism from capacious instances of African self-writing. While his analyses of race in Africa are incipient in comparison to recent studies, Armah encourages us to address the social entanglements that traverse borders in a critique of racial capitalism.²¹ Mbembe also unfavorably compares Afro-radicalism with the coincident 'politics of black radical activity' in the United States that conjoined Marxism and Black Nationalism, and laments that it precipitated no efforts to theorize race and class analogous to Cedric Robinson's (2002, p. 241). Armah's black Marxism can begin to fill this historical vacuum. Influenced by Africana studies in the United States, it also makes visible the connections between radicalism in Africa and the diaspora. Indeed, the worldliness of Armah's black Marxism presents an opportunity to enhance our understanding of geographical and intellectual formations like the black Atlantic, as well as Afro-Asian imaginaries, so as to develop the critique of racial capitalism.²²

To be sure, Armah's program for re-Africanization did not arrest the forces of capital, and we must account for its fate in relation to epochal projects around the world that constitute the cultural turn. In Europe and the United States, as the promise of social democracy faded and neo-liberalism took hold, the New Social Movements learned to speak in a post-Marxist idiom that subordinated control of the state. In Africa the related structural adjustment programs were the final death knell for third worldism but, by contrast, did not prompt mobilizations analogous to the New Social Movements, which could have promoted Armah's black cultural radicalism. The absence of a political movement could be another reason that Armah sets his imagining of re-Africanization in the past. This speculation foregrounds the significance of aesthetic forms like the historical novel in working against the intellectual division of the globe into three worlds.²³ If Marxist approaches to African literature are to apprehend the interpretative challenges of the capitalist world system today and go beyond the cultural turn, they will need to construe relations between intellectual movements, social movements, and aesthetic forms.

Notes

1. I derive my understanding of the connections between cultural turns around the world between 1945 and 1989 from Denning (2004), which makes the striking observation that culture moved into the foreground of analysis at the same moment that political thinkers imagined that the world was divided into three parts. By using the phrase 'black Marxism,' I analogize Armah's engagement with Marxism to that of Cedric Robinson. His *Black Marxism* (Robinson, 2000) shows how the spatial proliferation of capitalism reveals the

- Eurocentrism and incoherency of Marx's thinking on race, class and insurrection, and develops a lineage of black cultural radicalism in response to the disappointments of mainstream socialist thought.
2. My understanding of apposition is indebted to Kazanjian (2016, pp. 9–10). My use of the term and its cognates responds to the challenging 'worldedness' of the Sixties, which according to Connery is 'one of links and co-presence' in contrast to the 'coordinated worldedness of the Comintern' or 'globalization' as understood in the 1990s (Connery, 2007, pp. 78–79).
 3. The limitations of this view derive in part from what these critics cite in relation to the so-called debate about race and class, in which Wole Soyinka plays an outsized role. *Marxism and African Literature* admits to an 'anti-Soyinka bias' (Gugelberger, 1986, p. iv), derived from Marxist critiques of his ethnocentric interpretative category of the 'African' (see Newell, 2006, pp. 159–169). Amuta establishes the priority of class critique against the strategies for cultural decolonization proffered by Chinweizu and Madubuike (1983), who were also in conversation with Soyinka (see Gugelberger, 1986, p. 4). The 'race' in the debate, then, is Soyinka's essentialist ethno-category rather than a social fact that indexes cultural, political and economic processes.
 4. With the exception of O. S. Ogede (1992), Armah's essays have received little sustained attention.
 5. Other critics observe Armah's affinities for Fanon. Fraser recognizes that Fanon motivates Armah's explanation of the cultural blockages to African liberation, but does little more than assert that Fanon provides a hermeneutic for neo-colonialism (Fraser, 1980, p. 9–10). Wright observes the differences between Armah and Fanon's political analysis, and argues that Armah gives aesthetic form to Fanon's psychoanalytical conception of neo-colonialism and blackness, but, as his aim is merely to establish Fanon's influence as an African thinker on Armah, he does not consider Armah's intellectual development in light of this relationship (Wright, 1989, pp. 35–51).
 6. Lindfors similarly critiques the 'anti-racist racism' of Armah's historical novels (Lindfors, 1980, p. 90). My argument disagrees with this assessment but does not follow Ogede in positively equating Armah's philosophy with Négritude (O. Ogede, 2000).
 7. Armah is absent from Gordon et al.'s (1996) overview of the four stages of 'Fanon studies,' but he surely belongs to the first stage, which comprises initial reactions to and applications of Fanon's work by Fidel Castro, Ché Guevara, Huey Newton, Paulo Freire, Sidney Hook, Hannah Arendt, Nguyen Nghe, and Jack Woddis.
 8. For an overview of the scholarship on the relationship between Marxism and Fanonism, see R. Rabaka (2010, pp. 145–215).
 9. On this dichotomy, see Lazarus (2012, pp. 161–182).
 10. Armah's essays intervene in long-running debates about the ideological and institutional relationship between communism and pan-Africanism, which stretch back to the proclamation of the Third International (1919–1943) in 1922 that 'the Negro problem has become a vital question of the world revolution' (Adi, 2018, p. 65). For more on this history, which effected the way that communists and pan-Africanists conceptualized national identity, created Africanist movements that underpinned Nkrumah's bid for independence, and related to the 1955 Bandung Conference, see Adi (2018) and Kelley (2002). On the relationship between this history and black Marxism, see Edwards (2001).
 11. On the promise of Nkrumahism as a characteristically modern, see Ahlman (2017).
 12. Armah critiques Wallerstein (1961). For a more recent restatement of world-systems theory, see Wallerstein (2004).
 13. On the discursivity of Fanon's texts, see Gates (1991) and S. Hall (1996).
 14. For Armah's biography, see Fenderson (2008).
 15. On the breadth of discussion about decolonization in *Présence Africaine*, see Mudimbe (1992).
 16. For more on the possibilities of this lineage of black radical thought, see R. Rabaka (2009).
 17. For recent work on black Marxism, see Johnson and Lubin (2017).
 18. For an alternative reading of *Fragments* as an index of belated trauma from the slave trade, see Murphy (2012, pp. 106–132).

19. I borrow the idea of a critical 'problem space' from the work of David Scott, who encourages us to consider the relationship between anticolonial questions and strategies and how it effects our critical emplotments of postcolonial pasts, presents and futures. For more, see Scott (1999, 2004).
20. On Afropolitanism as breaking with the intellectual history of emancipatory politics in African studies, see Balakrishnan (2017). On the relationship between Afropolitanism and Pan-Africanism, see Balakrishnan (2016).
21. See, for instance, El Hamel (2013), B. S. Hall (2011), Pierre (2013), and Ray (2015).
22. For examples of recent efforts to rethink the Bandung era and third-worldism, see Lee (2010), Pham and Shilliam (2016), and Prashad (2008). For analogous work on Afro-Asian solidarities in particular, see Shih (2016), and Jones and Singh (2003). For new approaches to the black Atlantic, see Getachew (2019), Jaji (2014), Kazanjian (2016) and Wilder (2015).
23. It also underscores Greg Forster's contention that postcolonial historical fiction develops 'critical maps of colonialism' and envisions corresponding projects of utopia (Forster, 2019, p. 2).

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