

Acta
Universitatis
Danubius



RELATIONES
INTERNATIONALES

Coercion and Disunity as Tremors in African Nationhood Foundation: Armah and Kourouma's Fault Line Criticisms

Anthony Njoku¹

Abstract: Africa of the twenty first century is plagued by a horde of social and economic misfortunes traceable to both political and historical evolutions which have taken the people back to the beginning of everything African. Two of them, important events, are the foundation of African nationhood which has led to heated debates; and disunity which is partly inherent and instinctual and partly the outcome of the former. Sequel to this, the present paper provides answers to questions such as: how did the African nationhood evolve? What role did disunity play both in the formative and later stages of African nationhood? It goes about this quest by studying the impact of the Berlin Conference of 1884 on Africa and that of wars on Africa's Ancient empires. It is a qualitative research based on the works of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ahmadou Kourouma and review of criticism of external influence on the constitution of the African nationhood and its consequential role in the post-independence dilemma. In the end, the paper concludes that the foundation of African nationhood is faulty as a result of imposition and coupled with lack of unity among African ethnicities which constitutes a source of malaise. Armah and Kourouma might have x-rayed historical facts to the best of their abilities, yet there is element of tribal sentiment that characterizes their accounts, and which also to an extent is *aporetic*.

Keywords: African Nationhood; Berlin Conference; Coercion and Disunity; Armah and Kourouma

Introduction

The concepts of coercion and disunity in the foundation of African nationhood are very critical tools in the appraisal of vision, philosophy, and tradition in the post-independence angst that streaks across Armah and Kourouma's novels. This

¹ PhD, Comparative Literature Programme, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, Tel: 08030849163, Corresponding author: Anthony.njoku@uniport.edu.ng.

assertion points to the fact that the authors' novels are deeply preoccupied with the foundational indices of the African nationhood and how such indices affect governance of the average African nation in the current political dispensation. The indices no doubt are the ethnic, cultural and linguistic configurations which have a crucial role to play in the becoming of any nation. Indeed, a nation marked by multicultural and Omni-linguistic character, as it were, and so plagued by antagonisms, would face an uphill task in welding its components together as one political entity with common identity and territorial integrity. Painting this gloomy picture rather exposes the difficulties facing African nations that were founded in line with the proceedings and communiqués of the odious Berlin Conference of 1884 known also as the Scramble for Africa, which Boahen (1991, p. 169) refers to in the following declaration:

“However, during the incredible short period between 1880 and 1914, the whole of the continent with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia was carved up among the capitalist imperial powers of Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Spain and Portugal. This is the phenomenon that has become known as the Scramble for or the Partition of Africa; in which Africans were converted from sovereign and royal citizens into colonial and dependent subjects.”

The challenge of defending and sustaining the integrity of a nation that is born out of the Berlin Conference in the course of the herculean task of nation building might be daunting as to bring back innuendoes of vast histories ready to pose fresh problems of justification, stabilization and equity in the polity. Such a dicey situation could cause the return to the table of new negotiations capable of triggering off political upheavals ultimately leading to referendum as the only way of achieving peaceful and stable nationhood in Africa. Achebe (2012, p. 1) never spares time and energy to remind the world in *There Was a Country*:

“An Igbo proverb tells us that a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. The rain that beat Africa began four to five hundred years ago, from the ‘discovery’ of Africa by Europe, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the Berlin Conference of 1885. That controversial gathering of the world’s leading European powers precipitated what we now call the Scramble for Africa, which created new boundaries that did violence to Africa’s ancient societies and resulted in tension-prone modern states. It took place without African consultation, to say the least”.

Achebe has spoken in his usual manner and language and his comments with all its weight clearly illuminate where we are from and where we are going as a race and nation states and eventually as critics in the opportunity offered to us by this paper. However, a careful survey of the history of African states, with the necessary critical lenses, shows that the tension and acrimonies generated by their origins linger in the post-independence era. From all indications, hardly an African nation could be addressed as a nation, were it not for the sheer enthusiasm and hope of turning diversity to the advantage of unity, which, to a large extent, has been very difficult or is more of a probability or fantasy. In reality, the cultural homogeneity and social cohesion that bind the aspirations of one people are totally absent in the African nations of today. Balkanization of Africa at the infamous Berlin Conference and colonization of the continent found in many innuendoes in this write-up remain two milestones explored by European powers to forge unctuous nations out of the heterogeneous ethnic nationalities of Africa. And ever since the end of colonization and the cold war, these nationalities instead of being liberated from the political bondage (which action conforms to their nationalistic aspirations) have been compelled by imperialism to remain in their respective spurious unions by coercion. Force is needed to break this yoke, but any attempt to secede, all of which are treated as such, has led to civil and fratricidal wars and in some cases total ethnic cleansing. African history, replete with such cases, will never forget the decades of bitter armed conflicts between The Sudan and Southern Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea; all which are now over. As conflicts leading to the emergence of two new nations, they have set the pace for other struggles and propagandas before and after them such as those that becloud the relationship between Nigeria and the defunct Republic of Biafra which had caused genocide and yet have not been totally laid to rest. Cameroun and Abazonia are currently at a devastating war. We can cite as many liberation struggles in Africa as possible, where ethnic militia or rebel leaders have tried to topple the government in power and perhaps seek autonomy for their people. Currently, there are also schisms prompted by ethnic and religious fanaticism and intolerance that have snowballed into gruesome murderous campaigns as seen in Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Somalia and Kenya, Nigeria, Chad and Cameroun. Ethnic and sectional dichotomy between Tutsi and Hutu led to the unfortunate and unforgettable events in Rwanda in 1994. The litany is endless, but it is simply a cause and effect relationship: the lumping together of diverse nations with parallel cultures, religions and languages that stoked sanguinary rivalry in the search for separate identities and political emancipation. It is in line with these political developments in post-

independent Africa that T. D. Jakes, who traced his genealogy to Igbo ancestry through DNA, stated, in an interview with the BBC: “I deeply respect and understand that there’s a passion amongst many Igbo to recede from Nigeria to develop their own influence and culture. We’re grappling with the after-effects of colonialism,” (www.lasgidireporters.com).

This present paper has, therefore, become very much important in the examination of the role of coercion and disunity in flawed nationhood and political travesty in independent Africa based on the novels of Ayi Kwei Armah and Ahmadou Kourouma. Our objective therefore is to look at the cradle of the African nationhood and the root of the problems associated with it, the nature and consequences of this diseased spring, which leads to the analyses of the works of the two authors and the ancillary criticisms of other scholars on whom the discourse is anchored.

The Birth and Features of African ‘Nations’

The birth of African nations via historically ridiculous circumstances is not unconnected with the outrageous Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 convened by the then German Chancellor, Otto Von Bismarck, directed toward aborting possible and unhealthy tussle among European powers over the control of Africa. For details, many theses have been proposed as reasons for the scramble. Boahen streamlines the arguments and reaches the conclusion that firstly it was aimed to respond to the rise of new imperialism in Europe which was the product of economic, political and social conditions. Secondly, the industrial revolution drove the need for raw materials and markets outside Europe, circumscribed still by economic conditions, and which mainly tropical regions of the world could provide, of which Africa was one. Thirdly, the spring of Germany and Italy, the prevalent strong wave of nationalism and the use of number of colonies as yardstick for measuring power and prestige among European nations called for balance of power, which Europe ultimately went for in the whole exercise (Boahen, 1991, pp. 170-171).

It was perhaps at the point of this illegitimate partitioning that King Leopold of Belgium, who had governed the Congo as his personal estate handed it over to his country to run as a colony. Nwakanma (2006, p. 216), in a poetic verse, conceives the end of this hideous colonial enterprise, the handover ceremony and the condition of the Congo under his grip and that of his nation as the domination and deflowering of a virgin:

There was no hamlet/It was only the ruffled figure of the Prince of Belgium/ His eyes, the colour of whiskey, held the archives of midnight's carousing/The colonnades, the great imperial statutes, the imported battalion, standing mutely outside the street, saluted his royal highness/ His mind was still cluttered with sleep, the virginal fluids of a raped continent, freshly in his waking, still coursed in his vein/ He rehearsed the royal proclamation, the post-colonial dicta, carefully in his thought; and he mounted the rostrum, and uttered his farewell, and smiled into the microphone, and shook his gloved hands with the natives, and sat heavily, like the guest of honour, to courteous silence.

History as it has become, these momentous events, balkanization and colonization, pose mammoth problems of socio-cultural, linguistic and religious nature to not only the Congo, but Africa today and such gangrenous and schizoid acts constitute a kind of deliberate political specter that will ever haunt the continent unless radical changes occur. However, these de facto nations expected to fizzle out after tortuous years in the claws of the predating European colonial powers still subsist till the present time and to the bewilderment of critics, nationalists and literary experts. Binda (2010:99) writes to portray the conundrums of ugly effects these events cause in the annals of African politics:

When European colonialists met at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), they sought to shape the future of Africa with respect to their sphere of influence with little or no consideration for the wellbeing of Africans (Rodney, 1972). Their hope had been that of subduing Africans and subjecting (sic) under their control for their continuous benefit. With respect to these they have to deform the structural patterns of the African society to replace with their alien institutions. This was aimed at making Africans their perpetual subjects. The present predicament of political leadership in Africa can be considered to have been hatched at the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), which had little of interest in Africa's progress. The outcome of this malevolent conference remains a legacy of ogre nations bequeathed to Africa by Europe. These nations with physiological incongruities, amorphous and bestial oddities, lump together as amoeboid features, lack cultural hegemony and uniform identities. This jumble of nations assembled in the most incoherent and insensitive manner has incurred the wrath of critics over time. So many literary icons, writers and critics apart from Binda keep questioning the continued existence of the structures left behind by the colonizers insisting that the first generation of leaders, the patriots and revolutionaries who in their paranoid voluntarism fought for and won independence were in a hurry to replace the Europeans and did not realize the need to restructure

the nations they inherited and realign them to suit the political and cultural aspirations of the ethnic groups constituting them and that is mostly the reason behind Africa's predicament in the current age. Such mistake having been made, it seems very difficult to reverse the trend as African nations appear to have completely lost control. Peters (2005:82) in his works discusses various views of critics and analysts and rises in condemnation of the brazenly vicious arrangements and legacies bequeathed to these leaders, which were lacking the texture of harmonious cultural relations:

These critics buttress their arguments by stressing that the ethnic communities of Africa, not only constitute separate nations, but also over-lap. For example, the Hausa tribe is not only found in Nigeria, but also found in countries like Ghana, Mali and Niger. And the Yoruba tribe can be found in not only Nigeria, but also in the Republic of Benin. The same can be said of the Bambara in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Again, T. D. Jakes refers to the ugly outcome of the Conference and argued that "They were more interested in the land than the people. So, they divided up the land at the expense of the people. And I think we're still trying to overcome that. I say 'we' because we were there too (www.lasgidireporters.com). Aniebo (2007, p. 31) adds his voice in the tirades underscoring European insensitivity and injustice to Africa in the misnomer nature of nations that are the fall-outs of the Berlin Conference and which constitute an albatross to the effective governance of the African elephant nations in the last six decades:

By 1884, a scramble for African territory had begun, and it ended in the sharing of the continent into numerous European colonial possessions. As a result of the frequent disputes between the European powers, as they tried to obtain special rights and territories in various parts of Africa, they convened the Conference of Berlin (1884-1885) to agree upon the orderly partitioning of Africa. The "balkanisation" of Africa that resulted had long-lasting effects harmful to its unity and even more inhibiting effect on African economic development. Some European scholars have joined forces with their African counterparts thereby authenticating the views of the pioneer critics. Sequel to this, it becomes a popular opinion that European powers shot their conscience away from the glaring political, economic, socio-cultural miscarriage and, most regrettably, the structural damage this singular act unleashed on the culture and geography of the continent. The pressure of the violence that could have consumed them was then channeled to one victim, that African whom the Germans thus address: "Neger, Neger schornsteinfeger" (Ibemesi 2005, p. 311). This

means that the Nigger is the chimney sweeper. In other words, this species of humanity is meant to bear the brunt of the world's mistakes: racism, slavery, colonialism, objectification etc. In 'The Congo: A Brief History', the critic, Hennessy (1971: 87) presents a version of the proceedings of the conference which is in tandem with similar accounts emanating from Africa. Besides, his account becomes a confession of sorts x-raying European misdeeds in her intervention in Africa:

While Leopold was looking to his own interests, the rivalry for Africa became more intense. The saner participants realized that the prize was too great to be lost by the risk of war, and consequently, in 1884, a conference was called in Berlin by Bismarck. Its purpose was to attempt to iron out the differences between the nations with territorial ambitions in Africa and at the same time to draw up a set of rules for would-be exploiters which would prevent open conflict. Up to this point the general pattern had been for each country's exploration parties to push inland from the coast until they met each other. Moreover, in his wonderful coverage of the political commotions and proceedings of the post-independence era, the Polish journalist and writer, Ryszard Kapusciński, in his peregrination and panoramic novel, perhaps with slight exaggeration, shows two causative agents why Africa could not get it right in the beginning and unfortunately has never got it so. One of them is that there are many problems of ethnicity in Africa caused by the hazardous effects of "balkanization". Thus Kapusciński (2003, p. 179) sums up these salient points: "À l'époque du colonialisme, les mouvements de libération concentraient leurs efforts sur la conquête de l'indépendance, c'était leur objectif majeur. Les frontières de la plupart des Etats d'Afrique ne sont que la conséquence des décisions arbitraires prises par les grande puissances coloniales: de nombreuses tribus et cultures ont été intégrées a ces Etats, et les différences qui les séparent sont a l'origine des tensions politiques. At the time of colonization, liberation movements concentrated their efforts on gaining independence and that was their major objective. The boundaries of most African countries are just the results of arbitrary decisions taken by big colonial powers: numerous tribes and cultures were integrated into these countries, and the differences that separate them are the source of political tensions (our translations)

All in all, the critics and analysts are pointing at telling evidence of selfishness made manifest in territorial ambition and racial domination in the whole exercise on the part of European colonial powers, which characterizes their adventures in Africa and

other climes not only in the time of political tutelage, but also in the neocolonial and post-servitude era.

Deconstruction of African Nationhood

The patented dictionary definition of a nation does not cause any confusion and our allusions on terms like “language”, “homogeneity” and “cultural harmony” have already given us insights into what to expect; and if that definition were a Tonga, only very few African nations would wear it. Others naturally would not meet the criterion of unique historical, religious, cultural and linguistic values or experience to bear that nomenclature. This very shortcoming gingers critics whose take is that that title is a case of usurpation by these multicultural African nations with complex compositions. They argue that the Berlin Conference and colonization never sought the consent of the divergent ethnic nationalities before merging them through great coercive and impactful action. Ekpo is one of the scholars in the vanguard of demystifying the pseudo-concept of nationhood in Africa. At first, he unveiled the myopia exhibited by African literary authors in their postulations about the post-independence travesties. They have turned art from mere entertainment and recreation to the vehicle of social protest against the post-colonial misnomer, providing now prescriptive remedies for political anomy. Suffice it to say that Ekpo recognizes these specialized roles arising from artistic reengineering to the service of humanity, yet he underscores the imperative of thorough grasp of the inherent contradictory forces at work in the so-called nations. The artists who write about them clearly manifest their lack of requisite knowledge of the history of the nations or they have decided to keep a blind eye in their judgments on the historical forces at work that determine the existence of contemporary African nations. First, the writers arrogate to themselves the power of insights needed to identify the problem with the continent and the responsibility and summarily apportion blame to the leadership. Besides, they structure themselves into opposition and adversaries of the oppressive dictatorial regimes and have woven a discourse of ‘self-insulation’ and ‘self-righteousness’ in the face of massive corruption and mismanagement of African affairs. And by comparing African and European nations they fail to realize that what we have in Africa are “Empire States” and their citizens are “incongruous amalgam of tribesmen” as things were in the defunct Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (Ekpo 1999:9). This last statement is in tandem with Armah’s narration in *Fragments: ‘Scalder woman’s play’*, the white man disappears, to be replaced by a

brutish whip-swinging African, and the whole thing becomes purely a free for-all among yelling tribal savages' (Armah 1969:132). The nationalists merely resuscitated the colonial imperial states and verbally called them nation-states without any restructuring. Daniel Kunene (2007:315) corroborates this position when he declares:

The Berlin Conference both carved us up into Islands and then, with the help of anthropologists and Africanists of other persuasions, glued the pieces together rather crudely into an artificial "homogeneity". One's first gripe, therefore, is that somehow someone came up with the label "African" to characterize a whole host of activities and concepts, including "African" literature. On the other hand, the features of an empire state comprise force, imposition and conquest and they are abundantly present in these nations. Therefore tyranny, violence and dictatorship remain the only viable option since the vassal states of the empire state would not like to be ruled from above (Ekpo, 1999, pp. 9-10).

Therefore, there is great need to deconstruct these writers and the nations themselves. First, the empire state is a monstrous creation of the colonialists with 'mecantilistic' ideology. But the Africanists and anti-colonialist elements converted it to the service of nationalism without necessarily changing the dynamics and institutional compositions bequeathed to it by colonialism and sustained by imperialism. African empire states touted as nations states are hiding under the ruse of masked framework. Ekpo (1999:9) insists that 'nationalism only tried to palm off, but could not obliterate the imperial logic and dynamics of maintaining and running the post-colonial state'. The writers on their own part ignore the incontrovertible fact for which the critic declares: Ahmadou Kourouma's *Les Soleils des indépendances*, from the structural as well as propagandist point of view, as the paradigmatic overture to the novel of post-independence discontent. The novel is generally believed to be a moving exposé on the systematic destitution of the pro-Independence masses by a thoroughly ruthless post-colonial elite. Fama the hero is seen as the symbol of the ordinary person disinherited and humiliated and finally liquidated by a brutal post-Independence single party dictatorship. Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* gravely informs us that post-Independence Afrocentric leadership in Ghana has engendered nothing but filth, rottenness and death. In this book, readers are made to hold their noses as they follow 'The Man' in their dreary, dark journey in and around the decay and stench of a systematically misruled, irremediably soiled and stinking post-Independence society (Ekpo, 1999, p. 7). Maduka (2005, p. 7) buys into this view when he avers that the Nigerian leaders, like their counterparts elsewhere

in Africa, uncritically inherited the idea of territorial integrity from our colonial masters without matching it up with the recognition of the importance of the principle of human freedom and the inalienable rights of peoples to determine their destiny. The situation breeds ethnicity caused by political domination and mutual mistrust among the ethnic groups that make up African nations. He describes Nigeria as an example of an entity that cannot be called a nation since its peoples are not united and still have mutual fear of betrayal. The language factor offers ample proof for this ugly situation, thus: English cannot effectively serve as the language of our national integration. In fact, in the contemporary society, it is used as a language of mass deceit, hypocrisy and national betrayal, for most Nigerians use it when they want to mask their feelings in public but switch over to their mother tongues whenever they want to discuss issues that touch them deeply with members of their ethnic kindred (Maduka, 1994, p. 23).

Flawed Nationhood in Armah and Kourouma's Works

The post-independence critique of Armah and Kourouma's novels is succinctly a critical concern about virtually failed states. The deterioration of life and infrastructures brought about by increasing tendency of dictatorship has imposed such irredeemable conclusion on the discourse of these novels. The comments in *Why Are We So Blest* again remind us that there is yet no nation in Africa: 'Things take long in a colony only freshly disguised as a nation, even if, as here, the paint is blood. The powerless need an infinity of patience' (Armah, 1972, p. 138). But how couldn't the nations disguise rather than be united if Homi Babha had critically looked at the situation and recalled that 'Fanon recognizes the crucial importance, for subordinated peoples, of asserting their indigenous cultural traditions and retrieving their repressed histories'? (Gomba, 2012, pp. 114). All the disillusionment novels therefore shed light on the situation confronting Africa. Armah (1978, pp. 177-188) in *The Healers* narrates the exploits of Asante Empire especially in the area of war and conquest. Different tribes are involved in the wars, the taking of hostages and killing of slaves as sacrifice. Damfo, the healer, talking to his trainee Densu, explains the efforts of the different tribes to be one united community, all to no avail as fate would not allow such a thing to happen: You, Densu, growing up, have been told you belong to the Fantse people, like everyone else at Esuano. No one told you the Fantse people are no people at all but a single small fragment of one community that misfortune blew apart. Of that exploded community the Asante are also a part of The Denchira, the Akim, the Wassa, the Sewhi, the Aowin, the Nzema, the Ekuakpem-

all these are merely scattered pieces of what once came together (Armah, 1978, pp. 83-84).

The overriding factor according to the novel is disunity which it considers a disease. "Not a tribe, not a nation. Tribes and nations are just signs that the whole is diseased" (Armah, 1978, p. 82). That is why healing is necessary and it is clear in the novel that the healers fail to heal the tribes and nations not as a result of their incompetence. The reason is that those to be healed are not willing and ready to be one tribe or one nation (Armah, 1978, p. 83). Ababio, an antagonist gives strong illustration while speaking to Densu about Appia, the prince: He says a king should work for all the people to bring all the black people together. The boy's brain has been poisoned, I tell you. He, a prince, doesn't know there would be no more kings if some catastrophe brought all black people together. Kings belong to their tribes. He doesn't know that (Armah, 1978, p. 31). The fact is that these tribes cannot co-habit as one nation and any effort to forge them together is a subterfuge. Rather he blames their inability to embrace unity in diversity. These ancient tribes serve as a metaphor of contemporary African nations and the healers as that of their leaders since the novel itself is a post-colonial work. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, divisions and disunity cover the whole plot. The novel indicates that new and sharp diversities in religion and culture have emerged; and Arab-European culture has poisoned the people's way causing disharmony. The ostentatious cripples, the white beasts from the desert (Armah, 1973, pp. 58-60) now train the askaris (Armah, 1973, p. 60) from among the people to align with change and to oppress their people. They and the white predators convert the indigenes to their alien ways and give abominable names like Mohamed, Hassan (*Two Thousand Seasons* 1973, p. 23); and Abdallah and George Bradford (Armah, 1973, p. 163). Besides, other weird practices like homosexuality are being taught the people (Armah, 1973, p. 23). The novel argues that as far as these differences exist among the people, there can be no one tribe and people or nation.

In *Osiris Rising*, Armah (1995:10) takes stock of the horrifying turnings of African history ranging from one disaster through the other: the conspiratorial silencing of the civilization of ancient Egypt for its being African, the Negro slave trade and now the Partition of Africa, believing that these historical vicissitudes have shaken the foundation of Africa:

For centuries now, our history in Africa has been an avalanche of problems. We've staggered from disaster to catastrophe, enduring the destruction of Kemt, the sca-

tering of millions ranging the continent in search of refuge, the waste of humanity in the slave trade organized by Arabs, Europeans and crumb-hungry Africans ready to destroy the land for their unthinking profit. We have endured the plunder of a land now carved into fifty idiotic neocolonial states in this age when large nations seek survival in larger federal unions, and even fools know that fission is death.

The author intentionally employed this sarcastic tone to drive home the point that the states carved out in this forceful manner are really in trouble and they are going against the direction of the current and therefore opposed to the ideal examples and such unions he has in mind, no doubt, might be the European Union and the United States. Armah is indeed against Africa's split that took place after the Berlin Conference and he cast aspersion at it with the aid of very impactful allusion. Moreover, he conceives in the later part of the same novel another form of coercion that has hampered the rapid spontaneous development and evolution of these same states. It was accomplished under the aegis of unsolicited generous Western tutelage or civilization mission that culminated into Western Narratives which Africa was obliged to imbibe for its ascension to modernity, thus:

The colonial History curriculum was designed to demonstrate the glory of the Western antecedents. It assumed that all societies were destined to grow by imitating the West. Hence a key purpose of history teaching in Africa: to supply Africans with suitable European models to imitate (Armah, 1995, p. 216).

Armah's novels are full of antagonisms against the role Europe played in Africa's history and there were two key issues in such role: slave trade and colonization and the third the Berlin Conference.

Kourouma (1998, p. 11) refers to the Scramble for Africa in *En Attendant le Vote des Bêtes sauvages*: "Au cours de la réunion des Européens sur le partage de l'Afrique en 1884 à Berlin, le goïfe du Bénin et les Côtes des Esclaves sont dévolus aux Français et Allemands » (In the course of the European conference on the Partition of Africa in 1884 in Berlin, the Beninese Gulf and Slave Coasts were allocated to the French and the Germans). Like Armah, Kourouma claims that the original plan of the Europeans is to impose their civilization on Negroes in the Gulf zone. It was through this imposition of territories and values that the problems of African nations were inaugurated. In *Quand On Refuse on Dit Non*, the author turns inward to discuss one of these problems which bothers on religious differences causing dichotomy among ethnic nationalities in the Ivory Coast. The Bété, catholic in the south have risen against the Dioulas (Malinké), Muslims in the north. Birahima

narrates that with the help of their intellectuals, the Bété have developed the concept of 'ivoirité' imagined to be the ideal national identity of Ivoirians (Kourouma, 2004, p. 16; 107). They have exclusively invented it for themselves as antics with which to drive away others by divesting them, especially the Dioulas, of Ivorian citizenship. It is the opinion of the novel that this is the major cause of ethnic strife the country faces. As soon as Houphouët Boigny was dead and with the coming into power of Laurent Gbagbo, the Bété begin to intensify the hunt for the Dioulas. Expectedly, the massacre that follows according to the account of the novel leads to the rise of a rebel group fighting for the interest of the north. Claims and counter claims of anthropological knowledge of who the true Ivoirians are ensue: Après les pigmés, les ethnies ayant les traces les plus anciennes sont les Sénoufos et les ethnies du sud ne peuvent guère laisser de traces observables. L'humidité et les pluies détruisent et effacent toute empreinte humaine (Kourouma, 2004, p. 56).

After the pigmies, the most ancient tribes are the Senoufos and the southern tribes could scarcely be traced to anywhere. Flood and rains destroyed and wiped out all human traces (our translations).

The novel concludes that there is nothing, not even a stone, in the south that is not built through the labour of the north (Kourouma, 2004, p. 65).

On the other hand, *Allah n'est pas obligé* demonstrates that African nations exist as incongruities of tribes and tongues sprawling together with a myriad of differences. For having not erected common structures as neutral playing ground for the interaction of the component's parts, they have been dragged into a theatre of wars. Liberia and Sierra Leone plagued with strife that brings the ethnic nationalities into bitter conflict, are two examples the narrator, Birahima cites. Political intrigues among the elite are responsible for the Liberian crisis which later invited ethnic dimensions. Birahima narrates that Samuel Doe and Thomas Quionkpa, Krahn and Gyo respectively, lead a successful coup against the descendants of the ex-slaves, the Afro-Americans called the Congos who dominate the indigenous tribes (Kourouma, 2000, p. 73). Later and expectedly, the rift shifts to Doe and Quionkpa as a result of the tension of primitive tribalism between the Krahns and the Gyos. His opponent eliminated, and the Gyos relegated, Doe as the Head of State faces a stiff challenge from the rebels led by Charles Taylor, an Afro-American (Kourouma, 2000, p. 104). The situation degenerates to a full-blown ethnic war and later spreads to neighbouring Sierra Leone. To show that there is no one united country in Liberia, except the forced union where the ex-slaves are settled to live with the autochthonous

peoples willy-nilly, the novel portrays the country in the light of a hotbed of violence caused by ethnic squabbles, where a medley of nations, like condiments, boil in one pot. However, it is pertinent to assert that there is a blind-spot in the critique of Kourouma's novel which contradicts the author's perspective as a writer. The author for instance addresses his fellow countrymen as 'bussmen'. This must have been informed not only by historical antecedent but by the sheer contemporary post-independence spirit of ethnicity haunting all multi-ethnic African nations. *Monné, Outrages et Défis* (Kourouma, 1990, p. 78) informs the reader of the same 'bousmen' who obstruct the construction of a railway and cannibalize the workers. Nevertheless, *Allah n'est pas obligé* almost mystifies the issue in terms of the real identity of the 'bousmen'. Yet the reader could discern through the corruption of the word that it is an ethnic group in Ivory Coast:

Yacouba alias Tiécoura était un grand quelqu'un, un vrai hadji. Quand il a été circoncé, il a quitté le village pour aller vendre les colas au pays des bushmen, en Côte d'Ivoire, comme Agloville, Doloa, Gagnoa ou Anyama (Kourouma 2000, p. 39).

Yacouba also known as Tiécoura was great, a true Alhaji. When he was circumcised, he left the village to go and sell kola in the land of the bushmen of Ivory Coast, such as Agloville, Doloa, Gagnoa or Anyama.

With a city mentioned in *Allah n'est pas obligé* the audience has got the bearing and the geographical link with which to trace this group of people to *Quand On Refuse on Dit Non* and *Monné, Outrages et Défis*. *Allah n'est pas obligé* therefore gives the clearest picture of who the 'bousmen' or 'bushmen' are: they are Bété and their capital city is Doloa: 'Daloa est une ville en pleine terre bété. C'est la capitale du pays bété. Le Bête, c'est une ethnie, une tribu ivoirienne de la forêt profonde dont nous parlerons beaucoup' (Kourouma, 2004, p. 15) Daloa is a town right in Bété land. It is the capital of Bété. Bété is an Ivorian tribe that lies in a thick forest which we shall speak much about (our translation). What intrigues us here is that the portrait of the Bété, apart from aspersion cast at them as a primitive tribe, mirrors the author's tone of ethnic sentiment against all presumable self-insulation and sacrosanct vision of a literary writer of post-colonial disillusionment. We consider this literary ambivalence or aporia because of the self-exoneration tendency in the novels in analysis. Hence, we doubt any form of non-partisanship on the part of the author in this narration and we make bold to say that the narrator is beclouded by a tinge of ethnic parochialism since he is Dioula in origin. On a final note, this is a

demonstration that there is no united nation in Africa in the real sense of it, even the literary critics, Armah and Kourouma, cannot distance themselves from the socio-political milieu plus the forces of history that trail them. As the products of this period or system, they could not fail to unconsciously act as elements conditioned by the same historical circumstances.

Conclusion

The problems facing African nations in the post-independence times have prompted the need to search for the sources of the continent's misfortunes in terms of political leadership and economic development. That quest led to the excavation of historical facts that are century-old part of which is the founding by European colonial powers of the African states characterized by sheer force, indiscrimination and imposition. The result of these arbitrary traits that abound in African countries of the post-colonial dispensation is highly reduced possibility of peaceful co-habitation on the part of numerous ethnic nationalities with rambunctious elements and divergent cultures. That is the reason why this essay sustains the view that disunity is contributory to the failure of African nations. In addition, it is also its opinion that Africa's dilemma has its origins in the nature and formative stage of its nation states, which is the coming together, not by volition, of peoples of different tongues whose consequence is the gradual enlargement of cultural seams and chasms that have kept them apart despite being in one political entity. Ayi Kwei Armah and Ahmadou Kourouma as well as other literary critics share that common voice by trying to use their literary outlets to show evidence of wrong foundation of African nations and heaping the blame on the dictates of Berlin Conference that caused the indiscriminate Partition of Africa. However, coercion and disunity, conceived as tremors rocking the foundation of African nations, might appear complementary in this context, yet they differ in some ways; while the colonialists used force and arbitrariness to constitute the nations, Africans through disunity worked very hard to make sure that the state structures created in the process did not succeed. In this paper, Armah's works mainly serve as a rallying point for the later argument. Disunity is presented by the author as an inherent disease in the kernel of the black race and so a people that were once united had to disintegrate even before the advent of balkanization and colonization and togetherness was rather seen as misfortune and should be fought against going by the view of one of the characters in the person of Ababio. The author advocates the action of a surgeon to remove this natural cancer in the life of the

community. The emphasis is on unity because whether it is the colonial or postcolonial period and whether in heterogeneous or homogeneous system, unity and peace are a sine qua non for progress and development. Armah seems to say that the Black race needs this constant. Kourouma also highlights this point when he attacks the concept of “ivoirité” which becomes an instrument for disenfranchising fellow compatriots by denying them citizenship. The reader notices how this ill-tailored programme triggered off civil unrest, ethnic rivalry and violence leading to full-blown civil war.

The authors’ knowledge of the nature and history of the African nations no matter how deep in their own perception looks very shallow to a critic like Ekpo, who maintains that their criticism could have been mollified owing to the gravity of the problems and challenges bequeathed by the colonial masters to the first-generation African leaders who also share the blame for not restructuring their nations. Since they seem not to have the full grasp of the impediments hampering the smooth running of a post-colonial African nation state, it was possible for them to fall into the trap of ambivalence and *aporia*. For instance, Kourouma could not hold back the surge of ethnic sentiment of which the post-colonial leaders are being accused. This essay has taken time to foray into these salient points and hopes that the audience will appreciate its perspectives.

References

- Achebe, Chinua (2012). *There Was a Country A Personal History of Biafra*. USA: Penguin Press.
- Aniebo, N.C. (2007). *Notes on African Poetry*. 2nd edition. Port Harcourt: Uniport Press.
- Armah, A. K. (1969). *Fragments*. London: Heinemann.
- Armah, A. K. (1972). *Why Are We So Blest?* London: Heinemann.
- Armah, A. K. (1978). *The Healers*. London: Heinemann.
- Armah, A. K. 1968-1973. *Two Thousand Seasons*. London: Heinemann.
- Binda, G. A. (2010). The Challenges of Political Leadership in Africa in *IBJACLHSSDS*, B C. Nwankwo (ed.), Onitsha, Nigeria: Golden Value Investment. pp. 99-102.
- Boahen, A. A. (1991). Africa: Colonialism and Independence. *AFRICA TODAY*, R. Uwechue (ed), London: Africa Books Ltd. pp. 99-102.
- Ekpo, D. (1999). The *Aporia* of Post-Colonial Anger: Dissidence and Difference in Africa's Contemporary Literary Discourse. *Social Semiotics*, vol.9, no. 1. pp. 5-221.
- Gomba, O. (2012). 'Postcoloniality, Dissemination and Tremors of the Margin. *ANA Review Journal of the Association of Nigerian Authors: New Series* 1. Austine Amanze Akpuda (Ed.), pp. 109-123.
- Hennessy, M. N. (1971). *The Congo: A Brief History, 876-1908*. Heart of Darkness, a Norton Critical Edition Revised, An Authoritative Text Backgrounds and Sources Criticism. Kimbrough (Ed.), USA: W.W. Norton & Company mc, pp. 86-90.
- Ibemesi, F. N. (2005). German Studies in Africa with a closer Reference to Nigeria: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives' in *Compass: Essays in Honour of Willfried F. Feuser*. Chidi Maduka and Denni Ekpo (eds.), Port Harcourt: Grand Orbit Communications & Emhai Press, pp. 311-335.
- Kapuséïński, R. (2003). *Il n'y aura pas de paradis*. Paris: Librairie Plon (Translator).
- Kourouma, A. (1990). *Monné, Outrages et Défis*. Paris, Seuil.
- Kourouma, A. (1998). *En Attendant le Vote des Bêtes Sauvages*. Paris, Seuil.
- Kourouma, A. (2000). *Allah n'est pas obligé*. Paris, Seuil.
- Kourouma, A. (2004). *Quand On Refuse On Dit Non*. Paris: Seuil.
- Kunene, D. P. (2007). African Language-Literature: Tragedy and Hope. *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Tejumola, Olaniyon & Ato, Quayson (eds.). MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 315-322.
- Maduka, C. T. (2005). Africa and Comparative Literature in the Era of Globalization' in *Compass: Essays in Honour of Willfried F. Feuser*. Chidi Maduka and Denis Ekpo (eds.), Port Harcourt; Kiabara Publications, pp. 5-29.
- Nwakanma, O. (2006). A Brief Memoir of Time. *Camouflage—Best of Contemporary Writing from Nigeria*. Otiono, N. & Okenyodo, O.G. Editors, Yenagoa: Treasure Books.

Peters-Austen, O. (2005). *Topics in Comparative Literature. A Handbook for University Students*. Makurdi, Nigeria: Aboki Publishers.

Web Sites:

US Cleric, Bishop T D Jakes Traces His Roots to Nigeria, Discovers His Ancestors Were Igbo
Nigeria. www.lasgidireporters.com, Accessed September 24, 2020 in Social Media reports.