

## Healers of Post-colonial Ghana in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments*

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### Abstract

The colonial nations in Africa had been controlled by several imperialistic governments. Years of slavery distorted even souls of the people of Africa. Healers are the best-known people who liberate the imprisoned souls of West African natives. Ghana is a West African nation colonised by the British rulers until 1957. The colonial domination replaced the traditional medicines with the Western medicines. The replacement diminished the method of psychological healing followed by the traditional healers in addition to physical healing. The psychological suppression sustained to Ghana even after independence of the nation. The present paper decodes the ways by which the intellects of the post-colonial Ghana healed the psychological wounds of the natives. It emphasises the ways the intellects used to reunite the African people by analysing the events happening in the novel *Fragments* by Ayi Kwei Armah. The paper focuses both on the causes and effects of the intellects of Ghana as healers of post-colonial nation. It also analyses the disillusionment experienced by the intellects of the society for their deeds.

**Key words:** Traditional, Colonial, Healer.

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Disillusion becomes an inevitable phenomenon of African continent. The West African people follow oral tradition to pass their culture and traditional values to the upcoming generations. The Healers were the people who worked as traditional physicians from ancient period. People had more faith in the traditional gods they worship. The natives of most of the African countries had believed the souls of the dead people as their god, before the influence of Christianity and Islam in the nation. The Healers act like priests who understand the souls of the diseased and cure them with their medicines and counselling. Oral tradition helps the Healers to pass the medicinal knowledge and practices to the future generations for the benefits of the natives. The people believed in the traditional customs as their framed rules for the life to live in their society. From the precolonial period, the Healers had the responsibilities to liberate the natives from the psychological suppression undergone by slave trade and brutal rules of kings who supported the colonial masters. So, the Healers were in need of revealing about the indirect imperialism enforced on common people by the aristocrats of the nations.

The Healers can understand the symptoms of the disease and cure it with their solution. Armah's novel *The Healers* portrays about the professional healers and their job of healing. The Healer Damfo says, "The healer trains his eyes – so he can read signs. His training is of the ears – so he can listen to sounds and understand them" (95). The lines explain the extreme sensitivity of five senses of the Healers and ability to understand the things around them with more focus on the important skills of healing. They train their mind and soul to identify the problem of the diseased person who comes for solution, by viewing and understanding the symptoms of it. The Healers use three forms to heal the people: they are divination, spiritualism and herbalism. Depending on the identification of the problem they practice the forms. Divination and spiritualism are practised depending on the religious base and spiritual powers of dead souls. Herbalism is performed using herbal medicinal plants.

The Healers identify the significant problems of the society as division among the people. They identify division of soul and a body as the first problem and conflict between one community or

individual and other community or individual as the second problem. On the whole, they strive for the unity of their own people without any discrimination. Damfo explains the Healer's knowledge as "It says there are two forces, unity and division. The first creates. The second destroys; it's a disease, disintegration" (97). The traditional medicines and practises help the people to defeat the disease and heal the body and community by unity. The traditional medicines lost its influence among the people after British colonisation. Many missionary hospitals were built during the colonial Government. People got attracted towards the Western medicines and demolished the traditional methods of healing. Later, the traditional practisers of healing were considered as criminals by the colonial Government and made those people live in hiding. The Western medicines had the aim of curing the physical diseases and they failed to cure the psychological diseases.

Colonisation brings different methods to dominate the native to rule the land and trade the natural resources of the nation. To emphasis, after independence of the nation, imperialism is the significant method of ruling followed by the colonisers to dominate the people. Imperialism is the process of extending their power over the colonised nation with indirect means of hard power and soft power. In Ghana, even after independence, the people follow the customs and rules framed by the colonisers during colonial ruling in the nation. But, the intellects of the nation in every field try to change the unchanged cruel customs followed by the people for many years. In Armah's novel, *Fragments*, the psychiatric doctor, Juana tries to demolish the inevitable colonial idea existing in a hospital. She asks the nurses working under her in the hospital to call her by her name instead of calling with her designation as doctor. But she fails in her attempt, "she had only succeeded in embarrassing them,... they had made her understand that it was strange and threatening to them" (*Fragments* 26). The nurses get afraid to accept the new formality which Juana tries to implement. The fear of the nurses comes out of the customs to obey the rules of authorities. The people working in the hospital are separated by the title of the position they deserve. As an educated doctor, Juana tries to bring unity among the people by calling their names instead of titles they possess. Through which Juana does the work of Healers in the post-colonial nation. She identifies the disease of the people through her observation and heals the disease with the medicine of unity.

Working class people in the society have been facing the similar problems from the precolonial to post-colonial era. The suppression of the rich people makes the poor to do some deeds which are disgusting for their own soul from the perspective of Healers. As a psychiatric lab assistant, Bukari tells about the patients of the lab: "they first try to find a way out themselves, out of a bad life" (43). The deep observation of the lab assistant helps the person to identify that the persons the society underestimates as psychologically imbalanced, are the people who try to come out of the bad life they live in the corrupt society. As an ordinary person in the society, the psychiatric lab is approached with pessimistic ideas. But the educated people observe the issues in the lab and considers lab as a place where the suppressed people get rehabilitation of their life. Bukari, as a keen observer of the patients, tells that the drugs and wee smokes consumed by the patients are the means they use to get rid of their suppression.

Finding of Juana's keen observation of the society around her makes her to conclude with the words, "People with their eyes deliberately closed against the knowledge that their own useless lives were part of the slow dissolution of their peoples, doomed to an extinction started long ago" (52). The disease of the precolonial suppression and division emerged out of the colonial government and brutal traditional customs framed by kings of Gold Coast. But the post-colonial disease of the people emerges from their own mind and psyche. The words of Juana cautions that the ignorance of the people in independent Ghana about the illegal and corrupt things happening around them are going to bring the lives of the people back to the painful lives of the past. The unity of the people has been distorted by the slavish mentality of the people. Even after independence, people fail to question against the authorities of their own nation for their rights. As mentioned by John McLeod in his book *Beginning Postcolonialism*, "Oppressed people discover their unity in the simultaneity of their suffering" (81). The mindset of the oppressed leads to mass disparity rather than unity. This mindset makes the suffering as part of their life.

Post-colonial society has been separated by class discrimination. Poor people are less concerned by the Government but they are maintained to live in disillusionment that they have all rights in the society. Baako, the protagonist of the novel, is an educated poor man tries hard to get a

job as junior assistant to the secretary of Civil Service Commission. But the secretary neglects him in every attempt. The artist, Kofi Ocran diagnoses the issue as: "There are dozens of organizations, supposed to take care of this and that. But if you want anything done you have to go running all round these stupid organizations themselves" (*Fragments* 121). The issue lies as great anxiety of many educated people of the nation. Ocran instructs as an intellect that Baako could not find job in the straightway, instead he needs to bribe the officials or depend on fake organisation. The situation highlights that the citizen of Ghana cannot get anything which brings them more privilege, without bribing the officers. And the organisations run for the upliftment of the lives are the perfect forms of disillusionment of the people. Through advising the protagonist Baako, Ocran acts as a healer of Baako's disease, unemployment. Ocran is keen on his seeing and listening the things happening around him which helps him to become the healer of many people around him. Especially disparity of the educated Ghanaians.

The post-colonial Ghanaian thinkers and writers suffocate to live for their sufferings to forget their impotence to heal the diseases of the society. Writers are fond of assessing the corrupt people of the society disregarding their status in the society. Lawrence Boateng, a writer who was completely drunk when he came to attend the soirees headed by the magazine editor Akosua Russell. He reasons Juana for his drunkardness with a question; "I see the truth when I'm drunk, and I can say what I see. Is that wrong, Doctor?" (155). The question even confuses the Doctor to answer. Even the drug becomes a medicine for the writer to emancipate himself from the psychological breakdowns he faces in the society. The alcohol enriches the mind of a social thinker to expose the truth of the society. Lawrence exhibits mistake of a rich personality of the society by being a drunkard in the public meeting. For his exhibition of truth, he is beaten by the bodyguards of Russell. Lawrence, as a healer, identifies the problem of the society and heals the problem by sacrificing his own dignity in the public meeting. Though the method of healing is contradictory to the traditional way of healing, Boateng adapts the practical way of finding the medicine for the disease of ignorance of the native about the crooked mind of the rich people in the nation.

Ignorance of the native people about the corrupt politicians and the hypocrisy of rich people in the society restrains them from understanding the truth. So, ignorance can become the disease of post-colonial Ghana. In the workshop for writers, Russell avoids the question of the boy who asks for his higher education. This rages the anger of Boateng and he exposes the truth: "Nobody meets to discuss real writing anymore. This has become a market where we're all sold" (167). Where, as a writer Boateng identifies the problem that the organisations and the rich people like Russell conduct workshop in the name of the welfare of the Ghanians, but in reality, they conduct the workshop for their own benefits. As a writer, Boateng expresses his anxiety, but as a healer, he destroys the ignorance of the people who still believe that the rich will uplift the lives of them through such hypocritical meetings.

The disease of psychological suppression caused by the public service departments and political leaders makes the people suffer in the unjust society. The protagonist, Baako happens to see the truck driver, Skido meets with an accident and dies while shifting his lorry in the jetty. The lorry is loaded with food materials to be transported, but Skido gets worried about the wastage of food by waiting for more days and moves his lorry in low space boat. This causes him the accident. Baako complains the engineer that the accident occurred because of making the lorry delay for three days on the shore. But, the engineer ignores him with the question; "It's always serious. They're just like animals. They don't think, that's all" (198). So, even educated engineers avoid the common working-class people in every field. Skido's soul is pure by his action of saving the food for the people to whom he is going to deliver, as a driver. But, as an educated engineer, he considers the pure soul as an animal. By looking at these events, as an educated intellect, Baako worries more, because of his impotence to bring change in any system of his society which is diseased in every aspect.

The Healers suffer under loneliness because of their honest living in corrupt land. The Healers are less attractive than other people since they never seek power to dominate the people. But the people identify themselves to live in disparity under the rule of corrupt authorities and find their redemption with Healer who live in the forest. In the similar way, the educated intellects of Ghana try their ways to rescue the ignorant people live an absurd life in corrupt society. Though they could not

bring ultimate change in the society, they diagnose the problems of the people and make them realise that the society is spoiled with several causes such as materialistic minds and class discrimination.

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